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Agon & Reconciliation: Ethical Conflict and Religious Practice in Hegel's Account of Spirit

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AGON & RECONCILIATION:

ETHICAL CONFLICT AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

IN HEGEL'S ACCOUNT OF SPIRIT

Molly B. Farneth

A DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

Agon & Reconciliation: Ethical Conflict and Religious Practice in Hegel's Account of Spirit

Molly B. Farneth

This dissertation is an account of how G. W. F. Hegel addresses the emerging issues of social ethics and cultural conflict in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and about what he might have to teach us in our own social and historical context. In Chapter VI of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel describes how conflicts over norms and authority emerge in different types of communities. He argues for the relevance of rituals and other social practices in confronting and overcoming these conflicts. This dissertation explicates Hegel's claim, implicit in Chapter VI of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, about the priority of social practices in the institution of norms and normative authority. On my interpretation, norms and normative authority are generated and transformed through ongoing practices of agon and reconciliation. I argue that this is not the work of a god or cosmic spirit, as many interpreters of Hegel have suggested, but of ordinary human beings engaged in everyday activities. The dissertation extends this claim to contemporary debates in religion, ethics, and politics – debates about the nature of epistemic and normative authority, the varieties of ethical conflict, and the practices of contestation and reconciliation that sustain a religiously-diverse community over time.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	…….	iii
Acknowledgments	…….	v
Introduction	…….	1
A Note on Primary Texts	…….	21
PART I:		
Chapter 1: Greek *Sittlichkeit* and the Social Construction of Norms	…….	22
Chapter 2: Faith, Enlightenment, and the Authority of Social Practice	…….	61
Chapter 3: The Reciprocal Recognition That *Is* Absolute Spirit: Confession, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation	…….	98
Chapter 4: Religion, Philosophy, and the Agonistic Absolute	…….	145
PART II:		
Chapter 5: Religion and Philosophy in a Diverse Society	…….	183
Chapter 6: Democracy's Dialectic	…….	209
Bibliography	…….	232

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The smallest indivisible human unit is two people, not one; one is a fiction. From such nets of souls societies, the social world, human life springs.

Tony Kushner[1]

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[1] Tony Kushner, "Afterword," *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes* (New York: TGC, 1995), 289.

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INTRODUCTION

On October 14, 1806, Napoleon faced off with Prussian troops outside the city of Jena. It was the middle of the Napoleonic Wars, and the battle of Jena was the latest in a series of confrontations between the French and the Prussians. The Holy Roman Empire was collapsing. The Battle of Jena only lasted one afternoon, but it was a devastating defeat for the Prussians.

At the time, G. W. F. Hegel was struggling to make ends meet as an unsalaried lecturer at the University of Jena. He was also working on a long-promised, book-length exposition of his philosophical system and, that autumn, he was nearing its completion. That book would be the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. In a letter to Friedrich Schelling, Hegel claimed to have finished the *Phenomenology* in the middle of the night before the battle of Jena.[2] He entrusted the final pages of the book to a courier who traveled through French lines to deliver them to Hegel's publisher in Bamburg. As Hegel's student Eduard Gans later wrote, "under the thunder of the battle of Jena [Hegel] completed the *Phenomenology of Spirit*."[3]

If Gans's dramatic rendering of the completion of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is somewhat embellished, it nevertheless captures the fact that the book was conceived and written in a moment of great political and social upheaval. Hegel was hopeful about the latent possibilities of his changing society, but he was also concerned about the collapse of old communities and ways of life. He watched as political and military alliances shifted, and he wondered what glue would hold the emerging society together. He anticipated the tensions

[2] Letter to Schelling of 1 May 1807, *Hegel: The Letters*, trans., Clark Butler and Christiane Seiler, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), 80. Terry Pinkard discusses this episode in *Hegel: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 227-230.
[3] Quoted in Pinkard, *Hegel*, 229.

between families and local communities, on the one side, and the political entities that would demand their allegiance and sacrifice, on the other. At the same time, Hegel noticed and began to theorize the way that traditional roles and duties, including gender roles, were constructed within these local and national communities. He tried to make sense of the apparent authority of these socially-constructed norms as well as their capacity to change. Through his work, Hegel discovered and theorized the priority of social practices in constituting and changing norms and normative authority.

This dissertation is an account of how Hegel addresses the emerging issues of social ethics and cultural conflict in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and about what he might have to teach us in our own social and historical context. In particular, it looks to Chapter VI of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, in which Hegel describes how conflicts over norms and authority emerge in different types of communities and argues for the relevance of rituals and other social practices in confronting and overcoming these conflicts. This is a social-practical interpretation of Hegel that challenges the notion that reconciliation is the work of a god or cosmic spirit, while identifying religion as an important source of the relationships and rituals that sustain diverse communities over time.

The *Phenomenology of Spirit*

A brief sketch of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* will situate the interpretation of Chapter VI and highlight its contemporary relevance. Hegel called the *Phenomenology of Spirit* a "voyage of discovery" taken by consciousness in its search for a self-conscious and self-sufficient standard of knowledge. Hegel and his readers can only arrive at the destination – the standard of knowledge – by undertaking this voyage. The point of departure is the simplest account that

Hegel can imagine of consciousness's certainty of its object, and the voyage leads, through experiences that reveal that account's internal conflicts and contradictions, to more complex and adequate accounts. Along the way, Hegel and his readers themselves learn from the experiences of consciousness. Hegel begins with sense-certainty, in which consciousness claims to be immediately and infallibly conscious of its object. Consciousness apprehends its object as *this, here, now*. In sense-certainty, the standard is taken to be immediate, as consciousness's unimpeachable knowledge of its object. After Hegel describes sense-certainty, however, he shows how consciousness's experience of its object (as not merely *this, here, now*, but as a unified and enduring complex) exposes the inadequacies of this account. Hegel demonstrates sense-certainty's failure to account for its knowledge of this particular object and suggests what should be learned from that failure. This gives rise to the next account of the standard of knowledge (in this case, what Hegel calls perception).

In the Introduction to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel refers to this phenomenological investigation as "the path of *doubt*, or, more properly, as the path of despair" (§78/72). This doubt or despair is not to be confused with Cartesian doubt or Kantian skepticism; it is more like immanent critique than that. Hegel and his readers track consciousness as it gives an account of itself and its object, finds its account wanting, and reassesses this account. Hegel calls this a "self-consuming skepticism" (*ibid*), in which he shows what consciousness posits as its standard of knowledge, how it tries to apply this standard to its experience, and what its experience reveals about the inadequacies of the standard that it has set for itself. Hegel shows his readers what the logical consequences of this failure are by way of a subsequent account of the standard of knowledge that attempts to overcome the problems plaguing the previous one. The goal of the phenomenology, he writes, "lies at the point where knowledge no longer has the need to go

beyond itself, that is, where knowledge comes around to itself, and where the concept corresponds to the object and the object to the concept" (§80/74). Through this dialectic, in which consciousness repeatedly tries and fails and tries again, consciousness eventually arrives at the self-conscious and self-sufficient standard of knowledge. At that point, the object of consciousness corresponds to consciousness's concept of it; the account does not collapse. Hegel calls this "absolute knowledge."

Initially, this phenomenological story – consciousness's voyage from sense-certainty to absolute knowledge – may appear irrelevant to Hegel's social and political concerns. But as the story of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* unfolds, it becomes clear that any adequate account of the standard of knowledge would have to address the social and historical context in which people make knowledge claims. Hegel's account of *spirit* – the norms and norm-generating and -sustaining practices of a form of life – highlights the ways that individuals' knowledge is mediated and judged in a community through its social practices. While the *Phenomenology of Spirit* begins with a premise about isolated, ahistorical consciousness, it turns out to be a story about socially and historically situated individuals and communities. By the end of the book, Hegel has attended to such practical matters as slavery, tragedy, the sacrifices of young men in war, burial rites, gender roles, religion, the culture war standoff between religious faith and secular rationalism, and political revolution.

The *Phenomenology of Spirit* tells this story in three sections, which are divided into eight chapters. Following the Preface and Introduction, Section A ("Consciousness") comprises three chapters: Sense-Certainty, Perception, and Force and the Understanding; Section B ("Self-Consciousness") includes only one chapter: Self-Consciousness; and Section C comprises four chapters: Reason, Spirit, Religion, and Absolute Knowledge. The transition from Chapter V

("Reason") to Chapter VI ("Spirit") is particularly pivotal for understanding the book's social and political import, because it begins with the moment in which consciousness's account of the standard of knowledge acquires its social and historical context. Unlike the first five chapters, which discuss what Hegel calls "shapes of consciousness," Chapter VI focuses on "shapes of spirit." This is a significant shift.[4] Whereas a shape of consciousness is a conceptual scheme – the way a particular individual or group characterizes itself, the source of authority for its beliefs or norms, and its relationship to the world in which it finds itself – a shape of spirit is an embodied form of social life, including its norms and laws, social practices, and language. As Terry Pinkard notes, "a 'shape of spirit' is thus more fundamental than a 'shape of consciousness," for it provides the social and historical context in which particular conceptual schemes can even appear as live options.[5] In Hegel's words, "Spirit is thereby the self-supporting, absolute, real essence. All the previous shapes of consciousness are abstractions from it" (§439/325).

In Chapter VI, Hegel discusses a succession of shapes of spirit, considering not only the accounts that individuals and communities within these shapes of spirit give of themselves, but also the norms and social practices that actually appear in it. Hegel presents a progression of individuals and communities who, for reasons that will become clear, cannot provide an adequate account of the authority of their norms, laws, institutions, and practices. He describes the ways that these individuals come into conflict with one another and the ways that their own understanding of the authority of their norms fails to help them confront and overcome these

[4] Pinkard argues that the distinction between "shapes of consciousness" and "shapes of spirit" is the "dominant distinction in the *Phenomenology*." See Terry Pinkard, "What is a 'shape of spirit'?" in *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit: A Critical Guide*, D. Moyar and M. Quante, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 112.
[5] Pinkard, "What is a 'shape of spirit'?," 114.

conflicts. Some of these communities and conflicts are familiar to readers. The conflict between Antigone and Creon, which Hegel draws from Sophocles's *Antigone*, ends in tragedy. The standoff between Faith and Enlightenment – Hegel's labels for the positions held by early modern Pietists and their secular rationalist opponents – devolves into a seemingly-intractable culture war. Both of these conflicts are confronted in ways that lead to the downfall of a whole form of life – that is, the conflicts make it clear that something is wrong with that way of organizing a community and justifying its beliefs, practices, and institutions. Again and again, Hegel describes how communities fall apart, only to be replaced by other communities that try to compensate for the weaknesses of what came before. It is only at the end of Chapter VI that he depicts a conflict that ends in reconciliation rather than self-destruction – in part because of the conflicting parties' participation in sacramental practices of confession and forgiveness. At this point, full-fledged reciprocal recognition and what Hegel calls "absolute spirit" emerge.

What exactly this "absolute spirit" *entails*, however, is one of the most disputed points of contemporary Hegel interpretation. The "absolute" is the common object of religion and philosophy. In its reflections on the absolute, religion represents it as "God"; philosophy, however, knows the absolute as "spirit." The interpretive dispute concerns the question of how to understand these related concepts of "absolute," "God," and "spirit," and the question of how to understand the difference between religious and philosophical reflections on them. A large body of Hegel scholarship contends that Hegel should be understood as a spirit monist or speculative theologian for whom absolute spirit is a kind of pantheistic self-consciousness or divine mind that manifests and reveals itself in history.[6]

[6] This is a diverse group, including scholars like Frederick Beiser, William Desmond, Peter Hodgson, Walter Jaeschke, and Merold Westphal. As Thomas A. Lewis notes in his review of recent Hegel scholarship, diverse scholars such as Jaeschke, Desmond, and Hodgson, "all

Recent developments in the study of Hegel, however, have challenged this interpretation of Hegel and of the concept of absolute spirit. In the last two decades, a growing number of scholars have argued that Hegel's concept of spirit does not refer to a supernatural entity immanent in history. The absolute that religion represents as "God," is, philosophically understood, the collection of norms (beliefs, habits, institutions, practices, etc.) and norm-generating and -sustaining practices that make up a form of life. History is not driven forward by a supernatural force but by fallible human beings, who institute their norms and who argue over them. In *absolute* spirit, the process of creating, sustaining, challenging, and transforming norms is fully self-conscious; absolute spirit is the shape of spirit in which members of the community *recognize* that their norms are, on the one hand, inherited and, on the other hand, self-legislated. In absolute spirit, members of a community know that they are the collective authors of their norms and, therefore, that they are responsible for them. They know themselves to be both shaped by their socially and historically situated norms and to be shapers of them. My interpretation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is indebted to this second group of scholars, the post-Kantian interpreters of Hegel.

Collectively, their work is sometimes referred to as the non-metaphysical interpretation of Hegel, but that label can be confusing. "Metaphysics" is a slippery enough term that it is unclear what is being ruled out when Hegel (or an interpretation of Hegel) is labeled "non-

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interpret Hegel as offering a highly rationalistic account in which God is not radically other to human beings, yet they evaluate the proposal and its relation to Christianity quite differently" ("Beyond the Totalitarian," *Religion Compass* 2/4 (2008), 564). See Frederick Beiser, *Hegel* (New York: Routledge, 2005); William Desmond, *Hegel's God: A Counterfeit Double?* (Aldershot: Ashgate Press, 2005); Peter C. Hodgson, *Hegel and Christian Theology: A Reading of the Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); and Merold Westphal, *History and Truth in Hegel's Phenomenology* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1979 [1998]), and "Hegel and Onto-Theology," *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain* 41/42 (2000), 142-65.

metaphysical." Moreover, the label has had the unfortunate effect of repelling many theological readers. The assumption has been that a non-metaphysical Hegel is a Hegel stripped of relevance for religion and theology. This problem has more to do with the neglect of these topics by the analytic philosophers who have spearheaded this interpretation than with the interpretive moves themselves. To avoid (some of) the confusion, I will refer to this interpretation as the post-Kantian interpretation of Hegel, and I will insist on its relevance for religion and theology. It is worth specifying, in more detail now, what this post-Kantian Hegel scholarship claims.

Recent Hegel Scholarship

The post-Kantian interpretation of Hegel emphasizes Hegel's continuity with Kant and objects to interpretations that cast Hegel's philosophy as engaged in the dogmatic metaphysics that Kant tried to rule out.[7] According to Robert Pippin, for instance, Hegel should not be interpreted as rejecting Kantian philosophy and reverting to pre-critical metaphysics. Instead, he should be interpreted as endorsing and extending central aspects of Kant's project.[8] For the

[7] Here, I will mainly discuss the work of Robert Pippin and Robert Brandom, although two other scholars who have developed aspects of the post-Kantian interpretation have deeply influenced my project. In *Hegel's Phenomenology*, Pinkard applies the post-Kantian interpretation to the entirety of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. It is a helpful guide to the text and is especially useful in its explication of key Hegelian terminology. To use Pippin's words, it provides a "high altitude picture" of Hegel's argument, but does not tarry with the details of any particular section. See Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Meanwhile, Thomas A. Lewis has connected the post-Kantian interpretation to Hegel's philosophy of religion. In *Religion, Modernity, and Politics in Hegel*, he mounts a formidable challenge to traditional interpretations of Hegel. The book considers Hegel's early theological writings, the *Logic*, and the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* at length, but does not discuss the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. See Thomas A. Lewis, *Religion, Modernity, and Politics in Hegel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[8] See, especially, Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). Also, Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy: Rational Agency as Ethical Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); and Pippin, *Hegel on Self-Consciousness: Desire and Death in the Phenomenology of Spirit* (Princeton, NJ:

purposes of this dissertation, the most important of these is Kant's account of the "transcendental unity of apperception." In the Transcendental Deduction in *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant argues that the human mind does not passively record data from the sensible world, but rather engages in an active process of "unifying the manifold," that is, making judgments about how sensory material ought to be organized. The experience of seeing a table, for instance, is not a matter of the object "table" impressing itself on the mind, but rather an activity of organizing relevant sensory material and judging that what one is looking at is a table rather than a jungle gym or a bed. In this sense, representations of objects are normative judgments, true or false claims about the world, undertaken by an apperceiving (that is, reflective or self-conscious) subject or, in Kantian terminology, a unity of apperception.

With Kant as his starting point, Hegel likewise argues that human beings' experiences of the world – even experiences as commonplace as seeing a table – involve making normative judgments, and, furthermore, that this practical activity is what being a subject entails. Where Hegel extends this claim, according to Pippin, is in his insistence that these judgments are open to contestation from other self-conscious subjects. Hegel believes that people cannot make normative judgments of the kind that characterize human beings as self-conscious subjects unless *other* self-conscious subjects recognize or contest these judgments. As Hegel writes, "self-consciousness attains its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness" (§175/144). In *Hegel on Self-Consciousness*, Pippin reads the famous lordship and bondage section of the *Phenomenology* in light of this interpretation, concluding that Hegel views apperception or self-

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Princeton University Press, 2011). Critics have argued that the post-Kantian interpretation makes Hegel relevant to contemporary thought at the expense of accuracy. See, for instance, Beiser 2005. Meanwhile, ongoing work in the post-Kantian line of interpretation argues that it provides a more plausible account of Hegel in his historical and intellectual context than earlier interpretations, while having the advantage of getting Hegel's philosophy of mind in the same frame as his ethical and political thought.

consciousness "as always in a way provisional, as opening up a kind of gap between a subject's initial resolving and any satisfaction of its desire to confirm that what it takes to be true or right or good is; that this possible unity of itself with itself, as [Hegel] said, must become essential for it and so that self-conscious consciousness should be understood as 'desire'."[9] For Hegel, self-consciousness is not a static faculty of the mind but an ongoing movement or process that involves making judgments and having those judgments affirmed or denied by someone other than oneself.

Robert Brandom connects this post-Kantian aspect of Hegel's thought to Brandom's own pragmatist philosophy of language, in order to develop what he calls a semantic interpretation of Hegel.[10] Like Pippin, Brandom argues that Hegel both draws on Kant's account of the unity of apperception and insists that such a unity of apperception must be socially and historically situated. As noted above, Kant thinks that human beings' experiences of the world require judgments. Brandom characterizes these judgments as normative *commitments* for which human beings (as subjects) take responsibility. As a human being interacts with the world, she acquires new commitments, some of which may contradict other commitments that she holds. To become a self-conscious subject – a *unity* of apperception – she must synthesize a unified set of commitments out of such conflicts.

According to Brandom, Hegel sees (as Kant did not) that this synthetic unity has a social dimension. While Hegel agrees with Kant that the subject is the entity who is responsible *for* his

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[9] Pippin, *Hegel on Self-Consciousness*, 60.

[10] See Robert B. Brandom, *Tales of the Mighty Dead: Historical Essays in the Metaphysics of Intentionality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); and *Reason in Philosophy: Animating Ideas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009). Also, Brandom has made draft chapters of his forthcoming book on Hegel's *Phenomenolgoy of Spirit* available on his website. I am grateful to him for his permission to use and cite those draft chapters in this dissertation (Personal correspondence, 7 Jan 2011). See Brandom, *A Spirit of Trust: A Semantic Reading of Hegel's Phenomenology*, http://www.pitt.edu/~brandom/hegel/index.html, n.d.

or her commitments, he goes beyond Kant to suggest that the subject must also be responsible *to* someone or something. Without this responsibility *to*, there is no normativity. In response to this problem, Hegel develops what Brandom calls a "recognitive model of normative bindingness," in which subjects are responsible *to other subjects* for their normative judgments, concept use, and so forth. The practices of reciprocal recognition, which include taking responsibility, granting authority, and holding oneself and others accountable, are all *social* practices. Moreover, according to Brandom, the conflicts and reconciliations that happen at the individual level, as a subject synthesizes a self out of various conflicting commitments, also happen at the social level, as members of a community contest others' beliefs, norms, and actions and reweave the fabric of the community in the face of such conflicts. In Brandom's reading of Hegel, the "inexhaustibility of concrete, sensuous immediacy guarantees that we will never achieve a set of conceptual contents articulated by relations of material inferential consequence and incompatibility that will not … at some point lead to commitments that are incompatible, according to those same standards. *No integration or recollection is final at the ground level*."[11] According to Brandom, we should expect that conflicts will continue to arise at both the individual and social level and, therefore, that we will perpetually need to resynthesize the self or the society. The reciprocal recognition and reconciliation from which absolute spirit emerges are never more than temporary, contestable achievements. Social life must involve *ongoing* practices of contestation and reconciliation.

Brandom's interpretation notes the role of social practices in Hegel's account of spirit and emphasizes that, for Hegel, it is through social practices that human beings become subjects, loci of responsibility, who authorize one another to take responsibility for their knowledge and

[11] Brandom, *Reason in Philosophy*, 104 (emphasis added).

norms. This emphasis on the social-practical dimension of human life places Hegel at the forefront of an intellectual tradition that prioritizes social practice in epistemology and ethics alike. In the United States, Hegel's influence on John Dewey, in particular, place him at the beginning of the tradition of inquiry that animates American pragmatism. Meanwhile, contemporary scholars like Brandom, Richard Bernstein, Terry Pinkard, Robert Stern, and Jeffrey Stout have all, in different ways, entertained the questions of whether and to what extent Hegel might be said to be a pragmatist, and whether pragmatism has anything to learn from Hegel.[12] Recent pragmatist reconstructions of Hegel's thought focus on practices of reasoning, deliberation, and justification – paradigmatically, asking for and giving reasons for one's commitments or actions.

The intellectual tradition inaugurated by Hegel's insights into the social practical basis of norms and normative authority has a second strand, which includes many of the most influential twentieth-century continental philosophers, including Heidegger, Foucault, Bourdieu, and Butler. Nevertheless, important differences persist between these two strands of the intellectual tradition. In Brandom's account, Hegel's grittier discussions of slavery, domination, tragedy, revolution and terror, and sacrifice become allegories for the pragmatist semantics on which Brandom is focused. Pippin identifies this as a limitation of Brandom's interpretation of Hegel, but his own account attends to the philosophical context and implications of Hegel's claims more

[12] See, for instance, Robert Brandom, "Some Pragmatist Themes in Hegel's Idealism: Negotiation and Administration in Hegel's Account of the Structure and Content of Conceptual Norms," *European Journal of Philosophy* 7:2 (August 1999), 164-189; Terry Pinkard, "Was Pragmatism the Successor to Idealism?" in *New Pragmatists*, Cheryl Misak, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 142-168; Robert Stern, *Hegelian Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); and Jeffrey Stout, "The Spirit of Pragmatism: Bernstein's Variations on Hegelian Themes," *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 33:1 (2002), 185-246, and "What Is It That Absolute Knowing Knows?" (Paper presented at the annual meeting for the American Academy of Religion, Chicago, Ill., November 2012).

than their religious and ethical dimensions.[13] As Marxist philosopher Fredric Jameson writes, "Pippin has taught us to reread Hegel's arguments with the respect due a rigorous philosophizing, even though he achieves this by a modest lowering of the volume of Hegel's dialectical claims, which are surely what have always excited the latter's followers, not many of whom will be altogether content with the unpretentious Rortyan pragmatism of this new avatar."[14] Jameson worries that the post-Kantian interpretation highlights the "philosophical chapters" in the first half of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* at the expense of the "non-philosophical (or 'sociological') chapters" in the second half of the book.[15]

While I would not neatly categorize the two halves of the book as philosophical versus sociological (it seems to me that both halves of the book do both kinds of work), the broader point is well-taken; many of the Anglo-American philosophers who have championed the post-Kantian interpretation of Hegel *have* emphasized the first half of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* over the second and the philosophically abstract over the socially and religiously concrete. This is especially true of Pippin's influential *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness*, which is often considered the founding text of the post-Kantian interpretation.

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[13] See Robert B. Pippin, "Brandom's Hegel," *European Journal of Philosophy* 13:3 (2005), 381-408. It is my understanding, however, that Pippin is now working on a project on Hegel's political thought and its relevance for contemporary societies.

[14] Fredric Jameson, *The Hegel Variations: On the Phenomenology of Spirit* (London: Verso, 2010), 10.

[15] Jameson insists that that Marxist readings of the second half of the *Phenomenology* remain the "most useful and productive commentaries" on those chapters, even while he criticizes them for their overreliance on Alexandre Kojève's interpretation of Hegel. He suggests that "the fountainhead of such commentary is of course the classic lecture series of Alexandre Kojève in the 1930s, still stimulating, but about which I think some new kinds of questions can now be raised" (*The Hegel Variations*, 11). Among the questions that Jameson asks of Kojève are whether the latter's use of the master-slave dialectic as the interpretive key to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is justified, and whether the final chapter of the book represents the "end of history." Jameson suggests – and I agree – that both of these questions should be answered in the negative. I address Kojève's interpretation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in Chapter 3.

Pippin argues that Hegel has more or less made his philosophical case by the end of Chapter V, before the chapters treating spirit, religion, and absolute knowledge. By focusing on the priority of the social-practical – and on the social (and not only linguistic) practices that Hegel describes and advocates – this dissertation tries to bridge the gap between post-Kantian interpreters of Hegel and those animated by continental philosophy. As Chapter VI of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* makes clear, Hegel is taken with ritual and religious practices, particularly the sacraments and sacrifice, and their role in the institution of norms and normative authority.

As I have already suggested, the transition from "shapes of consciousness" to "shapes of spirit" in the middle of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is significant, and the second half of the text requires the careful analysis that the first half has already received from the post-Kantian interpreters. This is particularly pressing because, as Jameson notes, the social, political, and religious themes that have made the *Phenomenology of Spirit* so compelling in continental philosophical circles for the past two centuries have been underemphasized by this new reading of Hegel (mainly pursued by analytic philosophers). In focusing on Hegel's account of spirit, and hence, on Chapter VI of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, I hope to establish the relevance of these post-Kantian interpretive developments to concerns about ethical conflict, religious practices, and the construction of norms.[16]

[16] Because I am interested in Hegel's account of spirit, my analysis focuses on the second half of the text. I read the second half as following from, and of a piece with, the first half. On this point, I agree with Jon Stewart and Michael N. Forster, both of whom argue for the coherence and unity of the text as a whole. Both Stewart and Forster take issue with the frequent claim that the *Phenomenology of Spirit* follows no discernible plan. See Jon Stewart, *The Unity of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit: A Systematic Interpretation* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2000); Michael N. Forster, *Hegel's Idea of a Phenomenology of Spirit* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). C.f. Robert C. Solomon, *In the Spirit of Hegel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

By highlighting the ongoing processes of agon and reconciliation, the dissertation presents Hegel as one who already anticipates many nineteenth and twentieth-century objections to (and misreadings of) his philosophy. Those who read Hegel as a philosopher of totality, of mediation that ends in absolute spirit, have objected to his supposed claim that mediation could come to an end under present historical circumstances (Marx, Kierkegaard, Kojève), while others have objected to his apparent presumption that mediation could come to an end under *any* circumstances (Adorno, Foucault, Derrida). If Hegel's metaphysics are of the sort that traditional interpretations suggest – that is, if Hegel thinks that absolute spirit involves the subject's *a priori* knowledge of the absolute – then absolute spirit *would* entail closure.[17]

In the following pages, by contrast, I argue that Hegel is a philosopher of "mediation without closure."[18] As my reading of Hegel's account of spirit demonstrates, Hegel is committed to the notion that social practices stand at the center of human life. Through social practices,

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[17] In "What is Open and What is Closed in the Philosophy of Hegel," David Kolb argues that attempts to appropriate Hegel's historicism without his supposed metaphysics have failed: "an open thinking would have difficulty comprehending and reconciling in the strong sense Hegel has in mind" ("What is Open and What is Closed," 34). For Kolb, Hegel is the philosopher of closure. John W. Burbidge disagrees with Kolb. He argues that "the absolute method of knowledge involves continually taking account of the partiality in whatever has already been achieved, anticipating something else, whatever it be, that will expose how partial it is, yet being able to incorporate that novelty into a comprehensive perspective that is thereby altered and transformed" ("Hegel's Open Future," 178). More recently, Catherine Malabou has argued for the "plasticity" of human beings, God, and philosophy in Hegel's account, although she does not connect this argument to the recent Anglophone scholarship. My argument connects the "openness" or "plasticity" of Hegel's thought to the post-Kantian interpretation of his epistemology and metaphysics. See David Kolb, "What is Open and What is Closed in the Philosophy of Hegel," *Philosophical Topics* 19:2 (1991), 29-50; John W. Burbidge, "Hegel's Open Future," in *Hegel and the Tradition: Essays in Honor of H. S. Harris*, ed. Michael Baur and John Russon (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 176-189; Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality, and Dialectic*, trans. Lisabeth During (New York: Routledge, 2005).

[18] I am borrowing Merold Westphal's felicitous phrase. Westphal does not think that Hegel is a philosopher of "mediation without closure," but he does think that Hegel can inform such a project. Westphal, *Truth and History in Hegel's Phenomenology*, xiii.

human beings become subjects – and through social practices, these subjects create, maintain, and transform the norms of their shape of spirit. When subjects reflect on these processes, Hegel claims, the search for a self-sufficient standard of knowledge comes to an end, because they become self-conscious of their participation in the practices by which they themselves institute norms and normative authority. Nothing about this, however, necessitates the end of difference, conflict, or contestation. Indeed, absolute spirit is the shape of spirit in which subjects are self-conscious of their ongoing participation in practices of creating as well as contesting and changing their norms.

The Project

The dissertation has two goals. The first is to explicate Hegel's account of spirit as a claim about the priority of social practices in the creation of subjects and the institution of norms and normative authority. The second is to extend this claim to contemporary debates in religion, ethics, and politics – debates about the nature of epistemic and normative authority, the varieties of ethical conflict, and the practices of contestation and reconciliation that sustain a religiously-diverse community over time. Accordingly, the dissertation proceeds in two parts. In Part I of the dissertation, comprising Chapters 1-4, I offer an interpretation of Chapter VI of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in light of Hegel's search for a standard of knowledge – an account of the circumstances under which norms come to be judged as good or right or true. Moreover, I argue that his concept of "absolute spirit" should be understood as an articulation of a self-sufficient but nevertheless agonistic standard of this sort. In Part II of the dissertation, comprising Chapters 5 and 6, I draw on this interpretation to offer a rational reconstruction of a Hegelian standpoint suited to a religiously-diverse society. I suggest neither that Hegel was

"really" a democrat, nor that he would have been had he lived in the twenty-first century. Rather, I argue that a Hegelian standpoint that is committed to a social-practical account of norms and normative authority offers a robust account of the nature of religious and ethical conflict and of the practices of agon and reconciliation that sustain a pluralist society over time.

Part I begins with three chapters focused on three different shapes of spirit, and it outlines Hegel's assessment of the strengths and weakness of each of these three ways of organizing a community and justifying communal norms. Chapter 1 looks at Greek *Sittlichkeit*, an idealized picture of ancient Greek ethical life. The members of Greek *Sittlichkeit* take their identities and social roles (including gender roles) to be natural – simply and immediately given to them and therefore withheld from critique or revision. As Hegel shows through a discussion of Sophocles's *Antigone*, in the course of playing their roles, the members of Greek *Sittlichkeit* come into conflict with one another and have no resources for coping with their conflict. Such conflicts – paradigmatically, tragic conflicts – expose the flaws of Greek *Sittlichkeit*. A community whose members take their norms to be natural, fixed, and given, will be characterized by tragedy.

Chapter 2 turns from immediacy and tragedy to self-legislation and alienation through a discussion of Faith and Enlightenment. Hegel depicts an emotionalist religious movement (Faith) and a rationalist philosophical movement (pure insight or Enlightenment). Faith and Enlightenment believe that norms must be self-legislated; they reject appeals to nature or tradition as grounds for the authority of beliefs and practices. They believe that individuals must be able to affirm their commitments for themselves, based on objective standards that are available to everyone. Faith and Enlightenment disagree, however, about what those standards are. For Faith, religious experience provides the ground for one's commitments; for

Enlightenment, rationality provides such a ground. While they avoid the problems of immediacy and tragedy that plagued Greek *Sittlichkeit*, Faith and Enlightenment have problems of their own. Each takes its standard as foundational and, in this sense, fixed and given. Meanwhile, each rejects the standards of the other, and each fails to see or account for the strengths of the other's position. They become locked in an impasse, a culture war in which neither recognizes the normative authority of the other.

This idea is explored further in Chapter 3, which focuses on the "conscience" section of Chapter VI, particularly the conflict between the wicked consciousness and the judging consciousness. The wicked consciousness takes action in the world, and the judging consciousness judges the wicked consciousness for acting in a way that sullies his inner moral purity with outward action. Their conflict is overcome when one consciousness confesses and the other forgives, leading to reciprocal recognition and the emergence of absolute spirit. I highlight the sacramental character of confession and forgiveness, and argue that it is crucial for Hegel's account. Through their words and deeds – their confession and forgiveness – the two consciousnesses symbolize and actualize their recognition of their shared normative authority. They overcome both the immediacy of Greek *Sittlichkeit* and the alienation of faith and enlightenment. Each one recognizes the other as being in the same position as itself as a potential agent, judge, confessor, and forgiver. They recognize their parity or equal standing.

Chapter 4 draws out the implications of these three conflicts for an understanding of Hegel's account of *absolute* spirit. I address interpretive debates about what Hegel means by "absolute spirit" through a discussion of his claim that the absolute is both substance and subject and his suggestion that religion and philosophy share the same object (the absolute) while knowing this object in different forms. According to Hegel, it is the religious practice of

sacrifice that relates substance and subject in the absolute, and it is the philosophical account of what this sacrifice entails that marks the attainment of absolute spirit. This requires attention to Chapters VII ("Religion") and VIII ("Absolute Knowledge"). Absolute spirit, I will argue, is characterized by agonism, disagreement, and struggle, sustained by practices of recognition, and punctuated by moments of reconciliation.

Part II of the dissertation moves from interpretation to application. There is, of course, no straightforward way to apply Hegel's philosophy to contemporary public life. Hegel's system of philosophy is marked by its own social and historical context. Hegel himself knew this; as he famously wrote in the Preface to the *Philosophy of Right*, "philosophy is its own time comprehended in thoughts."[19] Nevertheless, many of the social, political, and philosophical challenges with which Hegel grappled still demand attention, and it seems to me that his account of spirit continues to provide philosophical resources for thinking about these challenges. Hegel's emphasis on the priority of social practice, in particular, offers a view of agon and reconciliation that remains highly relevant today.

Chapter 5 addresses a potential objection to this interpretation and application of Hegel's account of spirit – namely, that it promises pluralism but demands adherence to a naturalist view of norms and normative authority, in which human beings are the primary (and perhaps only?) participants in the social practices that generate and sustain authority. I respond to this objection with an account of how conflicts – including conflicts between supernaturalists and naturalists over this very issue – would appear in a Hegelian democracy of the sort that I have described.

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[19] G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 21. And, of course: "When philosophy paint its grey on grey, a shape of life has grown old, and it cannot be rejuvenated, but only recognized, by the grey in grey of philosophy; the owl of Minerva begins its flight only with the onset of dusk" (*ibid*, 23).

While the Hegelian standpoint is at odds with some religious views, it embraces a set of practices for engaging with one another across such differences and disagreements. The status of religion and philosophy, God and authority, are among the matters about which members of an agonistic democracy will continue to disagree.

Chapter 6 outlines the shared practices of conflict and reconciliation that would characterize an agonistic, democratic Hegelianism appropriate to a religiously-diverse society. I contrast this form of conflict – agonism – to the other forms of conflict that Hegel describes in Chapter VI, particularly tragic conflict and culture war, and outline its unique features. This type of conflict involves a view of norms and normative authority in which the members of the community are authorized *by one another* to take responsibility for their norms. Because they are likely to find themselves in situations in which they disagree with one another about how norms ought to be applied – or whether they ought to be upheld at all – members of the community engage in social practices of examining their own commitments and those of others, giving and asking for reasons for those commitments, and holding one another accountable for them. I contrast this view of normative authority with that of Slavoj Žižek, whose interpretation of Hegel intersects with mine on many points, but whose conclusions about its political and ethical import lead him to endorse something like Hegelian Leninism rather than Hegelian democracy.

A NOTE ON PRIMARY TEXTS

I have relied on Terry Pinkard's new translation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* throughout the dissertation: G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, facing page translation, trans. Terry Pinkard, http://terrypinkard.weebly.com/phenomenology-of-spirit-page.html. In-text citations include the paragraph number in Pinkard's translation, followed by the page number in the following German edition: G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Werke 3, eds. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970). (Note that the paragraph numbers in Pinkard's translation differ from those in A. V. Miller's widely-used translation. Pinkard's paragraph numbers are one number behind the corresponding paragraphs in Miller's translation from §403 through §540. Following Hegel's own paragraph breaks, Pinkard combines Miller's §402 and 403, and later divides Miller's §540 into two paragraphs.) Where I have altered Pinkard's translation, I note the alteration in the footnotes.

For Hegel's "Tübingen Essay," in-text citations include the page number of the English translation in *Three Essays 1793-1795*, translated by Peter Fuss and John Dobbins (Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 30-58, followed by the page number in the following German edition: G. W. F. Hegel, *Frühe Schriften*, Werke 1, eds. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1971), 9-44.

Emphasis is Hegel's own, unless otherwise stated.

CHAPTER ONE: Greek *Sittlichkeit* and the Social Construction of Norms

Chapter VI of the *Phenomenology* opens with a discussion of Greek *Sittlichkeit*, or ethical life, in which Hegel considers the contradictions and conflicts inherent in ancient Greek social arrangements through a discussion of Sophocles's *Antigone*.[20] The *Antigone* has an unparalleled position in both classical literature and modern Western philosophy as an ongoing source of reflection on the tensions between religion and the state, divine and human law, and agency and responsibility. Hegel was taken with the play, turning and returning to it at several points in his life and work. His interpretation of the *Antigone* in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is odd and provocative, and later philosophical treatments of the play have often been compelled to grapple with Hegel's interpretation of the *Antigone* as much as with Sophocles's own text.

The central conflict of the *Antigone* is simultaneously a conflict between Antigone and Creon, between the obligations of men and of women, and, more broadly, between human law and divine law. It is, in Hegel's interpretation, a conflict between two sets of one-sided stances, each of which stubbornly asserts itself as natural, fixed, and immediately given. Through his discussion of the play's central conflict, Hegel argues that those religious and political

[20] The chapter is limited to a discussion of Hegel's reflections on Sophocles's *Antigone* in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Hegel also discusses the *Antigone* in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*, and this later discussion of the play is relevant to understanding Hegel's broader theory of the tragic. See G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975). The starting point for English-language scholarship on the latter is A.C. Bradley's 1909 essay "Hegel's Theory of Tragedy," republished in *Hegel on Tragedy*, Anne and Henry Paolucci, eds. (New York: Harper and Row, 1975).

Earlier versions of part of this chapter were presented at the International Society for Religion, Literature and Culture 15th Biennial Conference at Oxford University in October 2010 and published as "Gender and the Ethical Given: Human and Divine Law in Hegel's Reading of the *Antigone*," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 41.4 (2013): 643-667.

communities that justify their beliefs and practices by claiming that they are simply natural, fixed, or given are subject to tragic conflict and collapse. Greek *Sittlichkeit* fails to account for the authority of its norms and therefore falls short as a way of organizing communal life.

This may be the place in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* where Hegel is most explicit about the social construction of norms, including gender roles, and the problems that arise when people fail to recognize their responsibility for these norms. Therefore, this section has been particularly relevant for philosophical discussions about gender and about tragedy.[21] As Brandom writes, "the paradigm example [Hegel] chooses to exemplify this claim about traditional misunderstandings of the significance of natural properties for normative proprieties is gender essentialism."[22] Moreover, it is an example in which gender essentialism is the source

[21] As a preliminary matter, it is worth noting that because Hegel's discussion of the *Antigone* focuses on the conflict between male and female characters in the context of an ancient Greek society organized around strictly divided gender roles, it has been the site of ongoing debate about Hegel's views on gender. Relevant questions include: Is Hegel presenting an essentialist view of gender? Does Hegel provide resources for feminist philosophy and ethics? Readers have come to dramatically different answers to these questions. For instance, while Judith Butler accuses Hegel of gender essentialism, Robert Brandom claims that Hegel is *critiquing* that very thing. Indeed, Brandom goes so far as to say that Hegel's critique of gender essentialism in the Antigone section should earn Hegel a place in the feminist pantheon. Kimberly Hutchings, meanwhile, finds resources in the section for a feminist project, but argues that Hegel must at times be "read against himself" in order to critique what she takes to be Hegel's misogynistic claims at the end of the section. See Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Brandom, "From Irony to Trust: Modernity and Beyond," *A Spirit of Trust*, 23; and Kimberly Hutchings, *Hegel and Feminist Philosophy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003). Other works relevant to these questions about Hegel's views on gender and the resources that his work provides feminist philosophy include Jocelyn Hoy, "Hegel, *Antigone*, and Feminist Critique: The Spirit of Ancient Greece," in *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit: A Critical Guide*, D. Moyar and M. Quante, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Kimberly Hutchings and Tuija Pulkkinen, eds., *Hegel's Philosophy and Feminist Thought: Beyond Antigone?* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); and Patricia J. Mills, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of G. W. F. Hegel* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996). On feminist interpretations of *Antigone* more broadly, see Bonnie Honig, *Antigone, Interrupted* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[22] Brandom, "From Irony to Trust," *A Spirit of Trust*, 23.

of *tragic* conflict. I will return to both of these issues, gender and tragedy, in detail later in the chapter.

I begin by briefly discussing the context of this section within the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, including a summary of Hegel's effort to provide a positive account of Greek *Sittlichkeit*. Then, I provide a close reading of his description of the collapse of this form of social life, drawing attention to two key concepts in the text – character and the acknowledgment of guilt. In the conflict between Antigone and Creon, each is what Hegel calls a "character," not only in the sense that they are literal characters in Sophocles's drama but also in the sense that they take on identities that they believe to be natural, fixed, and each independent from the other. Through their actions, however, both realize that they are responsible to one another. By acknowledging their responsibility, these two characters break down. Yet, these acknowledgments and the break-down of the one-sided characters are insufficient to resolve the conflict. In fact, Hegel argues that resolution is impossible because the identities and obligations in Greek *Sittlichkeit* are grounded in the immediately-given authority of the human and divine law, and thus withheld from critical reflection or revision. Along the way, I draw distinctions between Judith Butler's influential interpretation of the section and my own. Against Butler's critical reading, I conclude that Hegel argues that when the authority of identities and obligations are taken as immediately given, irresolvable conflict will result; conversely, ethical conflict can only be overcome in a community that acknowledges that naturalized identities and obligations in fact embody normative commitments that may be open to contestation and revision. The final section of the chapter reflects on the conditions for tragic conflict.

Greek *Sittlichkeit*: The Harmonious View

In Greek *Sittlichkeit*, laws, practices, institutions, and other norms have the authority that they do simply because they have always had that unquestioned authority. Of the Greeks' conception of their own laws and norms, Hegel writes:

> They *are* and nothing more than that. This constitutes the consciousness of their relations. It is in that way that they count for Sophocles's Antigone as the *unwritten* and *unerring* law of the gods:
>
> > Not now and yesterday, but forever,
> >
> > It lives, and nobody knows from whence it appeared.
>
> They *are*. However much I inquire about their emergence and confine them to their point of origin, still I have gone far beyond them, since it is I who am henceforth the universal, and they are the conditioned and restricted. However much they are supposed to be legitimated through my insights, still I have already set their unwavering being-in-itself into motion, and I regard them as something which is perhaps true for me but perhaps not. An ethical disposition consists precisely in immovably sticking to what is right and in abstaining from any movement, any undermining, and any reduction. (§436/321-22)

In this shape of spirit, the authority of the laws that govern human activities is taken as immediately given. These laws simply *are*. To be ethical, Hegel writes, consists in "immovably sticking to what is right," rather than seeking to understand or critically justify the laws and norms.

Hegel is responding to a view that was widely held by his contemporaries, in which Greek *Sittlichkeit* is viewed as a "fully harmonious and non-alienated social order and self-

understanding" that provides an appealing alternative to the fragmentation of modern life.[23] Hegel's task in this section of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, however, is to expose the deep contradictions at the heart of Greek *Sittlichkeit*, which make it an unsupportable option for Hegel and his contemporaries. One interpretive challenge facing Hegel's readers is to determine when he is describing a shape of spirit in the terms in which its members would describe it (that is, a shape of spirit *for itself*), and when he is stepping back to show us, his readers, a contradiction or conflict within a shape of spirit that its members have not yet seen (i.e., that shape of spirit, *for us*). In general, he begins with a sympathetic description of a shape of spirit *for itself* – the best account that its members can give of themselves – before showing how that account is self-defeating. Accordingly, the section has two parts. In the first part, Hegel develops what he takes to be the account of Greek *Sittlichkeit* that the ancient Greeks would give of themselves. In the second part, Hegel reveals the conflicts and contradictions inherent in this shape of spirit. While this chapter focuses on the conflict in the second part of the section, I will briefly sketch out the supposedly "harmonious" conception that Hegel puts forward.

According to Hegel, the harmony of Greek *Sittlichkeit* does not result from the non-differentiation of spirit, but rather from differentiations that are taken to be reconcilable. Most important for the ancient Greeks is the differentiation between human law and divine law. Regarding the first, Hegel writes:

> Ethical substance is thus the *actual* substance, absolute spirit *realized* in the plurality of existing *consciousnesses*. The spirit is the *polity*, which, when we entered into the practical embodiment of reason itself, was *for us* the absolute

[23] Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology*, 136. Hegel himself held something like this view in his youth; many of his earliest works contrast Greek religion's ability to reconcile individuals to one another and to their society with Christianity's apparent failure to do so.

> essence and which here emerges in its truth *for itself* as a conscious ethical essence and as the *essence for the consciousness* which we now have as our object…. As the actual *substance*, it is *a people*, and as *actual consciousness*, it is the *citizens* of the nation. (§446/329)

According to the Greeks, ethical substance is absolute or self-sufficient spirit that has been actualized in the nation and its citizens. The community of citizens – "*for itself*" (that is, according to the Greeks' own view of themselves) – emerges as the bearer of the true ethical essence. This, Hegel concludes, is the human law, which is immediately known by all in the community. He writes that "its truth is the *validity* which is publicly open to the light of day. It is an *existence* which, for immediate certainty, takes on the form of existence that has been made freestanding" (§447/329-30). Ethical substance as the human law is taken to be "freestanding;" its validity or authority is immediately given to consciousness.

Standing alongside the ethical substance of the human law is the divine law. The divine law consists of the "*simple* and *immediate essence* of ethical life," those unquestioned norms and laws that are not raised to critical self-consciousness but are simply acknowledged and accepted (§448/330). The divine law is made actual and concrete in the institution of the family. Hegel writes, "This moment expressing ethical life in this element of immediacy, that is, in the element of *being*, or an *immediate* consciousness of itself both as essence and as being this self in an other, which is to say, as a *natural ethical* polity – this moment is the *family*" (§449/330). The family, based in the household, is the site of the natural ethical community that takes the divine law as immediately given and authoritative for it. Furthermore, accompanying these divisions between *polis* and household, government and family, and human law and divine law is the division between men and women. Men, as citizens, have primary identities and obligations

originating in human law, the *polis*, and the universal self-conscious ethical community. Women, whose primary identities in Greek *Sittlichkeit* are related to their roles within the family, have obligations issuing from the divine law, the family, and the immediate or natural ethical community.

The supposed harmony of this form of life depends upon the fact that the self-conscious universality of the human law and the immediacy of the divine law are part of the same spirit, or form of life, and thus reconcilable. For this to be the case, what is taken as social and normative within the *polis* must be compatible with what is taken as given and natural within the family, and the natural relations of the family must carry universal ethical meaning. This harmony appears threatened by the fact that the family has a tendency to pull away from the *polis*, to establish itself as an independent and self-sufficient unit. But the *polis* has a solution for this problem: war. By waging war against an external threat, the *polis* binds together the disparate units that constitute it. Hegel writes that "in order not to let [the family] become rooted and rigidly fixed within this activity of isolating themselves, an activity which would otherwise let the whole come undone and the spirit within it fade away, the government must from time to time shake them to their core by means of war" (§454/335). Through war, the *polis* reasserts its transcendence of the family units that constitute it.

The family is bound to the *polis* in war through the sacrifice of its young men. Husbands, sons, and brothers become soldiers, the family's sacrifice to the state. These soldiers confront death for the sake of the *polis*. Hegel writes that "death is the consummation and the highest work that the individual as such undertakes for the polity" (§451/332). Faced with death, these young men transcend their familial roles, becoming bound to and identified with the *polis* that gives meaning to their sacrifice. Hegel writes that "by the labor imposed on them, those

individuals, who have become absorbed in their own lives and who tear themselves loose from the whole in striving after inviolable *being-for-itself* and personal security, are made to feel their lord, death" (§454/335).[24] By demanding the sacrifice of its citizens, moreover, the *polis* connects the power of the human law to the power of the divine law that governs death: "the polity therefore has the truth and substantiation of its power in the essence of the divine law and in the realm of the underworld" (§454/335).

The family and the *polis* are also connected in the burial rites that the women of the family are obligated to perform for men who have died in battle. Through burial, the family takes what was assumed to be merely natural and contingent, namely *death*, and affirms its social meaning, thereby "interrupting nature's work" (§451/333). Burial reinstates the dead individual as a member of the ethical community. In this way, the family serves not only as a natural (i.e., biological) unit, but also as a locus of ethical activity that reconciles the natural and the normative, the family and the community, and the individual and the universal. Hegel writes, therefore, that "this last duty [burial] thus constitutes the consummate *divine* law, that is, it constitutes the positive *ethical* action vis-à-vis the individual" (§452/334). In Greek *Sittlichkeit*, it is a role-specific obligation for women to conduct these rites on behalf of their male family members. This obligation links women to the sacrifices required by the *polis*. As we will see, this is a crucial issue in the *Antigone*.

In this "harmonious" picture of Greek *Sittlichkeit*, the family also serves a second recognitive function for women. While men can attain recognition through their work on behalf of the *polis*, women are primarily identified with the household and therefore cannot. Since the relationship between husband and wife is characterized by sexual desire, and the relationship

[24] Translation altered slightly.

between parents and children is unequal, neither can serve as the basis for recognition in Greek *Sittlichkeit*. The relationship between brothers and sisters, however, can serve this function. The brother-sister relationship is natural (by which Hegel once again means biological) but free from sexual desire, and the brother, as a member of the *polis*, is already an ethical agent capable of bestowing recognition. One might object that the disparity between the social roles of brothers and sisters already points to a fundamental inequality in their relationship and, hence, a barrier to mutual recognition. At this point in the section, however, Hegel is merely describing what he takes to be the Greeks' account of their shape of spirit and is not yet evaluating whether that account is sound. In the Greeks' account of themselves, as Pinkard writes, "The sister is thus able to achieve selfhood in the process of reciprocal recognition between her and her brother, and thus the harmony of Greek life seems not to be threatened."[25] Like war and sacrifice, both burial and the recognition bestowed through the brother-sister relationship connect the ethical functions of the family and the *polis*. The union of man and woman in the family, Hegel writes, serves as the mediator between the two, even as man and woman take on distinct roles in Greek *Sittlichkeit* (§462/341-42).

Some commentators have noted that Hegel's dismissal of the possibility of sexual desire between brothers and sisters is puzzling here, given his later discussion of Sophocles's *Antigone*. As Judith Butler notes, for instance, Antigone is an odd representative of the principle of kinship in Greek *Sittlichkeit*, given that she is the offspring of the incestuous relationship between Oedipus and Jocasta and given the strong intimations of sexual desire and possible incest between Antigone and her brother, Polyneices.[26] We should remember, however, that Hegel is not yet presenting his own view of the matter. At this point, he is giving an approximation of

[25] Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology*, 143.
[26] Butler, *Antigone's Claim*, esp. 5-6.

Greek *Sittlichkeit*'s account of itself as a form of life. In using Antigone as a stand-in for "woman" and "kinship," Hegel will demonstrate that these categories are *overdetermined* in Greek *Sittlichkeit*. Antigone, identified as a woman, is thus understood *within Greek* Sittlichkeit as simply a bearer of divine law and a representative of the principle of kinship, despite the complex details of her genealogy, her desires and loves, and the very obvious ways in which she enters the play as a social and political agent. In this reading, it is not Hegel but Greek *Sittlichkeit* itself that ignores Antigone's particularity and the challenges that her particularity poses for the Greeks' social arrangements.

Thus, Hegel concludes his overview of Greek *Sittlichkeit*. According to Hegel, the question remains whether this account of harmonious Greek life actually provides a non-contradictory account of the norms and obligations internal to it. As we turn to the second part of his discussion, we will see that Hegel's answer is a resounding no.

Character, Conflict, and the Acknowledgment of Guilt

Hegel turns to Greek tragedy for an account of Greek *Sittlichkeit*'s collapse. In particular, he offers an idiosyncratic reading of Sophocles's *Antigone*. Hegel's reading of the *Antigone* may or may not be a "good" interpretation of Sophocles's play. It has been, however, a generative one. In what follows, my goal is to explicate Hegel's reading of the *Antigone* and to understand the point that he is trying to make with it.

Sophocles's *Antigone* opens on a terrible scene. Eteocles and Polyneices, the sons of the disgraced and now deceased Oedipus, have been engaged in a struggle for control of the city of Thebes. When Eteocles ascended to the throne, Polyneices gathered an army to wrest control of Thebes from his brother. Both Eteocles and Polyneices were killed in the resulting battle. Their

uncle, Creon, assumed the throne, and declared that Eteocles would receive a hero's burial while Polyneices would be denied burial as a traitor. Eteocles's and Polyneices's sister, Antigone, has resolved to follow the dictates of the divine law regarding her obligation to bury her kin and, thus, to bury her traitorous and disgraced brother. The play begins with a dialogue between Antigone and her sister, Ismene, in which Antigone announces her intention to bury Polyneices. Ismene refuses to help Antigone and urges her to reconsider her intention, but Antigone's mind is made up. She buries Polyneices. She is caught in the act, however, and, once apprehended, Antigone acknowledges that she has done the deed. Creon condemns her to death. Despite the protestations of his family members and advisors, Creon refuses to reconsider the condemnation until it is too late; by the time he reconsiders and takes action to free Antigone, she has committed suicide, and so has her betrothed, Haemon (Creon's son), and his mother (Creon's wife). The play ends with Antigone dead and Creon ruined. [27]

Character and Conflict

Hegel begins his discussion of the *Antigone* in the section titled "Ethical action. Human and divine knowledge. Guilt and fate." He describes how each individual in Greek *Sittlichkeit*

[27] Although Hegel does not offer a summary of the *Antigone* in the *Phenomenology*, he succinctly describes the play in his lectures on *Aesthetics*: "Everything in this tragedy is logical; the public law of the state is set in conflict over against inner family love and duty to a brother; the woman, Antigone, has the family interest as her 'pathos,' Creon, the man, has the welfare of the community as his. Polyneices, at war with his native city, had fallen before the gates of Thebes, and Creon, the ruler, in a publicly proclaimed law threatened with death anyone who gave this enemy of the city the honor of burial. But this command, which concerned only the public weal, Antigone could not accept; as sister, in the piety of her love for her brother, she fulfills the holy duty of burial. In doing so she appeals to the law of the gods; but the gods she worships are the underworld gods of free self-conscious national and political life." Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 424.

comes to be defined by either the human or the divine law, according to his or her sex. He writes:

> Ethical consciousness knows what it has to do, and it has decided whether it is to belong to divine or human law. This immediacy is a *being-in-itself* and hence, as we have seen, its meaning is at the same time that of a natural being. It is nature, not the accident of circumstances or of choice, which assigns one sex to one law and the other to the other law – or conversely, it is both ethical powers which give themselves their individual existence and their actualization in the two sexes. (§464/343)

At the beginning of this passage, Hegel affirms that each individual, or "ethical consciousness," has *decided* whether to take its identity and obligations from the divine law or the human law. Although this is a decision, it takes on *the significance* of a natural distinction for the Greeks. Thus, Hegel states the Greeks' own view of the matter: that *nature* assigns the human law to men and the divine law to women. The Greeks believe this sex-based distinction to be natural, rather than contingent or chosen. Immediately, however, Hegel contradicts the Greeks' account, stating, "conversely," that it is the ethical powers themselves that divide and actualize themselves in men and women. Hegel is showing his hand; he will go on to argue that this sex-based distinction of identities and obligations is socially constructed rather than given or natural. It is not nature but the ethical norms of that shape of spirit that decide which laws apply to which people, even though Greek *Sittlichkeit* does not recognize this. For the Greeks, nature dictates which law applies to each person, depending on his or her sex. Therefore, each ethical consciousness, male or female, takes one of the ethical powers, the human law or the divine law, as determining his or her obligations. The result is that men and women experience themselves

as having distinct identities and obligations, each exclusive of and opposed to the other (§465/343).

An individual's decision to follow the human law or the divine law gives rise to what Hegel calls "character" [*Charakter*]. Hegel writes, "Because it has *decided* for *one* of them, ethical consciousness is essentially *character*. It is not the same essentiality of both which exists for ethical consciousness" (§465/343). What are we to make of this term "character"? We have several hints from elsewhere in the *Phenomenology*. When Hegel uses the term in other contexts, it refers to something one-sided, and it typically carries the negative connotation of something fixed, stubborn, or incorrigible. For instance, Hegel writes dismissively of the "settled character" of the human brain in misguided scientific efforts to observe reason (§331/250), and later of the "stiff-necked selfsame character" of the judging consciousness in his discussion of confession and forgiveness (§667/490). In his discussion of morality, Hegel provides a more explicit description of character. He writes that self-knowing consciousness is "*immediate* – just like ethical consciousness, it both knows its duty and does its duty, and it belongs to that duty as to its own nature. However, it is not *character*, which on account of its immediacy is a determinate spirit and *which belongs merely to one of the ethical essentialities and has the aspect of not knowing*" (§597/442, emphasis added). Character, as Hegel presents it here, is a form of identity that is immediately given, one-sided, and unknowing or unreflective.

With this conception of character in mind, let us return to the passage at hand. Antigone and Creon, as woman and man, are obligated to obey the divine law and the human law, respectively; that is, each plays a given role, taking her or his character to dictate in an immediate, one-sided, and unreflective way what must be authoritative for her- or himself. Meanwhile, neither Antigone nor Creon recognizes that what is authoritative for her- or himself

stems from the same ethical source as that which is authoritative for the other, namely, Greek *Sittlichkeit*. Hegel continues:

> For that reason, the opposition appears merely as an *unfortunate* collision of duty with an *actuality* utterly devoid of right. In this opposition, ethical consciousness exists as self-consciousness, and as such it sets itself to subordinate by force the actuality opposed to the law with which it is associated, that is, to dupe this opposed actuality. Since it sees right only on its own side and sees wrong on the other, the consciousness that belongs to divine law beholds on the other side human, contingent *acts of violence*; and that consciousness which belongs to human law beholds on the other side the obstinacy and *disobedience* of inward being-for-itself. (§465/343-44)

Antigone and Creon each assume a privileged position relative to the other, condemning the other's position as merely subjective. Antigone views Creon as committing "contingent acts of violence," while Creon views Antigone as willfully disobedient in the name of self-legislation.[28]

[28] Interestingly, Sophocles's *Antigone* contains the first known references to both the concept of the unwritten law *and* to the ascription of autonomy to a person rather than to a state. [On the former, see Paul Woodruff, "Introduction to *Antigone*," in Sophocles, *Antigone* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2001), xviii. On the latter, see Martin Ostwald, *Autonomia: Its Early Genesis and History* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), 1. My thanks to Joseph Clair for pointing out Sophocles's novel use of the concept of *autonomos* in the *Antigone*.] In the play, Antigone asserts that she follows a law that belongs to "the gods' unfailing unwritten laws." As we have seen, Hegel quotes what Antigone says next (although the translation differs slightly): "These laws weren't made now or yesterday. They live for all time, and no one knows when they came into the light" (Sophocles 19). The chorus, meanwhile, accuses Antigone of being a law unto herself, that is, *autonomous*. As she proceeds toward the tomb, the chorus sings: "True to your own laws [*autonomos*], you are the only one of mortals, who'll go down to Hades while still alive" (Sophocles, *Antigone*, 36). Hegel picks up on the tension between these two types of law – the unwritten law and the self-legislated law. They are not the same thing, as Hegel points out in the passage quoted above. While Antigone takes herself to be following a law that is fixed, given, and eternal, she is accused by Creon (Hegel's account largely ignores the Chorus) to be following her *own* whim or caprice.

Because each character takes itself as authoritative over against the other, it proceeds in casting the other character in reductive terms. Believing that the other is merely subjective, each character believes that she or he alone follows an objective law. Hegel writes that each ethical consciousness experiences "the opposition between the *known* and the *not known*" and, therefore, the "absolute *right* of ethical *self-consciousness* comes into conflict with the *divine* right of *essence*" (§466/344). Each experiences an implicit conflict between itself and the other, between what it takes to be authoritative and what the other takes to be authoritative.

This implicit conflict becomes explicit when Antigone and Creon take action. Hegel has presented two characters, each of whom understands her or his identity and attending obligations as immediate and objective, while taking the other to be its antithesis. When Antigone and Creon take action, they each do what they are obligated to do; that is to say, they play the roles assigned to their characters. Antigone obeys the divine law by burying her brother. Creon obeys the human law and attempts to maintain social order by forbidding Polyneices's burial and condemning Antigone for breaking the law. In so doing, however, Creon and Antigone reveal a deep contradiction between the differentiated gender roles on which Greek *Sittlichkeit* stands. When Antigone buries Polyneices, for instance, she not only fulfills her obligation to the divine law but also disobeys the human ordinance against his burial. And Creon, in condemning Antigone under the human law, ignores the dictates of the divine law. Hegel writes that "the deed has merely carried out the terms of one law in opposition to the other. However, since it is interrelated in the essence with this other, fulfilling the demands of one law both arouses and provokes demands to fulfill those of the other, and, with the deed having made it so, it provokes the other as a violated and hostile essence now demanding revenge" (§468/347). Simply put, obedience to one law entails the violation – and provocation – of the other.

Action and the Acknowledgment of Guilt

This is the pivotal point in the story for Hegel. Antigone is caught in the act of burying her brother and, when confronted by Creon, she acknowledges that she has committed this deed. This acknowledgment [*Anerkennen*], as we will see below, entails Antigone's recognition that she is *guilty* of violating the human law. In order to set up this point, Hegel abruptly turns to the Oedipus myth, in which the tragic hero unintentionally kills his father and marries his mother. Hegel writes:

> As concerns the action, only one aspect of the decision itself lies open to the light of day… Hence actuality keeps concealed within itself this other aspect which is alien to knowledge and which does not show itself to consciousness as it is in and for itself – which neither shows the son that the man insulting him and whom he strikes dead is his father, nor shows him that the queen whom he takes as his wife is his mother. In this way, a power that shuns the daylight preys on ethical self-consciousness, a power which bursts forth only after the deed is done and when it has taken the deed in its grip. (§468/347)

Hegel suggests that "only one aspect of the decision" is initially clear to the agent. Oedipus intends to kill the man who insults him and to marry the woman whom he desires. But "actuality keeps concealed within itself" aspects of the deed that cannot become clear until the deed is done. At that point, Oedipus's actions prove to have consequences far beyond his intentions. His intended action is bound up with consequences that he neither intended nor anticipated, which is to say that the earlier antithesis between the known and the not-known falls apart. As Hegel writes, "This is so because the completed deed is the sublated opposition between the

knowing self and the actuality confronting it" (*ibid*). The deed binds the intention to actuality, the actual action and its consequences. Once Oedipus takes action, he can no longer deny his entanglement in something beyond the myopic story that he told himself about who he was and what he was doing. Thus, Hegel concludes, "the agent can deny neither the crime nor his guilt" (*ibid*). Oedipus acknowledges and takes responsibility for the full range of intended and unintended consequences of his actions.

According to Hegel, the same is true for Antigone. Antigone takes action, burying Polyneices according to the unwritten law of the gods. Her action violates the human law that forbids Polyneices's burial. Therefore, Hegel insists, Antigone commits a crime against the human law and is guilty of the consequences. This is made more complicated by the fact that Antigone, unlike Oedipus, knows ahead of time that she is following the divine law over against the human law. Taking the latter to be merely human caprice, however, she buries her brother anyway. Because she knew of this opposition beforehand, Hegel writes, her guilt may be more inexcusable than Oedipus's, a point to which we will return momentarily.

In *Antigone's Claim*, Butler is critical of Hegel's interpretation on this point. She argues that Hegel casts Antigone "not as a political figure, one whose defiant speech has political implications, but rather as one who articulates a pre-political opposition to politics, representing kinship as the sphere that conditions the possibility of politics without ever entering into it."[29] Moreover, Butler continues, Hegel inaccurately describes Antigone as confessing to a crime against the human law which she defied, and then he denigrates the principle of kinship (and hence Antigone herself) in favor of the *polis*. Thus, guilt – and the acknowledgment of guilt – play an important role in Butler's criticism of Hegel. Butler challenges Hegel's claim that "guilt

[29] Butler, *Antigone's Claim*, 2.

becomes explicitly experienced in the doing of the deed, in the experience of 'breaking through' of one law and in and through another, 'seiz[ing] the doer in the act.'"[30] Antigone, Butler protests, does not seem to feel guilty at all, "even as she acknowledges that the 'law' that justifies her act is one that Creon can regard only as a sign of criminality."[31] She continues:

> [Hegel] distinguishes Oedipus from Antigone, establishing the excusability of his crime, the inexcusability of hers… As if taking the point of view of Creon who cannot get Antigone to perform a full enough confession for him, Hegel concludes this discussion with the claim that 'The ethical consciousness must, on account of this actuality and on account of its deed, acknowledge its opposite as its own actuality, [and] must acknowledge its guilt.' The opposite of her action is the law that she defies, and Hegel bids Antigone to acknowledge the legitimacy of that law.[32]

According to Butler, then, Hegel calls Antigone's crime "inexcusable" and wrongly casts her as acknowledging the legitimacy of the human law that she defied over and against the divine law that she obeyed.

Two crucial points in this passage from Butler require further attention. First, Butler mischaracterizes Hegel when she claims that, according to him, Oedipus's crime is excusable while Antigone's crime is inexcusable. Rather, Hegel writes: "Ethical consciousness is more complete and its guilt purer if it both *knows* the law *beforehand* and the power against which it takes an opposing stance, and it takes them to be violence and wrong, to be an ethical

[30] Butler, *Antigone's Claim*, 32.
[31] *Ibid*.
[32] Butler, *Antigone's Claim*, 34.

contingency, and then, like Antigone, knowingly commits the crime" (§469/348).[33] Hegel states that Antigone's *guilt* (not her crime) is purer (not more inexcusable) than Oedipus's, and it is important to understand exactly what Hegel means by guilt and crime in this context.[34] Throughout the section, Hegel uses the word *guilt* to refer to an objective state of affairs in which a person is responsible for the consequences of her actions, whether or not these consequences were intended. The heroic agent takes responsibility for the action in this full sense, not for the deed narrowly-defined by some prior-held intention. To say that the hero acknowledges her guilt in bringing about a state of affairs that she neither anticipated nor endorsed is not to say that feels badly about that state of affairs, but to say that she recognizes her responsibility for it. Hegel's discussion of Oedipus is clear on this point. Although Oedipus is unaware that he is killing his father and marrying his mother, once he does the deed "[he] can deny neither the crime nor his guilt" (§468/347).[35] Antigone, who knows beforehand that she will violate the human law by

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[33] *„Aber das sittliche Bewußtsein ist vollständiger, seine Schuld reiner, wenn es das Gesetz und die Macht vorher kennt, der es gegenübertritt, sie für Gewalt und Unrecht für eine sittliche Zufälligkeit nimmt, und wissentlich, wie Antigone, das Verbrechen begeht.*" (§469/P412-3).

[34] Butler derives this language of inexcusability from A. V. Miller's translation of the passage, although not its direct connection to crime rather than guilt. Miller's translation of the sentence is as follows: "But the ethical consciousness is more complete, *its guilt more inexcusable*, if it knows *beforehand* the law and the power which it opposes, if it takes them to be violence and wrong, to be ethical merely by accident, and, like Antigone, knowingly commits the crime." See Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 284 (emphasis added).

[35] As Danielle Allen has pointed out to me in personal correspondence, Hegel's reading of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, in which Oedipus takes full responsibility for all of the significant consequences of his or her acts, may be troubled by developments in *Oedipus at Colonus*. In that play, which takes place after *Oedipus Tyrannus* and before *Antigone*, Oedipus denies full responsibility for the consequences of those actions which he believes he was fated to commit. Hegel recognizes this in his later *Lectures on Aesthetics*, in which he casts *Oedipus at Colonus* as already moving beyond his conceptions of classical tragedy, action, and heroism. Hegel writes that "more beautiful than this rather external sort of denouement is an inner reconciliation which, because of its subjective character, already borders on our modern treatment. The most perfect classical example of this that we have before us is the eternally marvelous *Oedipus Coloneus*," (Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 1219).

burying Polyneices, has as much, if not more, reason to take responsibility for the full range of consequences of her action. In this sense, Antigone is *objectively responsible* for the violation of the human law – she did the deed – which is the same as saying, in Hegel's words, that her guilt is purer.

This sort of guilt is not unique to Antigone, however. Hegel's interpretation would imply that this sort of guilt is nearly unavoidable in Greek *Sittlichkeit*, because the divisions within Greek *Sittlichkeit* create a situation in which a one-sided character, in playing out her role, will fulfill one law while violating another. A character may recognize her responsibility or guilt only *retrospectively*. She cannot take responsibility for her commitments prospectively, because she takes the authority of the law as immediately given to her. Her responsibility is only backward-looking, never forward-looking.[36] Antigone is held accountable for the intention and consequences of her action, while she lacks the standing to take responsibility prospectively for her deeds. Antigone is in a double bind, as she takes responsibility for the consequences of her actions, while failing to recognize her responsibility for the character that comprises her commitments. As we have seen, she takes her character and her commitments to be natural, fixed, and given. Under such conditions, Hegel writes:

[36] I borrow the term "forward-looking moral responsibility" from Henry S. Richardson's excellent work on the subject. See "Beyond Good and Right: Toward a Constructive Ethical Pragmatism," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 24:2 (Spring 1995), 108-141; and ""Institutionally Divided Moral Responsibility," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 16:2 (Summer 1999), 218-249. In the latter, Richardson contrasts forward-looking moral responsibility with what J. B. Schneewind called "the divine corporation," in which a form of moral life is taken for granted and individuals act according the rules that govern their social roles. Richardson writes that "individuals are given scant responsibility for the interpretation of moral requirements. Instead, what is required of them is something more deductive or subsumptive: the mere recognition that their case falls under some previously given rule. There is no differential authorization to revise [according to one's social role] because there is simply no authorization to revise" (231). I submit that this is roughly the situation in which Hegel finds Antigone and Creon.

> Innocence amounts to non-action, like the being of a stone and not even that of a child. However, in terms of content, ethical *action* has the moment of crime in itself because it does not sublate the *natural* allocation of the two laws to the two sexes. Rather, within *natural immediacy*, it persists to an even greater degree as a *non-estranged* directedness to the law, and, as activity, it makes this one-sidedness into guilt, grapples with only one of essence's aspects, and conducts itself negatively towards the other, i.e. violates it. (§467/346)

According to Hegel, crime and guilt inevitably follow from the Greek *Sittlichkeit*'s supposedly "natural allocation of the two laws to the two sexes." By taking these gender roles to be natural, Greek *Sittlichkeit* assumes that they are not the sort of thing for which people can be held responsible. Nevertheless, to act out one of these gender roles, as Antigone and Creon do, leads one to take actions that actualize the human or divine law while violating the other. This violation leads both Antigone and Creon (and, presumably, everyone else in Greek *Sittlichkeit*) to be retroactively responsible for something which could not have been otherwise.

There is a second point in Butler's criticism of Hegel that requires further attention. When Hegel writes that Antigone must "acknowledge [her] opposite as [her] own actuality" (or, in Pinkard's translation, "must recognize [her] opposite as [her] own"), Butler is correct that Antigone's opposite is the human law, and, therefore, that Hegel casts Antigone as recognizing the authority of the law. As I have argued, however, this is because the human law is part of the same *Sittlichkeit* that Antigone herself already acknowledges as authoritative. To reiterate a point made above, Hegel argues that the two characters that come into conflict are products of – and responsible to – the same shape of spirit. The problem is that they do not yet realize this.

The sentence that Butler quotes in the passage above and the subsequent sentence in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which Hegel draws from Sophocles's text, are absolutely crucial for understanding the claims that Hegel makes in this section. Let me repeat them here. Hegel writes:

> In terms of this actuality and in terms of its deed, ethical consciousness must recognize its opposite as its own. It must acknowledge [*anerkennen*] its guilt:
>
> *Because we suffer, we acknowledge that we have erred.*[37] (§469/348)

This passage and the ensuing paragraphs prefigure a discussion of confession and forgiveness that comes much later in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. At the end of Chapter VI, Hegel describes two modern characters who are embroiled in a conflict of a different sort: a conflict between one who acts in the world and one who judges the other's actions. These characters become known as the wicked consciousness and the judging consciousness. The wicked consciousness takes action in the world, and the judging consciousness condemns the wicked consciousness for acting in a way that sullies dutiful action with subjective intentions and desires. The wicked consciousness recognizes that this is true, not only for itself but also for the

[37] Butler notes that Antigone acknowledges her deed in this way, although her reading of this acknowledgement is quite different from my own. Like many other commentators, Butler raises questions about Hegel's translation of this last sentence from the Greek. Hegel's translation removes a crucial conditional clause from the original text. Thus, what Paul Woodruff's translation of the *Antigone* renders: "If the gods really agree with [Creon's judgment],/ Then suffering should teach me to repent my sin," becomes Hegel's quite different phrase, "Because we suffer we acknowledge we have erred." Sophocles, *Antigone*, 40. While Butler is correct that Hegel's translation is an unreliable rendering of Sophocles's text, I suggest that we follow the story that Hegel is trying to tell about character, guilt, responsibility, and acknowledgment through his idiosyncratic appropriation of the play. Second, Butler argues, "…the verbal form of her acknowledgement only exacerbates the crime. She not only did it, but she had the nerve to *say* she did it. Thus Antigone cannot exemplify the ethical consciousness who suffers guilt; she is beyond guilt – she embraces her crime as she embraces her death, her tomb, her bridal chamber" (Butler, *Antigone's Claim*, 34). Again, I submit that Hegel invokes a conception of objective rather than subjective guilt here; thus Butler's mention of "one who suffers guilt" is misleading.

judging consciousness who has made the condemnation. The wicked consciousness realizes that the judgment made by the judging consciousness is not simply the "rightful consciousness of action" but also a form of action that can likewise be marked by subjective intentions and desires (§666/489). Therefore, the wicked consciousness confesses [*gestehen*] this realization to the judging consciousness. According to Hegel, the confession is an acknowledgment that what the wicked consciousness had taken as alien to it, namely the judging consciousness, is in fact "the same as himself" (*ibid*). Hegel writes:

> His confession [*Geständnis*] is not an abasement, nor a humiliation, nor is it a matter of his casting himself aside in his relationship with the other, for this declaration is not something one-sided through which he would posit his non-selfsameness with the other. On the contrary, it is solely in consideration of this intuition of his *selfsameness* with the other that he gives expression to himself, that is, he gives expression on his own part to *their selfsameness* in his confessions, and he does this because language is the *existence* of spirit as the immediate self. He thus expects that the other will contribute his own part to this existence. (§666/490)

The confession, then, is not an admission of subjective guilt, or guilty feelings; as Hegel states, it is not an abasement or a humiliation. Rather, it is an acknowledgment of what the two individuals hold in common – in Hegel's words, their selfsameness. Thus, the wicked consciousness confesses, "I am he [*Ich bin's*]," and expects the judging consciousness to say the same. While the judging consciousness initially refuses to do so, his "hard heart" eventually

breaks, he recognizes the position shared by himself and the other, and the two consciousnesses enjoy forgiveness and reciprocal recognition.[38]

The Antigone section parallels this later discussion in three illuminating ways. First, like the wicked consciousness, Antigone acknowledges her guilt. As in the later section, we should not read this as subjective guilt – feeling badly – but as objective guilt, that is, responsibility for the intended and unintended consequences of one's actions. Antigone's acknowledgment of her guilt is not an abasement or a humiliation, but her recognition that the repercussions of her actions extend beyond the intentions of her one-sided character.

Second, in the acknowledgment of her guilt, Antigone's one-sided character breaks down. Like the wicked consciousness, for whom "it is solely in consideration of this intuition of his *selfsameness* with the other that he gives expression to himself," Antigone "must recognize [her] opposite as [her] own." The word that Hegel uses here, translated as "recognize," is *anerkennen*, which can indicate both acknowledgment and *recognition* in the sense of granting a status to something. In *Hegel's Hermeneutics*, Paul Redding helpfully parses the meaning of *anerkennen*:

> Like the English verbs 'recognize' and 'acknowledge,' *anerkennen* has a *performative* dimension: to acknowledge another in some particular way is to acknowledge the *validity* of some implicit claim and thereby bind one's actions in relevant ways. Thus, if I acknowledge some person's greater expertise or knowledge in certain matters, I will in the future, all other things being equal, defer to that person's judgments in such matters. But the word *anerkennen* is also closely connected with its cognates *kennen* and *erkennen*, which have

[38] See §667-671/490-93. I analyze this section at length in Chapter 3; at this point, however, a short summary will suffice.

> predominantly epistemic senses. … A little reflection reveals that these performative and epistemic issues are actually interwoven in quite complex ways. One does not acknowledge another *simpliciter*: one acknowledges another *as* (an expert, prime minister, honest, …). That is, performative acknowledgement is itself bound up with hermeneutic issues concerning the recognition of another *as* a certain kind of subject. And conversely, given that *knowing* itself involves a form of 'validity claim,' that of *truth*, it is bound up in complex ways with acknowledgement as an act.[39]

This word is important throughout the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, including in Hegel's discussion of reciprocal recognition [*gegenseitiges Anerkennen*] in the later confession and forgiveness section. At this point, however, we can see that through her speech act Antigone *acknowledges* her guilt, both in the epistemic sense of accepting the fact of her responsibility *and* in the practical sense of recognizing the validity of the human law that she violated, bestowing a status upon it that she did not previously. This acknowledgment or recognition, Hegel writes, "expresses the sublated conflict between the ethical *purpose* and *actuality*" (§470/348). Because Antigone's character was essentially one-sided and unreflective, it cannot survive her acknowledgment of the human law.

Third, as in the later section on confession and forgiveness, Hegel states that the confession of just one ethical consciousness is insufficient for the resolution of the conflict. He writes that "the victory of one power and its character along with the conquest of the other would thus merely be one part and would be the imperfect world which inexorably advances towards equilibrium (§471/349). It is crucial to Hegel that both characters break down. We have seen

[39] Paul Redding, *Hegel's Hermeneutics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 103-4.

how Hegel thinks that Antigone's character breaks down through her acknowledgment of the human law that she violated. Hegel then turns to Creon: "the agent gives up his *character* and the *actuality* of his self and is brought to his downfall. His *being* is to belong to his ethical law as his substance, but in the recognition of the opposition, this law has ceased for him to be his substance, and instead of achieving his actuality, the agent has achieved a non-actuality, a disposition" (§470/438). Creon's downfall comes from his recognition that the human law cannot have the immediate authority that he had ascribed to it. The character – the role that he played out – cannot survive this recognition. Creon, the character, is ruined. Indeed, both Antigone and Creon acknowledge that both the human law *and* the divine law provide partial accounts of Greek *Sittlichkeit*. Hegel writes, therefore, that "the movement of the ethical powers against each other and the individualities which set these powers into life and action have therein reached their *true end* in that both sides experience the same demise. This is so because neither of the powers has any advantage over the other that would make it into a *more essential* moment of substance" (§471/349). Human law and divine law, along with the characters that actualize these laws, have been destroyed by their conflict. Neither side – human or divine law, man or woman, Creon or Antigone – has the standing to trump or override the claim of the other.

Given these similarities between the Antigone section and the later confession and forgiveness section, why does Antigone's acknowledgment of guilt fail to produce the reconciliation that the wicked consciousness's confession produces? I submit that it is because Greek *Sittlichkeit* is a shape of spirit in which identities and obligations *must* be taken as natural, fixed, and given. In the play, Antigone and Creon take their gender roles and then obligations dictated by these roles (i.e., their characters) as immediately given. They do not assume responsibility for these identities and obligations; they can only claim responsibility for the

consequences of their deeds – and this can only be done retrospectively. Creon does not acknowledge his guilt until after Antigone kills herself and Creon's wife and son have committed suicide. Only then does he cry out, "I'll never pin the blame on anyone else that's human. I was the one, I killed you, poor child. I did it. It is all true."[40] By that time, of course, reciprocal recognition and reconciliation are impossible for Antigone and Creon. Thus, while the human law is initially victorious over the divine law, the condemnation of Antigone ultimately undermines the human law itself: "The achievement of public spirit is thereby transformed into its opposite, and the public spirit experiences that its supreme right is supreme wrong and that its victory is to an even greater degree its own downfall" (§473/351).

When Butler argues that Hegel casts Antigone as acknowledging the legitimacy of the human law, she is correct. But she is only *partially* correct, for Hegel also casts Creon as acknowledging the legitimacy of the divine law. Indeed, in Hegel's discussion of the *Antigone*, both Antigone and Creon do retrospectively recognize their responsibility for the whole of Greek *Sittlichkeit*. Ultimately, however, there is no opportunity for reciprocal recognition either within the play or, as we will see, within Greek *Sittlichkeit* more broadly. Because the ancient Greeks take their immediate understanding of the human law as beyond criticism and of the divine law as infallible, there is no hope for reconciliation in this form of life. The confessions of Antigone and Creon fall on deaf ears.

"The Feminine" and Other Identities

[40] Sophocles, *Antigone*, 57. The "poor child" to whom Creon refers is his own son, Haemon, not Antigone. Thus, Creon is acknowledging his guilt, his indirect responsibility, for the death of his son. Again, this is consistent with Hegel's emphasis on guilt as related to an individual's responsibility for the *unintended* consequences of his or her actions as well as the intended consequences.

Hegel's claim is that Antigone realizes, through her action, that her understanding of what was authoritative for her was incomplete. In acknowledging her guilt, she sheds her one-sided and unreflective character. This entails relinquishing her sense of the divine law as something natural, fixed, or immediately given. Unlike in the later discussion of the wicked and judging consciousnesses, however, Antigone's acknowledgment does not lead to reciprocal recognition. Rather, Hegel concludes his discussion of the *Antigone* with the downfall of Thebes. Just as the divine law was sundered, so too the *polis*.

In the final paragraphs of the section, Hegel highlights the impossibility of resolving ethical conflict within this shape of spirit. He turns from the play to a broader reflection on its lessons about Greek *Sittlichkeit*, beginning with the issues of war, sacrifice, and death. The independence of the family threatens to undermine the unity of the *polis* in Greek *Sittlichkeit*. The *polis* responds to this threat by engaging in perpetual warfare and mandating that young men fight on its behalf. While the "harmonious" account of Greek *Sittlichkeit* suggests that this response binds the family to the *polis* and overcomes their tension, the *Antigone* demonstrates that it does not. Instead, this response generates resentment, particularly on the part of women. Hegel writes that "since the polity gives itself durable existence only by disrupting familial happiness and by dissolving self-consciousness in the universal, it creates an internal enemy for itself in what it suppresses, which is at the same time essential to it, that is, it creates an enemy in the feminine [*Weiblichkeit*] itself" (§474/352). According to the norms of Greek *Sittlichkeit*, women are governed by the unwritten laws of the Penates and their obligations are defined by their familial roles as sister, wife, and mother. Insofar as warfare disrupts the life of the family – as when Antigone's two brothers are killed in the battle over control of Thebes – Hegel suggests that it creates an enemy among the guardians of the Greek family, namely, women.

This passage troubles many feminist philosophers who are repelled by the suggestion that women are an "internal enemy" of the polity and who read Hegel as affirming the gender essentialism of Greek *Sittlichkeit*. Some, like Butler, argue that as Hegel abstracts from Antigone to "womankind in general," he reduces her to a mere representative of her sex and thus "effaces her from [the] text."[41] Kimberly Hutchings, who elsewhere argues persuasively against Butler that "to read Hegel as affirming the purity of the realms of divine and human law is to read him in terms of Antigone's and Creon's mistakes about the nature of ethical life," is nevertheless puzzled when Hegel writes in this passage: [42]

> By intrigue, the feminine – the polity's eternal irony – changes the government's universal purpose into a private purpose, transforms its universal activity into this determinate individual's work, and it inverts the state's universal property into the family's possession and ornament. In this way, the feminine turns to ridicule the solemn wisdom of maturity, which, being dead to individuality – dead to pleasure as well as to actual activity – only thinks of and is concerned for the universal. (§474/352-53)

According to Hutchings's interpretation of this passage, Hegel is making a "generalized transhistorical claim about the role of woman in relation to the community" that is at odds with his earlier criticisms of the dualisms at the heart of Greek *Sittlichkeit*. [43] Hutchings argues that present-day readers can only account for this passage by reading Hegel against himself: "Hegel's misogyny is confirmed on Hegelian grounds."[44]

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[41] Butler, *Antigone's Claim*, 36.
[42] Hutchings, *Hegel and Feminist Philosophy*, 99.
[43] *Ibid*.
[44] *Ibid*. A more radical claim is made by Kelly Oliver in her essay, "Antigone's Ghost: Undoing Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*." Oliver argues that, in the dialectical movement of the

It seems unlikely, however, that Hegel would endorse a "generalized transhistorical claim" just paragraphs after arguing that Antigone and Creon's tragic fate stems from seeing their identities and obligations as natural, fixed, and given. We must be careful to distinguish between different types of passages, including those in which Hegel is describing Greek *Sittlichkeit for itself*– that is, according to the characterization that participants in that shape of spirit would give of themselves – and those passages in which he stands back to show his readers the problems that plague a shape of spirit, but which its participants do not yet recognize.[45] Passages of the latter type involve an immanent critique of the position at hand. In the passage

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Phenomenology, "woman gets left behind as the unconscious of the family upon which all subsequent dialectical movements of the conceptualization of spirit rest." In this way, Hegel fails to bring to full self-consciousness all that spirit entails, thereby "undermining the entire project of that text." Kelly Oliver, "Antigone's Ghost: Undoing Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit," *Hypatia* 11:1 (1996), 67-90.

[45] This argument is similar to the strategy pursued by Jocelyn Hoy in her essay, "Hegel, *Antigone*, and Feminist Critique: The Spirit of Ancient Greece." Hoy summarizes a series of criticisms of Hegel made by feminist theorists, and she argues that, often, these criticisms stem from a failure to distinguish between positions that Hegel is merely describing and those he is endorsing. She writes that "exploring feminist critiques of Hegel in the *Phenomenology* shows that Hegel's claims about sexual difference and gender roles need to be contextualized in terms of his dialectical strategy. Within the *Phenomenology* each shape of consciousness or spiritual world presents its own ideals or conceptions of knowledge… Along the way Hegel cannot rightfully be assumed to identify with any one set of claims made from within the world under consideration" (186).

Karin de Boer also draws on the distinction of Hegel's descriptions of Greek life as it appears "for itself" versus as it appears "for us." She argues that Hegel "does not characterize womanhood as 'enemy' from an external point of view but seeks to explain how the community, presided over by the government, threatened to oppose itself to one of its inherent moments" (141). Moreover, in contrast to most feminist readers of Hegel, de Boer argues that Hegel is no longer discussing the *Antigone* in his statement about "womankind"; rather, Hegel has turned from Sophocles's tragedies to Aristophanes's comedies, "implicitly draw(ing) on the insights of Greek comedy to argue that Greek culture, organizing its ethical life in accordance with the natural distinction between the male and female sex, contradicts the principle of individuality it harbors" (145). I take de Boer's approach to the text to be largely compatible with my own; unfortunately, a more detailed discussion of her fascinating analysis of this final section of Hegel's discussion of Greek *Sittlichkeit* and its connections to Greek comedy is beyond the scope of the present article. See Karin de Boer, "Beyond Tragedy: Tracing the Aristophanian Subtext of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*" in Hutchings and Pulkkinen 133-151.

above, it is clear that Hegel is describing Greek *Sittlichkeit*; what is not yet clear is what type of description this is and whether it amounts to an implicit endorsement or criticism of what is being described. We will return to this question momentarily.

The passage continues as Hegel describes the irresolvable conflict at the heart of Greek *Sittlichkeit.* He writes: "The community can only maintain itself by suppressing [woman's] spirit of individualism, and, because it is an essential moment, all the same creates it and, moreover, creates it by its repressive attitude towards it as a hostile principle."[46] The paradox is this: in order to maintain the unity of the *polis*, the *polis* requires the family to sacrifice young men to fight and die on its behalf. As the guardians of the family and household, women resent this requirement. They are repressed by the state, as Antigone's experience demonstrates, thereby generating further resentment and tension between the family and the *polis*, which the *polis* must then struggle once again to overcome. These tensions and conflicts are built into the gender roles and obligations that form the basis of Greek *Sittlichkeit*. Greek *Sittlichkeit* creates, naturalizes, and then suppresses its own "internal enemy" or "hostile principle" in women.

All of this turns out to be normative for Greek *Sittlichkeit*, rather than transcultural or transhistorical. Internal social distinctions, such as gender roles and social obligations, are socially constructed. So are the practices and norms that govern the relation of family, *polis*, and external enemies. But in a community like Greek *Sittlichkeit* that takes its norms to be natural, these roles, norms, and obligations are all taken as fixed and given. Thus, the tensions and conflicts that arise within and among individuals, families, and *polis* cannot be resolved. Nevermind the idealized portrait of harmonious and unalienated Greek *Sittlichkeit*; the discussion of the *Antigone* and the passages that follow it reveal Greek *Sittlichkeit* to be

[46] This is the A. V. Miller translation (Hegel 1977, §475/288), as quoted in Hutchings 99.

burdened by the unresolvable conflict between women and men who take their ethical obligations to issue from different, at-times-conflicting, and yet non-revisable sources. It is in this sense that, within Greek *Sittlichkeit*, womankind generates that which is suppressed by the *polis* and yet essential to it. This reveals the instability, self-contradiction, and tragic conflict that characterize this particular form of life. Because it cannot withstand the inconsistencies between its account of itself and its actual existence, Greek *Sittlichkeit* collapses. It cannot sustain the social roles and obligations that define it internally, nor can it maintain the perpetual warfare that defines its borders.

We can now understand the "transhistorical claim" that Hutchings takes Hegel to be making about women at the end of the discussion of Greek *Sittlichkeit*. This claim is best understood as one that Hegel believes *appears* true from within the perspective of Greek *Sittlichkeit*, a shape of spirit that he has shown to be internally inconsistent and self-destructive. Hegel argues that, in Greek *Sittlichkeit*, people *believe* that their norms are natural, generalized, and transhistorical. They believe that women and men have distinct sets of identities and obligations, which are immediately given and unreflectively enacted. What Hegel has argued in this section is that these sexed characters are one-sided, inadequate, and bound for destruction just like Antigone and Creon. Thus, given what I have argued about Hegel's conception of character, the conflict of characters, and the mutual destruction of characters, we should interpret Hegel's reading of the *Antigone* as an argument about the construction of norms, including gender norms. Hegel argues that identities and obligations must *not* be taken as immediate and natural – or generalized and transhistorical – and that ethical conflict can only be overcome in a community that acknowledges gender and other identities as normative commitments, open to revision.

I have argued that Hegel's discussion of the *Antigone* and Greek *Sittlichkeit* in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* criticizes a shape of spirit that naturalizes its norms, including gender identities and obligations. One objection to this argument may be that Hegel himself appears to naturalize gender roles in his later work and, therefore, that his views of gender in this section of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* ought to be interpreted in light of the later work or disregarded all together. I do not think that this objection holds. While an assessment of Hegel's later work is beyond my scope here, it is plausible that some of the same problems facing the interpretation of this section also affect the interpretation of those texts. If that is the case, we may find greater consistency than is assumed between the treatment of gender that I have argued is to be found in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and that of the *Philosophy of Right*, *Aesthetics*, and other later texts. Even if Hegel does naturalize gender roles in his later work, however, one can still deny the claim that Hegel's views of gender in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* ought to be disregarded. Given the strength of the evidence for construing Hegel's argument to be a critique of a shape of spirit that naturalizes gender norms, one would be justified in reading Hegel as having made a significant conceptual breakthrough on this topic without fully seeing or consistently accepting the conclusions that follow from it.

Seyla Benhabib's essay, "On Hegel, Women, and Irony," involves a second alternative to my argument. Benhabib argues that Hegel's work advances ethical arguments for gender divisions even as it rejects arguments that naturalize these divisions. She writes that Hegel "show(s) a clear awareness of the cultural, historical, and social variations in family and sexual relations. Nevertheless, although Hegel rejects that differences between 'men' and 'women' are naturally defined, and instead sees them as part of the spirit of a people (*Volksgeist*), he leaves no doubt that he considers only one set of family relations and one particular division of labor

between the sexes as rational and normatively right."[47] Benhabib draws on several of Hegel's texts to support her argument, but she concludes with a brief analysis of Hegel's interpretation of the *Antigone* that the present interpretation challenges. According to Benhabib, Hegel's dialectic "will sweep away Antigone in its onward historical march…. Spirit may fall into irony for a brief historical moment, but eventually the serious transparency of reason will discipline women and eliminate irony from public life."[48] On Benhabib's view, the irony that women introduce into the *polis* is a form of social criticism. Benhabib's impulse to preserve space for social criticism is important, but I believe that her interpretation misses Hegel's own social criticism in this section. As I have argued, women appear as the "everlasting irony" of Greek *Sittlichkeit* precisely because of its naturalization of gender norms. It is neither women nor criticism which is sublated in Hegel's dialectic, but the naturalized gender roles that create and repress women as an "internal enemy" of the community. Thus, even if Benhabib is correct in reading Hegel as advancing patriarchal gender norms elsewhere in his work, Hegel's move in this section of the *Phenomenology* opens up the possibility of normative arguments (including arguments with and against Hegel himself) that challenge the naturalization of such norms.

Hegel and Tragic Conflict

Hegel's discussion of the *Antigone* at the beginning of Chapter VI of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* encapsulates his views on ethical givenness and its relationship to responsibility and tragedy. Let us now take a step back from the textual details of the section in order to make sense of this relationship. Scholars disagree about whether Hegel develops a theory of tragic

[47] Seyla Benhabib, "On Hegel, Women, and Irony," in Mills, *Feminist Interpretations of G. W. F. Hegel*, 30.
[48] Benhabib 40-41.

drama or a theory of tragic conflict, with the former being an account of the literary genre of tragic drama and the latter being an account of the forms of ethical conflict that are explored in many, but not all, examples of that genre and that also emerge in real life. A. C. Bradley's classic essay on the subject, "Hegel's Theory of Tragedy," takes the former stance, and, more recently, Pinkard seems to have followed suit.[49] According to Pinkard, Hegel's discussion of the *Antigone* amounts to a theory of tragic drama, as a genre depicting characters who must pursue "something that is *right* that is at the same time unequivocally *wrong* and leads to the agent's downfall."[50] Walter Kaufmann, on the other hand, argues that Hegel's discussion of tragedy does not add up to a "Procrustean 'theory of tragedy,'" although it "illuminated many of Aeschylus', Sophocles', and Euripedes' tragedies more than any other philosopher before or after him."[51] In Kaufmann's view, Hegel does not develop a one-size-fits all theory of tragic drama, but rather offers instructive analyses of particular plays that illuminate aspects of agency, responsibility, and conflict. In this view, Hegel is less of a literary theorist than an ethical theorist. While we cannot (and need not) settle this debate here, this section follows Kaufmann, thinking with Hegel *about* ethical conflict *through* a discussion of tragedy.

Not every conflict is properly described as *tragic* conflict and not all suffering is *tragic* suffering. Although we commonly use the word "tragedy," along with its derivatives, to mark particularly terrible or absurd conflicts, catastrophes, and suffering, Hegel uses the term in a more specific and narrow sense. Tragedy, on Hegel's view, is one particular form of ethical conflict in which two goods or rights stand in opposition to one another, such that the pursuit of

[49] Bradley's essay remains an important touchstone for contemporary discussions of Hegel's relevance to literary theory.
[50] Pinkard, *Hegel*, 210.
[51] Walter Kaufmann, *Tragedy and Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968), 200-212. See also J. G. Finlayson, "Conflict and Reconciliation in Hegel's Theory of the Tragic," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 37:3 (July 1999), 493-520.

one entails the relinquishment or violation of the other. Under such circumstances, acting well or rightly also necessitates committing a wrong. Whereas Hegel describes a number of ethical conflicts in Chapter VI, few of them can properly be called tragic conflicts. The conflict between Antigone and Creon, however, is a paradigmatic tragedy.

In Sophocles's *Antigone*, Antigone and Creon each hold to one of two opposing and incommensurable rights and each advances her or his right to the exclusion of the other. This set up, and the conflict that emerges from it, is what draws Hegel to the *Antigone*. As Kaufmann writes, Hegel "realized that at the center of the greatest tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles we find not a tragic hero but a tragic collision, and that the conflict is not between good and evil but between one-sided positions, each of which embodies some good."[52] In the *Antigone*, neither Antigone nor Creon has a monopoly on right; each advances a correct claim about the good that she or he ought to pursue. Nevertheless, both Antigone and Creon commit a grave wrong in their pursuit of that good.

In Hegel's discussion of the *Antigone*, both Antigone and Creon take responsibility for the deeds they have done and for the full range of intended and unintended consequences of these deeds. Part of what is tragic about this is that Antigone and Creon, as we have seen, are both characters. Remember that a character, for Hegel, is a one-sided and unreflective figure. The character plays a role. It is a role over which the character does not have authority; it is given to her, written by someone or something else and unreflectively enacted. As tragic figures,

[52] Kaufmann 201-2. Hegel states this more clearly in his lectures on *Aesthetics*: "The original essence of tragedy consists then in the fact that within such a conflict each of the opposed sides, if taken by itself, has *justification*; while each can establish the true and positive content of its own aim and character only by denying and *infringing* the equally justified power of the other. The consequence is that in its ethical life, and because if it, each is nevertheless involved in *guilt*" (VA 3:523/A 2: 1196); he continues, "although the characters have a purpose which is valid in itself, they can carry it out, tragically [*tragisch*], only by pursuing it one-sidedly and so contradicting and violating someone else's purpose" (VA 3:525/A 2:1197).

Antigone and Creon must take responsibility for the terrible consequences of actions that could not have been otherwise without having been granted the authority to determine their own commitments, intentions, and deeds. As Brandom writes, "the responsibility and the authority are not commensurate."[53]

A character is the kind of moral agent who merely acts out a role. Hegel suggests that there is something implicitly wrong with being this kind of moral agent. To act out a role in the way that characters do – that is, to take identities, obligations, and social roles as fixed, and to take the authority of norms as immediately given – is to relinquish (or never to have been granted) responsibility for creating, maintaining, and transforming those norms. A character is a deficient moral agent, and a form of life in which moral agents are limited to acting out the roles of characters is a deficient form of life.

One criticism of Hegel's theory of the tragic is that it is too closely tied to his account of reconciliation to be particularly *tragic* at all.[54] Martha Nussbaum levels a version of this criticism against Hegel. She contends that Hegel's interpretation of the *Antigone* "locates the deficiency of the protagonists in [their] narrowness or one-sidedness alone, not in their conflict-avoiding aims."[55] According to Nussbaum, this is indicative of Hegel's broader project of eliminating conflict from human interaction. Nussbaum argues that, according to Hegel, "from tragedy we learn not to eliminate [conflict] in the wrong way, by an exclusive attachment to one value and the disregard of others. But we also learn, by implication, how to avoid it correctly: by

[53] Brandom, "From Irony to Trust," *A Spirit of Trust*, 32. Brandom's discussion of these points includes a very helpful distinction between the heroic conception of agency and the modern conception of agency (Brandom 32ff).
[54] Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy, rev. ed.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
[55] Nussbaum 67.

effecting a synthesis that will do justice to both of the contending claims."[56] On this view, Hegel's point is not only that *tragic* conflict ought to be overcome or eliminated, but that all conflict ought to be overcome or eliminated through the sublation of rival positions.

This is the wrong lesson to take from Hegel's discussion of the *Antigone*. Hegel argues that the tragic conflicts that plague Greek *Sittlichkeit* are the product of deficiencies in that shape of spirit, particularly its inadequate and unsupportable accounts of responsibility, authority, and normativity. Encountering this shape of spirit through Hegel's phenomenological story of consciousness, the reader learns that consciousness is not justified in holding to Greek *Sittlichkeit's* accounts of responsibility, authority, and normativity, since a community that is based on them will collapse under the weight of its inherent conflicts and contradictions. Hegel does *not* suggest that every sort of conflict is to be eliminated or avoided, only that the particular form of conflict that arises in Greek *Sittlichkeit* is to be avoided. Moreover, in order to avoid such conflicts, individuals must be in a position to recognize the construction of norms *and* to take responsibility for their role in constructing, transmitting, and contesting them. As I will argue (especially in Chapters 3 and 4), other forms of conflict persist throughout Hegel's account of spirit, even in absolute spirit.

The immediacy and unreflectiveness with which the ancient Greeks ascribe authority to their beliefs, norms, and practices make tragedy a perpetual feature of their shape of spirit – at least until that shape of spirit becomes so unstable that it falls apart entirely. Hegel does think that practices of reconciliation have a role to play in coping with conflict. The shape of spirit in which conflict and reconciliation are co-equal moments in an on-going dialectic – the shape of spirit that Hegel calls *absolute spirit* – could not have tragic conflict as its paradigmatic ethical

[56] Ibid.

confrontation. Moral agents would understand themselves as loci of authority and responsibility. The authority of their beliefs, norms, and practices would not appear to them as immediately given, but would be understood as maintained and shaped by their actions and those of others in their community. Ethical conflicts would persist, but, strictly speaking, they would not be tragic conflicts in the sense that Hegel describes here.

But I am getting ahead of myself. There are a few more stops to make before arriving at absolute spirit. I turn now to a different type of conflict – the struggle between Faith and Enlightenment – and a different way of understanding the relationship between action and authority.

CHAPTER TWO: Faith, Enlightenment, and the Authority of Social Practice

In his discussion of Greek *Sittlichkeit*, Hegel responds to the German Romantics, who view ancient Greece as a harmonious society that offered an alternative to the fragmentation of modern European societies. For the Romantics, the immediacy with which the Greeks identified with their social norms was superior to the alienation that characterized modern individuals' relation to theirs. Hegel shows, however, that this evaluation of Greek *Sittlichkeit* is wrong, and that Greek *Sittlichkeit* contains within itself the conditions of its own demise. The identities and obligations available within Greek *Sittlichkeit* come into conflict with one another and, because the supposed harmony of that society comes from the immediacy with which individuals identify with its norms, the conflict cannot be resolved within the terms of that shape of spirit. Hegel argues that, for Greek *Sittlichkeit*, "however much [the norms] are supposed to be legitimated through my insight, still I have already set their unwavering being-in-itself into motion, and I regard them as something which is perhaps true for me but perhaps not. An ethical disposition consists precisely in immovably sticking to what is right and in abstaining from any movement, any undermining, and any reduction" (§436/322). As soon as the laws and norms are called into question – as they are when such conflicts arise – the relation of immediacy is sundered.

Hegel thus refuses to romanticize Greek *Sittlichkeit*. A return to the past is both impossible and undesirable. But neither does he romanticize the present. Hegel acknowledges that modernity *does* appear fragmented, with religious and intellectual movements making incompatible demands on modern individuals and claiming different sources of authority for these demands. Modernity appears beset by conflict, and it is unclear what standards or authorities, if any, could adjudicate between seemingly incommensurable positions. From his

earliest essays, Hegel is interested in the role that religion – and, particularly, religious practices – might play in overcoming conflicts and creating social cohesion.

A Prelude: Religion in Hegel's "Tübingen Essay"

Motivated by his concerns about the chaos and fragmentation of the rapidly changing societies of late 18th and early 19th century Europe, Hegel's early essays attempt to reconcile a conception of *Sittlichkeit* with the loss of immediacy that accompanies modern reflexivity.[57] These essays explore the role of religion – in some cases Christianity and in others what Hegel calls *Volksreligion* – in unifying a diverse and fragmented society.[58] In an essay that Hegel began writing while still a seminary student in Tübingen, and therefore known as the "Tübingen Essay," Hegel tries to reconcile Kantian morality, with its emphasis on rationality and the moral law, with Hegel's own interest in *Volksreligion*, the religion of a people.[59] In the "Tübingen

[57] Although Hegel already recognizes in this early period that the re-creation of Greek *Sittlichkeit* is not a viable option for modern societies, he is still more enamored with Greek *Sittlichkeit* than he comes to be in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and his later work.

[58] See, especially, "The Positivity of the Christian Religion," "The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate," and the "Tübingen Essay." All three appear in *Werke 1* of Hegel's collected works. The first two are published in English translation in *Early Theological Writings*, translated by T. M. Knox (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1948). The latter is published in *Three Essays 1793-1795*, translated by Peter Fuss and John Dobbins (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 30-58. For an in-depth discussion of all three essays, and, in particular, their role in the development of Hegel's thoughts on religion and politics, see Lewis, *Religion, Modernity, and Politics in Hegel*, 16-56.

[59] Fuss and Dobbins translate *Volksreligion* as "folk religion." As Thomas A. Lewis points out, however, "'folk religion' too easily suggests a stress on popular, rather than elite, religion that is foreign to Hegel's usage" (Lewis, *Religion, Modernity, and Politics in Hegel*, 27n33). Lewis translates *Volksreligion* as "civil religion," which he argues "better captures the public, social, and political character of Hegel's notion of a *Volksreligion*" (27). While I agree that civil religion is less misleading than folk religion, many scholars of religion will associate that phrase with the elite discourses of elected officials and statesmen, described by Robert Bellah's (Rousseauian) work on civil religion. I do not think this quite captures Hegel's meaning either. I prefer "the religion of a people," but, as this is somewhat cumbersome, I have left the phrase untranslated and altered the Foss and Dobbins translations accordingly.

Essay," Hegel basically assumes that pure reason is the ground of knowledge and that practical reason can determine the moral course of action. He notes, however, that people tend to act in accordance with their habits, desires, and passions rather than the dictates of reason. Even if they can rationally determine the moral course of action, reason alone can rarely compel them to follow this course. Unlike reason, *Volksreligion* comprises practices, communities, and institutions that train moral subjects. *Volksreligion* can shape habits, desires, and passions to *accord* with reason, thereby making it compatible with moral action and social cohesion. In fact, a religion's ability to serve this function is the measure of *Volksreligion*; Hegel writes that "any religion purporting to be a *Volksreligion* must be so constituted that it engages the heart and the imagination. Even the purest / religion of reason must become incarnate in the souls of individuals, and all the more so in the people as a whole" (52/37).

Against those who would interiorize or privatize religion, Hegel insists on the importance of its public aspects, particularly rituals and other religious practices. As Lewis characterizes the "Tübingen Essay," the young Hegel is trying to find a "middle path between radical interiorization of faith that would disregard practice altogether and what he views as an irrational superstition that views these practices as 'mechanical operations.' He seeks to give the Enlightenment its due without allowing it to undermine a vital role for religious rituals."[60] Thus, early in the "Tübingen Essay," Hegel echoes a Kantian concern about religion as superstition when he states that "religion is sheer superstition whenever I seek to derive from it specific grounds of action in situations where mere prudence is sufficient, or when fear of divinity makes me perform certain actions by means of which I imagine that it might be placated" (37/18).[61]

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[60] Lewis, *Religion, Modernity, and Politics in Hegel*, 31.

[61] Cf. Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Bare Reason*, translated by Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2009). Kant writes that religious practices may

This caveat aside, however, Hegel asserts that *Volksreligion* is not only compatible with but also inconceivable without religious practice. He argues that *Volksreligion* has three aspects: concepts, essential customs, and ceremonies. Leaving concepts aside, he distinguishes between essential customs and ceremonies. "With regard to ceremonies," Hegel writes, "on the one hand, no *Volksreligion* is conceivable without them; on the other, nothing is harder to prevent than their being taken by the populace at large for the essence of religion itself" (53/38). Ceremonies are inessential customs, merely a "formal aspect" of religion's structure. This is not the case, however, with the straightforwardly-named *essential* customs. Unlike ceremonies, which are "formal" or "mere embellishment," essential customs are connected to the *content* of the religion. Hegel names baptism, the Eucharist, and sacrifice as examples of essential customs. The sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist, Hegel writes, are "rites involving certain extraordinary benefits which we as Christians are duty-bound to perform so as to become more perfect, more moral" (*ibid*). Sacrifice, likewise, is "part of the [religion's] structure," not in terms of religion's "formal aspect" but in terms of its true content (*ibid*).[62]

In this early account of *Volksreligion*, Hegel emphasizes sacrament and sacrifice as particularly important religious practices. Hegel drops the term "essential customs" in his later work, but he remains committed to the notion that sacrament and sacrifice are more than "mere

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have beneficial social functions, but that the Christian conception of them constitutes mere superstition. Communion, for instance, "contains within it something great that expands the narrow, self-loving, and intolerant way of thinking of human beings… to the idea of a *cosmopolitan community*; and thus it is a good means for invigorating a community to the moral attitude of brotherly love as which this community is conceived;" nevertheless, Kant continues, to believe that this communal practice somehow confers God's grace on the practitioners is "a delusion of religion." Kant 220-1.

[62] While Hegel considers both sacraments and sacrifice to be "essential customs" in the "Tübingen Essay," the two types of ritual serve somewhat different functions in the *Phenomenology*. I consider Hegel's view of the sacraments in Chapter 3 and consider sacrifice in detail in Chapter 4.

embellishment," that they *do* something, at once expressing a set of commitments and bringing about a change in the practitioner. This notion is more complicated than simply the idea that religious practices shape habits and dispositions, although Hegel continues to endorse that claim as well.[63] Rituals and religious practices generate authority, an authority that is informed, but not wholly predetermined, by the commitments of the individuals who perform them. Hegel's

[63] Hegel pursues this point in both the *Philosophy of Right* and the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. In the latter, he argues that religion is a critical site for the "education, practice, cultivation," of a disposition toward rational self-determination (Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion: One Volume Edition, The Lectures of 1827*, R. F. Brown, P. C. Hodgson, and J. M. Stewart, trans. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 478). He thinks that individuals have the capacity for rational self-determination, but that this capacity must be developed into a habit or disposition. He writes that "it is the concern of the church that this habituating and educating of spirit should become ever more inward, that this truth should become ever more identical with the self, with the human will, and that this truth should become one's volition, one's object, one's spirit" (Hegel, *LPR*, 479). As others have argued, this combination of habituation and self-determination is crucial to Hegel's concept of freedom, in which the individual identifies with the social norms (into which she has been habituated) which she can also endorse for herself as rational. See, especially, Thomas A. Lewis, *Freedom and Tradition in Hegel: Reconsidering Anthropology, Ethics, and Religion* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005).

Hegel's attention to religious ritual should be of interest to ritual theorists. The literature on the concept of ritual is extensive, as are the contemporary debates over how ritual should be understood and theorized by scholars of religion. One significant debate is whether ritual should primarily be understood as expressive and symbolic or as effective and disciplinary. To put the question bluntly, does ritual express the already-held beliefs of religious subjects or does ritual produce and transform those beliefs and the subjects themselves? While these theoretical debates are beyond my scope here, I hope that interested readers will find that Hegel's discussions of ritual provide compelling fodder for these contemporary discussions. In my reading, Hegel thinks that rituals and other religious practices both *symbolize* and *actualize* a community's central commitments, at once reinscribing them and holding them up for potential scrutiny and revision. On the contemporary theoretical questions, see Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Terry F. Godlove, Jr. "Saving Belief: On the New Materialism in Religious Studies," in *Radical Interpretations of Religion*, edited by Nancy K. Frankenberry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Amy Hollywood, "Performativity, Citationality, Ritualization," *History of Religions* 42:2 (2002), 93-115, and "Practice, Belief and Feminist Philosophy of Religion," *Feminist Philosophy of Religion: Critical Readings*, edited by Pamela Sue Anderson and Beverly Clack (London: Routledge, 2004); Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

account of ritual and other sorts of social practices is far too complex to address in a prefatory way, however, so the remainder of this chapter and the following chapter will be devoted to clarifying it.

While the *Phenomenology of Spirit* lacks a clear parallel to the discussion of *Volksreligion* in the "Tübingen Essay," Chapter VI does feature several shapes of spirit in which rituals and religious practices serve an important role in conflict, recognition, and reconciliation. In Greek *Sittlichkeit*, for instance, burial rites are supposed to overcome an apparent conflict between the family and the *polis*, the natural and the normative, by recognizing and reinstating the dead as a member of the ethical community. Although Hegel shows how the self-understanding of Greek *Sittlichkeit* undermines this recognitive and reconciliatory practice, he also implies that particular rituals, in a community with the right sort of self-understanding, might serve such a function.

This issue arises again in Hegel's discussion of Faith and Enlightenment. Faith and Enlightenment each provide an account of a universal standard of knowledge, but they disagree with one another about what this standard is. Faith relies on its religious practices to generate an authoritative emotional experience of the absolute. Enlightenment turns to the authority of reason to generate its absolute standard. Hegel suggests that both of these accounts are flawed. Neither Faith nor Enlightenment understands how its practices participate in, and generate, norms and normative authority. Both remain alienated, therefore, from one another and from the absolute.

Given how much material has been written about the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, surprisingly little has focused on this section, which is often overshadowed by the earlier discussion of Greek *Sittlichkeit*, the account of the French Revolution and Terror that

immediately follows the conflict between Faith and Enlightenment, and the final section of Chapter VI in which absolute spirit makes its debut.[64] The section on Faith and Enlightenment is a critical link, however; without it, consciousness could not arrive at absolute spirit. Thematically, this section focuses on the relationship between action and authority (or, to return to Hegel's technical term, essence), and, although neither Faith nor Enlightenment quite understands how these relate, the conflict between them shows how Hegel thinks they do. By analyzing the section on Faith and Enlightenment, we can understand Hegel's view of action and authority, and the importance of rituals and religious practices in it.

The remainder of this chapter has three parts. The first will briefly describe the transition in Chapter VI of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* from Greek *Sittlichkeit* to modernity, setting the stage for the conflict between Faith and Enlightenment. The second will turn to the conflict itself, and will highlight the role of ritual and other forms of action in it. Hegel suggests that Faith's embrace of ritual and religious practice is its strength, while its account of the role that these practices play in generating and sustaining remains inadequate. Faith does not recognize its practices as norm-generating activities. Enlightenment, meanwhile, understands itself to be self-legislating – that is, identifying and affirming the norms that it will take to be authoritative –

[64] Notable exceptions include Brandom, "From Irony to Trust," *A Spirit of Trust*, 75-96; Jürgen Stolzenberg, "Hegel's Critique of the Enlightenment in 'The Struggle of the Enlightenment with Superstition,' In K. Westphal (2009), 190-208; and Lewis P. Hinchman, *Hegel's Critique of the Enlightenment* (Gainsville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1984). The latter two authors focus primarily on Hegel's criticisms of the Enlightenment. Jean Hyppolite also devotes a chapter to "The Struggle between Enlightenment and Superstition" in *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by Samuel Cherniak and John Heckman (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974). Brief summaries and interpretations of the section on Faith and Enlightenment are provided in the context of extended accounts of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, including Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology*, 165-79; Stephen Crites, *Dialectic and Gospel in the Development of Hegel's Thinking* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 416-31; and Walter Jaeschke, *Reason in Religion: The Foundations of Hegel's Philosophy of Religion*, trans. by Michael J. Stewart and Peter C. Hodgson (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 191-3.

but it believes that it does this only as a solitary activity, without recognizing the role that tradition, community, and social practices play in authorizing its commitments. The third section draws on Robert Brandom and Dean Moyar to outline a theory of action that makes sense of Hegel's criticisms of Faith and Enlightenment. The Hegelian theory of action draws on the insights of both Faith and Enlightenment while exposing their blinders. It shows where they went wrong and why their conflict was irreconcilable. With this, Hegel begins to sketch an account of the social-practical basis of authority.

From Greek Immediacy to Modern Alienation

The collapse of Greek *Sittlichkeit* is followed by the rise and fall of several other social arrangements, including Roman legal society and European aristocratic culture. As we have seen, Greek *Sittlichkeit* comes to an end when the identities and social roles that individuals experienced as immediate, fixed, and given come into conflict with one another. When this happens, the illusion of a harmonious form of life in which the identities and commitments of individuals are fully compatible with the institutions and practices of the community is shattered. At the end of the *Antigone*, the eponymous character is dead by her own hand and her rival, Creon, is ruined. Nevertheless, what Hegel and many of his contemporaries admired about the Greeks was their sense that individual identities and communal norms *should* achieve harmony.

The shape of spirit that follows Greek *Sittlichkeit* in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* lacks both its immediacy and its sense of identification between the individual and the community. Whereas Greek *Sittlichkeit* was governed by what were taken to be natural identities and obligations, all of which were supposed to be reconciled in a differentiated but harmonious spirit,

this new shape of spirit is governed by a conception of legal personhood that is utterly divorced from individuals' identities and commitments. Hegel writes:

> Since this determinateness [i.e. the determinateness of Greek *Sittlichkeit*] disappears, the life of spirit and this substance, which is conscious of itself in the self-consciousness of all, are both lost. In both of them, the substance emerges as a *formal universality* and no longer dwells in them as a living spirit. Instead, their simple unadulterated individuality has been shattered into a plurality of multiple points. (§475/354)

This new shape of spirit is Roman legal society, in which "persons," as bearers of legal rights, are formal members of the society but have no deeper identification with it in terms of their identities or commitments.

In Roman legal society, legal persons have no natural or normative affinity for the vast empire or its laws. "As a legal person, each exists for himself, and he excludes continuity with other through the absolute unaccommodating nature of his point-like existence. Those legal persons are thus in a merely negative relationship to each other" (§481/358). It is a community in only the most formal sense. Stephen Crites writes:

> There is no ethical life to mediate between the empire, as a concentration of political and military power, and the individuals it rules. The family [which mediates between individuals and the larger community in Greek *Sittlichkeit*] presumably survives, but its lifeblood does not circulate through the imperial order as it did through the ethical world. The empire is indifferent to the languages, customs, traditions, religions, and cultural life of its subject people. It

> rules by force, pulverizing the many ethical communities into a mere aggregate of undifferentiated individual 'persons.'"[65]

Legal persons are not bound together by shared beliefs and norms but by laws that are determined and enforced by the "lord of the world" or emperor though coercion and the threat of violence. The emperor dominates his subjects, exercising power over them arbitrarily.[66]

This relationship of domination is also one of *alienation*. The legal person is estranged from the empire, "since the content alien to legal personality makes itself effective within it, and it makes itself effective because it is their reality" (§481/358). The norms and laws by which the legal person must abide are exogenous to it, and, thus, the legal person is bound by an authority which it cannot itself endorse. In such a society, the legal person cannot speak or act in a way that it can endorse for itself. Its public role and its private identity are related only arbitrarily.

As a result, "legal personality thus experiences –even more so, its complete lack of substance" (§481/358) and it is "*driven back into itself*" (§482/359), seeking authority not in the world but in within itself. This retreat into the subject generates the reflexivity that was absent in Greek *Sittlichkeit*, but it is an incomplete reflexivity insofar as it cannot connect the subject to any object. It is divided into the empty and contentless interiority of the individual and the determinate but arbitrary content of the material and social world. Thus, Hegel writes that "the world of spirit falls apart into two worlds," into the "actual world" and the world that spirit "constructs for itself in the ether of pure consciousness" (§486/362-3). For the former, all authority rests on the side of the substance, or the world. For the latter, all authority rests on the

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[65] Crites, *Dialectic and Gospel*, 409.

[66] I owe this way of putting the point to Phillip Pettit's discussion of domination in *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). In his definition, "one agent *dominates* another if and only if they have a certain power over that other, in particular a power of interference on an arbitrary basis" (52).

side of the subject, or consciousness. In neither case, however, are subject and substance, consciousness and world, reconciled.

The "actual world" evolves into the European aristocratic culture. In this shape of spirit, the individual must become "cultured," divested of his individuality and trained to comport himself according to external standards, which are largely set by those with political power or wealth. While the German word *Bildung* generally refers positively to the product of education and cultivation, Hegel uses the term somewhat ironically here to describe a culture that is complete artifice. As Crites writes, it is a culture "with no organic relation to either nature or to social solidarity."[67] Through a series of complex moves, Hegel shows how the "cultured" individual comes to see that the beliefs, norms, and practices of this form of life lack self-sufficient authority – they are not, and cannot be, the absolute. Like the legal person, the cultured individual now recognizes power and wealth as arbitrary, external authorities that he cannot endorse as authoritative for himself. Thus, Hegel sets up his discussion of that other division, the world that spirit "constructs for itself in the ether of pure consciousness."

The Conflict Between Faith and Enlightenment

Within this ether, Faith and Enlightenment are born. Hegel writes that "such a flight away from the realm of the present is hence immediately in itself a doubled flight. Pure consciousness is the element into which spirit elevates itself, but pure consciousness is not only the element of *Faith*, it is equally that of the *concept*. Hence both emerge together at the same time, and the former comes into view only in opposition to the latter" (§486/363). What Hegel calls "the concept" here is connected to what he later calls pure insight or Enlightenment. Along with

[67] Crites, *Dialectic and Gospel*, 413.

Faith, it is alienated from the arbitrary and contingent standards of the world and has retreated into itself. Neither Faith nor Enlightenment can recapture the spirit of Greek *Sittlichkeit* or legal personhood with those earlier forms' sense of "the immediate recognition and validity of self-consciousness simply because it *is*" (§487/363). That type of immediacy is impossible for modern individuals. But neither are they satisfied to live according to exogenous laws and norms. They are alienated from these laws, unable to endorse them as authoritative for themselves. In order to overcome this alienation, they hope to identify universal grounds of belief and action within the consciousness of the individual. Almost at once, however, these two movements "come undone from each other and enter into a twofold consciousness," each side affirming different grounds of belief and action (§528/393).

Faith

On one side is *Faith*. Faith [*Glaube*] and religion [*Religion*] are related concepts, but Hegel is careful to distinguish between them.[68] Initially, he warns his readers not to confuse Faith with religion proper. He writes that Faith is "not therefore self-consciousness of the absolute essence as it is *in* and *for itself*; it is not religion which is being considered. Rather, it is *Faith* insofar as it is a *flight* away from the actual world and thus does not exist *in* and *for itself*" (§486/363). Whereas religion reflects on the absolute in a way that reconciles world and consciousness, Faith attempts to flee the world and to find the absolute in pure consciousness.

[68] Although *der Glaube* carries the dual meaning of "faith" and "belief," I will consistently translate it and its derivatives as "faith," "faithful," and so forth, in order to capture the religious connotation of the German word.

But Faith *cannot* really flee the world. Faith is a shape of spirit. It involves norms, practices, and community.[69] In this sense, it turns out to be a *form* of religion that remains un-self-conscious about the role that its practices and communal life play in creating and sustaining norms and normative authority. Hegel explains:

> Just as *religion* – for it is clear that it is religion that is being spoken of – comes on the scene here as the Faith belonging to the world of cultural development, religion does not yet come on the scene as it is *in and for itself*. –It has already appeared before us in other types of determinateness, namely, as the *unhappy consciousness*, as a shape of the substance-less movement of consciousness itself. –In ethical substance it also appeared as a Faith in the netherworld. However, consciousness of the isolated spirit is not really *Faith*, not really the essence posited in the element of a pure consciousness which lies beyond the actual. Rather, Faith itself has an immediate presence; its elemental unit is the family. – However, religion has here partly emerged from the *substance* and is the pure

[69] In claiming that Faith is a shape of spirit (as opposed to a "shape of consciousness"), I am disagreeing with Michael N. Forster's interpretation of Chapter VI. Forster argues that Hegel abandons his analysis of social substance around the time it introduces the world of self-alienated spirit and what Hegel calls "pure consciousness." Forster interprets Hegel as revisiting the project of the first half of the book by depicting and discussing forms of thought rather than forms of life in the second half of Chapter VI. As Forster writes, "from the section *Faith and Pure Insight* onwards – with a partial exception in the treatment of the French Revolution in the section *Absolute Freedom and Terror* – the chapter ceases to depict *social contexts*, instead focusing once again, like the earlier chapters, on very general perspectives or "shapes of consciousness," this contrary to the official policy stated at the beginning of the chapter that we have now left behind 'shapes of consciousness' for 'shapes of a world.'" See Forster, *Hegel's Idea of a Phenomenology of Spirit*, 451. In what follows, I hope to provide evidence to the contrary; indeed, my argument is that how Faith and Enlightenment understand and shape their own social contexts is precisely the issue in this section. Thus, my position is close to Brandom's when he writes that Faith and Enlightenment "comprise not only norms and the individuals subject to them, but also practices and institutions in which those norms are implicit. Faith and Enlightenment are not just theories of normativity; they are *institutionalized* theories" (Brandom, "From Irony to Trust," *A Spirit of Trust*, 76).

> consciousness of that substance; this pure consciousness, the *essence*, is in part alienated from its actual *existence*. Thus, it is, to be sure, no longer the movement of substance-less consciousness, but it still bears the determinateness of opposition to actuality as *this actuality* itself, and it is the opposition to the actuality of self-consciousness in particular. It is thus essentially merely a *Faith*. (§527/392)

Repeating his earlier claim that Faith is not "religion *in* and *for itself*," Hegel compares the relationship between consciousness and substance posited by Faith to that posited by two other forms of religion, each of which appeared earlier in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The first example is the unhappy consciousness. Hegel discussed the unhappy consciousness at the end of Chapter IV ("Self-Consciousness"). The unhappy consciousness is a shape of consciousness, rather than a shape of spirit, so it gives an account of the standard of knowledge that is independent of any norms, social practices, or institutions. It is, as Hegel writes here, substance-less consciousness.

The second example is "faith in the netherworld," the religion of Greek *Sittlichkeit*. Hegel quickly adds that, despite the name, this is not *really* Faith insofar as its commitments are actualized in the institution of the household and in social practices like burial rites. Unlike the unhappy consciousness, Greek *Sittlichkeit* brings consciousness and substance together. Its account of the standard of knowledge involves the immediate and unreflective unity of consciousness and substance.

As a shape of spirit, Faith is not *without* substance like the unhappy consciousness was. But its account of the standard of knowledge fails to unify consciousness and substance. Faith forms communities and participates in religious practices, but these communities and social

practices do not appear in its account of the authority of its commitments. This is what Hegel means when he states that, in Faith, religion does not yet appear *in and for itself*; what Faith is *actually* committed to is different from what it takes itself to be committed to. Faith believes itself to be "pure consciousness," independent of substance or the actual world, and therefore it is committed to the idea that its beliefs are grounded on the authority of religious feelings and emotions that are wholly independent of the material and social world. Thus, Faith affirms the distinction between consciousness and substance, claiming that what is authoritative for it is independent of the world, even while it emerges from and acts within the world. To use Hegel's terminology, Faith's *essence* becomes alienated from its *existence* in the world; thus, "this *pure consciousness* of absolute essence is an alienated consciousness" (§528/392). What Faith takes to be authoritative for itself cannot be reconciled with its actual existence in the world.

One thing that Faith takes itself to be committed to is the doctrine of the Trinity. According to this doctrine, Hegel writes:

> What comes first is *the absolute essence*, which is spirit existing in and for itself insofar as spirit is the simple eternal *substance*. However, in the realization of its concept, which is to be spirit, substance passes over into *being for others*. Its selfsameness becomes *actual* self-*sacrificing* absolute essence. It becomes a *self*, but a transitory self at that. Hence, the third point is the return of this alienated self and the humbled substance into their first simplicity. It is only in this manner that substance is represented as spirit. (§531/395)

For Faith, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are "spirits which persist and have returned into themselves and exist at one with themselves in their own sphere" (§530/395). The movement from one to another is, for Faith, a completed historical event. The birth and death of the Son in

the world, and the dwelling of the Spirit in the community, made it possible for the faithful to have a relationship with the absolute and eternal Father, who resides in the other-worldly beyond.

Meanwhile, Faith both lives in the world and rejects it, seeking to overcome the worldly and contingent part of itself through obedience to and worship of the triune God. Through rituals and other worship practices, Faith prepares itself for an experience of the divine, evidenced by intense emotions. Hegel writes that "this obedience of service and praise brings forth the consciousness of unity with the essence existing in and for itself…" (§533/396). Through these practices, Faith enters into a relationship with the divine, although never once and for all. Hegel continues, "this service is merely that incessant act of engendering [the unity], an activity which never completely reaches its goal in the present" (*ibid*).

Hegel has in mind the emotionalist religious movements of his day, including, most importantly, Pietism.[70] This Christian sect rejected both the rationalism of the seventeenth century and the authority of religious orthodoxy and, instead, focused on the authority of religious experience as a ground of belief. The Pietists emphasized the role of religious communities and practices in providing the conditions for the experience of the divine. However, the Pietists did not believe that these practices had any independent authority. To use Hegel's language, they were not taken to be *essential* for the Pietists. Instead, like Faith, the Pietists believed that religious practices were vehicles for religious experience and that the emotions brought forth by those experiences were evidence of their relationship with God.

[70] Several texts provide invaluable accounts of Hegel's religious and theological context, including Laurence Dickey, *Hegel: Religion, Economics, and the Politics of Spirit, 1770-1807* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); and Alan M. Olson, *Hegel and the Spirit: Philosophy as Pneumatology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992). In *Hegel's Phenomenology*, Pinkard also provides a brief discussion of the connection between Pietism and what Hegel calls Faith (166).

Pure insight (or, Enlightenment)

Enlightenment is also fleeing the world. Like Faith, Enlightenment tries to overcome the groundlessness that plagued the world of self-alienated spirit by identifying objective standards for belief. It shares Faith's rejection of tradition and external authorities as providing such grounds. Pinkard points out that Faith and Enlightenment share two important assumptions about the grounds of belief and knowledge: first, they share the assumption that "for an agent to know something is to submit it to certain authoritative grounds that are not themselves dependent on any transcendent source for their own authentication (although these authoritative grounds may themselves serve to authenticate belief in something transcendent)," and second, that "for an agent to know something is to be in possession of 'grounds of belief' that hold universally for all individuals."[71] While Faith claims to find non-transcendent, universal grounds of belief in the experience of religious emotion, Enlightenment claims to find authoritative grounds in pure insight or critical scrutiny.

For Enlightenment, only rational norms that are self-legislated can be authoritative. This is what Hegel means when he writes that "[pure insight] knows the essence not as *essence* but as the absolute *self*" (§535/397). Thus, it "proceeds to sublate all self-sufficiency that is *other* to self-consciousness," that is, it critically scrutinizes and rejects every law, norm, or tradition that appears to self-consciousness as something given to it from outside of itself (*ibid*).

Initially, Enlightenment does not affirm a set of commitments of its own. Instead, it claims to offer a standpoint – the standpoint of pure insight – from which to evaluate others' commitments, which appear to Enlightenment as given rather than self-legislated. Regarding

[71] Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology*, 166.

itself as a neutral arbiter of this exogenous content, pure insight "is in the first place empty insight whose content appears to it as an other. Hence, in Faith it *comes across* this content in this shape which is not yet its own, as an existence totally independent of it" (§548/405). Because pure insight is supposed to be a *universal* ground of belief, it exhorts others to adopt its rational standpoint by casting aside their own contingencies and particularities. As Hegel concludes the introduction to his discussion of pure insight: "this pure insight is thus the spirit that calls out to every consciousness: *Be for yourselves* what you all are *in yourselves – rational* [vernünftig]" (§536/398). This is how Enlightenment confronts Faith. The resulting conflict is what Hegel calls "the struggle of Enlightenment with superstition."

The Struggle

Enlightenment recognizes what Hegel has already told his readers: that what Faith takes itself to be committed to differs from what Faith's beliefs and actions reveal it to be committed to. In an attempt to expose Faith's errors, Enlightenment launches a three-pronged attack. First, Enlightenment argues that Faith's belief in God is false. According to Enlightenment, there is no being-for-itself other than self-conscious human beings. Because Faith's God is a being-for-itself that exists in an other-worldly beyond, Enlightenment treats this being as it does all exogenous content, as mere prejudice or error.

Second, Enlightenment claims that Faith gives a bad account of how its beliefs are justified. Although Faith claims that its commitments are justified through the experiences and emotions that serve as evidence of its unity with the absolute, Enlightenment argues that the content of Faith's commitments actually depend on "individual pieces of historical evidence," contingent and particular events that cannot support these commitments. Testimony regarding

miracles, the transmission of this testimony, and the interpretation of scripture are all contingent and arbitrary historical events that cannot support Faith's beliefs about God. With regard to these first two aspects of Faith, Hegel writes Enlightenment "knows Faith to be opposed to itself and thus opposed to reason and truth. Just as in its eyes Faith is on the whole a tissue of superstitions, prejudices, and errors, the consciousness of this content is in its own eyes further organized into a realm of errors in which false insight, as the *universal social sphere* [*allgemeine Masse*] of consciousness, is immediate, naïve, and completely without any reflective turn into itself" (§542/401). According to Enlightenment, therefore, Faith's ontological and epistemological claims about God must be false.

Third and finally, Enlightenment attacks Faith's account of its actions. Faith claims to stand in an immediate relation to God, as evidenced by the emotions brought about by religious experience. These experiences, in turn, are prompted by religious practices that take place in the actual world. Enlightenment is puzzled by this account. How can the faithful come to stand in an immediate relation to God, who exists independently of human beings in an other-worldly beyond, merely by engaging in this-worldly practices? For Enlightenment, there is an insurmountable gap between the absolute being in the beyond and Faith's practices in this world. Thus, Enlightenment "finds it both foolish and wrong" that the elevation above this-worldly particularity "should be demonstrated *by way of the deed*, that is, this pure intention is in truth a deception which both pretends and demands to be an *inner* elevation but which takes on the affectation that it is gratuitous, foolish, and even wrong to be serious about *actually putting this into practice* and *demonstrating its truth*" (§556/412).

Enlightenment criticizes, for example, Faith's practices of sacrifice [*Aufopferung*]. To demonstrate and reinforce their detachment from this world, the faithful give up certain

possessions and pleasures. Enlightenment scoffs at these sacrifices, dismissing them as "wrong and useless" (§569/421). According to Enlightenment:

> The believing, faithful consciousness recognizes the actuality of possessing property and of keeping hold of it and consuming it. In claiming its property, it behaves in an even more isolated and stubborn manner, just as it has even more crudely thrown itself into its consumptive activities, since its religious activity – that of *giving up* possessions and the consumption of them – falls into the other-worldly side of this actuality, and it purchases freedom for itself on that side. In fact, through this opposition, this service of sacrifice of both natural activities and the activities of consumption has no truth; both the retention and the sacrifice occur together *side by side*. The sacrifice is merely a *sign* that the actual sacrifice has been performed in only a small degree; hence, the sign is in fact merely a *representational thought* of the sacrifice. (§569/421)

Enlightenment argues that Faith's sacrifices are wrong because the faithful sacrifice some possessions and pleasures while holding on to others; their sacrifices can be no more than a symbol of something that they cannot achieve in actuality. Furthermore, Enlightenment claims that these sacrifices are useless, because it "finds it simply inept either to discard *a* possession in order both to know and to prove that one is liberated from possession *per se* or to renounce *an* indulgence in order both to know and prove that one is liberated from indulgence *per se*" (§570/421). Enlightenment ridicules Faith for sacrificing particular possessions or pleasures when its aim is to rid itself of the desire for *all* worldly goods. "Since in the action the *purpose*, which is a universal purpose, and the *execution* of the purpose, which is an individual activity, essentially would have to be present to consciousness in their inadequacy to each other, that

action proves itself to be the sort of action in which consciousness has no share, and this action thereby proves to be too *naïve* even to be an action at all. It is simply too naïve to fast in order to prove oneself freed from the pleasures of the table, and it is too naïve to rid *the body* of some other pleasure, as Origen did, in order to show that one has dismissed pleasure." (§570/422). The gap between the universal purpose of the action and what the action actually accomplishes is too great for the action to even be taken seriously.

Of Enlightenment's three criticisms of Faith, this is the most important. It is through the *practical* conflict between Faith and Enlightenment that the ontological and epistemological conflicts are considered and addressed. While Hegel himself claims that Faith's self-understanding – particularly its denial of the authority of its this-worldly practices – is misguided, he also suggests that Enlightenment's criticism of Faith's practices misses the mark. Enlightenment's criticism of Faith's practices rightly notes the mismatch between Faith's this-worldly practices and its other-worldly absolute. But, in characterizing Faith's practices, Enlightenment wrongly emphasizes Faith's intentions for its practices rather than their practical effects. Enlightenment wrongly "puts all essentiality into the *intention*, into *thoughts*, and it thereby spares itself from actually accomplishing the liberation from natural purposes" (§571/422). Enlightenment thinks that whatever authority an action has is to be found in an agent's intentions. The action as it is carried out, or in its effects in the world, is irrelevant. As Jean Hyppolite puts the point, Enlightenment "admits interiority, but separates it from *works*, which strike it as empty."[72] Because of this emphasis, Enlightenment misses the significance of Faith's practices.

[72] Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, 443.

Hegel will insist again and again, however, that an action's significance is greater than the subject's intention for it. It involves not only the subject's intention, but also its effects in the world and others' evaluation of them. This, however, is what Enlightenment denies. By emphasizing intention (rather than action itself), Enlightenment fails to see how nature or the given is transcended, transformed into norm through human being's social practices. Provisionally, we might say that it is through the this-worldly practices of members of a community that consciousness and substance are unified, that individuals' desires and commitments – those which are essential or authoritative for them – are reshaped by (and participate in reshaping) the norms of a shape of spirit.

Action and Authority

In Greek *Sittlichkeit*, individuals immediately identified with the social roles and norms that were assigned to them. This identification, however, came at the expense of critical scrutiny of that inheritance. The authority of their social roles and norms was taken as fixed or given. What marks Faith and Enlightenment as modern shapes of spirit, in contrast to Greek *Sittlichkeit*, is their effort to find *grounds* for the authority of their social roles and norms. Both Faith and Enlightenment believe that the authority of their social roles and norms comes not from their givenness or immediacy, but from their correspondence to a standard that is, in principle, available to any person at any time. When they reject the world of culture in favor of the ether of pure consciousness, they reject tradition, social and political authorities, and other contingent grounds for the authority of social roles and norms. They turn inward, seeking universal and timeless foundations for norms and normative authority in experience, emotion, or reason.

This move overcomes the problems of immediacy that plagued Greek *Sittlichkeit*, but it creates a new set of problems for Faith and Enlightenment. They become alienated from their actual existence in the world. Faith, for whom the standard of knowledge is to be found in the religious experience of the absolute, cannot give a satisfactory account of the role that worship plays in creating or sustaining norms or normative authority within the community. Enlightenment, for whom the standard of knowledge is to be found in universal and timeless reason, refuses to acknowledge its own practices of critical scrutiny as creating or sustaining norms or normative authority. Moreover, it misunderstands the significance of action in this process. Both of their accounts of the standard of knowledge fail to address the socially and historically situated practices in which they are engaged; they are, in a sense, alienated from their own actions.

The strength of Faith lies in the very practices that Enlightenment criticizes. Practices of worship and sacrifice, for instance, connect Faith to the absolute. Nevertheless, Faith does not know this to be the case. Its weakness, therefore, lies in its account of the relationship between these practices and the authority of its commitments. Faith claims that religious experience, embodied in feelings and emotions, provides evidence of God and the divine order. In Faith's account, emotions are the grounds of belief. The rituals that it performs, and the community with which it performs them, prepare the way for religious experience, but have no authority of their own. They are, as Pinkard writes, mere "auxiliaries" to what is truly authoritative for Faith.[73] Faith believes that its rituals and worship are inessential, and that the ground of its commitments lies beyond the material and social world.

[73] Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology*, 172.

Hegel argues, however, that Faith entails a set of normative commitments embodied and embedded in a religious community and its practices. He writes, as we saw above, that "for it to be the spirit of the religious community, an essential moment is the activity of the religious community itself" (§549/406).[74] Recall, from the introduction, Pippin's argument that Hegel both draws on Kant's account of the unity of apperception and insists that such a unity of apperception must be socially and historically situated. Pippin argues that, with Kant as his starting point, Hegel describes our experience of the world as an ongoing practice of making judgments, true or false claims about the way the world is. The practice of making judgments, furthermore, is what being a subject entails. Where Hegel extends this claim, according to Pippin, is in his insistence that, to count as normative, these judgments must be open to contestation from other self-conscious subjects. Hegel argues that we cannot make normative judgments of the kind that characterize human beings as self-conscious subjects unless *other* self-conscious subjects are in a position to affirm or contest *our* judgments. These others not only judge our self-determined judgments; they are also the condition for the possibility of our judgments in the first place. In order to have meaningful commitments, an individual must be a part of a community in which the concepts entailed by those commitments have determinate content.

Robert Brandom's semantic interpretation of Hegel elucidates this complex relationship among commitments, concepts, determinate contents, and communities. Broadly speaking, Brandom agrees with the aspects of Pippin's interpretation of Hegel discussed above, although

[74] Westphal notes that, on this point, Enlightenment's criticism of Faith is correct: "since the truth of Faith is to be found in the religious community and not in some super-human, extra-mundane realm, Enlightenment provides an essential corrective to Faith in rejecting the beyond and focusing all interest on the here and now" (*History and Truth in Hegel's Phenomenology*, 192).

Brandom characterizes normative judgments as *commitments* for which we take responsibility. Commitments – including judgments about the way things are – involve concepts. For example, my commitment to the statement, "The United States is a democracy," involves the concepts "United States" and "democracy." Each of these concepts, in turn, has content, that is, it *means* something. In order for my commitment to be contentful or meaningful, the concepts contained within it and the relationship among those concepts must themselves be meaningful. And the way that concepts become meaningful is through their use. The concept "democracy" has come to mean what it does through countless instances of the concept being used to describe particular social and political arrangements, and those uses being either accepted or rejected. Excepting cases of metaphor, a statement like "this book is a democracy" will cause most anyone in hearing-distance to judge me to be confused or incompetent. The concept "democracy" typically does not apply to a book (with something like Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* being the metaphorical exception). But if I state that "the United States is a democracy," the same people are likely to grant that I am a competent concept-user, even if they disagree with my proposition. In that case, I may spark a debate about the concept "democracy," its content, and its legitimate application. Democracy may be a *contested* concept, but it is a *contentful* one nevertheless.[75]

[75] According to political theorist William Connolly, political debates are essentially conceptual contests. Citizens who agree, for instance, that justice and freedom are concepts worth talking about, may share an understanding of how these concepts have been used in the past but disagree about the application of these concepts to novel situations. Indeed, the meaning and applications of such concepts is the kind of thing about which people are likely to disagree: "Central to politics is the ambiguous and relatively open-ended interaction of persons and groups who share a range of concepts, but share them imperfectly and incompletely. Politics involves a form of interaction in which agents adjust, extend, resolve, accommodate, and transcend initial differences within a context of partially shared assumptions, concepts and commitments. On this reading conceptual contests are central to politics; they provide the space for political interaction." Connolly, *The Terms of Political Discourse, 3rd Edition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 6. I will explicitly address the political implications of this claim about

In this way of thinking about concepts, their content is neither entirely up-for-grabs nor ever settled once-and-for-all. This is because the determinate content of concepts comes from the way that people have used those concepts.[76] When I say that "the United States is a democracy," my interlocutors and I rely on the way that people have previously used the concept "democracy" in order to make sense of my proposition. Those past uses include not only those of political philosophers who have defined the term, but also of journalists who have written about politics, teachers who have given civics lessons, grassroots leaders who have organized citizens, politicians who have campaigned for votes, and citizens who have debated this or that public policy. Contentful concepts are bequeathed to us by these past concept-users, and their past use governs our current use. Nevertheless, we continue the process of specifying the content of concepts as we continue to use old concepts in new situations. Past use governs current use, but never completely forecloses the possibility of new uses that expand, contract, or revise a concept's content. This is how our concepts evolve.

In order to have contentful *commitments* – commitments like "the United States is a democracy" as opposed nonsensical commitments like "the book is a democracy" – an individual must be in community with other thinking, acting, and judging subjects who largely share a set of concepts and a set of practices by which those concepts are used, debated, and revised. This is partly because, as we have seen, the content of the concepts that make up our commitments depends on past concept use. But there is a second aspect to Hegel's claim about intersubjectivity, and this second point goes directly to the way that actions *express* commitments and *generate* authority.

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how concepts are contested, including Connolly's argument that conceptual contest is what politics are essentially about, in chapter 5.

[76] Brandom, *Reason in Philosophy*.

While Hegel agrees with Kant that the subject is the entity who is responsible for his or her commitments, he goes on to suggest that the subject must be accountable *to* someone. Without this accountability, Hegel contends, there is no normativity. The practices of reciprocal recognition, which I will discuss at length in Chapters 3 and 4, include taking responsibility for one's commitments, granting authority to others to make and judge commitments, and holding oneself and others accountable for concepts used and commitments held.[77] In and through such practices, commitments, concepts, and their contents are made explicit and available for affirmation, disagreement, or revision.

The Enlightenment, by contrast, "puts all essentiality into the intention." For Enlightenment, what is essential is simply the subject's commitment to the action under a particular description – that is, the subject's intention. It does not recognize that what is essential – what grounds authority – is not just individual thought and intention but also action itself. Action puts an agent's commitments at risk by subjecting them to the judgment of others. For an action to be *my* action, an intentional action, I must make a commitment to it. When I act, I make my commitment explicit and I petition the community to recognize my action as mine under the description that matches my commitment. But the community may refuse to recognize the action under that description. As Brandom writes, "the truth of the performance, what it is in itself, is expressed in all of the descriptions of what is actually achieved, all of the specifications of the content in terms of its consequences. These descriptions are available in principle to anyone in the community to recognize the performance under or to characterize its commitment."[78]

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[77] Brandom, *Reason in Philosophy*, esp. 52-77.
[78] Brandom, "Expressive Metaphysics of Agency," *A Spirit of Trust*, 22.

To say that action involves risk is to acknowledge that a subject cannot unilaterally dictate the meaning or content of her action or the community's evaluation of the commitments expressed in the action. This should sound like the claim made earlier about concepts, in which for me to state a proposition like "the United States is a democracy" is to subject my use of the concepts in the proposition (as well as their relation in the proposition itself) to the judgment of other concept users. Stating a proposition is, of course, one kind of action. What Brandom claims, however, is that all sorts of actions work in this way, making commitments explicit and further determining the content of those commitments in roughly this way. As Brandom writes:

> The notion of determinate conceptual contents is ultimately intelligible only in terms of the process of determining such contents – making them more determinate – by seeking the objective fulfillment of subjective practical commitments. If we are to understand the sense in which subjective commitments and the objective states of affairs they are fallibly responsible to or authoritative over are determinately contentful, we must understand how the processes and practices that are the exercise of intentional agency are intelligible both as the mere expression, revelation, and translation from subjective to objective form of already fully determinate contents and simultaneously as the means by which initially less determinate contents become more determinate: the process of determining conceptual contents.[79]

Intentional actions express a subject's already-held commitments *and* subject them to possible challenge or change as they are made explicit, evaluated in terms of the action's intention and its consequences, and finally reintegrated in this new form into the subject's set of commitments.

[79] Brandom, "Expressive Metaphysics of Agency," *A Spirit of Trust*, 14.

Enlightenment does not grasp this. Nor does Faith – at least, not at a conceptual level. Instead, Hegel suggests that Faith has an implicit grasp of this, embedded in the doctrine of the Trinity. According to Faith, the doctrine of the Trinity captures the relationship among the three persons of the triune God.[80] According to Hegel, however, the doctrine of the Trinity expresses the three-stage movement in which a subject's commitments are expressed in a community through action, subjected to the judgment of that community, and, finally, reintegrated into the subject's set of commitments. Whereas the faithful believe that the incarnation happened once and has now passed, Hegel argues that the incarnation is a recurrent moment in an ongoing dialectic through which spirit is engendered by the actions of the community. Hegel writes: "for it to be the spirit of the religious community, an essential moment is the activity of the religious community itself. It exists *only by being engendered* by consciousness – or, to a greater degree, it does not exist without being engendered by consciousness, for essential as this engendering is, it is equally essentially not the only ground of the essence, but is merely a moment of it. At the same time, the essence exists in and for itself" (§549/407).

The religious practices that Faith believes open its heart to an immediate relationship with the divine, and which Enlightenment denounced as wrong and useless, play a crucial role in Hegel's argument about what Faith and Enlightenment *both* are *in themselves*. Hegel writes: "*obedience and activity* are a necessary moment through which the certainty of existence within the absolute essence comes about… The absolute essence of Faith is essentially not the *abstract* essence which is supposed to lie in an other-worldly beyond of the faithful consciousness; rather, it is the spirit of the religious community, the unity of that abstract essence and self-consciousness" (§549/406-7). The absolute essence, or the self-sufficient standard, of Faith

[80] I address Hegel's account of the symbolic or representational form of religious doctrine in Chapter 4.

turns out not to be the other-worldly God but the "spirit of the religious community" – the norms, practices, institutions, and other aspects of Faith's communal life. Faith's sacrifices and worship practices are *necessary moments* that unify the consciousness and substance of the faithful.

Nevertheless, Hegel argues that Faith is an *alienated* shape of spirit. Dean Moyar argues that Hegel's account of alienation is closely connected to his account of intention, and Moyar describes both in terms of G. E. M. Anscombe's formulation of intentional actions as those to which the question "why did you do that?" pertains.[81] In Anscombe's account, the answer to this question identifies the agent's intentions, the reasons that make the action worth doing for the agent. Those reasons are, as Brandom also argues, connected to practical reasoning and to a range of other beliefs, emotions, attitudes, and evidence that are implicit in the commitment an agent undertakes in her intentional action. Moyar argues that an *alienated* agent does act intentionally, such that the "Why?" question pertains, but that she is unable to provide reasons for her action that satisfy the one who asks the "Why?" question. As Moyer writes, "one is alienated when one recognizes the need to give reasons for one's action, yet those reasons are either unavailable or fail to count as reasons."[82]

Alienation is a modern phenomenon in Hegel's portrayal, because it is only in the late medieval and early modern period that this conception of intentional action emerges. Antigone did not attempt to answer the "Why?" question, providing reasons for her action to Creon. Nor did Creon ask. In Greek *Sittlichkeit*, one acted the way one did simply because that was the way things were done. That is what makes that shape of spirit *immediate*. Modern individuals,

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[81] G. E. M. Anscombe, *Intention* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1957).
[82] Dean Moyar, "Self-Completing Alienation: Hegel's Argument for Transparent Conditions of Free Agency," in Moyar and Quante (2008), 156.

however, give reasons for their beliefs and actions, and they sense the need to give authoritative reasons. This is what launched Faith and Enlightenment on their search for authoritative grounds for belief and action in the first place.

Faith's grounds for belief, and the reasons that it gives to justify its practices, satisfy the "Why?" question within the religious community itself. As Moyar argues, "the faithful's relation to the religious essence (i.e. God) is not that of a knower making an ordinary theoretical claim about what exists. It is more like a practical claim about the description under which an act is intentional. Such a description, affirmed by a religious community expresses (less sympathetically, 'projects') the divine object that the faithful take to be the essence."[83] With regard to sacrifice, Faith's answer to the "Why?" question is "to vanquish desire for worldly goods." With regard to the Eucharist, its answer might be "to make God present" or "to bring about an immediate relation to God." But these practical claims make no sense to Enlightenment, which asserts that only certain kinds of reasons (largely, those based on theoretical reason or empirical evidence) count as satisfactory reasons. Moyar notes, "the Enlightenment assumes that its question, 'Why?' must be answered in a certain way, a way that faith cannot answer and remain the distinctive practice that it is."[84] According to Moyar, therefore, Faith is alienated in this sense of being unable to provide reasons for its actions that satisfy the one who asks the "Why?" question, Enlightenment.

But Faith is also complicit in its own alienation, since it insists on giving two kinds of reasons for its practices, this-worldly reasons and other-worldly reasons. Hegel writes that Faith "keeps a separate set of books" in each of these worlds, and that the two sets are mutually incompatible. Moyar writes, "Even if one grants religion the use of ordinary objects (bread,

[83] Moyar, "Self-Completing Alienation," 166.
[84] Moyar, "Self-Completing Alienation," 167.

wine) for sacraments, and grants the traditional stories that connect these rituals to the 'absolute essence, there remains a way that the justification of the action breaks down. One's worldly actions will have their set of ends (e.g. accumulating property) and devotional practice will have a different set of ends (e.g. getting closer to God). Enlightenment merely brings these two sides together, showing their inconsistencies."[85] Once again, recall that Faith is not religion in and for itself, so its account of itself remains incompatible with some of its own beliefs and actions.

Ultimately, in the "struggle of Enlightenment with superstition," Faith cannot shield itself against the barrage of criticisms leveled against it by its opponent. It cannot provide a satisfactory response to Enlightenment's criticisms of its beliefs and actions, because in Faith's own account of itself its communities and religious practices are inessential to its commitments. Its norms lose their apparent authority; the beliefs and practices no longer seem to demand Faith's allegiance. Faith's practical response to Enlightenment's attack consists of an attempt to further distance itself from this world, stripping itself of doctrine and religious practices in favor of an increasingly contentless emotionalism. As Hegel writes, "Faith has thus lost the content that brought its element into fruition" and it descends into "pure longing." In this contentlessness, it looks more and more like the deism of some Enlightenment thinkers, who affirm that the universe was created by a supreme being who set in motion the laws of nature, but who reject doctrine, ritual, and formal worship all together. Hegel continues:

> [Faith's] truth is an empty *other-worldly beyond* for which there is no longer any adequate content to be found since everything now stands in a different relationship. –Faith has in fact thereby become the same as Enlightenment, namely, the consciousness of the relation between the finite existing in itself and

[85] Ibid.

> a predicate-less, unknown and unknowable absolute. The only distinction is merely *that Enlightenment* is *satisfied*, whereas Faith is the *unsatisfied* Enlightenment. (§573/509-10)

Faith is unable to provide any account of the grounds of its belief and action once it strips itself of content in this way. Because Faith claimed that the unmediated relationship to the divine, attested to by an emotional experience of this relationship, provided the universal ground of knowledge, the fact that it can no longer say anything determinate about who God is and what God requires of human beings presents a deep threat to the possibility of knowledge. In other words, absent any content, it is impossible to specify what the faithful can claim to know on the basis of their emotional experience of the divine.

Enlightenment, meanwhile, recognizes the role that self-conscious individuals play in generating norms. Hegel argues that Enlightenment is correct when it says that "what Faith takes to be the absolute essence is a being of Faith's own consciousness, is its own thought, is something generated by consciousness" (§549/406). Pure insight, Hegel writes, is "conscious of itself as the *mediating* movement, that is, it is aware of itself as *activity*, as engendering" (§549/406). But it does not see that this self-legislation is only possible in the context of a community of other self-conscious subjects. It is not a solitary activity, but a social one. Hegel writes that this is what Enlightenment is *in itself*; "it is the still unconscious activity of the pure concept which, to be sure, comes back round to itself as object but which takes this object for an *other* and which is also not even aware of the nature of the concept, namely, that the concept is what-is-without-distinction which absolutely divides itself" (§565/418-9). While Faith expressed, in the doctrine of the Trinity, the outward and returning movements of spirit (even if

it did not explicitly claim to be a participant in that movement), Enlightenment sees no social or intersubjective movement at all, just the dichotomy of self and other.

Neither Faith nor Enlightenment recognizes that the other offers something that it itself lacks. For Faith, this is Enlightenment's insight about self-legislation. For Enlightenment, this is the determinate content generated (although unacknowledged) by Faith's community and practices. But because they are both alienated – unable to answer the "Why?" question with reasons that the other *counts* as reasons – neither can recognize the insights of the other. As Crites writes, "since faith's content and pure insight's rationality are alike alienated from anything actual, since, that is, their common element is alienation, there can be no recognition between them."[86] Moreover, neither Faith nor Enlightenment is able to bring together its own insights about action and authority, even though what each is *actually* doing connects its commitments and its practices.

Standing back from the viewpoints of Faith and Enlightenment, Crites concludes that "*we* see in this exchange of insults merely the pathos of two mutually uncomprehending positions. It is not even tragic like the conflict between divine and human law in the ethical world, since it is not a conflict between two actual rights, but a polemic between blindness and emptiness, the two sides of an alienated mind."[87] Throughout the section, Hegel often steps back to show us what these two positions hold in common, what each fails to see about itself and the other, and what modernity might learn from each. Yet, in the context of their struggle, neither learns anything about itself from the other. As Crites suggests, this is not tragedy. It is culture war, early modern style.

[86] Crites, *Dialectic and Gospel*, 419.
[87] Crites, *Dialectic and Gospel*, 421.

Conclusion

In the "Tübingen Essay," Hegel had claimed that the essential customs of a *Volksreligion* – particularly the sacraments and sacrifices – could be a source of unity among disparate individuals. He remains committed to this claim throughout his life. As his work develops, however, his endorsement of ritual and religious practices comes to be based on more than their ability to cultivate or habituate rational subjects. Hegel also views *Volksreligion* and its practices as a source of unity because such practices allow commitments to become contentful, to be generated, sustained, and transformed over time. Through such practices, nature (what appears as immediate, fixed, and given) is transformed into norm.

To call these practices a source of unity may be misleading, however. The phrase may imply the "end of history" reading of Hegel, in which the emergence of absolute spirit entails the homogeneity of subjects who have overcome difference and conflict once and for all. This is certainly not my meaning. What I mean is that Hegel holds out the promise that if we understand what we are *in ourselves* – socially and historically embedded subjects, engaged in ongoing norm-generating practices – our conflicts will take on a new air. According to Hegel, if we understand ourselves in this way, we should expect that conflicts will arise as we go about the every-day human business of making commitments and taking action in light of incomplete information about the world, reevaluating those commitments and actions in the face of new information or novel situations, and holding ourselves and members of our community accountable for our commitments and practices.

Both Brandom and Moyar insist on this perpetuity of conflict. Moyar, in particular, points to two important political implications of his view of alienation. First, built into Moyar's technical definition of alienation is the notion that some individuals and groups will count as

alienated "by the very fact of living under certain political conditions," for instance, conditions of domination, or, I would add, extreme political polarization such that one side cannot count the reasons given by the other side as satisfying the basic criteria of rationality.[88] This latter instance would be quite like Enlightenment's rejection of Faith's reasons for its action and also like some pessimistic descriptions of contemporary ethical discourse.[89]

Second, Moyar argues that even if alienation is a condition to be avoided, the risk of alienation always remains present. Moyar argues that "Hegel did not imagine a tranquil society in which everyone agrees on what counts as a reason and as a fulfilling life. Such issues are inevitability contested in many areas, and in a pluralist society many questions will not have a unitary answer."[90] This should remind us of Brandom's argument that intentional action entails *risk*, the possibility that a community will reject the commitment that an agent undertakes in acting. It also connects to a second Brandomian theme, namely, that one precondition for recognition is *trust*, the trust that others with whom one stands in relation will *count* one's reasons as such. In any case, given the diversity of modern social and political communities, our

[88] Moyar writes that "an individual is alienated when he fails to be able to answer satisfactorily the warranted question "Why" about his actions, where the answer and the question presuppose (1) that he affirms the reasons for action as dependent on his own free judgment, (2) that his language expresses his commitment to the transparency of those reasons in determining the action, (3) that the authority of the reasons depends on their referring to the core purposes of the agent's conception of a fulfilling life and the agent can provide a story connecting his specific actions in a recognized social space to those core purposes, and (4) that the individual is a citizen of a sovereign State governed by constitutional law and containing many intermediate institutions, such that an agent's reason refer to purposes that can be nested within broader, more inclusive institutional purposes" ("Self-Completing Alienation," 171).

[89] Alasdair MacIntyre's account of contemporary ethical conflict is one example. According to MacIntyre, contemporary ethical discourse is incoherent because, in a diverse society, we lack the common tradition and shared practices that give political and ethical concepts (like justice, democracy, or the sacred) their content. See MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Press, 1981).

[90] Moyar, "Self-Completing Alienation," 172.

social life must involve ongoing practices of collective contestation, confrontation, and reconciliation.

The challenge facing modernity, Hegel thinks, is to figure out what these practices are and to cultivate them. As we will see, Hegel is not making a merely formal point about action; rather, the content of particular religious activities matters. Hegel is claiming that the very practices that Enlightenment regards as superstitious – including sacramental and sacrificial rituals – are crucial for contestation, confrontation, and reconciliation. A more detailed account of these practices comes in his discussion of the judging and wicked consciousnesses, and their mutual confession and forgiveness, to which we must now turn.

CHAPTER THREE: "The Reciprocal Recognition that *is* Absolute Spirit:" Confession, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation

Hegel's discussion of Faith and Enlightenment raises the question of how modern individuals overcome alienation from one another and from the communities of which they are a part. Hegel suggests that the very practices that Enlightenment regards as superstitious are crucial to overcoming this alienation. Nevertheless, Faith failed to see how its own sacrifices and worship could serve this function. Instead, it stripped itself of doctrine and ritual, becoming increasingly empty and contentless.[91]

In the final section of Chapter VI of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel introduces a new conflict, which is overcome through practices of confession and forgiveness. From these practices, reciprocal recognition and absolute spirit emerge. The present chapter looks to this section to understand how the practices of confession and forgiveness are related to absolute spirit – the self-conscious and self-sufficient process by which norms and normative authority are generated and sustained. In particular, it looks at the sacramental logic at the heart of Hegel's account. Hegel draws on and transforms Martin Luther's sacramental theology in order to show how confession and forgiveness express and actualize the absolute in the community.

Before turning to the section on confession and forgiveness, however, it is worth taking a brief detour to Chapter IV ("Self-Consciousness"), in order to look at the famous struggle for recognition that takes place there. The section of Chapter IV on "Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness: Lordship and Bondage," also known as the master-slave dialectic, has long been the starting point for discussions of Hegel's concept of recognition, due in part to

[91] An earlier version of part of this chapter was presented at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting in Chicago, Illinois in November 2012. I am grateful to my co-panelists and members of the audience for their questions and comments.

Alexandre Kojève's influential interpretation of it. Kojève's interpretation highlights the role of conflict and domination in the section on lordship and bondage and throughout *Phenomenology of Spirit*. This section is an important starting point – but, importantly, *not* an ending point – for a nuanced picture of reciprocal recognition and absolute spirit. In the second half of the chapter, therefore, we return to the end of Chapter VI, where we find two consciousnesses who come into conflict, but who reciprocally recognize and reconcile with one another through confession and forgiveness.

Hegel's Concept of Recognition

Hegel's concept of recognition has received considerable attention in recent years, not only from philosophers with exegetical and epistemological concerns, but also from political theorists who have developed the idea of a Hegelian politics of recognition as a response to the problems of subordination, exclusion, and marginalization in multicultural societies.[92] In spite of this proliferation of scholarship on recognition, however, one of the most influential accounts of Hegel's concept of recognition remains Alexandre Kojève's *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*. This text, the published version of a series of lectures delivered in Paris in the 1930s, is

[92] Two of the most prominent of these normative theorists of recognition are Axel Honneth and Charles Taylor. See, especially, Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995), and Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, edited by Amy Gutmann, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994). In *Bound by Recognition*, Patchen Markell criticizes Honneth and Taylor, and suggests a different direction for progressive and radical politics informed by Hegel's concept of recognition. Markell, *Bound by Recognition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

credited with having revived Hegelian philosophy in twentieth-century France, where it became the interpretation of Hegel with which a generation of continental philosophers wrestled.[93]

In Kojève's interpretation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit,* the struggle for recognition stands front and center. In his *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, this is literally true, as the introductory essay in the volume is a commentary on the lordship and bondage section of the *Phenomenology*, presented as an interpretive key to the rest of Kojève and Hegel's texts. Because Kojève's lectures were assembled for publication by others, this order of presentation is not his own, although it is consistent with his emphasis throughout the lectures on the struggle for recognition.

In what is perhaps the most famous section of the *Phenomenology,* Hegel describes a self-consciousness that takes another self-consciousness as its object. Each views the other as alien to itself, and each desires the elimination of the other. They enter into a life-and-death struggle, until one self-consciousness admits that it would rather give up the object of its desire than lose its life. It surrenders and becomes the slave; the other is its master (§178-89/145-50).[94]

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[93] Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, assembled by Raymond Queneau, edited by Allan Bloom, and translated by James H. Nichols, Jr. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980). At one time or another, Raymond Aron, Georges Bataille, André Breton, Jacques Lacan, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Raymond Queneau, and Leo Strauss each attended Kojève's lectures. For a consideration of Kojève's philosophy and other twentieth-century French appropriations of Hegel, see Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987). Interestingly, Kojève's interpretation has not been influential in contemporary Anglo-American Hegel scholarship. In that body of scholarship, Kojève's interpretation has largely been ignored or treated critically.

[94] The terms that Hegel uses, and which are translated here as mastery and slavery, are *Herrschaft* and *Knechtschaft*. While *Herr* may be translated as master or lord, *Knecht* is best translated as servant or bondsman (as opposed to *Sklav(e)*, or slave). Because of the long tradition of translating these terms as master and slave in discussions of Kojève's work, I use the terms master/mastery and slave/slavery throughout the present discussion. Elsewhere, when Kojève's work is not at issue, I use the terms lord/lordship and bondsman/bondage. As I discuss later, the latter translation has the advantage of resisting the conflation of the type of master

Kojève interprets this section as a description of the original occasion of an essentially human phenomenon – the desire and the struggle to be recognized by another human being. He calls this the "desire for recognition." Kojève argues that the desire and struggle for recognition distinguish humans from non-human animals:

> To be *human*, man must act not for the sake of subjugating a *thing*, but for the sake of subjugating another *Desire* (for the thing). The man who desires a thing humanly acts not such much to possess the *thing* as to make another *recognize* his *right* … to that thing, to make another recognize him as the *owner* of that thing. And he does this – in the final analysis – in order to make the other recognize his *superiority* over the other. It is only Desire of such a *Recognition* (*Anerkennung*), it is only Action that flows from such a Desire, that creates, realizes, and reveals a *human*, non-biological I.[95]

Kojève argues that, for Hegel, the desire for recognition and, thus, for domination, is *essential* to human personhood, to the "human, non-biological I."

Kojève reads the rest of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as a set of variations on this foundational theme, in which an individual desires the recognition of another, fights the other to secure that recognition, and satisfies his or her desire only when the other submits. In his reading of Hegel, not only the human being but also history itself is driven by this desire for recognition, a desire with violent and dominating consequences. Kojève writes that "history must be the history of the interaction between Mastery and Slavery: the historical 'dialectic' is

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[*Herr*] that Hegel discusses in this section and the master [*Meister*] described at the end of the confession and forgiveness section.

[95] Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 40.

the 'dialectic' of Master and Slave."[96] The master-slave relation appears over and over again as the inevitable outcome of the primordial human desire for recognition.

A number of more recent studies of Hegel's concept of recognition challenge this interpretation. In *Hegel's Hermeneutics*, for instance, Redding identifies a set of contradictions in Kojève's interpretation of Hegel's concept of recognition. Redding notes that Kojève sometimes identifies recognition as the precondition for human reality, as when he writes that "human reality can be begotten and preserved only as a 'recognized reality.'"[97] Yet Kojève's idea of a primordial *desire* for recognition, which gets the first recognitive relationship off the ground in the life-and-death struggle, presupposes a human reality prior to the existence of recognitive relationships or social structures. We see this second idea at work in the passage quoted above, in which *desire* for recognition "creates, realizes, and reveals" the human being. Redding writes:

> The contradictory nature of these accounts is apparent in the circularity that dogs Kojève's account of the "first" or "original" struggle for recognition. Read as the most basic context within which recognition can occur, the struggle provides an initial *context* within which human intentionality can emerge. And yet for Kojève the struggle is itself motivated by a distinctly human motive – the desire for the "essentially nonvital" end of "pure prestige." That is, while the struggle is conceived as brought about by, *born from*, human desire – the desire for

[96] Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 8. The reason that the dialectic continues is, in this account, that the recognition secured through the master-slave relation cannot satisfy the master because it is forced.
[97] Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 9.

> recognition – it is also seen as providing a necessary condition for the emergence or *birth of* the only sort of being capable of having that motive.[98]

This circularity, Redding argues, exposes the flaws of Kojève's reading.[99]

Redding also suggests that there is little textual evidence to support Kojève's interpretation. He notes that the phrase "desire for recognition" does not appear in the section on the life-and-death struggle or its resolution and, furthermore, that when Kojève claims that "according to Hegel, Man is nothing but Desire for Recognition," his textual support is Hegel's quite different sentence, "*der Mensch* ist *Anerkennen*," or "the human being *is* recognition."[100] According to Redding, Kojève's interpretation elevates one particular instance of the struggle for recognition and makes it paradigmatic of recognition itself, rather than attending to the different forms that recognition takes in each particular context Hegel describes.[101]

In his own interpretation of the section on lordship and bondage, Redding argues that the life-and-death struggle and its resolution present one particular – and, indeed, deficient – recognitive relationship. In the life-and-death struggle, Hegel presents two consciousnesses whose desires come into conflict, giving rise to the new desire, "the desire to eliminate the other."[102] Unlike the previous desire, the object of this desire is not a thing but another being. Through the struggle, each consciousness comes to see that itself and the other are in the same

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[98] Redding, *Hegel's Hermeneutics*, 120.
[99] For additional criticisms of Kojève's interpretation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, see George Armstrong Kelly, "Notes on Hegel's 'Lordship and Bondage,'" in *Hegel: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Alasdair MacIntyre (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1972), 189-218; Robert R. Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), esp. 366-371.
[100] Moreover, this sentence does not even appear in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Kojève cites Hegel's Jena lectures: Volume XX of the series of Hegel's collected works compiled and edited by Georg Lasson and, later, Johannes Hoffmeister (page 206, line 26).
[101] Redding, *Hegel's Hermeneutics*, 121.
[102] Redding, *Hegel's Hermeneutics*, 109.

situation – each is a desiring consciousness whose object is also a desiring consciousness. As Redding writes, "each can recognize that the annihilation each means for the other is simultaneously meant for itself. Thus each now has the opportunity to grasp the 'doubled meaning' of the process in which they are involved."[103]

According to Redding, the "doubled meaning" of the struggle for recognition is the interpretive key to this complex Hegelian concept. He writes:

> Each combatant is a living "Subject-Object" able to recognize itself in an inverted form in that Subject-Object facing it. More specifically, from X's particular perspective, Y is presented as an objective Subject-Object, that is, an objective being with intentionality. Because X can see its own intentional desire reflected back to it in Y's action, it can grasp *itself* as the subject of that intention. But it can only recognize Y's behavior as intentional because that behavior is directed toward an *object*, and X itself is that object. So X's recognition of Y's behavior as intentional, a recognition that is a precondition for grasping its own subjectivity, also implies that X must grasp its own *objectivity*. It is thereby that each Subject-Object becomes self-conscious of itself *as* Subject-Object…[104]

Hegel's concept of recognition captures the intersubjective structure of self-consciousness itself, as each being, *through the struggle*, comes to recognize itself as a subject (*being for itself,* in Hegel's terms) as well as the object of another's desire (*being for an other*). This recognition is at the heart of self-consciousness. Self-consciousness requires the acknowledgment of this doubled subject-object relation, which is simultaneously a self-relation and self-knowledge

[103] Redding, *Hegel's Hermeneutics*, 109.
[104] Redding, *Hegel's Hermeneutics*, 112.

mediated through another. To put it another way, to be a human being is to be recognized as such by another.

As noted in Chapter 1, the German word "*Anerkennen*," like the English "recognition," has both epistemic and performative dimensions. Epistemically, to recognize something or someone is to re-*cognize*, to consider it again. This is the sense in which one recognizes someone she has met before, or recognizes something for what it really is. Performatively or practically, however, to recognize something or someone is to bestow a status upon it. This is the sense in which a government recognizes the sovereignty of another nation, or one recognizes someone else's right to speak. Redding argues that reciprocal recognition requires that epistemic recognition be paired with performative recognition. In the resolution of the life-and-death struggle, the practical recognition is neglected and, thus, the epistemic re-cognition is suppressed. One refuses to recognize the other as a locus of authority; thus, the lord is recognized only as subject, while the bondsman is recognized only as object. Neither consciousness maintains the epistemic and practical recognition of their doubled self-relation, the self-relation that characterizes self-consciousness.

Like Redding, Robert R. Williams argues that master-slave relations are a debased form of recognition. Rather than providing the model for all forms of recognition, master-slave relations demonstrate the deficiencies of a form of recognition maintained through coercion and domination. Hegel sees the deficiencies of this form of recognition as "self-subverting" or self-undermining. Thus, Williams, argues, "Hegel's master and slave is but an important first phase of unequal recognition that *must* and *can* be transcended. It is not the final, but merely a transitional, inherently unstable, configuration of intersubjectivity."[105] Williams argues Kojève's

[105] Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition*, 10.

overemphasis on master-slave relations has left Hegel open to "rather obvious criticisms, particularly criticisms oriented on the other, otherness, and difference."[106] Members of the continental philosophical tradition, in particular, have worried whether recognition is possible without domination, particularly when parties to the recognitive relationship have unequal access to social, economic, or political power.

While Williams is right to raise questions about the centrality of master-slave relations to Kojève's interpretation of the *Phenomenology*, Kojève is correct to identify an element of domination in every shape of spirit prior to absolute spirit.[107] Each shape of spirit prior to absolute spirit fails to provide a self-sufficient, non-arbitrary account of the authority of its beliefs and practices. If the norms of the community are grounded in something arbitrary – that is, if their authority is one-sided rather than self-sufficient – then those norms can only be maintained by some form of force, coercion, or deception. As Pinkard writes, "Hegel's claim to philosophical immortality rests on this novel attempt to make this distinction between putative claims to normative legitimacy that are in reality exercises of coercive power for the sake of unequal advantage (non-reciprocal recognitive statuses), and successful claims to normative legitimacy, to do so by beginning with an image of a situation regulated exclusively by exercises of power, and to show that the ultimate unsustainability of such a relation can be demonstrated 'experientially,' or 'internally,' that ultimately achievement of agent status requires a social status that cannot be achieved by exercises of power alone."[108] By focusing on mastery and

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[106] Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition*, 12.
[107] Again, I am drawing on Pettit's definition of domination (Pettit, *Republicanism*, 52). For a discussion of this definition of domination in relation to other accounts of power and domination, see Jeffrey Stout, *Blessed Are the Organized: Grassroots Democracy in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 301n32, 301n33, and 303n35.
[108] Pippin, "Brandom's Hegel," 397.

servitude, Kojève trains our eyes on these forms of domination.[109] The master enforces his beliefs and practices through the use or threat of violence against the slave. Now, when we look, we can see elements of arbitrariness in other shapes of spirit: Creon's condemnation of Antigone, or Enlightenment's attack on Faith.

Kojève also notes that Hegel describes a shape of spirit – absolute spirit – that is non-dominating. Williams mischaracterizes Kojève somewhat when he suggests that master-slave relations are the *final* configuration of intersubjectivity in Kojève's interpretation of Hegel. Kojève *does* provide an account of this final phase of non-dominating intersubjective relations, although the account the Kojève provides is marred by his earlier interpretation of the struggle for recognition. Because Kojève treats the desire and struggle for recognition as essentially primordial – and because he thinks that domination is *implicit* in this struggle – he can only account for the emergence of reciprocal recognition and absolute spirit as a radical break in human history at which point the struggle for recognition is finally overcome. The struggle for recognition and the resulting relations of domination cease only at the "end of history," when human beings achieve a shape of spirit that can universally satisfy the desire for recognition and "dialectically overcome" mastery and servitude. Kojève writes that "history stops when Man no longer acts in the full sense of the term – that is, when he no longer negates, no longer transforms the natural and social given through bloody Fighting and creative Work. And Man no longer does this when the given Real gives him full satisfaction (*Befriedigung*) by fully realizing his Desire (*Begierde*, which in Man is a Desire for universal recognition of his unique personality –

[109] As Stout argues in a different context, "the relation of master to slave is a paradigm of domination because it is so lopsided that one party is *obviously* in a position to exercise power arbitrarily over another, with no recourse for the party being dominated." Stout, *Blessed Are the Organized,* 59-60.

Anerkennen or *Anerkennung*)."[110] Thus, according to Kojève, the *Phenomenology of Spirit* culminates with the not-yet-realized community in which the desire that drives human history is fully satisfied and in which humans no longer engage in the work of creating and transforming norms, laws, and social structures.

I think this interpretation of absolute spirit is wrong. Hegel claims that a shape of spirit in which norms are taken as natural, fixed, or immediately given collapses, for it is unable to confront and overcome its internally-generated conflicts. Absent this immediacy, ethical responsibility must be forward-looking, that is, it entails the authority to consider one's commitments and to revise norms in light of new situations. This revision could only cease if (a) members of a community somehow returned to an immediate form of ethical life, in which every concept, commitment, and meaningful consequence entailed by action was settled in advance, or (b) action ceased altogether. The first is beyond unlikely, and would make it impossible to imagine what Kojève means by "unique personality" in the passage above; the second is possible only when human life itself ceases.

These points are connected in Hegel's discussion of confession and forgiveness at the end of Chapter VI. In this section, Hegel describes two consciousnesses: the wicked consciousness and the judging consciousness. The wicked consciousness takes action in the world, and the judging consciousness condemns the wicked consciousness for acting in a way that sullies dutiful action with subjective intentions and desires. The wicked consciousness recognizes that this is true, not only for itself, but also for the other, whose judgment is also a form of action that can be marked by subjective intentions and desires. Thus, it sees itself in the judging consciousness, recognizing that other consciousness as an intentional subject like itself. The

[110] Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 192.

wicked consciousness confesses [*gestehen*] to the judging consciousness. According to Hegel, the confession is an acknowledgement that what the wicked consciousness had taken as alien to it, namely the judging consciousness, is in fact "identical with himself." The wicked consciousness expects the judging consciousness to reciprocate. While the judging consciousness initially refuses to do so, his "hard heart" eventually breaks, he recognizes the position shared by himself and the other, and the two consciousnesses enjoy forgiveness and reciprocal recognition. Unlike the life-and-death struggle, this conflict is resolved in a way that preserves both the epistemic and practical senses of reciprocal recognition. Reciprocal recognition affirms the difference *and* the unity of the two consciousnesses in a way that neither dominates nor assimilates one in favor of the other; moreover, conflict is preserved as a recurring moment in their reciprocal recognition.

In the rest of this chapter, I explicate this section and clarify its implications for reciprocal recognition and absolute spirit. As he often does in the *Phenomenology*, Hegel first presents a new shape of spirit as those within it would characterize it, and then presents how he thinks it comes into conflict on its own terms.[111] I follow Hegel's presentation of the section in the same fashion. This requires, first, a discussion of the shape of spirit from which the two conflicting consciousnesses emerge, namely, "conscience." Second, I outline the conflict and its resolution and connect the concept of reciprocal recognition that emerges to insights from Chapters 1 and 2 about ritual and, more broadly, social practice. Finally, I will discuss the role

[111] C.f. Dean Moyar, *Hegel's Conscience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Moyar follows Jon Stewart in designating "concept" and "experience" phases of the presentation of shapes of consciousness in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and sees the conscience section following roughly that formulation, with the addition of a second set of concept and experience phases. Moyar argues that what Hegel presents in the concept phase of his discussion of conscience largely represents Hegel's own view of the matter. See also Stewart, *The Unity of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*.

of practices of confession and forgiveness in the emergence of reciprocal recognition and absolute spirit. Hegel contends that these practices are *sacramental*, in that they simultaneously symbolize and actualize absolute spirit. I will argue that, for Hegel, what is essential to absolute spirit, that which is symbolized and actualized through practices of confession and forgiveness, is the acknowledgement of human fallibility and the revisability of norms.

Conscience

First, we need to understand the shape of spirit in which the wicked and judging consciousnesses exist, which Hegel calls "conscience." Immediately prior to introducing conscience, he addresses the "moral worldview." The moral worldview holds, first, that one can identify the moral course of action through introspection of one kind or another; second, that the moral course of action, although self-legislated, nevertheless constitutes an objective and universal duty, such that any individual in the same set of circumstances could and should come to the same conclusion about the moral course of action; and, third, that, in taking action, one must be motivated by duty alone in order for the action to count as morally good.[112] The challenge facing the moral worldview, however, is to account for the way that a particular individual's determination of duty can be reconciled with an objective or universal morality. Hegel argues that the moral worldview is unable to provide such an account and, therefore, that it "falls to pieces" (§631/463).

To solve the problems of the moral worldview, a subsequent shape of spirit would need to preserve the idea of self-legislation while overcoming the moral worldview's inability to reconcile the subjective and objective points of view. The shape of spirit that tries to achieve this

[112] Pinkard suggests that Hegel is referring to both Kantian and Pietist morality. Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology*, 193.

is "conscience."[113] Like the moral worldview, conscience looks within itself to determine what is authoritative for it. Unlike the moral worldview, however, conscience does not claim that every individual could or should arrive at the same determination about the moral course of action. Whereas the moral worldview thought that morality comprised a set of universal duties, conscience conceives of only one duty: the duty to act in accordance with one's own convictions. This is how conscience claims to overcome the problem of the moral worldview; in conscience's self-understanding, each individual has the same *formal* duty (the duty to act in accordance with one's own convictions), while each supplies his or her own *content* for that duty (the content of the convictions themselves). Thus, conscience claims that moral duty is universal, objective, *and* self-legislated.

Conscience also thinks that it has an advantage over the moral worldview insofar as it can avoid the problem of conflicting duties. Whereas the moral worldview was plagued by the problem of multiple and conflicting duties, such that individuals could violate one duty by fulfilling another, conscience has but one duty and does not fear such conflict. Hegel writes:

> It does not conduct itself as the *positive universal medium* within which the many duties, each on its own, would acquire unshakable substantiality so that *either* no action could take place at all, since every concrete case contains opposition per se (and moral cases contain oppositions among duties), since there would thus always be *one* aspect, *one* duty which would be *violated* in the determination of

[113] This movement has often been identified with German Romanticism, as in Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology*, 207-13. Beiser questions this identification, arguing that there is "too great a discrepancy between Hegel's account of the beautiful soul in the *Phenomenology* and actual Romantic attitudes and doctrines." Instead, Beiser identifies Hegel's precedents in *Sturm und Drang* and literary sources including Book VI of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, entitled "The Confessions of a Beautiful Soul," and Rousseau's account of the beautiful soul in *Julie, or the New Heloise*. See Beiser, "'Morality' in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*," in K. Westphal (2009), 222-3.

> action – *or*, if action does take place, the violation of one of the conflicting duties would actually come on the scene. Conscience is even more so the negative "one," that is, the absolute self which effaces all these diverse moral substances. It is simple action in terms of duty, an action which does not fulfill just this or that duty but which rather knows and does what is concretely right. (§635/467)

According to conscience, the positive universal duties posited by the moral worldview led to either paralysis or tragic conflict, since an adherent of the moral worldview could not fulfill one of its moral duties without violating another. Conscience therefore casts its moral duty as a "negative 'one'" and an absolute self – a god-like, self-sufficient being whose single duty is to know and to actualize its conviction.

Conscience does not weigh the circumstances or consequences of its actions, for "this actuality is an absolute plurality of circumstances which infinitely divides itself and spreads out backwards into its conditions, sideways into its juxtapositions, and forwards into its consequences" (§642/472). Conscience cannot anticipate all of these conditions, juxtapositions, and consequences, and it acts without full knowledge of them. Nor can conscience fulfill all of the duties posited by the moral worldview: "Conscience knows that it has to choose among them and to decide because in its own determinateness or in its own content, none of them is absolute, but rather only *pure duty* is absolute" (§643/472). None of this matters to conscience, for the only *absolute* that it recognizes is its own conviction. Because conscience has only one absolute duty, and because the content of this duty depends solely on its internal conviction alone, neither conflicting duties nor external circumstances and consequences concern it.

Action is initially important to conscience's account of normative authority. To do its duty, an individual must know her conviction and actualize it. This happens in her action.

Action is "merely the translation of its *individual* content into the *objective* element within which it is universal and is recognized, and it is precisely in the content being recognized that the deed is made into an actuality" (§640/470). In this objective form, others can recognize the individual's conviction and affirm that she has done her duty by knowing this conviction and expressing it: "Its *being-known* is what is recognized and is what *as such* is supposed to have *existence*" (§650/478). Recognition, according to conscience, consists of other individuals' affirmation that the agent knows and actualizes her convictions.

But what could it mean for others to *recognize* something like conviction, if these are understood as wholly internal states of affairs to which only the individual herself has access? That is, how can the community assess whether the agent has fulfilled her duty if she has not only *privileged* but also *exclusive* knowledge of her commitments? In such an account, others can know the agent's conviction only when her action amounts to a declaration of her conviction. In language, the individual declares her conviction or intention. Hegel writes that "this expression is the true actuality of the activity, that is, is what makes action valid" (§653/479). The individual's declaration validates the action itself. He continues, "consciousness expresses its *conviction*, and this conviction is that solely within which the action is a duty. It also *counts as* duty solely by virtue of its having *expressed* the conviction, for universal self-consciousness is free from the *merely existent determinate* action. In its eyes, the *action* as *existence* counts for nothing. Rather, what counts is the *conviction* that the action is a duty, and this is actual in language" (§653/479). The subject communicates her self-certainty, the knowledge of her duty, through the declaration of her conviction. Like Enlightenment, which claims that the significance of an act lies in the subject's own intention rather than in the act, its consequences, or others' evaluation of it, conscience claims that the significance of an act lies in the subject's

own conviction which is expressed in the action. According to conscience, others do not evaluate the act in itself; they simply confirm or deny that the subject's act has expressed her conviction.

Action has already lost its initial centrality in conscience's account of normative authority. Whereas conscience initially claimed that the individual had to take action in order to translate its conviction into an external and objective form in which it could be recognized, it now claims that the individual must simply assure others that she knows her duty and how to fulfill it. Hegel continues, "To realize the action does not mean here that one translate its content from the form of a *purpose*, that is, from *being-for-itself*, into the form of *abstract* actuality. What it means is that one translate it from the form of immediate self-certainty which knows its own knowledge, that is, its being-for-itself, as the essence, into the form of an *assurance* that consciousness has a conviction about its duty, and that as conscience, duty knows *from its own resources* what duty is. This assurance thus guarantees that consciousness is convinced that its conviction is the essence" (§653/479-80). In addition to downgrading action in its account of normative authority, conscience implicitly affirms that content is determined within the individual subject. Intersubjectivity is not essential for the determination of content, but merely for the affirmation of it.

Nevertheless, conscience claims that it achieves a community of reciprocal recognition among conscientious subjects. Each assures the other members of the community of her sincere convictions, and each recognizes the assurances of others as evidence that the moral duty is being fulfilled. Crites provides a helpful example of how the recognition of moral conviction works in this shape of spirit. In his example, two conscientious individuals pursue different

courses of action when faced with the question of whether or not to bear arms in a war. Each acts according to his conscience, and each recognizes the conviction of the other:

> If I choose to bear arms in warfare – and for the conscientious person such a course is a matter of personal choice and conviction, not as for the citizen of the ethical world a duty simply entailed in citizenship – such an act is subject to multiple interpretations. You may suspect that I am naturally bloodthirsty, or an adventure-seeker, or that I want to impress susceptible women, and so on and so forth. You can never know, on the basis of my deed, whether I am acting conscientiously or not. Suppose you refuse to bear arms, a refusal subject to an equal variety of possible motives. Still, if you refuse on grounds of conscience you may respect my decision if you believe that it, too, is based on honest conviction and I may reciprocate with the same understanding. But how can we be sure one another's motives are pure? … Answer: I must tell you that I am defending my country as a matter of conscience, and you must likewise speak the conviction according to which you refuse. Of equal importance, furthermore, is the condition that we must believe each other. It is not a matter of arguing our respective cases. It is sufficient to convince each other of the sincerity of our convictions.[114]

Crites's example has contemporary relevance. A U.S. citizen drafted to military service may become a conscientious objector, refusing to serve if his religious or moral convictions lead him to oppose war. According to the Selective Service System, the conscientious objector's convictions "may be moral or ethical; however, a man's reasons for not wanting to participate in

[114] Crites, *Dialectic and Gospel*, 434-4.

a war must not be based on politics, expediency, or self-interest."[115] In arguing the case for conscientious objector status, the individual must convince the Selective Service of his commitment to pacifism, but *not* the merits of pacifism itself. As in Crites's example, to be recognized as a conscientious objector is to have the relevant community affirm that one's conviction is sincere.

This form of recognition proves to be deficient. Conscience envisions itself as a community of absolute and self-sufficient individuals. Each of these individuals "conducts a solitary worship service within himself, for his action is the intuiting of his own divinity" (§655/481). When these individuals gather together, "this solitary worship service is at the same time essentially the worship service of a *religious community*" in which each declares his own convictions and worships the divinity within himself (§656/481). Their practices of declaration and affirmation amount to mere self-congratulation and sanctimony. Hegel writes that "the spirit and the substance of their bond is thus the reciprocal assurance of both their mutual conscientiousness and their good intentions; it is the rejoicing over this reciprocal purity, the refreshment received from the glory of knowing, expressing, fostering, and cherishing such excellence" (§656/481). The members of this community affirm the authenticity of one another's convictions but do not hold one another accountable for the content, context, and consequences of their actions.[116] The glue that binds the community together is its members' mutual "rejoicing over this reciprocal purity."

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[115] Selective Service System. http://www.sss.gov/FSconsobj.htm. Accessed 29 August 2011.
[116] Whereas the type of community that Mary Douglas called *strong grid, strong group* "will tend to a routinized piety towards authority and its symbols; beliefs in a punishing moral universal, and a category of rejects," a community like Hegel's conscientious individuals will be weakly structured, consisting of individuals who loosely share a symbol system but remain largely free from pressure from others. See Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (New York: Routledge, 1970), 63.

The assurance that members of the community provide one another is contentless, however, for each individual can only provide empty affirmation of the other's claim about its conviction. There can be no question, in conscience's account of itself, of whether the conviction is right or good or true; "its intention, as a result of being its own intention, is what is right, and the only requirement is that it should both know this and state its conviction that its knowing and willing are right" (§654/480). This self-certainty – the sense that the only the individual can know her own intentions and, moreover, that she can know them perfectly – mars conscience's account of intention. If the individual has privileged and infallible access to her intentions, and if the deed and its consequences have no relevance for the community's assessment of it, then members of the community can do nothing but nod in assent to the agent's statement of her convictions. Moreover, if the determination of content lies entirely in the hands of the agent, then the social practice of mutual assurance adds nothing. In a stunning passage, Hegel concludes that "absolute self-certainty is immediately converted into a dying sound, into the objectivity of its being-for-self, but this created world is its *speech*, which it has likewise immediately heard and whose echo is all that returns to it" (§658/483).

Once again, Hegel is looking for an account of normative authority that overcomes one-sided subjectivism and objectivism. Conscience represents a breakthrough for consciousness insofar as it is aware of the role that *action* plays in generating normative authority. Conscience's understanding of how action plays this role, however, remains insufficient. Because conscience views action as the translation of subjective content into objective form, authority remains one-sidedly *subjective*. Conscience takes the content or meaning of an action to be fully captured by the individual's conviction. Other members of the community can affirm the declared conviction, but they cannot judge it. Their affirmation, therefore, is contentless; it

adds nothing to the conviction that the subject already holds. The "solitary worship service" that each individual conducts has no rituals or social practices that express or generate shared beliefs or values of the community. There is only the declaration of subjective conviction and the empty affirmation of it. Knowing that the affirmation of the community is contentless – an empty echo of the individual's own declaration – conscience realizes that it has not resolved the problems facing the moral worldview after all. The moral worldview was unable to provide an account of how the individual's determination of duty was reconciled with an objective or universal morality. In similar fashion, conscience cannot provide an adequate account of how the individual's action fulfills the universal duty. The mutual assurances of conscientious individuals, which were initially taken as the community's recognition of the fulfillment of that duty, turn out to be empty.

Unlike the triune God, who unites spirit and substance by entering the world, this so-called absolute self-consciousness refuses to engage in the concrete world of action. Hegel writes that conscience "lacks the force to relinquish itself, that is, lacks the force to make itself into a thing and to suffer the burden of being" (§658/483). Like the moral worldview before it, therefore, conscience becomes paralyzed: "it lives with the anxiety that it will stain the glory of its inwardness by means of action and existence," for it is no longer has any assurance that its action is right (§658/483). Its sole activity is a kind of yearning, "which merely loses itself as it becomes an essenceless object, and as it goes beyond this loss and then falls back on itself, it merely finds itself as lost. – In this transparent purity of its moments, it becomes an unhappy, so-called *beautiful soul*, and its burning embers gradually die out, and as they do, the beautiful soul vanishes like a shapeless vapor dissolving into thin air" (§658/484). Thus, with its inadequate account of both action and recognition, conscience fades away.

The Conflict between the Wicked and Judging Consciousnesses

The speech act that conscience believed to reconcile the objective, universal consciousness and the subjective, particular self – the declaration and affirmation – merely echoed the subjective position of the particular self. Instead of resolving the problems of the moral worldview, conscience "falls apart into the non-selfsameness of individual being-for-self, and each consciousness is likewise reflected out of its universality and utterly back into itself," such that each conscience can only look inward for the content that makes its actions meaningful. This disparity reveals the "opposition of individuality both to other individuals and to the universal" and, Hegel writes, "it is this relationship and its movement which must now be examined" (§659/484). The final conflict in Chapter VI begins here.

The individual "exempts himself from the universal"; for him, "duty is only a matter of words and counts as a being for an other." Thus, the individual thinks that "it, as *this* self, generates its own content" (§659/484). Hegel continues:

> As empty knowledge, [conscience's] pure self is without content and without determination. The content which it gives to knowledge is taken from its own self *as this* determinate self, that is, from itself as a natural individuality, and in speaking of the conscientiousness of its action, it is indeed conscious of its pure self. However, in the *purpose* of its action as the actual content of the action, it is conscious of itself as this particular individual, of what is both for itself and for others, and it is conscious of the opposition between universality, that is, duty, and its being reflected into itself from out of universality. (§659/484-5)

The individual believes that the content of its norms and its actions come from within itself, even as it recognizes the opposition that this creates between the demands of duty and its own actions. It is still caught up in conscience's duality of subjective content and objective form. Having found no way to reconcile the two, this individual embraces its subjectivity.

In declaring its independence from duty and from objective universal content, however, the conscientious individual sets itself apart from other individuals. Unsurprisingly, this leads to conflict. The conflict that Hegel describes is the "non-selfsameness of [this individual's] particular individuality with respect to another individual" (§660/485), or the conflict between two particular individuals. Hegel initially calls these two figures the particular consciousness and the universal consciousness, but he comes to refer to them as the wicked consciousness and the judging consciousness. The first is the individual just described, who believes that all content or meaning is subjective. The second takes up the position of the universal consciousness, holding that there are duties with objective content that do not simply arise from within a particular individual. Hegel writes:

> Confronting this inward determination is thus the element of existence, that is, the universal consciousness, to which universality, that is, duty, is to an even greater degree the essence; this is in contrast to individuality, which exists for itself as opposed to the universal, something which, to the universal consciousness, counts merely as a sublated moment. To the latter universal consciousness which clings tenaciously to duty, the first consciousness counts as *evil* because it is the non-selfsameness between its *inwardly-turned-being* and the universal, and since the first consciousness at the same time also expresses its

> activity as selfsameness, as duty and conscientiousness, the universal consciousness takes it to be *hypocrisy*. (§660/485)

The latter consciousness accuses the former of evil and hypocrisy. It is evil because it believes there is an opposition between its own conscience and the requirements of moral duty; and it is hypocritical because it "demonstrat[es] its respect for both duty and virtue by *seeming to be* both of them and then using that semblance as a mask to hide itself both from its own consciousness and no less from the consciousness of others; it does this as if the recognition of the opposition would in itself imply the selfsameness and correspondence of the two" (§661/485-6). In other words, the wicked consciousness claims that it is both dutiful and virtuous, but it acts according to its own subjective convictions. All the while, it lies to itself and to others about the opposition of duty and conscience. As we have seen, its attempt to reconcile its particular self with the universal consciousness by assuring the community about its intentions and thereby securing the community's recognition of its action as conscientious produces a "dying sound," a hollow echo of the subjective position of the individual.

But, Hegel continues, the judging consciousness is also unable to reconcile the positions of the particular and universal, or the subjective and objective points of view. Hegel writes that since the judging consciousness "proclaims hypocrisy to be bad, base, etc., then in making such a judgment, it is appealing to *its own* law in the same way that the *evil* consciousness appealed to *its own law*" (§663/487).[117] He continues:

[117] Translation altered slightly – for reasons of consistency, I translate *niederträchtig* as base rather than vile (c.f. Pinkard 594). Hegel uses the word *niederträchtig*, and its opposite *edelmütig*, throughout Chapter VI. These two terms respectively refer to individuals who are alienated, because they cannot see that their own beliefs and identities are shaped by social norms, and those who are unalienated. In his earlier discussion of the formation of Roman legal society, for instance, Hegel writes of two opposing shapes of consciousness: "one of them is a conduct towards state-power and wealth as a relation to an *equal*, the other as a relation to an

> In both of them, the aspect of actuality is distinct from that of speech; in one of them, the distinction is made through the *self-interested ends* of action, and in the other, it is made through the *lack of action* per se, for the necessity of action is implied in talking about duty, since duty without deeds is something that simply has no meaning at all. (§664/487)

The judging consciousness talks about duty when it judges the wicked consciousness, but it does not itself engage in dutiful action. The judging consciousness's only action is judging, and it denies that this counts as an action. Although Hegel notes that "judging is also to be regarded as a positive action on the part of thought, and it has a positive content," the judging consciousness does not view its judgment as a positive action with positive content (§665/488).

The judging consciousness *does* view the wicked consciousness's action in these terms. In the wicked consciousness's action, the judging consciousness sees "an *intention* and a self-serving *motive* which is different from the action itself. As every action is capable of being taken in respect to its dutifulness, so too can every action be taken from the point of view of *particularity*, for as an action it is the actuality of an individual" (§665/488). The judging consciousness claims that the wicked consciousness acts with an impure or subjective intention, and, like Enlightenment, that the intention or motive of the action is the only relevant criterion of its moral value. Furthermore, Hegel states, every action can be judged in this way, since every action is the action of a particular individual: "duty for duty's sake, this pure purpose, is the non-actual. It has its actuality in what individuality does, and as a result, the action has the aspect of

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unequal – the consciousness of the relation which is a finding-of-equality is the *noble-minded* [*edelmütige*]"; the other, by contrast, "is that of *baseness* [*niederträchtige*], which clings tenaciously to the *inequality* between both essentialities. It thus sees the power of the ruler as a shackle, as the suppression of its *being-for-itself*, and it thus hates the ruler and merely obeys him with concealed malice, standing ever ready to spring into revolt" (§499-500/372).

particularity in itself. – No man is a hero to his valet, but not because that man is not a hero, but rather because the latter is – a valet, a person with whom the hero deals not as a hero but as someone who eats, drinks, gets dressed, that is, the valet generally deals with him in the individuality of his needs and views" (§665/489).

For the judging consciousness, every action is suspect. Because actions are taken by individuals, the motive of fulfilling one's pure duty is always marred by the particularity of the individual agent. In taking this position, however, the judging consciousness exposes *itself* as base and hypocritical. Hegel writes, "the judgmental consciousness is itself thereby *base* because it divides up the action, and it both produces and clings to the action's non-selfsameness with itself. Furthermore, it is *hypocrisy* because it pretends that such judgment is not merely *another manner* of being evil but is rather itself the *rightful consciousness* of action" (§666/489). In describing the judging consciousness as base, Hegel uses the word [*niederträchtig*] that he uses throughout the *Phenomenology of Spirit* to describe one who is alienated, who cannot reconcile his subjective experience with concrete, worldly existence. The judging consciousness is base and, hence, alienated, because it distinguishes between its apparently pure mental states, such as its convictions and intentions, and corrupt action and embodied existence. Moreover, it is hypocritical, because it claims that its judgment of the wicked consciousness's action is pure in a way that the latter's action is not.

The judging consciousness holds to some aspects of conscience's earlier problematic account of authority, but it has already begun to overcome others. Hegel's concerns about conscience's account of authority can be divided into two parts. First, conscience assumes that individuals are not only privileged knowers but also infallible judges of their own intentions. It presumes that because individuals have unique (privileged) knowledge of their own beliefs,

intentions, and judgments, they cannot be wrong in their assessment of their commitments. Second, it presumes that the significance of an action depends on intention alone, rather than the action, its consequences, or others' evaluation of it. The content or meaning of the action is taken to be determined solely by the agent, prior to acting, based on her intention for the action. The judging consciousness has begun to overcome the first of these two problems. The judging consciousness insists that the wicked consciousness's declared intention is false; it claims that the wicked consciousness is either mistaken or dishonest about its intention. Thus, the judging consciousness tacitly acknowledges that an agent can be wrong about his or her intention. Someone might be a privileged knower without being an infallible judge of his or her intentions. In order for the judging consciousness to assess the action, it must be able to judge the wicked consciousness's intention as well as the action itself. The significance of the action is not fixed by the agent's stated intention; it is both knowable and contestable by others as well. At this point, however, the judging consciousness has not had this self-conscious realization. It still holds the belief that the content or meaning of an action derives solely from the agent's intention. By the end of Chapter VI, both consciousnesses will overcome conscience's shortcomings.

The wicked and judging consciousnesses still see themselves as opposed to one another. That changes in the very next paragraph. The wicked consciousness realizes that the judging consciousness has taken him to be "alien and not the same as himself," and he also realizes that "the judgmental consciousness, in terms of the way that consciousness is constituted, is the same as himself" (§666/489). The wicked consciousness recognizes the validity of the judging consciousness's judgment – that he is a particular and fallible individual – but he recognizes that

this is equally true for the judging consciousness himself. On this basis, the wicked consciousness *confesses* to the judging consciousness:

> As [the wicked consciousness] intuits this selfsameness and *gives expression to it*, he *confesses* this to the other, and he equally expects that the other, who has in fact put himself selfsame to him, will reciprocate his *speech* and in his own words will express their selfsameness so that recognitional existence will make its appearance. His confession is not an abasement, nor a humiliation, nor is it a matter of his casting himself aside in his relationship with the other, for this declaration is not something one-sided through which he would posit his non-selfsameness with the other. On the contrary, it is solely in consideration of his intuition of his *selfsameness* with the other that he gives expression to himself, that is, he gives expression on his own part to *their selfsameness* in his confessions, and he does this because language is the *existence* of the spirit as the immediate self. He thus expects that the other will contribute his own part to this existence. (§666/489-90)

In his confession, the wicked consciousness acknowledges that he, like the judging consciousness, is a particular individual whose actions express his particular commitments. Recall Hegel's insistence that the confession is "not an abasement, nor a humiliation, nor is it a matter of his casting himself aside." Confession entails neither the domination of the confessing (wicked) consciousness by the judging consciousness nor the assimilation of the confessing consciousness within a homogenizing universal consciousness. Rather, the confession is an expression of "their selfsameness" as particular and fallible individuals subject to the judgment of others.

Confession is not only an acknowledgement of particularity; if it were, it would not be an advance over the wicked consciousness's initial standpoint. It is also an acknowledgment of a kind of universality. Like conscience, which used language to express and actualize its convictions in an objective form, the wicked conscience uses language to express and actualize its confession. Hegel emphasizes the role of language in this passage, even in his italicization of the phrases "gives expression to it," "confesses" and "speech" at the beginning of the section. Language mediates between the particular subject and the universal spirit: "language is the existence of the spirit as the immediate self."

On the face of it, the difference between confession and declaration (such as the conscience individual's declaration of her convictions) may appear slight. Both are speech acts that connect the individual to an other or a community in an attempt to overcome one-sided subjectivity and objectivity. The declaration, however, is an individual's statement of her conviction or intention prior to acting. The community affirms that she has really had this conviction, but neither the completed act nor its consequences are part of their judgment. The wicked consciousness, by contrast, confesses *after* it has taken action and another has issued an initial judgment of that action. With its confession, the wicked consciousness relinquishes its initial view that its actions can only be justified by its personal and subjective convictions. In its confession, the wicked consciousness demonstrates that it has given up its view that no one else could have anything to say about its commitments, insofar as it revises its assessment of itself and its action in response to the judgment of the other. In this sense, its confession entails its acknowledgment of the social context in which content or meaning is determined. Eventually, *both* the judging and the wicked consciousnesses realize that the judgment contributes to the content or meaning of the action; not all content can come from the conviction or intention of the

agent. While the community of conscientious individuals understood themselves as individually determining the content of their convictions and actions, the confessing community tacitly acknowledges that the content and meaning of one's convictions, intentions, and actions depend not only on one's own determination of them but also on the judgment of others. It recognizes that content is constructed intersubjectively.

This intersubjectivity, moreover, has the doubled structure of recognition. The wicked consciousness sees itself not only as an intentional subject, but also as the object of legitimate judgment by another intentional subject. Because the judging consciousness has not yet reciprocated the confession, this is not full-fledged reciprocal recognition, but Hegel is laying the foundation for that structure.

The judging consciousness hears the confession of the wicked consciousness, but does not immediately reciprocate. Its refusal to reciprocate reverses the situation of the two consciousnesses, and the wicked consciousness now judges the judging consciousness for the latter's failure to recognize his parity with the former. According to Hegel, "[the wicked consciousness] sees the judgmental consciousness as somebody who sets his own stiff-necked selfsame character in opposition to the confessing consciousness, and he sees the utter silence of someone who keeps himself locked up within himself, who refuses to be discarded vis-à-vis an other" (§667/490). The wicked consciousness sees the judging consciousness as a character, like Antigone and Creon in Greek *Sittlichkeit*. As a character, the judging consciousness is stubborn, one-sided, and unreflective. In further confirmation of their role reversal, the judging consciousness now appears as a beautiful soul, who cannot reconcile his "pure self" with his concrete, worldly existence. The judging consciousness is mute. Hegel calls this the "highest rebellion of self-certain spirit," in which the judging consciousness refuses even to "put itself

into communication with him – with him, who in his confession had already renounced his *separate being-for-itself*" (§667/490). In this way, Hegel writes:

> The hard heart shows itself to be the consciousness forsaken by spirit, the consciousness which denies spirit since it does not take cognizance that within its absolute self-certainty, spirit is master over every deed and over all actuality, and that spirit can repudiate them and make them into something that never happened. At the same time, the hard heart does not take cognizance of the contradiction it commits when it does not count the repudiation that took place *in speech* as true repudiation while it itself has the certainty of its spirit not in an actual action but in its inwardness and has its existence in the *speech* in which its judgment is phrased. It is therefore the hard heart himself who is putting obstacles in the way of the other's return from the deed into the spiritual existence of speech and into the equality of spirit, and by virtue of its hardness of heart, it engenders the non-selfsameness which is still present. (§667/491)

The judging consciousness refuses to acknowledge that it is not wholly self-determined, that "spirit is master over every deed and over all actuality."[118] This phrase stops many readers in their tracks. Taken alone, it appears to provide incontrovertible evidence of both Hegel's supposed spirit monism and his difference-effacing absolutism. In Miller's more well-known translation, the phrase is rendered even more problematic, as "Spirit, in the absolute certainty of

[118] The untranslated text reads: "*Es zeigt sich dadurch als das geistverlassene und den Geist verleugnende Bewußtsein, denn es erkennt nicht, daß der Geist in der absoluten Gewißheit seiner selbst über alle Tat und Wirklichkeit Meister [ist] und sie abwerfen und ungeschehen machen kann*" (Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, 491). I have altered Pinkard's translation slightly, preferring the more literal "is master over" to his "has a mastery over."

itself, is *lord and master* over every deed and actuality…"[119] Miller's translation, however, is misleading. While the word *Herr* (which Hegel uses in the lord and bondsman section) signifies master in the sense of a lord or ruler, the word Hegel uses here, *Meister*, signifies master in the sense of an expert craftsman or artisan, the person who has mastered a skill. This conflation in Miller's translation is compounded by the fact that he translates *Herr* in the lordship and bondage section as master rather than lord. This creates a linguistic affinity between these two sections in English translation that is not present in the original German text. In this passage, spirit is not a lord who dominates or rules, but a master who *shapes* deeds and actualities. This renders the passage rather similar to the position taken by many contemporary communitarians, pragmatists, Aristotelians, and feminists, among others, that subjects are shaped by their social and historical context, and that the identities, beliefs, and actions available to subjects are always constrained by that context. Understood in this way, this phrase can be read as a corrective to the absolute self-certainty of the hard-hearted judging consciousness. In effect, it is an admonishment of the judging consciousness and a reminder that the determinate content it affirms does not spring wholly from within but comes to it already shaped by spirit, that "universal" point of view secured not by a thing-in-itself but by a community existing over time. Spirit is master over deeds and actuality insofar as it comprises the social norms, context, and determinate concepts and commitments that make deeds and actuality meaningful to begin with.

The judging consciousness still will not admit this, and it clings to this irreconcilable opposition in which it can only be "pure being or empty nothingness." Thus, it "breaks down into madness and melts into a yearning tubercular consumption. It thereby, in fact, gives up its

[119] In Miller, the full sentence reads: "It does not know that Spirit, in the absolute certainty of itself, is lord and master over every deed and actuality, and can cast them off, and make it as if they never happened" (406).

grim adherence to *its being-for-itself*, but it only manages to engender merely the spiritless *unity* of being" (§668/491). The language here echoes §658, in which conscience wastes away, just prior to the emergence of the conflict between the wicked and judging consciousnesses.

In the next two paragraphs, however, the judging consciousness's hard heart breaks and the two consciousnesses achieve reciprocal recognition. This outcome is anticipated by what came before: "the true conciliation, which is to say, the *self-conscious* and *existing* conciliation, is in terms of its necessity already contained in the preceding. The breaking of the hard heart and its elevation to universality is the same movement which was expressed in the consciousness that confessed" (§669/491-2). In other words, the movement by which the wicked consciousness takes action, submits to judgment, and confesses, is the same movement by which the judging consciousness recognizes its judgment as an action, submits to the judgment of the wicked consciousness, and forgives: "to the latter, this other, its one-sided, unrecognized judgment must be broken in the way that for the former, its one-sided, unrecognized existence of particular being-for-itself had to be broken" (§669/492). The judging conscious therefore sees itself in the wicked consciousness and *forgives* it.

Confession and Forgiveness and the Emergence of Reciprocal Recognition

Through their confession and forgiveness, the wicked consciousness and the judging consciousness are reconciled. Their reconciliation, as we will see, marks the emergence of full-fledged reciprocal recognition and absolute spirit. Given the centrality of ritual and social practice in Hegel's account of spirit, it is not surprising to find confession and forgiveness at this crucial juncture. There are significant features of confession and forgiveness, however, which set them apart from the rituals and social practices described in earlier sections.

In Chapter 1, I argued that there were three significant similarities between the section on Antigone and the section on confession and forgiveness in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. First, in both cases, Hegel describes an individual who takes action and who, after doing so, acknowledges that the content or meaning of the action was not determined by her or his own intention for the action alone. Second, the individual who takes action recognizes that it has something in common with a second individual who judges that action. In the section on Antigone, Hegel describes Antigone's acknowledgment that the human law that Creon defends is part of the same shape of spirit as the divine law that she follows. This acknowledgment entails the break down of Antigone's one-sidedness. In the section on confession and forgiveness, Hegel describes the same phenomenon as the "intuition of [the wicked consciousness's] *selfsameness* with the other," an intuition that leads to its confession. Third and finally, in both the section on Antigone and the section on confession and forgiveness, the acknowledgment of guilt in the former and the confession in the latter, along with the breakdown of the one-sided character, are an insufficient basis for reconciliation between the conflicting parties. This is because non-dominating, non-assimilating reconciliation requires the doubled structure of reciprocal recognition, in which each individual recognizes itself and the other as both subject and object. Eventually, Antigone and Creon each have this epistemological realization, but they are unable to actualize the practical aspect of recognition. The wicked consciousness and the judging consciousness are reconciled only after the judging consciousness joins the wicked consciousness in acknowledging their selfsameness and after both *actualize* this selfsameness in their actions.

This acknowledgment and actualization takes place when the judging consciousness extends forgiveness to the wicked consciousness. Although Hegel uses the word "forgiveness"

[*Verzeihung*] only once in this section, its importance is signaled by its appearance in the section's title, "Conscience. The beautiful soul, evil, and its forgiveness," and by its position in a crucial passage that moves swiftly from the breaking of the hard heart to the extension of forgiveness to the emergence of reciprocal recognition and absolute spirit. Hegel writes:

> The forgiveness it extends to the first [i.e. the wicked consciousness] is the renunciation of itself, of its *non-actual* essence, an essence which it equates with this other consciousness which was *actual* action, and it recognizes as good what had been determined in thought to be bad, namely, action; or to an even greater degree, it abandons this distinction between determinate thought and its determinate judgment existing-for-itself, just as the other abandons its own act, which exists-for-itself of determining action. –The word of reconciliation is the *existing* spirit which immediately intuits in its opposite the pure knowledge of itself as the *universal* essence, intuits in it the pure knowledge of itself as *individuality* existing absolutely inwardly – a reciprocal recognition which is *absolute* spirit." (§670/492-3)

C. Allen Speight notes that Hegel's concept of forgiveness combines two key ideas: "(1) an overcoming of *resentment* that is based on a *revision of judgment* and (2) a recognition of conditions affecting both agency and judgment in general," such as the fallibility of agents, the self-interest of motives, and the potential for evil.[120] We can see each of these ideas at work in the passage above. The judging consciousness's forgiveness actually involves the revision of two judgments: the general judgment of action as bad and the specific judgment of the wicked consciousness as wicked for acting on the basis of its particularities. In its forgiveness, the

[120] C. Allen Speight, "Butler and Hegel on Forgiveness and Agency," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 43 (2005), 299.

judging consciousness acknowledges the fallibility of agents, the fact that agents can be wrong about the content or meaning of their own actions. This fact is as true for itself as for the wicked consciousness. The judgment that it had issued was not only motivated by a respect for universal duty, but also by its own particularistic desires and intentions.

Like the confession, the forgiveness is a speech act. Hegel's phrase, "the word of reconciliation," can refer literally to the words uttered by the two consciousnesses. Once again, Hegel claims that language is *existing* spirit, or, in other words, that language does more than mediate between the particular and the universal, the individual and the community, but actually marries the two. Individual commitments get their content when actions, including speech acts, express those commitments in public, expose them to the judgment of others, and reintegrate them.[121] Focusing only on the linguistic aspects of confession and forgiveness misses the significance of the religious and theological content and context of these practices, however. Hegel does not discuss just any speech acts. Rather, he specifically focuses on the religiously-inflected practices of confession and forgiveness and he uses the theologically-rich phrase, the "word of reconciliation." To ignore this would be to miss the absolutely crucial, if unorthodox, sense in which confession and forgiveness serve a *sacramental* function in Hegel's account.

[121] C.f. Gillian Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology* (London: Verso, 2009), 190-2. In Rose's reading of this passage, Hegel's point is that "words are not actions, that evil, confession and forgiveness are subjective, Christian virtues not ethical ones, and that abstract statements mask ethical actuality" (191-2). Rose's reading seems to depend on Hegel's discussion of conscience's own account of itself, according to which the affirmation of the other's conviction and the issuance of judgment of another's action do not themselves count as actions that are subject to normative judgment. In my reading, however, Hegel's point in the discussion of confession and forgiveness is that conscience was *wrong*: words *do* count as actions. They are simultaneously word and deed. Thus, there is nothing abstract or merely subjective about the acts of confession and forgiveness; both the wicked and judging consciousness ultimately recognize that they are in the position of both judge and judged – that is, subject and object – and their speech acts actualize this recognition.

Sacraments are rituals that involve both word and deed, and (at least on a Lutheran account) that are believed to both *symbolize* and *actualize* the absolute. They symbolize that reality through a visible sign, such as the bread and wine in the Eucharist, and they actualize the signified reality, as with Christ's real presence in the Eucharistic host.[122] In his early writings, Luther counted penance (or confession and forgiveness) among the sacraments, alongside the Eucharist and baptism. In "The Sacrament of Penance" (1519), Luther writes that penance consists of the three features of all sacraments: visible sign, signified reality, and faith. In the sacrament of penance, Luther identifies these three features as absolution, or the words of forgiveness; grace, or the gift of forgiveness; and faith, or the trust that one has been forgiven. The words of forgiveness are the sign, grace is the signified reality, and, finally, "the faith that believes the sacrament is what removes the sin."[123]

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[122] In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Hegel explicitly states his preference for the Lutheran account of the Eucharist over against the Catholic and Reformed accounts. According to Hegel, the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation venerates the material host itself, while the Reformed doctrine reduces the Eucharist to its symbolic and memorial functions. The Lutheran position charts a middle course, acknowledging the actual presence of Christ in the bread and wine, made manifest in the act of partaking: "the communion, the self-feeling presence of God, comes about only insofar as the external thing is consumed – not merely physically but in spirit and in faith." See Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, 479-81. See, also, Hegel's brief discussion of "*repentance* or *penitence*" immediately preceding this. As scholars like Walter Jaeschke, Cyril O'Regan, and Peter Hodgson have all noted in discussions of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Hegel is not endorsing a full-fledged sacramental theology in these pages, at least in any orthodox sense. As O'Regan writes, "Hegel is not so much defending a particular sacramental theology as indicating support for a sacramental *principle* that may very well apply to all reality" (O'Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel*, 243). Or, in Hodgson's words, "[Hegel's] account of historical details is often imprecise, and his emphasis lies on conceptual distinctions that appear in history in a variety of ways" (Hodgson, *Hegel and Christian Theology*, 193). For an excellent discussion of the role of the sacrament of communion in Hegel's work, see Stephen Crites, *In the Twilight of Christendom: Hegel vs. Kierkegaard on Faith and History* (Chambersburg, PA: American Academy of Religion, 1972), 49-51. For a more comprehensive account of Hegel's relation to Luther and Lutheran theology, see Ulrich Asendorf, *Luther und Hegel: Untersuchungen zur Grundlegung einer Neuen Systematischen Theologie* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1982).

[123] Martin Luther, "The Sacrament of Penance," *Luther's Works*, vol. 35, 11.

We find each of these features in Hegel's account of confession and forgiveness, too. Confession and forgiveness are speech acts that pair word and deed: the word of forgiveness, or, as Hegel puts it, "the word of reconciliation," is the sign, and the actualized forgiveness is the signified reality. The faith that one can and does forgive the other is the final aspect of their reconciliation. Without this faith, the confession and forgiveness would fail to reconcile them. As Luther writes: "The hard hearted who do not as yet seek comfort for their conscience, have likewise not yet experienced this tormenting anxiety. To them, this sacrament is of no use."[124] Using the same phrase as Luther [*das harte Herz*], Hegel writes that the hard-hearted judging consciousness must recognize that spirit is master over deed and actuality before he is able to respond to the wicked consciousness's confession. As I have argued, however, Hegel's spirit is not a lord who rules, but a master who *shapes* deeds and actualities. This is one place where Hegel's account of the sacramental function of confession and forgiveness differs from Luther's. Luther's God may be the lord who rules, as he suggests when he writes that the hard-hearted sinner must first be "softened up" with the "terrible judgment of God" before he will "seek for the comfort of this sacrament."[125] Perhaps Hegel also has in mind the hard-hearted Pharaoh of Exodus, who refuses to release the Israelites from bondage. In that case, hard heartedness implies domination.

On Hegel's account of the sacramental function of confession and forgiveness, it is not God but a fallible human being who judges and forgives the one who confesses. In this respect, Hegel's account combines aspects of the sacrament of penance with Luther's description of public confession and forgiveness. In the "Exhortation to Confession" (1529), Luther writes that through public confession "we mutually confess our guilt and our desire for forgiveness

[124] *Ibid*, 18.
[125] Ibid.

(Matthew 5:23-24). Now, all of us are guilty of sinning against one another; therefore we may and should publicly confess this before everyone without shrinking in one another's presence… So we have in the Lord's Prayer a double absolution: there we are forgiven our offenses against God and against our neighbor, and there we forgive our neighbor and become reconciled to him."[126] According to Luther, Christians can confess to and seek forgiveness from not only God or a priest, but also from one another. This is part of the work of reconciliation. When Luther writes that Christians should publicly confess without "shrinking in one another's presence," we may be reminded of Hegel's statement that the confession is "not an abasement, nor a humiliation, nor is it a matter of his casting himself aside." Moreover, echoing what Luther calls the "doubled absolution" of the Lord's Prayer, in which the individual and his neighbor are both the forgiver and the forgiven, the reconciliation between the wicked and judging consciousnesses entails the acknowledgment that each individual stands in the position of wrongdoer *and* judge, confessor *and* forgiver.[127] Their confession and forgiveness symbolize and actualize the reciprocal recognition "which is *absolute spirit*."

The connection between the practices of confession and forgiveness and sacramental theology is key to understanding *why* Hegel thinks that these particular practices give rise to absolute spirit and *what* "absolute spirit" entails. For Luther, the sacraments "represent" the

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[126] Martin Luther, "Exhortation to Confession," available at http://bookofconcord.org/exhortationConfession.php. This text originally appeared in the Luther's 1529 edition of the *Large Catechism*. It is included in some, but not all, editions of the *Book of Concord*. Similarly, in "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church" (1520), Luther exhorts the Church to "permit all brothers and sisters freely to hear the confession of hidden sins, so that the sinner may make his sins known to whomever he will and seek pardon and comfort, that is, the word of Christ, by the mouth of his neighbor." Luther, "Babylonian Captivity of the Church," *Luther's Works*, vol. 36.

[127] Luther expressed a similar notion when he characterized the state of the Christian as "*simul iustus et peccator*" ("at the same time righteous and a sinner"). For Luther, the Christian is not partly righteous and partly sinful, but both, fully and simultaneously – *totus iustus, totus peccator*.

divine, both in the sense of representing or symbolizing as sign and in the sense of *re*-presenting or actualizing as signified reality.[128] In Luther's understanding of the Eucharist, for example, Christ is represented by the bread and wine (visible sign), and actually made present in the community through the sacramental act (signified reality). In penance, likewise, the words of confession and forgiveness serve as signs of a reconciliation that is actualized in the ritual. Hegel thinks that Luther gets something right by insisting on the importance of practices of confession and forgiveness in the Christian community. Certain shared practices – sacramental practices – make it possible for communities to express their deepest commitments while making those commitments *actual* and *present* among them. Confession and forgiveness are sacramental practices in this sense. They symbolize and actualize reciprocal recognition and absolute spirit, a form of life that is non-arbitrary and self-sufficient. Let me say more about each of these in turn.

Confession and forgiveness symbolize and actualize reciprocal recognition. Both the wicked consciousness and the judging consciousness acknowledge their selfsameness – the fact that each is a locus of authority, an acting and judging subject who can be held accountable for his actions and judgments by others. These others, likewise, are acting and judging subjects, fit to be held accountable. The wicked consciousness and the judging consciousness acknowledge this fact not only in word but also in deed, in the confession and forgiveness that express and embody their agency, authority, and accountability. This is the doubled structure of reciprocal recognition.

At the same time, confession and forgiveness symbolize and actualize absolute spirit. Absolute spirit is the shape of spirit in which the standard of knowledge is self-conscious and self-sufficient. Hegel is suggesting, therefore, that this new shape of spirit emerges from the

[128] I owe this way of putting the point to Ron Thiemann.

confession and forgiveness of the wicked consciousness and the judging consciousness. The confession and forgiveness symbolize this absolute standard and actualize it within the community through the deeds themselves. The confession and forgiveness – the two consciousnesses' acknowledgements of their selfsameness in their agency, authority, and accountability – are themselves the actualization of the absolute standard. Finally, the two consciousnesses' faith in the practices of confession and forgiveness, as part of what constitutes the absolute, is what makes it so. Although there is something about this account that initially sounds almost mystical, I will argue in Chapter 4 that it is best understood as a social-practical account of spirit. Hegel's transformation of Luther's sacramental theology involves his insistence that confession and forgiveness follow a sacramental logic as well as his denial that the absolute that is symbolized and actualized in the sacrament is the Christian God.

Hegel's goal in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* has been to identify a community whose members are neither immediately identified with their norms nor alienated from them. He hopes to describe the way in which their beliefs and actions can be both self-legislated and accountable to standards outside of themselves. His discussion of confession and forgiveness suggests how Hegel thinks these are reconciled. The practices of confession and forgiveness are *sacramental* practices. In each, a speech act symbolizes and actualizes each individual's recognition of the normative authority of the other. By confessing and extending forgiveness to one another, each one recognizes the authority of the other to act, to judge, and to forgive. In recognizing this authority, they also generate it. Norms and normative authority, on this account, are created and sustained through the ongoing practices of acting, judging, confessing, forgiving, and recognizing in which these individuals and communities participate.

Hegel's account of confession and forgiveness, understood in this way, is more practical and substantial than some interpreters have suggested. Robert Pippin, for instance, argues that Hegel stops short of describing the institutional arrangements conducive to reciprocal recognition and only hints at the "spiritual possibility, a quasi-religious 'conversion experience,' in a community: 'forgiveness'" [129] In Pippin's reading of the confession and forgiveness section, the wicked consciousness and the judging consciousness are in a situation of "inevitable guilt, and the drama that [Hegel] narrates leaves us only with the option of 'confessing' such guilt to others who we hope will reciprocate in a gesture that will undermine any such pretended independence and will reaffirm in mutual forgiveness our inevitable dependence."[130] Pippin argues that there is "no institutional manifestation" in this account of confession and forgiveness, and "very little" that could connect it to the concrete instantiations of spirit described in the *Philosophy of Right*.[131] In Pippin's reading, Hegel's confession and forgiveness section resembles Shakespeare's tragic play, *King Lear*, with Lear as the wicked consciousness who sullies moral duty with subjective desire and Cordelia as the hard-hearted judge or beautiful soul who cannot understand Lear's willingness to mix personal and familial love with public and political objectives. Eventually, they privately confess and forgive, but are unable to avoid their terrible and tragic fates. Pippin concludes that "the aspiration for a culminating reconciliation is everywhere in Hegel, but everywhere elusive."[132] On this reading, the practices of confession and forgiveness are a thin balm for a deep wound.

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[129] Robert Pippin, "Recognition and Reconciliation: Actualized Agency in Hegel's Jena Phenomenology," in *Hegel: New Directions*, ed. by Katerina Deligiorgi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 139.
[130] Pippin, "Recognition and Reconciliation," 139.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Pippin, "Recognition and Reconciliation," 140.

Pippin notes that "some see this all as evidence of the 'tragic nature of all social action' for Hegel, comprising both a universal dimension and an inevitable transgression of such a law," and he cites J. M. Bernstein's essay "Confession and Forgiveness: Hegel's Poetics of Action" as an example of this position.[133] According to Bernstein, confession is an admission of human particularity that cannot but transgress the universal law; forgiveness is an act of mourning this "inevitable transgression." Pippin, however, disagrees with Bernstein's reading; it is, he writes, "Hegel read through Adorno."[134] Instead, Pippin suggests that readers turn from the end of Chapter VI to the *Philosophy of Right* in order to find the fulfillment of the aspiration for reconciliation in Hegel's theory of the state.

While I agree with Pippin's claim that the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Philosophy of Right* should be read as complementary and, furthermore, with his suggestion that reciprocal recognition is only attainable and sustainable under particular social and historical conditions that must ultimately be specified, I also think that Hegel has provided more insight into reconciliation than either Pippin or Bernstein suggest. When Hegel invokes the practices of confession and forgiveness, he is not gesturing toward a vague "spiritual possibility, a quasi-religious 'conversion experience,'" but directing his readers' attention to the Christian sacraments with which they are likely already familiar. For Hegel's readers, what Pippin refers to as "the option of 'confessing' such guilt to others who we hope will reciprocate," would not appear as thin and contingent as Pippin seems to think. As sacraments, confession and forgiveness both symbolize and actualize reciprocal recognition and absolute spirit. The sacrament of penance, recall, involves the word of forgiveness, the gracious gift of forgiveness,

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[133] J. M. Bernstein. "Confession and Forgiveness: Hegel's Poetics of Action," in *Beyond Representation: Philosophy and Poetic Imagination*, ed. Richard Eldridge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 34-65.
[134] Pippin, "Recognition and Reconciliation," 140, 142n11.

and faith – or *trust* – that forgiveness has been offered. Public confession and forgiveness among Christians, at least in Luther's view, entails confession "without shrinking in one another's presence," with the faith or trust that the forgiveness extended to one's neighbor in the Lord's Prayer will be extended by one's neighbors to oneself as well.[135] While Hegel is not content to stop with Luther's understanding of the sacraments, the sacramental logic of confession and forgiveness is crucial to understanding reciprocal recognition and absolute spirit.

With Hegel's emphasis on confession and forgiveness and the section's implicit lessons about human fallibility and wrongdoing, certainly some form of guilt (as Pippin suggests) or transgression (Bernstein) is at play. It must be distinguished, however, from the guilt incurred by Antigone and Creon. As one-sided characters in Greek *Sittlichkeit*, Antigone and Creon had to play the roles assigned to them. Their identities were taken to be natural, fixed, and immediately given. Their actions fulfilled the roles and duties assigned to them but violated other duties under Greek *Sittlichkeit*. While they could ultimately see that their actions had significance that they did not intend, there was no way for them to revise their identities or obligations without giving up the natural role that they *had to play*. Hegel thinks that modern individuals cannot think about their identities and obligations in this way. Identities, social roles, and duties are revisable – not willy-nilly, for there are others to whom each individual is accountable, but revisable nonetheless. The wicked consciousness and the judging consciousness are guilty of

[135] In Brandom's interpretation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trust is an indispensable component of recognitive communities. Indeed, Brandom argues that it is only in the presence of trust that contentful norms can be developed and sustained. He writes: "In confessing, one not only expresses retrospective acknowledgement of the residual disparity in one's beliefs and actions between what things are in themselves and what they are for one, between norm and subjective attitude, one also expresses prospective trust in others to find ways of forgiving that disparity, forging/finding a unity of referent behind the disparity of sense, healing the wound. Such trust is an acknowledgement of dependence on others for recognition in the form of forgiveness" (Brandom, "From Irony to Trust," *A Spirit of Trust*, 216).

error – both in their actions and in their self-understanding – but they accept responsibility and remain open to the criticisms and corrections offered by others. Under the terms set by their shape of spirit, Antigone and Creon could do no such thing. That is why that shape of spirit was tragic, while the shape of spirit brought about by the wicked consciousness and the judging consciousness is not.

Through their confession and forgiveness, the wicked and judging consciousnesses reconcile and enter into a relationship of reciprocal recognition. This reconciliation and reciprocal recognition need not be read as a "culminating reconciliation" or "end of history." Just as sacramental theology understands human beings' need for grace to be perpetual, Hegel's discussion of confession and forgiveness does not suggest that reciprocal recognition is attained once and for all. Rather, it seems as though practices of confession and forgiveness would have to be ongoing. These two consciousnesses could come into conflict again over a particular judgment one issues that the other thinks is false, or over an action that one takes that the other thinks is wrong. Reciprocal recognition entails the acknowledgment that the self and other are the kind of beings entitled to make judgments of this sort, and that one had better take the judgment of the other in good faith. Pippin's emphasis on inevitable guilt and Bernstein's emphasis on the transgressive character of human action acknowledge ongoing conflict. These emphases overlook, however, the possibility of ongoing reconciliation. The reciprocal recognition that emerges at the end of Chapter VI entails the epistemic and practical acknowledgment that oneself and the other are both subject and object, and that oneself and the other stand in equal positions of responsibility to one another for one's commitments and actions. Confession and forgiveness are practices of contesting and revising norms and

judgments in this structure of reciprocal recognition. In this view, conflict and reconciliation must be eternally recurring moments within a structure of reciprocal recognition.

Conclusion

In Kojève's interpretation, the struggle for recognition ceases only at the "end of history," when social life has been perfected and human beings no longer need to participate in the creation or transformation of norms, laws, and social structures. What I have tried to highlight, in the foregoing discussion of the Hegel's discussion of confession and forgiveness, is an emergent form of recognition that neither has violence, domination, and assimilation at its core nor claims to have overcome conflict once and for all. In the confession and forgiveness section, Hegel presents a particular conflict that is resolved through ongoing practices. Conflicts will continue to arise, individuals will continue to judge and revise judgments about their actions and the actions of others, and the dialectic of agon and reconciliation will churn forward.

Needless to say, the end of Chapter VI is *not* the end of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Given the religious and theological content of the final paragraphs of the section on confession and forgiveness, it is not surprising to find Hegel turning to religion in the following chapter. There, he moves back through the shapes of spirit that have already been traced in order to pinpoint the religious beliefs and practices that inform those forms of life. As I have suggested, Hegel thinks that Christians get something right in their practices of confession and forgiveness. But Hegel also thinks that what religious communities get right is right in *representational form* [*Vorstellung*], which is to say that it is symbolically but not self-sufficiently true. What Hegel finds compelling about sacramental theology is the idea that certain shared practices enable communities to express their deepest commitments while making those commitments *actual* and

present among them. While the sacrament of penance in its representational form is predicated on the notion that it is the Christian God who is represented and re-presented in the sacrament, in its absolute form – that is, fully actualized and brought to self-consciousness – practices of confession and forgiveness represent and re-present the absolute, that self-conscious and self-sufficient standard.

In Chapter 4, the final interpretive chapter of the dissertation, I turn to the last two chapters of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* – Chapter VII ("Religion") and Chapter VIII ("Absolute Knowledge") – to see how sacraments and sacrifice are employed and transformed as the representational thinking that characterizes religion becomes the absolute knowledge of philosophy.

CHAPTER FOUR: Religion, Philosophy, and the Agonistic Absolute

What Hegel calls "absolute spirit" is the self-conscious and self-sufficient process by which norms and normative authority are generated and sustained. In absolute spirit, consciousness recognizes that normative authority is generated through social practices in which contestation about what individuals and communities are justified in believing and doing is ongoing.

This understanding of absolute spirit – what I have been calling the social-practical account of spirit – is supported by the foregoing analysis of the Chapter VI of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Chapters 1, 2, and 3 examined three shapes of spirit prior to the emergence of absolute spirit and the conflicts that arise in each of those three. In Greek *Sittlichkeit*, individuals take the authority of their norms to be immediately given, a posture that evades individuals' responsibility for authorizing those norms and disables practices of critical scrutiny and revision in the face of internal contradictions and conflicts. For this reason, Greek *Sittlichkeit* is characterized by *tragedy*. Because individuals are merely characters, playing out scripted social roles, they are unable to scrutinize or revise their norms and other commitments in the face of conflicting goods. They can only recognize their responsibility retrospectively, acknowledging their guilt for the tragic consequences of their actions. Faith and Enlightenment, meanwhile, contend that norms must be self-legislated but based on objective standards that are available to any individual. Because Faith and Enlightenment disagree about what those standards are, however, they are at odds with one another. Neither can provide reasons for its commitments that even count as reasons for the other. Moreover, their emphasis on *self*-legislation means that they are mistaken about the role that their social practices and relationships play in authorizing their commitments. It is only at the end of Chapter VI, when

the wicked consciousness and the judging consciousness confess to and forgive one another, that Hegel depicts a conflict ending in reconciliation and reciprocal recognition. It is there that absolute spirit emerges.

The reciprocal recognition of the wicked consciousness and the judging consciousness – that doubled structure in which each recognizes the other as both agent and judge, confessor and forgiver – *is* absolute spirit itself. "The word of reconciliation," Hegel writes, "is the *existing* spirit which immediately intuits in its opposite the pure knowledge of itself as the *universal* essence, intuits it in the pure knowledge of itself as *individuality* existing absolutely inwardly – a reciprocal recognition which is *absolute* spirit" (§670/493). The practices of confession and forgiveness, in other words, occasion the two consciousnesses' knowledge of themselves as both universal essence and individuality. This is both reciprocal recognition and, as Hegel writes, absolute spirit.

In the final lines of Chapter VI, Hegel elaborates on this emergent shape of spirit. He writes, "the reconciling *yes*, in which both I's let go of their opposed *existence*, is the existence of the *I* expanded into two-ness, which therein remains selfsame and which has the certainty of itself in its complete self-emptying and in its opposition. –It is God appearing in the midst of those who know themselves as pure knowledge" (§671/494).[136] In this cryptic passage, Hegel suggests that the reconciled consciousnesses are not two individuals who have become one, but

[136] In this passage, Hegel makes good on a promissory note issued in Chapter IV of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*: "What will later come to be for consciousness will be the experience of what spirit is, that is, this absolute substance which constitutes the unity of its oppositions in their complete freedom and self-sufficiency, namely, in the oppositions of the various self-consciousnesses existing for themselves: The *I* that is *we* and the *we* that is *I*" (§177/145). I argue in this chapter that these passages should not be read as evidence of any commitment to a divine super-mind, but rather in light of Hegel's grappling with Kantian and Fichtean conceptions of the "I" – the self-conscious subject – in ways that overcome givenness, subject-object dualism, and resulting skepticism about what we can know about others and the world.

rather one who has become two. This one or *I*, Hegel states here, is God in the midst of the reconciled consciousnesses. As an elaboration of what absolute spirit is, this passage confuses more than clarifies. It invokes, once again, the sacramental logic of the practices of confession and forgiveness, suggesting that God is manifest in the community in and through them. But what does Hegel mean by God? And what is the relationship between the *ongoing* practices of conflict and reconciliation and the picture of absolute spirit sketched here?

To reach any conclusions about the metaphysical dimensions of Hegel's account of spirit, these questions need to be addressed. This chapter seeks to address them, describing the relationship among God, spirit, and the absolute as presented in Chapters VII ("Religion") and VIII ("Absolute Spirit") of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. According to Hegel, God and spirit are the religious and philosophical titles, respectively, for the absolute. Religion and absolute knowledge (the philosophical standpoint) have the same object – the absolute – but their knowledge of this object has different forms. For religion, knowledge of the absolute takes the representational form of doctrine, ritual, and worship of God. For absolute knowledge, knowledge of the absolute takes the conceptual form of self-conscious reflection on and participation in spirit. Because Hegel believes that philosophy's knowledge of the absolute surpasses religion's, we need to avoid smuggling religious assumptions about God into the account of spirit.

With this in mind, this chapter begins by considering Hegel's assertion in the Preface of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* that the absolute is both substance and subject. This claim, and its relationship to Cartesian, Spinozist, and Kantian accounts of the absolute, forms the philosophical backdrop for a consideration of God, spirit, and the absolute. I then turn to an analysis of religion's representational knowledge of the unity of substance and subject in the

absolute, followed by absolute knowledge's conceptual knowledge of this unity. I argue that, for both religion and absolute knowledge, *sacrifice* helps to bring about this unity, but that their different accounts of sacrifice reveal the ways in which religion's knowledge of the absolute remains incomplete. Finally, I return to the final paragraph of Chapter VI and argue that the "God appearing in the midst of those who know themselves as pure knowledge" is philosophically understood as the spirit that is generated and sustained through social practices of conflict and reconciliation.

The Absolute is Both Substance and Subject

In the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel argues that "the truth" or "the absolute" is both substance and subject: "in my view, which must be justified by the exposition of the system itself, everything hangs on apprehending and expressing the truth not merely as *substance* but also equally as *subject*" (§17/22-3). This sentence is something of a puzzle: as Peter Hodgson notes, Hegel's characterization of the truth or the absolute as both substance and subject brings together two traditionally opposed conceptions of the absolute.[137] Given Hegel's insistence on the insufficiency of one-sided accounts of authority, his effort to reconcile these two conceptions should not surprise us. It may, however, take some work to "apprehend and express" it. (Remember, it took Hegel the entire *Phenomenology*!)

The traditionally opposed conceptions of the absolute that Hegel attempts to reconcile are, roughly speaking, a Spinozistic account of the absolute as substance and a Kantian account of the absolute as subject. The Spinozistic account, popularized in Hegel's youth by the "pantheism controversy," draws on Spinoza's emendation of Descartes's earlier conception of

[137] Hodgson, *Hegel and Christian Theology*, 33.

substance.[138] In Descartes's view, adopted by Spinoza, substance is that which exists such that it needs nothing else for its existence. Substance is, in other words, self-sufficient. Descartes went on to suggest that there were two kinds of substance: thinking substance (mind or soul) and

[138] While it is likely that Hegel read Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* shortly after leaving the Tübingen seminary, his discussions of Spinozistic philosophy are more concerned with the popular Spinozism of his contemporaries than with the details of Spinoza's own philosophy. Hegel and his seminary friends, Hölderlin and Schelling, were deeply influenced by the popular Spinozism stirred up by the "pantheism controversy" surrounding F. H. Jacobi's 1785 book, *Über die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an Herrn Moses Mendelssohn*. In the book, Jacobi published a series of letters that he had written to Mendelssohn, in which Jacobi claimed that Lessing, shortly before his death, had confided his "Spinozism" to Jacobi. While the controversy initially involved a dispute between Jacobi and Mendelssohn, it became a major public debate over reason, rational faith, pantheism, and, to use the term that Jacobi himself coined, "nihilism." This debate eventually drew in nearly all of the major German intellectuals of the day, including Kant, Goethe, and Herder, and one of its significant effects was to make Spinoza's philosophy – or at least a Spinozistic pantheism – respectable and popular after a long period of disrepute. Among the new "Spinoza enthusiasts," according to Beiser, were "nearly all of the major figures of the classical *Goethezeit* – Goethe, Novalis, Hölderlin, Herder, F. Schlegel, Hegel, Schleiermacher, and Schelling," (Beiser, *The Fate of Reason* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987], 44). For two compelling, but quite different, accounts of the underlying causes of the controversy as well as its effects on German intellectual life in the late eighteenth century, see Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*, 44ff; and Michah Gottlieb, *Faith and Freedom: Moses Mendelssohn's Theological-Political Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). While Beiser argues that the pantheism controversy was fundamentally a debate about metaphysical and epistemological questions – particularly, "the authority of reason" – Gottlieb contends that the debate was less about metaphysical and epistemological problems than "about ethical and political issues concerning the best means of promoting human dignity and freedom in modern society" (113). For a detailed account of Spinozism in late eighteenth century Germany, see David Bell, *Spinoza in Germany from 1670 to the Age of Goethe* (London: Institute for Germanic Studies, 1984).

Meanwhile, Hegel's own relationship to Spinozism was complex and evolving. Hegel, Hölderlin, and Schelling *were* enthusiastic about Spinozism while in seminary, particularly its rejection of mind-body dualism and of orthodox theism. Yet Hegel comes to reject Spinozism (as well as the other pre-critical positions to which he was drawn as a young man, such as Greek *Sittlichkeit*), contending that, as Pinkard summarizes the argument of Hegel's later review of Jacobi's work, "the Spinozistic account of substance cannot account for how it is that itself, this substance, can come to be aware of itself and give an account of itself, and how this insufficiency in Spinozism requires a move not back to pre-Spinozistic metaphysics but forward to idealist doctrines of self-consciousness" (Pinkard, *Hegel*, 385). Of course, the extent to which Hegel actually moved beyond Spinozism is a matter of debate. See Pinkard, *Hegel*, esp. 30-32 and 384-388; Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism*. C.f. Beiser, *Hegel*; Westphal, "Hegel and Onto-Theology."

extended substance (body). Descartes thought, moreover, that thinking substance could be either infinite or finite. While there is only one infinite substance – God – there is a plurality of independent minds, each of which is a distinct finite substance. While Spinoza embraced Descartes's account of substance as that which is self-sufficient, he rejected Descartes's divisions of substance. Instead, Spinoza argued that there was one substance. Thought and extension could not refer to different types of substance, but to two of the infinite attributes of substance. What Descartes had considered finite substances – such as independent minds – were, in Spinoza's view, merely *modes* that exist within and are wholly dependent upon the one substance.

Hegel seeks a better account of difference and differentiation than he finds in this conception of substance. He denounces the Spinozistic account of substance (taken up in Schelling's conception of the absolute) that subsumes distinct entities into the one substance in which "everything is the same." Hegel calls this position an "utterly vacuous naiveté in cognition" that attempts to "pass off its *absolute* as the night in which, as one says, all cows are black" (§16/22).[139] According to this position, substance may be infinitely modified, but these modifications are essentially emanations of the same thing. This position fails to recognize the union of identity *and* non-identity in the absolute. For Hegel, to be *this* subject or object is to be unified with, but irreducible to, *that* subject or object. Hegel insists that this differentiation persists in the absolute. To suggest otherwise, Hegel thinks, is to render the absolute essentially contentless.

[139] Stephen Crites nicely frames Hegel's concern about the Spinozistic conception of substance in terms of William James's later pluralism: "If the whole were Spinozistic substance, a changeless truth the spatiotemporal appearances of which are merely the illustrations of perception, it would be a good example of what William James called a 'block universe' against which James protested on behalf of the validity of experience with its contingency and open-endedness" (Crites, *Dialectic and Gospel*, 448).

While Descartes's divisions of substance may initially appear to provide an account of differentiation, Hegel also rejects the Cartesian position. Descartes's division of substance into thinking substance and extended substance set up the mind-body and subject-object dualisms that Hegel is trying to overcome in the *Phenomenology*. Each shape of spirit that we have discussed up to this point initially grounds the authority of its norms in *either* the subjective or objective side of the subject-object divide. It is this one-sidedness in their accounts of the authoritativeness of their norms that has led to the collapse of each and every one of these shapes of spirit. On the one side, those shapes of spirit that attempt to ground the authority of their norms in *objects*, the way things are *in themselves*, cannot give an account of how these things are *for us*. In Chapter VI, this problem initially appears in Greek *Sittlichkeit*, which claims that its laws simply *are*. Because individuals take the authority of those laws as immediately given, they cannot say why the mere existence of the law should count as authoritative for them. When Antigone and Creon come into conflict over the burial of Polyneices, however, they acknowledge the one-sidedness of their positions. Neither one can say why the law it follows is authoritative for him or herself, or why it should count as authoritative for the other. This problem is raised to the level of self-consciousness in the Roman legal society, in which the legal person cannot give an account of how he, as a subject, can justify the norms, institutions, and practices that govern the social and political world.

Conversely, those shapes of spirit that attempt to ground the authority of their norms in the individual subject, the way things are *for the subject*, cannot give an account of what these things are *in themselves.* This leads to skepticism and alienation. They cannot say why their norms should count for anyone other than themselves, and they cannot even receive confirmation that their norms should really count for them. Faith and Enlightenment, for example, both place

all authority on the side of the subject. As a result, they disavow their objective existence – relinquishing their actual existence and actions in the world – and become alienated from it and from each other. Their concepts become contentless, like Faith's concept of God, and they become skeptical about the possibility of knowing anything concrete about the world.

The only account of norms and normative authority that can overcome these problems will be an account of why our norms are authoritative *in themselves and for us*, that is, an account that overcomes subject-object dualism. Hegel thinks that the reconciliation of substance and *subject* yields such an account. As with substance, we must not confuse Hegel's conception of the subject with the familiar Cartesian subject, the *cogito*. Instead, the starting point for Hegel's conception of the subject is the Kantian subject, the locus of responsibility.

As with the Spinozistic conception of substance, however, Hegel is not entirely satisfied with the Kantian conception of subject. Hegel draws on and transforms the Kantian subject, casting it as the entity responsible *to* others *for* its judgments, intentions, and actions. The Hegelian subject is an intersubjectively-understood locus of responsibility. This gets to the heart of Pippin's interpretation of Hegel as a post-Kantian idealist.[140] Hegel identifies and hopes to solve a problem in Kant's two-part account of knowledge, a problem that is connected to this subject-object dualism. For Kant, sensibility and understanding are both necessary for knowledge. Sensibility receives or intuits objects in the world. The understanding applies categories to organize or classify those objects as knowledge. Hegel thinks that this account of knowledge has two built-in forms of givenness: first, the objects themselves are given to intuition, and, second, the categories are given to the understanding. Hegel thinks that Kant

[140] See, especially, Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism* and "Concept and Intuition: On Distinguishability and Separability," *Hegel-Studen* 40 (2005). Also excellent on this point is Sally Sedgwick, *Hegel's Critique of Kant: From Dichotomy to Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

begins to suggest a way around this givenness in the B-version of the Transcendental Deduction. There, Kant states that the representations given in intuition must be accompanied by the "I think," or what he calls the "transcendental unity of apperception." Tensions seem to arise between Kant's account of the unity of apperception and his strict division of labor between sensibility and the understanding. If the representations given in intuition are already accompanied by the "I think," then are they not already organized in some way by the understanding? Pippin argues that Kant "clearly wants to establish that *objects* do conform to the categories, not that we must apply the categories to *whatever* sensory contact is delivered to us."[141] While this is Hegel's starting point, he also needs to wrestle with the givenness of the categories. To avoid the problem of skepticism – the gap between what appears to be true to the subject and what she can affirm as true about the objective world – thinking cannot be the activity of the isolated subject applying her subjectively-given categories to the world. As Lewis writes, "any account of this thinking that conceives it fundamentally in terms of the activity of a particular subject falls into the contradictions traced in Kant: it presupposes the distinction between the subject and the world that is to be explained and is consequently unable to explain how this chasm is bridged."[142] To avoid that problem, Hegel's account of absolute knowing centrally concerns the *community* of thinking and judging subjects existing over time.

Hegel's conception of the absolute, as we will see in greater detail below, seeks to reconcile substance and subject in a way that overcomes subject-object dualism. This absolute is both self-sufficient substance and self-conscious subject. The absolute cannot be an undifferentiated, and hence contentless, substance, nor can it be a Cartesian theater rent from other subjects and the world. What Hegel insists on in the Preface, and what he claims to have

[141] Pippin, "Concept and Intuition," 32.
[142] Lewis, *Religion, Modernity, and Politics in Hegel*, 73.

demonstrated at the end of the *Phenomenology*, is that the absolute unifies substance and subject. It is not the pre-critical consciousness of substance endorsed by Greek *Sittlichkeit* or Spinozistic metaphysics, but a critical and self-conscious unity. It can only be achieved and recognized in a shape of spirit, a community and way of life. The shape of spirit that accomplishes this and recognizes it as such is what Hegel calls *absolute spirit*.

Both religion and philosophy reflect on the absolute as both substance and subject. Moreover, both religion and philosophy recognize that the unity of substance and subject is brought about through a dialectic of sacrifice and reconciliation. The "self-emptying" in the final paragraph of Chapter VI is the sacrifice that brings about the emergence of this unified absolute. To understand what that absolute *is*, we have to look at what both religion and philosophy take it to be, and see how they account for the self-emptying which brings it about.

Religion: God as the Absolute

Chapter VI ("Spirit") ends and Chapter VII ("Religion") begins with the emergence of absolute spirit. While religious phenomena have figured into consciousness's various attempts to specify the absolute, Chapter VII is the first to consider religious communities' self-conscious reflections on the absolute (§672/495).[143] It is the first to consider, Hegel writes, "the absolute essence *in and for itself*, the self-consciousness of spirit" (§672/495).

[143] As on other points, my reading of this transition follows the post-Kantian interpretation. Lewis characterizes the transition in similar terms. He writes: "previous chapters traced the development of the 'absolute essence,' showing the way in which what was taken to be authoritative or of absolute value for a particular formation of consciousness could not satisfy its own criteria for success… These previous stages had the absolute essence as object, but Chapter VII is the first to focus on our practices of reflecting on this essence" (Lewis, "Religion and Demythologization in Hegel's *Phenomenology*," in Moyar and Quante (2008), 193). This reading of the transition differs from that of many scholars who interpret Hegel's philosophy of religion in more metaphysical terms. Peter Hodgson, for instance, argues that the previous

Religions, on Hegel's view, are shapes of spirit that engage in self-conscious reflection on the absolute and their relationship to it. The object of religious reflection, therefore, is the absolute. In this respect, religion has the same object as absolute knowledge, or speculative philosophy. Religion and absolute knowledge, however, know this object in different ways. Religion has representational knowledge of the absolute. Representational knowledge takes the form of images, stories, and metaphors. (Miller's translations of *Vorstellung*, which I translate as representation, as "picture-thinking" captures the imagistic quality of this form of knowledge). Although religious knowledge of the absolute is *true* knowledge of its content, we must keep in mind that its representational form will be surpassed by absolute knowledge. What religion knows as God, absolute knowledge will know as spirit.

In Chapter VI, Hegel presents a series of religions that reflect on the absolute. Unlike in his later *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Hegel does not intend to present a history of religions, but rather a series of conceptual possibilities or standpoints that consciousness might take. He considers three such possibilities: natural religion, religion of art, and revealed religion. Natural religion and religion of art each have one-sided accounts of the absolute.[144] Revealed

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chapters of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* considered religion "from the point of view of consciousness that is conscious *of* absolute being; absolute being in and for itself, the *self*-consciousness of spirit, has not appeared in these forms. This signals a transition from an anthropological to an ontotheological perspective" (Hodgson, *Hegel and Christian Theology*, 36). See also M. Westphal, *History and Truth in Hegel's Phenomenology*, 187-207.

[144] Like earlier chapters, Chapter VII describes the progression of consciousness in logical or rational terms rather than historical terms. That is to say, the movement from one shape of spirit to another (or, here, from one religion to another) is not a matter of actual historical progression but a matter of the kind of account that a new religion would have to give in order to overcome the problems in the latter account. Nevertheless, the religions that Hegel describes in Chapter VII (like the shapes of spirit that he describes in Chapter VI) have affinities to religious communities that have actually appeared in history. On this point, see Jaeschke, *Reason in Religion*, 189-90. My discussion of Chapter VII is limited to the third shape of religion, "revealed religion." For a discussion of the earlier shapes of religion and the overall movement of Chapter VII, see Farneth, "Hegel as Philosopher of Spirit," in *Religion and European*

religion, the most conceptually adequate religious standpoint in Hegel's account, overcomes the one-sidedness insofar as it reflects on the unity of substance and subject in God.[145] Because it reflects on this unity, it will be the focus of our inquiry into religion.

Revealed religion's reflections on the unity of substance and subject in the absolute are found in its doctrines. The doctrine of the Trinity, in particular, captures revealed religion's representational knowledge of the absolute. According to this doctrine, God encompasses three persons with a single essence or nature: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Father begets the Son, who enters the world, dies for the sins of humanity, and returns to the side of the Father. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, descending into and dwelling in the Church as God's continuing presence in the community. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are consubstantial; they share a single nature.

According to revealed religion, the unity of substance and subject in the absolute is achieved through two moments of self-sacrifice. The first is the "self-emptying" of the absolute into the incarnate Son. Hegel's word for this self-emptying is *Entäußerung*, the word that Luther's Bible uses to translate the Greek *kenosis* in Philippians 2:5-7:[146] "Let the same mind be

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Philosophy: Key Thinkers from Kant to the Present, Hollis Phelps and Philip Goodchild, eds. (Durham, UK: Acumen Publishing, forthcoming).

[145] Revealed religion is Hegel's somewhat idiosyncratic appropriation of 19th century German Protestantism. Not surprisingly, this is the religious standpoint with which he was most familiar.

[146] See Pinkard's translation notes on *Entäußerung*: http://web.mac.com/titpaul/Site/Phenomenology_of_Spirit_page_files/Notes%20on%20the%20translation%20and%20small%20glossary.pdf, viii. Miller translates *Entäußerung* as "externalization"; Baillie translates it as "relinquishment." In the secondary literature, *Entäußerung* is sometimes translated as "alienation," but this runs the risk of conflating it with *Entfremdung*, which is another important Hegelian term, but which Hegel uses to rather different ends. In *A Hegel Dictionary*, for instance, Michael Inwood includes both *Entäußerung* and *Entfremdung* in his entry on "alienation and estrangement." See Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 35-38. Slavoj Žižek is among those who emphasize the distinction between these two terms. He writes: "one should not equate externalization with alienation: the externalization, which concludes a cycle of dialectical process, is not alienation; it

in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but *emptied himself* taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness."[147] God empties Godself into a humble human form. As Hodgson notes, Hegel is presenting the "classic Lutheran doctrine of the two states of Christ (humiliation and exaltation)."[148] The Son is humbled in his humanity while he is exalted in his divinity. It is important for Hegel, particularly in light of the earlier discussion of the lord and bondsman, that the Son does not regard his divinity as a reason to dominate others, to arbitrarily exercise power over them, but rather enters into equality with humanity.[149]

The second moment of self-sacrifice comes in the Son's death on the cross. Here, the Son sacrifices himself for the sake of humanity, and is resurrected and returned to the side of the Father. Spirit proceeds from their union. Hegel writes: "Spirit has two aspects in it, which are represented above as two converse propositions. One is this, that *substance* empties itself of its

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is the highest point of disalienation: one really reconciles oneself with some objective content not when one still has to strive to master and control it, but when one can afford the supreme sovereign gesture of releasing this content from oneself, of setting it free" (Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*, (London and New York: Verso Books, 2012), 231).

[147] Phil 2:5-7 NRSV (my emphasis). Luther's Bible reads: „(5) *Ein jeglicher sei gesinnt, wie Jesus Christus auch war:* (6) *welcher, ob er wohl in göttlicher Gestalt war, hielt er's nicht für einen Raub, Gott gleich sein,* (7) *sondern entäußerte sich selbst un nahm Knechtsgestalt an, ward gleich wie ein andrer Mensch und an Gebärden als ein Mensch erfunden.*" Phil 2:5-7 LU.

[148] Hodgson, *Hegel and Christian Theology*, 37.

[149] Hodgson writes, "By descending from its eternal simplicity, the absolute being (the 'Father') attains for the first time its 'highest being'—which is not the remote and inaccessible deity of rationalism, but a divesting, absolving, relational being that comes down into history and makes itself manifest (the 'Son). Essential being (*Wesen*) becomes existent, determinate being (*Sein, Dasein*) – and this is to say that it becomes spirit (*Geist*), 'the being that is the process of retaining identity with itself in its otherness.' Spirit in the immediacy of self-consciousness is the particular individual Jesus of Nazareth, as contrasted with the universal self-consciousness of the religious community. But this individual human being' as whom absolute being is manifest,' is subject to the conditions of time, space, and mortality: his being passes into having been and his sensible presence into spiritual presence. This is the passage from the Son to the Spirit" (Hodgson, *Hegel and Christian Theology*, 38).

own self and becomes self-consciousness; the other is the converse, that *self-consciousness* empties itself of itself and makes itself into thinghood, that is, into the universal self. Both aspects have in this way accommodated each other, and their true union has thereby arisen (§755/548). Spirit emerges: "By virtue of their reciprocal self-emptying, that is, where each becomes the other, spirit thus enters into existence as their unity" (§755/550). This movement ought to sound familiar from the section on confession and forgiveness. Here, as in that earlier section, the universal standpoint takes on self-conscious individuality while the self-conscious individual takes on the universal standpoint. Their actions – the confession and forgiveness in the earlier section and the self-sacrifices in revealed religion – reconcile them and give rise to spirit.

The self-sacrifices that reconcile the Father and the Son and from which the Holy Spirit emerges on revealed religion's account are different from the renunciations and sacrifices that Hegel discusses earlier in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. If Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three persons with one nature, God, then their self-sacrifices are moments *within* the life of the absolute. The one who undertakes the sacrifice already participates in the absolute, and his action is part of this participation. The renunciations and sacrifices that we have seen up to this point, however, have been expressions of consciousness's alienation from the absolute. In these cases, consciousness believes that the absolute is something wholly other than itself. Its sacrifice is intended to strip it of whatever separates it from the absolute, thereby bringing about their reconciliation.[150] In such cases, however, consciousness's sacrifice fails to bring about the

[150] The concept of sacrifice shows up throughout Hegel's corpus. In the "Tübingen Essay," as I argued at the beginning of Chapter 2, Hegel refers to both sacrament and sacrifice as "essential customs," religious practices that express the true content rather than the "formal aspect" of religion. Hegel also links sacrament and sacrifice in Part I of his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, in which he states that sacrament and sacrifice are "external forms through which the

intended result.[151] The unhappy consciousness, for instance, is characterized by its alienation from, and yearning for, the absolute. In an attempt to overcome its alienation, the unhappy consciousness tries to surrender [*aufgeben*] its this-worldly possessions, desires, and even its own will in order to reconcile with the absolute. Hegel writes that "in that self-renunciation, there is a bestowal of recognition that shifts all the power of being-for-itself away from itself and instead treats this power as a gift from above" (§229/176). The unhappy consciousness, in its renunciation, recognizes the absolute as the standard of knowledge and the ground of authority and attempts to surrender its own will in order to conform to that standard. Hegel writes that "its surrender of possessions and its abandonment of consumption likewise merely have the same negative significance, and the universal which thereby comes to be for it is in its eyes not its *own activity*" (§230/176-7). At the same time, however, its action (the renunciation) belies the insignificance that it claims for itself. The unhappy consciousness makes judgments and takes

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feeling of reconciliation is brought forth in an external and sensible manner." In terms of the classificatory scheme that he presents there, these practices belong to the second form of the cultus. The first form is characterized by inward *devotion*, the second by outward practices of *sacrament* and *sacrifice*, and the third by *repentance* (*LPR* 193-4, §334). For an excellent discussion of sacrament and sacrifice in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, see Lewis, *Religion, Modernity, and Politics in Hegel*, 169-178.

[151] Here, I provide only a brief overview of Hegel's concept of sacrifice in the *Phenomenology*. For a more detailed summary and assessment of sacrifice in the *Phenomenology*, see Paolo Diego Bubbio, "Sacrifice in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*," *British Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 20:4 (2012), 1-19. See also O'Regan 1994. George Bataille's well-known essay on Hegel's concept of sacrifice is deeply indebted to Kojeve's interpretation of the *Phenomenology*, with its emphasis on human beings' violent transformation of the given. Bataille himself states that his essay is an "excerpt from a study on the – fundamentally Hegelian – thought of Alexander Kojève" (9n1). As I argue at the beginning of Chapter 3, Kojeve's interpretation suffers from an overreliance on the master-slave section. Moreover, Bataille does not discuss sacrifice as it appears in Chapter VII, which he claims "strays from the essential" (18). As my interpretation will show, I strongly disagree with that assessment. See Bataille, "Hegel, Death and Sacrifice," trans. Jonathan Strauss, *Yale French Studies* 78 (1990) 9-28. For discussions of Hegel's concept of sacrifice in the Kojève-Bataille interpretive tradition, see Raphael Forshay, "Tarrying with the Negative: Bataille and Derrida's Reading of Negation in Hegel's Phenomenology," *The Heythrop Journal* 43:3 (2002), 295-310; and Dennis King Keenan, *The Question of Sacrifice* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), 160-173.

actions, even as it disavows its own normative authority in judging and acting as it does. Other failed sacrifices for the sake of reconciliation with the absolute include the virtuous consciousness's attempt to reconcile with the universal, the noble consciousness's attempt to reconcile with the state, and Faith's attempt to reconcile with the divine.

In each of these cases, the sacrifice fails to bring about the hoped-for reconciliation. Because consciousness thinks that the absolute is wholly other than itself, it comes to think that its action cannot bring about the unity that it desires. Consciousness attempts to efface itself, to give itself over to what it takes to be the standard of knowledge or ground of authority. In doing so, it recognizes the authority of the absolute, but denies its own responsibility and authority. Consciousness comes to see its sacrifice as yet another contingent and particular judgment and action that divides it from that which it takes to be authoritative. The action actually reinforces the divide between itself and the absolute, amplifying rather than diminishing its alienation. How can it know that *this* judgment and action is not debased? In consciousness's self-understanding (in Hegel's words, *for itself*), its sense of alienation can only become more profound.

Properly understood (that is, for consciousness *in itself*), the sacrifice participates in the absolute. The sacrifice is an action. It is performed by a subject, by a locus of authority and responsibility. If the subject sees all authority lying on the side of the other, then the sacrifice that she makes will fail. Through her action, she will try to strip herself of her particularities in order to merge with the absolute. But in taking action, she expresses and embodies an intention and a deed for which she is responsible. She remains a particular subject, fit to be held responsible. If, however, the subject sees herself as a participant in the absolute – if, that is, she knows herself to be a locus of authority and responsibility – then she knows that her sacrifice is

an action for which she is fit to be held responsible. She recognizes her role, and that of her action, in the ongoing contest of authority and responsibility.

Revealed religion knows that the moments of self-sacrifice in the life of the Trinity work in this way. The three persons of the Trinity all already participate in the absolute – indeed, they *are* the absolute. When God empties Godself into human form, the self-emptying is not an attempt to reconcile with the absolute. God is already the absolute. When the Son sacrifices himself for the sake of humanity, he is not trying to reconcile with the absolute as with an alien other. The Son already participates in the absolute. These self-sacrifices are not, therefore, a renunciation for the sake of reconciliation with the absolute; they are part of what it is to *be* the absolute. Hegel writes, "Since this self-consciousness consciously surrenders itself, it is preserved in its self-emptying and it remains the subject of the substance, but, as having emptied itself, it possesses at the same time, the consciousness of this substance; that is, since by way of its sacrifice, it *engenders* substance as subject, this subject remains its own self " (§749/545-6). Revealed religion captures the idea that the absolute is self-sufficient substance that *becomes* subject through its self-emptying. That is, through God's *kenotic* sacrifice, God becomes self-conscious subject. When the Son dies on the cross and returns to the side of the Father, the reconciliation of substance and subject is complete. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the unity of the self-emptying, self-sufficient substance (the Father) and the self-emptying, self-conscious subject (the Son), and it dwells within the this-worldly religious community: "Spirit is therefore posited within the third element, within *universal self-consciousness*; spirit is its religious community" (§781/568). The Holy Spirit, the third participant in the absolute, dwells in and, Hegel suggests, *is* the religious community itself. The religious community participates in the life of the absolute through its doctrines, rituals, and worship practices.

In its doctrines, revealed religion displays its representational knowledge of the absolute. It knows that the absolute is relational, that it contains multiple persons, and that the actions and interaction among these persons is part of what brings about the unity of substance and subject in the absolute. It represents the absolute as God, comprised of the three persons of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It tells a story about how the triune God empties Godself in order to enter the world as a subject (the Son), and about how that subject is sacrificed in order to return to the Godhead. Revealed religion, Hegel argues, is unique among religious standpoints for its recognition that the absolute becomes incarnate, becomes, that is, self-conscious. Hegel writes that "this incarnation of the divine essence, that is, that it essentially and immediately has the shape of self-consciousness, is the simple content of absolute religion. Within absolute religion, the essence is known as spirit, that is, religion is the essence's consciousness of itself being spirit, for spirit is knowledge of itself in its self-emptying; spirit is the essence which is the movement of keeping selfsameness with itself in its otherness" (§759/552). This "simple content" – that the absolute becomes self-consciousness – is the true content that revealed religion grasps. Moreover, revealed religion knows the absolute as the movement among persons that unifies them while retaining their individuality.

Revealed religion, however, knows this true content in representational form. It reflects on and relates to the absolute as God, a divinity that remains *other* than itself. Revealed religion, therefore, remains partially alienated from its object; it does not recognize itself as a full-fledged participant in the absolute. Revealed religion cannot fully overcome this alienation. It sees how substance and subject are unified in the absolute; this is what is expressed in the doctrine of the Trinity. But it does not see how its own actions participate in the absolute. God is still known as something alien to human consciousness. Hegel writes, "Something in [revealed religion's]

object is kept secret from *consciousness* if the object is an *other* for consciousness, that is, *alien* to it, and if consciousness does not know the object as *itself*" (§759/552). God is "an other for consciousness," and the relationships among the three persons of the Trinity are conceived in terms of the one-time historical event of the birth, death, and resurrection of the Son. Hegel writes:

> The *past* and *remoteness* are merely the incomplete form of the way in which the immediate mode is mediated, that is, is posited universally. This latter is merely superficially plunged into the element of thought, preserved within that element as a sensuous mode, and not posited as being at one with the nature of thought itself. It has been merely elevated into *representational thought*, for this is the synthetic combination of sensuous immediacy and its universality, that is, thought. (§764/556)

Revealed religion represents the incarnation as an historical event, which is past and remote. Its insight is "superficially plunged" into thought, grasped in a way that is sensuous and representational. The three persons of the Trinity – the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – are still understood as separate from consciousness itself; revealed religion fails to grasp how the incarnation can be "at one with the nature of thought itself." As Lewis writes, "Religion cannot completely grasp the community's reflective practices as themselves constitutive of the absolute essence or the social world as expressive of this essence."[152]

This is not to say that revealed religion is false. Indeed, Hegel insists that revealed religion is *true*, but it is true in this representational form.[153] He writes: "the *content* is the true

[152] Lewis, "Religion and Demythologization," 194.
[153] Lewis describes Hegel's philosophy of religion as *projectionist*: "religious representations portray the absolute as other than both the consciousness of the human community and actuality

content, but all of its moments, posited as lying within the element of the activity of representing, have the character of not having been comprehended. Rather, they appear as completely self-sufficient components which are *externally* related to each another" (§765/556). Revealed religion grasps its content in terms of discrete moments and historical events. It does not grasp its content, the absolute, as thought itself.

To grasp this content as thought itself is to move from the realm of representation to the realm of concept. When the *kenotic* sacrifice represented in the incarnation is grasped conceptually rather than representationally, it is known to be the self-emptying of the self-conscious subject who relinquishes his absolute self-certainty in order to submit himself to the judgment of others. This insight follows from the end of Chapter VI. Conscience takes itself to be a self-sufficient absolute; it believes that its own convictions and self-knowledge are authoritative. Being self-sufficient, however, it does not ever become *subject*. That is to say, it does not ever become *fit to be held responsible*. It fails to empty itself of its self-sufficiency and to submit itself to the judgment of others. The assurance that others extended to it was no more than a mere echo of its own conviction, now contentless and worthless. The wicked consciousness and the judging consciousness, however, overcome this impasse by relinquishing the absolute self-certainty that Hegel describes in the earlier section on conscience. The wicked consciousness admits its fallibility, but recognizes that its can also judge the other. The judging consciousness admits that it, too, is fallible and subject to criticism and correction, but that this does not mean it cannot also be a judge. Each one is self-sufficient (in the relevant sense) and fit

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proper. Rather than recognizing the community's reflective practices as themselves constituting the absolute essence, religion projects this absolute onto an object conceived as other than this consciousness" ("Religion and Demythologization," 195). Westphal also claims that Hegel's philosophy of religion is a theory of projection, but he argues that "one is not to infer from the projective nature of religion that it is an illusion" (195); see note 21 below.

to be held responsible. Rightly understood, this is the heart of absolute spirit – the community of subjects who reciprocally recognize authority, hold responsible, submit to judgment, and admit to fallibility.[154]

The same move from representation to concept can be made with respect to other elements of religious doctrine.[155] Like the incarnation, for instance, reconciliation appears to revealed religion as "something *remote*, something far away in the *future*, just as the reconciliation which the other *self* achieved appears as something remote in the *past*" (§787/574). Revealed religion contends that the Son's death, resurrection, and return to the side of the Father was a historical event that took place and is now past. Ordinary human beings' reconciliation with God will happen in the future and in an other-worldly beyond. Revealed religion, once again, experiences itself as alienated from the absolute. This alienation is revealed religion *in itself*, not *for itself* – which is to say that revealed religion actually participates in the absolute, but it does not fully recognize this.[156] Hegel writes, "Its reconciliation exists thereby

[154] Westphal's discussion includes an account of how Hegel anticipates Émile Durkheim's account of religion in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, in which gods and deities function as totemic objects, symbols of the religious community itself (*History and Truth in Hegel's Phenomenology*, 195-199). Westphal suggests that, for Hegel, religion is an outward *projection* of collective self-consciousness. In this, Westphal writes, Hegel's philosophy is similar to Durkheim's. This is also true with respect to religious rituals, including sacrifice. Durkheim claims that religious rituals are both products of and productive of the collective self-consciousness of the community. For Durkheim, Westphal notes, "Man does create his gods and is yet sustained by them, for he makes his own society, on which he is in turn dependent. The purpose of the rite, be it sacrifice or any other, is 'to revivify the most essential elements of the collective consciousness. Through it, the group periodically renews the sentiment which it has of itself and of its unity; at the same time, individuals are strengthened in their social natures'" (198). What Westphal (and Durkheim) neglect to explain, however, is the way that a group's beliefs and values might change over time, and the role that rituals and other religious practice might play in this process.

[155] For more on Hegel's account of the particular doctrines of revealed religion, see Crites, *Dialectic and Gospel*, 497-517.

[156] While Hegel's criticism is directed toward revealed religion's account of reconciliation, it also applies to other religious standpoints as well. This is due to Hegel's very conception of

within its heart, but it is still estranged from its consciousness, and its actuality is still fractured" (§787/574). Revealed religion reconciles with the absolute through its beliefs, practices, and institutions, but remains unaware that these constitute a shape of spirit in and through which they generate and sustain the absolute.

The reconciliation that revealed religion attains in its own practices is obscured by doctrines that project this reconciliation outward. The true content of the incarnation is that the absolute empties itself into the self-conscious subject, and the true content of the reconciliation is that the unified absolute comprises the self-emptying movements of the self-conscious subject and the self-sufficient substance. When the true content of reconciliation is known conceptually, rather than representationally, it sheds the characters and stories of revealed religion and becomes the content of thought itself. This brings us to absolute knowledge.

Absolute Knowledge: Spirit as the Absolute

Revealed religion captures true content in its doctrines, but Hegel argues that the representational form of religious reflection on this content is surpassed by the conceptual form of absolute knowledge. The final phenomenological transition in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is the transition from religion to absolute knowledge. Chapter VIII, the brief and, frankly, perplexing ultimate chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, outlines what absolute knowledge of religion and philosophy's shared content entails.

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religion. Because religion is spirit's reflection on the absolute, without philosophy's recognition that spirit's self-consciousness itself constitutes the absolute, religion must be alienated from its object. As Walter Jaeschke notes, "What Hegel says about the Christian community is true for religion as a whole: 'it is the spiritual self-consciousness that is not an object to itself as this self-consciousness, or that does not unfold itself to a consciousness of itself'" (Jaeschke, *Reason in Religion*, 192).

The brevity (and the perplexity) of Chapter VIII is often attributed to external factors that impinged on the writing of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, including the fraught personal and political circumstances under which Hegel labored to complete the text and the initial conception of the project as an introduction a much longer and more comprehensive *System der Wissenschaft* (such that Chapter VIII was intended to be a bridge to another work in which, presumably, Hegel would fill in what he merely sketches here).[157] Yet there is also an intrinsic reason for its brevity: the content and object of absolute knowledge is none other than the movement of spirit itself, as presented through the dialectical movements of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*: "The *goal*, absolute knowledge, that is, spirit knowing itself as spirit, has its path in the recollection of spirits as they are in themselves and as they achieve the organization of their realm" (§808/591). The culmination of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, in other words, is the recollection of the progression of the shapes of consciousness and shapes of spirit, *in themselves* (as opposed to *for themselves*). As readers of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, we have followed consciousness on this voyage of discovery. Absolute knowledge does not know anything that Hegel's readers have not experienced or encountered on this voyage.[158]

The reader cannot be faulted for initially supposing that absolute knowledge must add up to something more than this. The audacious phrase "absolute knowledge" seems to imply omniscience and infallibility. Hegel's concept of the absolute, however, need not entail

[157] In addition to the social and political context mentioned in the introduction to the dissertation, personal factors included Hegel's increasing financial distress along with pressure from the publisher to complete the manuscript. Pinkard *Hegel*, 221-230.

[158] Westphal makes a similar point about what I am calling the intrinsic reason for the brevity of the final chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. He writes, "So far as 'we' are concerned, nothing remains to be done, for 'we' are supposed to have seen throughout the preceding chapter that the truth of religion lies in correcting its misleading form by recognizing the divine to be nothing beyond us but the social whole of which we are parts" (Westphal, *History and Truth in Hegel's Phenomenology* 211).

completeness or certainty of that sort. What Hegel is signaling with his use of the term "absolute" is that this account of knowledge will avoid the forms of one-sidedness that follow from the dualistic conception of subjectivity and objectivity. It will avoid treating anything that is merely given as self-sufficiently contentful and authoritative, on the one hand, and it will avoid skepticism, on the other hand. That means that it must be able to give non-arbitrary answers to the questions: What can subjects know about the world? How confident can we be in our knowledge? What grounds the authority of our beliefs, norms, and practices?

Hegel thinks that the answer to these questions lies in absolute knowledge's self-sufficiency and its self-consciousness. Absolute knowledge is self-sufficient insofar as the standard of knowledge is neither wholly subjective nor wholly objective. Hegel writes that "spirit has shown itself to us to be neither the mere withdrawal of self-consciousness into its pure inwardness, nor the mere absorption of self-consciousness into substance and the non-being of its distinction" (§804/587). Absolute knowledge cannot be a one-sided affair. It does not privilege the authority of the inward-facing consciousness nor of the independent substance. Instead, it unites substance and subject in the continual movement of thought.

The absolute knowledge of philosophy is the self-consciousness of spirit. Like the triune God of revealed religion, spirit is the unity of substance and subject achieved through their self-emptying and reconciliation. Unlike the triune God, however, the participants in spirit engage in sacrifice and reconciliation over and over again. The movement by which the absolute sacrifices itself to enter the world, dies, and reconciles with the absolute, is the perpetually-recurring structure of absolute knowledge. Hegel writes:

> This substance, which is spirit, is its *coming-to-be* what it, the substance, is *in itself*; and it is as this coming-to-be which is taking a reflective turn into itself that

> spirit is truly in itself *spirit*. Spirit is in itself the movement which is cognition – the transformation of that former *in-itself* into *for-itself*, of *substance* into *subject*, of the object of *consciousness* into the object of *self-consciousness*, i.e. into an object that is just as much sublated, that is, into the *concept*. This transformation is the circle returning back into itself, which presupposes its beginning and reaches its beginning only at the end. (§802/585)

Spirit, Hegel writes, is the "movement which is cognition," the movement of substance into subject and back again. It is the ongoing movement of thought that takes what appears given or self-sufficient into self-consciousness. Spirit is consciousness that recognizes itself – its own movement – as its object. Spirit, this ongoing process, is the absolute.

Just as revealed religion knows that the persons of the Trinity are united through their self-emptying, Hegel argues that absolute knowledge knows that substance and subject are united through a kind of sacrifice. He writes that "spirit has shown itself to be this movement of the self which empties itself of itself and immerses itself in its substance, and which likewise, as subject, has taken both the inward turn into itself from out of that substance and has made its substance into an object and a content, just as it has sublated this distinction between objectivity and content" (§804/587-8). Spirit is both the object and the content of its thought; it knows itself to be this movement of the self through the moments of self-emptying and reconciliation. Thus, it experiences both self-sufficient substantiality and self-conscious subjectivity in a perpetual dialectic.

Spirit is the object and content of absolute knowledge. What this means is that absolute knowledge entails no more and no less than what we readers of the *Phenomenology* know by this point in the text. What we know, and the way we know it, has everything to do with what other

human beings have believed and said and done. The ideas, experiences, concepts, categories, forms, and norms of those who came before structure experience. Absolute knowledge reflects on the shapes of consciousness and shapes of spirit that have appeared before it, and it knows their strengths and weaknesses. Knowledge of these strengths and weaknesses are bequeathed to it; they become the object and content of thought, of knowledge. One thinks with and about the concepts, categories, norms, and forms that have been bequeathed to one by others.

The standard of absolute knowledge is intersubjective. Absolute knowledge knows that norms and normative authority are grounded in the social practices of recognitive communities. In these communities, individuals share responsibility for upholding their collective norms. They use these norms, judge others' use of them, and hold one another accountable for them. All the while, these individuals move from the absolute self-certainty of the conscience individual to the self-emptying of the wicked and judging consciousnesses who submit to the judgment of others. They recognize themselves and others as capable of error. Not only these individuals but also the community that they constitute risk their norms by submitting them to the judgment of others. When the members of a community are no longer willing to uphold a norm – to use it, to judge others according to it – it becomes a matter of contestation.

The *Phenomenology of Spirit* is a story about the standard of knowledge and the ground of authority, and, in this sense, absolute knowledge is the story's ending. Absolute knowledge is knowledge of the self-sufficient and self-conscious standard of knowledge expressed and embodied in the social practices of a community. At the end of Chapter VI, the wicked and judging consciousness have expressed and embodied this standard of knowledge and ground of authority through their practices of acting, judging, confessing, and forgiving. But they do not engage in self-conscious reflection on this. In Chapter VII, revealed religion expresses and

embodies this standard of knowledge and ground of authority through its practices, and it reflects on it in its doctrines. But revealed religion still thinks of the absolute as something from which it is at least partially alienated. In Chapter VIII, however, the beliefs and actions of individuals like the wicked and judging consciousnesses are recognized as and reflected upon as the absolute itself. That is to say, their beliefs and actions, their ways of granting authority and holding accountable, become both the content and object of thought and knowledge.

Unlike earlier shapes of spirit, which were unable to provide an adequate account of norms and normative authority, absolute spirit is able to account for normative authority as self-sufficient and non-arbitrary. It can give an account of its beliefs and practices that explains their *content* and their *authority*. Its members know that their beliefs and practices are contentful, or meaningful, on account of the content-generating practices of speaking and acting in this community over time. What gives them content is the history of concept use in that community. They also know that their beliefs and practices count as authoritative for them, for they know that their norms are embedded in and sustained by social practices of reciprocal recognition, intersubjective relations of granting authority and holding responsible, that both sustain norms and enable their scrutiny and critique. What gives them authority is the intersubjective structure of self-consciousness and responsibility.

Returning to Pippin's claim, discussed at the end of Chapter 3, that the "the aspiration for a culminating reconciliation is everywhere in Hegel, but everywhere elusive," we can now see the sense in which a culminating reconciliation does and does not elude us.[159] Absolute knowledge is absolute spirit's self-consciousness. In absolute knowledge, consciousness knows itself as a participant in spirit and spirit knows itself as the absolute. In other words, spirit

[159] Pippin, "Recognition and Reconciliation," 140.

knows itself as the source of norms and the ground of normative authority. Consciousness's experience no longer leads beyond itself; its account of the standard of knowledge, or of how something comes to be authoritative for it, no longer needs revision in the face of its experience of its object. This is the sense in which absolute knowledge is the endpoint of consciousness's voyage of discovery.

In another sense, however, this endpoint is not an ending at all, for absolute knowledge does not mark the end of mediation, contestation, or revision. Absolute knowledge is spirit's reflection on and participation in the never-ending mediation among the individual-yet-consubstantial people of whom spirit consists. The movement from one shape of spirit to the next has ceased because consciousness has arrived at an adequate account of how authority is generated. Authority, consciousness now knows, is generated through intersubjective practices in which people hold one another accountable for their beliefs, actions, and norms. Absolute spirit is the process, writ large, in which norms are enacted, sustained, and contested. This does not mean that mediation does not continue within this shape of spirit; indeed, mediation without closure is what absolute spirit is. Spirit's knowledge of itself as the source of normative authority does not guarantee that any particular norms will be authoritative. Its account of authority, in other words, does not point to certain gender norms or specify what counts as self-sacrifice or anything else on this order. These are the very matters that are subject to debate. It does suggest what it would take to be entitled to hold one or another view about one of these topics, or how others might structure their response to such a view. Absolute knowledge, therefore, requires the perpetual relinquishment of the posture of self-sufficiency. In absolute knowledge, the self-conscious subject knows "its limit." Hegel writes: "To know its limit means to know that it is to sacrifice itself (§807/590). Spirit knows that knowledge *is* this ongoing

movement out from itself, into the world, and back again. In Hegel's account of spirit, there are resolutions, but no culminating resolution. There is reconciliation, but also agon. Underlying absolute spirit – and this is why it stands at the top of the dialectical ladder, Hegel thinks – is the acknowledgement that human beings are going to get things wrong, time and time again. Human error, difference, disagreement, and the possibility of changing norms are built into the shape of absolute spirit. [160]

Hegel's conception of the absolute does not require the end of conflict. As Crites writes, "What Hegel calls spirit is not so diaphanous as it sounds, nor is its absoluteness so conversation-stopping."[161] In absolute spirit, individuals still have diverse commitments, and they are bound to draw different conclusions from their experiences of the world. Unlike the members of Greek *Sittlichkeit*, these individuals do not merely play roles that are assigned to them. Rather, they recognize their individual and collective responsibility for their roles and norms.[162] When these individuals hold themselves and others responsible for their beliefs and

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[160] The other part of Pippin's claim is that Hegel does not specify the practices and institutions that accompany absolute spirit. As I suggested at the end of Chapter 3, Pippin is largely right about the lack of institutions in Hegel's account of absolute spirit. Hegel discusses such institutions primarily in the *Philosophy of Right*. Yet I submit that it is also the case that these institutions are part of the contestable content of absolute spirit. In Part II of the dissertation, I suggest an *ethos*, a set of practices, and a few institutions that might actualize Hegel's insights about absolute spirit in a quite different social and political context from the one in which he wrote the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

[161] Crites, *Dialectic and Gospel*, 445. I am not certain whether Crites was self-consciously alluding to Richard Rorty's 1994 essay, "Religion as Conversation-stopper." Whether or not the allusion was self-conscious, the connection is apt. In that essay, Rorty contends that religion is best kept out of the public square, for religion is a conversation stopper; it causes vital political discussions to break down. Crites's comment suggests that Hegel's "absolute spirit" is not to be understood as a form of life in which claims to *a priori* knowledge of the absolute serve as trump cards that end discussion, deliberation, or debate. See Richard Rorty, "Religion as Conversation-stopper (1994)," republished in *Philosophy and Social Hope*, London and New York: Penguin Books, 1999. 168-174.

[162] Of course, even if these individuals recognize human beings as the authors of those social roles and norms, and even if they take responsibility for them, there are questions to be asked

actions, they do so from particular and contingent standpoints. Each acknowledges the corrigibility of her convictions, while rejecting the idea of a permanent gap between self-consciousness and its object.

Despite his reputation as a triumphalist thinker, Hegel's account of absolute spirit is poignant. It may overcome the formal tragedy of Greek *Sittlichkeit* – the conflict between two one-sided characters who refuse to acknowledge their own normative authority – but it provides no way out of human fallibility, finitude, loss, and impermanence. Hegel takes these features of human life seriously, building them into his account of how we believe, know, and act. The subject gives up the self-certain posture of the conscientious individual in order to submit herself and her actions to the judgment of others. In so doing, she risks censure and misrecognition. Hegel ends the *Phenomenology* with an invocation of memory and Golgatha, reminders that history and sacrifice are the conditions for the possibility of reconciliation. As Hegel wrote all the way back in the Preface, "the spirit of life is not a life that is fearing death and austerely saving itself from ruin; rather, it bears death calmly and in death, it sustains itself. Spirit only wins its truth by finding its feet within its absolute disruption" (§32/36).

Agon and Reconciliation

With this understanding of absolute spirit in mind, we can return to the two questions raised at the outset of this chapter: What does Hegel mean by God? And what is the relationship between the *ongoing* practices of conflict and reconciliation and the picture of absolute spirit sketched in the final paragraph of Chapter VI? In that paragraph, recall, Hegel states that "the reconciling *yes*, in which both I's let go of their opposed *existence*, is the existence of the *I*

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about the extent to which individuals can rationally revise the roles and norms that have been bequeathed to and inculcated in them.

expanded into two-ness, which therein remains selfsame and which has the certainty of itself in its complete self-emptying and in its opposite. –It is God appearing in the midst of those who know themselves as pure knowledge" (§671/494).

In this passage, Hegel describes the way that the wicked and judging consciousnesses – the two I's – sublate themselves, overcoming the one-sidedness of their accounts of the authority of their beliefs and practices. The wicked consciousness relinquishes its belief that there are no external grounds for judging its commitments, and thereby acknowledges that others have the standing to judge its beliefs and actions. The judging consciousness relinquishes its belief that it has incorrigible access to the universal point of view, and likewise acknowledges that others have the standing to judge its beliefs and actions. Each of the two consciousnesses recognizes itself and the other as a subject, a locus of authority and responsibility.

Each consciousness relinquishes something that it initially took to be part of its identity. Although Hegel uses the same term, self-emptying, that he uses to describe the incarnation and crucifixion, the ones who engage in this self-emptying are not the persons of the Trinity. Instead, we find two human consciousnesses emptying themselves by "let[ting] go of their opposed existence." Returning to the sacramental language that he used to describe the two consciousnesses' confession and forgiveness, Hegel writes that God appears in and through their words and deeds.

At the same time, Hegel states that each individual "remains selfsame." The two individuals relinquish their one-sidedness, their absolute self-certainty, but they do not lose their individual subjectivity. Unlike the unhappy consciousness, who tries to reconcile itself with the absolute through the renunciation of its own authority, the two I's described here bestow recognition on *one another*, each recognizing itself *and* the other as a locus of authority. The

sacrifice involves neither the renunciation of one's authority nor the disavowal of one's responsibility. Instead, the two I's recognize themselves as intentional subjects who are responsible for their actions, the commitments entailed by them, and the consequences of them. The self-consciousness of the subject requires recognition of and by another self-conscious subject – "the I expanded into two-ness." For Hegel, self-consciousness requires *two* I's, who are distinct yet interdependent. It is *two* individuals, not one alone, that are capable of producing the doubled subject-object relation that characterizes reciprocal recognition and absolute spirit.

The two consciousnesses are not destroyed or effaced in their self-emptying. Each "remains selfsame" and "has the certainty of itself in its complete self-emptying and in its opposite." Unlike the unhappy consciousness, the virtuous consciousness, the noble consciousness, and Faith, these two consciousnesses overcome the alienation between themselves and their object, because they recognize their parity. The wicked and judging consciousnesses recognize one another. Each gives up its distinct pretenses to absolute self-certainty, but each retains its self as a locus of responsibility. Because its sacrifice is "not an abasement, nor a humiliation, nor is it a matter of casting himself aside," the individual retains its sense of self and other as distinct subjects whose actions have moral authority and who are therefore fit to be held responsible.

Through their confession and forgiveness, the wicked and judging consciousnesses forge a relationship of reciprocal recognition. To confess and forgive as the wicked and judging consciousness do requires that each relinquish its pretense of absolute self-certainty. The ironic self-certainty of the wicked consciousness and the absolute self-certainty of the judging consciousness are the two (failed) postures available in the shape of spirit called conscience. In

relinquishing these postures, the wicked and judging consciousnesses recognize that they are responsible *for* their commitments *to* others in their community.

Each recognizes that it makes normative judgments about what to believe and how to act. These judgments are themselves subject to judgment as correct or incorrect by others in the community. Those others' judgments, in turn, are subject to judgment as correct or incorrect by still others. No individual has a God's eye view of things. The *kenotic* sacrifice that each individual makes is itself a relinquishment of the idea that such a view is possible.

When two or more individuals relinquish the posture of self-certainty and mutually confess to and forgive one another, the relationship that emerges between them is one of reciprocal recognition. Each individual recognizes itself and the other as an agent and a judge, a confessor and forgiver. The shape of spirit marked by networks of such relationships is *absolute spirit*.

The debate among scholars about how to understand Hegel's account of absolute spirit is sometimes characterized as a debate between metaphysical and non-metaphysical interpretations. This characterization, however, only adds to the confusion. Neither interpretation suggests that absolute spirit is the God of orthodox Christianity or a transcendent divinity of another sort. Frederick Beiser, a critic of the post-Kantian interpretation of Hegel, writes that "if metaphysics consists in speculation about such a [transcendent] realm, then Hegel would be the first to condemn it as a pseudo-science. It is necessary to stress that Hegel's own concept of the infinite or unconditioned is entirely immanent: the infinite does not exist beyond the finite world but only within it."[163] According to Hegel, the absolute cannot be a wholly transcendent other. The interpretive debate does not break down along these lines.

[163] Beiser, *Hegel*, 55.

The interpretative debate is better understood as a debate about how Hegel conceives the relationship between religion and philosophy's account of the absolute. When Hegel writes that the "reconciling *yes*" is "God appearing in the midst of those who know themselves as pure knowledge," he uses the religious term "God" to refer to that which emerges from the confession and forgiveness of the wicked and judging consciousnesses. The interpretive challenge is to figure out the extent to which this religious term squares with the philosophical term "spirit." Beiser, on the one side, argues that "since Hegel thinks that philosophy attempts to know God through reason, and since he understands God to be infinite or unconditioned, it follows that his philosophy is a metaphysics, and indeed in roughly the Kantian sense; for it attempts to acquire knowledge of the unconditioned through pure reason."[164] Claiming that philosophy attempts to know God (rather than spirit or the absolute), Beiser minimizes the difference between religion and philosophy and equates God, spirit, and the absolute. On his account, philosophy is an attempt to "know God."

On the other side, the social-practical account of spirit contends that philosophy is not an attempt to know the infinite and unconditioned God, but rather, an attempt to know the standard of knowledge and ground of authority. Philosophy knows this standard to be its own self-sufficient and self-conscious activity – the activity of taking action, making judgments, holding oneself and others accountable, *and* of reflecting on the entire process itself. On this account, spirit knows itself as the absolute.

On this account, moreover, substance and subject are unified in the absolute through social practices. Absolute spirit is substantial both in the sense that it is self-sufficient and in the sense that it is contentful. It is self-sufficient because it can give an account of how and why its

[164] *Ibid*.

norms have the authority that they do, built into which is the possibility that new experiences may reveal that those norms are in need of refinement, revision, or rejection. Such normative revision can take place without the community's account of the grounds of authority itself collapsing. Norms can be contested or revised, even as the account of what it would take for these norms to have authority remains stable. Furthermore, it is contentful because it recognizes the socially and historically-embedded nature of this process, the process by which norms are created, sustained, and transformed. Absolute spirit is also subject. It is a self-conscious locus of authority and responsibility, a set of beliefs, practices, and institutions that are reflected upon and upheld or challenged by the members of the community that constitute it.

There *is* something emergent about absolute spirit, even on the social-practical account. The spirit that proceeds from the unity of substance and subject is more than the sum of its parts. It is irreducible to the dyad of wicked consciousness and judging consciousness, or Father and Son, or substance and subject. Whether or not we call this emergent property "metaphysical" seems to me to be a matter of semantics. What is more important, on the social-practical account, is that spirit comprises the individual members of a community and it emerges and evolves in response to their social practices – including rituals like burial rites, devotional practices, confession and forgiveness, and sacrifice. When the members of a community reflect on these practices, and on their role as subjects who engage in them, they become self-conscious of their own normative authority, aware of their participation in the absolute.

Conclusion

Absolute knowledge is the endpoint of consciousness's voyage of discovery. It marks the point at which knowledge "no longer has the need to go beyond itself, that is, where knowledge

comes around to itself, and where the concept corresponds to the object and the object to the concept" (§80/74). At the end of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, consciousness arrives at this knowledge, and it recognizes the self-sufficient absolute or standard of knowledge.

Consciousness could not have arrived at this standard of knowledge without having travelled through the earlier shapes of spirit. It has learned from the strengths and weaknesses of previous accounts of the standard, and it is in a position to provide a diachronic and dialectical account of how it has incorporated their strengths and overcome their weaknesses. Unlike the members of Greek *Sittlichkeit*, the participants in absolute spirit know that the authority of their norms is neither fixed nor immediately given. Unlike Faith and Enlightenment, they know that authority depends on public action as much as private reason or experience. And unlike conscience, they know that authority depends not only on subjective conviction but also on shared social practices of agon and recognition. The shape of spirit that emerges with the confession and forgiveness of the wicked and judging consciousnesses involves a new account of authority and a new relationship to the conflicts that arise within it. Absolute spirit does not eliminate conflict; rather, it is characterized by agonism, ongoing difference, disagreement and struggle in the context of reciprocal recognition, punctuated by moments of reconciliation.

The preceding chapters have presented a social-practical account of spirit. In this account, I have tried to ascribe to Hegel only those commitments that he would acknowledge as his own. As I have discussed throughout these chapters, there are vigorous debates in contemporary scholarship about how Hegel ought to be interpreted on his own terms: does he reject Kant's philosophical system and advocate a form of Spinozist metaphysics, or does he accept and extend Kant's critique of such pre-critical metaphysics? Does Hegel's absolute spirit overcome conflict once and for all, or is it an agonistic form of life in which difference and

conflict persist? These are certainly not the only questions that preoccupy Hegel interpreters, but they are the two that I have addressed most explicitly in the foregoing pages. Regarding the first of these two questions, I have answered in accord with the post-Kantian interpretation developed by philosophers and scholars of religion such as Robert Brandom, Thomas Lewis, Robert Pippin, Terry Pinkard, Paul Redding, and Sally Sedgwick, although I have also paid serious attention to Hegel's use of religious categories and concepts. Regarding the second question, I have argued that the social practices that generate and sustain absolute spirit include not only practices of recognition and reconciliation, but also practices of contestation.

In addition to these interpretive debates, however, there are a number of equally important and contentious debates about what contemporary perspective on religion, ethics, and politics one ought to develop when reading Hegel. The interpreters of Hegel mentioned above are typically less engaged in this constructive project than various other contemporary theorists who have drawn on Hegel in the development of political and ethical positions.[165] The next two chapters turn from the interpretive debates to these contemporary religious, ethical, and political debates. The social-practical account of spirit developed in the preceding chapters turns out to have important implications for these debates. Hegel's account of spirit provides insight into the nature of ethical conflicts; the promises and perils of various ways of organizing social and political life; and the possibility of a community marked by a dialectic of ongoing conflict and reconciliation.

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[165] This distinction is roughly parallel to Brandom's distinction between *de dicto* and *de re* modes of ascribing commitments. In *de dicto* ascription, the interpreter employs only those commitments that the interpretee herself endorses. In *de re* ascription, the interpreter draws on those commitments and employs substitutional commitments and inferences to reach conclusions that the interpretee may or may not herself endorse. Robert B. Brandom, *Making It Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 503ff.

Hegel's philosophy, as abstract as it often is, was motivated by pressing social and political concerns. The *Phenomenology of Spirit* was written against the backdrop of the French revolution and the Reign of Terror and at the collapse of the Holy Roman Empire. Hegel was hopeful about the latent possibilities of his changing society, but he was also worried. What would this bigger and more diverse polity look like? What authority would it have over citizens – and what authority would citizens have over it? What beliefs, practices, and institutions would citizens need to cultivate in order to sustain it? Similar questions are with us still. In democratic thought and practice, we find debates about the authority of the sovereign, about the relationship between religion and politics, and about the role of reason (or reasoning) in political debate. It is to these debates, and to sketching out a Hegelian perspective on them, that I now turn.

CHAPTER FIVE: Religion and Philosophy in a Diverse Society

Religious people of many sorts are likely to object to the picture of religion and philosophy that Hegel sketches in the final chapters of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. According to Hegel, religion and philosophy share the same true content, but know this content in different forms. This shared content is "the absolute," that object which they take to be the self-sufficient standard of knowledge. Religion knows this standard in a representational form; philosophy knows it in a conceptual form. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel claims that philosophy's knowledge of the absolute surpasses religion's. Philosophy occupies a higher rung on Hegel's dialectical ladder than religion.[166]

It is easy to see why religious people might find this picture objectionable. Hegel claims that the philosophical view of the absolute presented in Chapter VIII is true, while the religious views of the absolute presented in Chapter VII are, if insightful, at least *partially* false.[167] While consciousness has learned something from the religious views of the absolute that it encountered

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[166] I presented an earlier version of parts of this chapter at the Brown-Yale-Princeton-PTS Ethics Colloquium at Yale University in September 2013. Many thanks to the audience for their helpful questions and comments.

[167] Someone could, however, adopt the standpoint of philosophy with respect to God and authority and still be compelled to participate in religious communities and practices. Hegel seems to open the door to this in his later work, especially the 1827 *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, in which he suggests that religion can cultivate virtue and combat alienation in a way that philosophy cannot. On this point, see Thomas A. Lewis, "Religion, Reconciliation, and Modern Society: The Shifting Conclusions of Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*," *Harvard Theological Review* 106 (2013): 37-60.

One example of such a view would be Mordechai Kaplan's view of Judaism as a religious civilization, a form of life whose practices and norms govern the members of the community, even as these norms are challenged and changed by them in light of new situations. I hope to pursue this connection in future work. Although this chapter deals primarily with challenges posed to me by Augustinian Christians, and hence on the resources for a Hegelian view of normativity within Christian theology, the argument is compatible with resources found in other religious traditions as well.

on its voyage of discovery, Hegel claims that it has preserved the strengths and overcome the weaknesses of those views in absolute knowledge. While religion may have been an indispensable rung on the ladder to the philosophical view of the absolute, Hegel leaves the impression at the end of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* that once consciousness has attained the standpoint of absolute knowledge that ladder can be kicked away.

If Hegel's views of these matters are to offer anything to members of a diverse modern society, two pressing questions must be addressed. First, how does the philosophical view of the absolute – which I have called the social-practical account of authority – bear on our understanding of diverse and often conflicting beliefs and practices? I argue that it offers a compelling account of how individuals go about justifying their commitments to one another, as well as a way of understanding how these commitments, at the individual and social level, can change over time. These two processes – the justification of commitments and the change of norms over time – take place in even the most homogenous societies, but an adequate understanding of how they take place when individuals do not presume to share foundational commitments is an important contribution to an understanding of pluralism. As I will suggest, Hegel's social-practical account of authority is at odds with some religious accounts of authority, but it nevertheless provides a compelling account of what people are doing when they are arguing over beliefs, norms, and values.

Second, is a commitment to the social-practical account of authority compatible with a commitment to pluralism? At first glance, some might say that it is not. After all, Hegel's philosophical view of the absolute claims to have surpassed all others. Can someone be committed to pluralism while claiming that one's own commitments are the best or truest ones? Some will object that this kind of exclusivism is inappropriate in a diverse modern society, a

violation of the liberal toleration that sustains such a society in the midst of difference.[168] Others, meanwhile, will object that the philosophical view is simply wrong, and that a religious view of the absolute provides a better, truer account of the authority of social norms and standards. I argue that, while the social-practical account of authority is not compatible with all religious views, it *is* compatible with a commitment to pluralism. It insists that, in any society, competing commitments and values must be aired, and that the justification of commitments (including its own) requires that they enter this space of contestation. Moreover, there is nothing anti-pluralist about claiming that one's beliefs are better or truer than the alternatives. That's simply what it is to be committed to them. Pluralism, by its nature, is a state of affairs in which people have a multiplicity of commitments, many of which turn out to be incompatible with others. The inhabitants of a pluralist society can hold commitments that are at odds with commitments held by others in the society, while nevertheless remaining engaged in conversations and collective action with those others. Hegel can help us see how this is so.

This chapter seeks to address these two questions in greater detail. First, I describe the way that, on the social-practical account, commitments are justified and norms change through social practices of agon and recognition. Then, taking up recent Christian accounts of interfaith dialogue and ad hoc apologetics, I model the sort of engagement across difference that this account recommends. I conclude the chapter by beginning to suggest the social practices that, on the Hegelian account, sustain the diverse society over time.

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[168] It seems to me that this view of tolerance, however, takes us closer to relativism than to pluralism. Properly understood, tolerance involves the endurance of objectionable differences; if we do not object to the difference, we are not tolerating it, but rather accepting it or acting indifferently towards it. My views on tolerance have been shaped by John Bowlin's forthcoming work, *On Tolerance and Forbearance: Moral Inquiries Natural and Supernatural*, and his careful explication of tolerance as a virtue.

Justification and Normative Change on the Social-Practical Account

Chapters 1-4 highlighted Hegel's social-practical account of authority in Chapter VI of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. This is Hegel's claim that the absolute – the standard of knowledge and the ground of authority – is the self-conscious movement of thought and action. Through social practices, individuals and communities express their commitments; at the same time, they actualize them, exposing them to judgment, criticism, and correction. This whole process, along with individuals' and communities' self-conscious reflection on it, generates and sustains norms and normative authority.

One of the challenges of pluralism is to see how norms and normative authority are generated and sustained when the members of the community disagree about which beliefs are justified and which norms have authority. The social-practical account of authority outlined in the previous chapters provides a compelling view of how this happens, even when the individuals involved disagree about which beliefs, norms, and institutions they ought to endorse. This account suggests how individuals justify their commitments in the midst of deep and abiding disagreements – as well as an account of how they cope with and, sometimes, overcome such disagreements.

Hegel's attention to the question of how individuals justify their commitments comes at the outset of Chapter VI, with his transition to an account of spirit and the social and historical context in which consciousness seeks the standard of knowledge. Unlike truth, justification is a social-practical affair, a process with social and historical dimensions. When I make a judgment, I am making a claim about what is true. While the truth that I claim for my judgment is not context-dependent, any argument that I make on behalf of the claim *is*. What I am justified in believing, endorsing, or doing depends not on universal and timeless reasons but on the strengths

and weaknesses of other past and present claims. My own claim is *justified* if it meets certain standards of adequacy and coherence that have become available in my social and historical moment. At one time, people by and large believed that the Earth was flat. Given the epistemic resources available to them at the time – the state of the sciences and mathematics – they were *justified* in believing this to be true. Subsequent scientific and mathematical developments, however, have shown that their belief was false. People who are alive today and who have access to the relevant information are no longer justified in believing that the Earth is flat. What a person is justified in believing about the shape of the Earth, in other words, depends on that person's social and historical context. In Chapter VI, Hegel highlights the way that the standards for evaluating truth claims are established and transformed through the social practices of particular communities. These norms and normative standards are transmitted and transformed over time and space.

The *Phenomenology of Spirit* suggests how these norms and normative standards change over time. It is, Hegel claims, a dialectical process. It turns out that this dialectical process itself – the process of articulating and arguing over norms and normative standards in light of the strengths and weaknesses of past and present alternatives – is itself the way people reason about what they are justified in believing and doing and the way that norms evolve. When people become conscious of their role in this process, they have attained absolute knowledge.

In a diverse modern society, people often have different assessments of what they are justified in believing and doing. They also disagree, as do the various shapes of spirit in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, about which people, texts, and traditions have the authority to settle such disputes. These conflicts can appear intractable. Indeed, when we survey the contemporary ethical, religious, and political landscape, many of our current conflicts seem to take this form.

Consider, for example, the abortion debate. Those at the poles of the debate disagree not only about whether abortion ought to remain legal, but also about the relevant norms and normative authority that ought to be considered: the will of God, the teachings of religious traditions, the liberal conception of personhood and the rights that follow from it, scientific evidence about fetal development, moral claims about life's sacredness, and so on.[169] No matter how forcefully each makes its case to the other, these two camps seem bound to disagree about what even counts as a good reason for or against this or that policy. Under the present circumstances, it is hard to imagine how the abortion debate could ever be resolved. Some have turned this and related disagreements into battle lines in an ongoing culture war.

Hegel's discussion of Faith and Enlightenment illuminates this form of conflict. There, Hegel describes one kind of impasse that results from the failure to recognize the dialectical nature of justification. Both Faith and Enlightenment think that their beliefs and actions can only be justified through appeal to some fixed standard. While Faith finds this standard in the experience of religious emotion, Enlightenment finds it in universal and timeless rationality. Because they disagree about the standard – and because both take the standard to be fixed – neither can see a way into conversation with the other. Their appeals to these fixed standards act as conversation-stoppers, and Faith and Enlightenment find themselves locked into their conflict.

Hegel thinks that the impasse is overcome when a shape of spirit can account for the significant strengths and weaknesses of *both* positions. He lays out an immanent critique of both sides, assessing their adequacy and consistency in light of their own standards, and then sets out

[169] It is worth saying, of course, that most people do not stand at the poles of the abortion debate, but occupy a stance somewhere in the middle. Those in the middle may be more likely to sympathize with the kinds of reasons provided by those with whom they ultimately disagree, and, perhaps, to find some common ground for beginning a conversation. This is a difficult task when the debate becomes as polarized as the abortion debate has become.

to determine what it would take to overcome the weaknesses. It turns out that Faith and Enlightenment have the same major weakness – namely, the inability to justify the fixed standard to which they appeal. These standards serve as foundational commitments, withheld from scrutiny or critique. Faith and Enlightenment's other commitments are justified through their logical relationship to these foundations.[170] Faith and Enlightenment contend that justification is a one-way street – the fixed standards do the work of justifying those other commitments that stem from them. But this way of thinking about justification has two problems. First, because neither Faith nor Enlightenment can give a non-question-begging account of its standards for evaluating its norms, neither one engages with the criticisms of the other. Each dismisses the other's challenges as irrelevant, because based on false premises, superstition, wishful thinking, arbitrariness, sin, and so forth. Hegel suggests that we ought to be on guard against reductionist accounts like these, which attribute only weaknesses and no strengths to an alternate viewpoint. As Alasdair MacIntyre writes in a 1977 essay, "It is a mark of a degenerate tradition that it has contrived a set of epistemological defenses which enable it to avoid being put in question or at least to avoid recognizing that it is being put in question by rival traditions."[171] MacIntyre (whose early debt to Hegel is often obscured in his more recent work) captures Hegel's concern about the weaknesses of Faith and Enlightenment, as each closes its ears to the claims of the other.

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[170] In Chapter 1, I highlighted Hegel's criticism of communities that take their norms to be fixed; this criticism goes a step beyond that, looking at communities that take the standards by which they judge their norms to be fixed. Apropos of this criticism and my discussion later in this chapter of connections between the Hegelian position and that of postliberal theologians, see William C. Placher's discussion of the Enlightenment and the "Myth of the Given" in *Unapologetic Theology: A Christian Voice in a Pluralistic Conversation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 24-35.

[171] Alasdair MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science," *The Monist* 60:4 (1977), 461.

Second, Faith and Enlightenment's shared assumptions about justification make it hard to imagine how normative change could ever take place, or how impasses could ever be overcome. If its fidelity to a fixed standard is the sole criteria for the justification of a commitment or norm, how could something that we were once justified in believing or doing become something that we now take to be *un*justified? We know that changes of this sort have taken place many, many times, and that what appeared to be intractable conflicts about what to believe or do have also been overcome. The United States, for example, is no longer paralyzed by the conflict over women's right to vote – a conflict that once appeared intractable. And most Americans no longer view their compatriots as justified in believing that women's disenfranchisement is acceptable. Faith and Enlightenment's views of truth, justification, and the standard of knowledge make it impossible for them to account for changes of this sort.

Hegel's discussion of Faith and Enlightenment also includes what he sees as their strengths. Faith's strengths lie in its rituals and worship. As Chapter 2 showed, these practices are faith's way of recognizing and reconciling with the absolute – that is, of recognizing and implicating themselves in their authoritative standard of knowledge. Fixed standards aside, Enlightenment's strengths lie in its practices of scrutiny and critique of commitments and norms. The account that overcomes Faith and Enlightenment's impasse must uphold the strengths of these practices of contestation and reconciliation, while disentangling them from Faith and Enlightenment's weaknesses.

A more adequate account of normative change would include Faith's attention to the social practices that express their commitments and Enlightenment's emphasis on self-conscious reflection and critique of those commitments. Something like this account is what Hegel provides with the confession and forgiveness of the wicked and judging consciousnesses. These

two characters have different views of what justifies belief and action. The wicked consciousness, who believes that justification is a purely subjective matter of whim and caprice, undertakes an action. The judging consciousness, who believes that justification is a purely objective matter of universal and timeless reasons, judges this action. The latter says that the former was not justified in acting in the way that he did, at least on the basis of the reasons that he gave. The wicked consciousness comes to recognize that this is true, and that justified action depends on the judgments of others. He confesses this to the judging consciousness, and expects him to reciprocate, to affirm that the judgment, too, is an action subject to assessment by others. The judging consciousness eventually does, and the two enjoy forgiveness and reconciliation. Each comes to recognize the other as a potential agent and judge, confessor and forgiver.

This account is descriptive insofar as Hegel thinks that these processes of justification take place all the time – basically, any time that a disagreement is aired or an impasse is overcome. The account is prescriptive in its suggestion that people ought to become self-conscious about these processes. Absolute spirit involves becoming self-conscious about how dialectical reasoning evolves when people make claims, take action, and both evaluate and revise these claims and actions in light of other norms and commitments. From now on, the dialectic can continue in awareness of its own interactive and diachronic structure. Absolute spirit does not, however, mark the end of the dialectic, because at the ground level the standards of adequacy and coherence – what it takes for a commitment or norm to be justified – will continue to evolve for as long as human beings engage in the kinds of acting, judging, and responsibility-taking that human beings engage in.

Normative standards depend on what has come before. This is not because *truth* is relative, but because human beings' practices of reasoning about what is true and what is not are

context-dependent. From our current vantage point, we can see how new norms came out of what appeared, for a long time, to be intractable ethical conflicts. We can assess, based on the other commitments that we hold and the variety of alternatives that have appeared before us, whether these changes have resolved the problems with those alternatives. Hegel's conclusions about what we are justified in believing (and on what grounds) lead to a form of social and political life in which these ground-level conflicts are *expected to arise continually*, and in which the work of recognition and reconciliation is *understood to always be incomplete*. This is an *agonistic*, or contestatory, form of life, suited to a diverse modern society, in which no one can presume that the norms or normative standards that she endorses are universally endorsed.

Any claim about rational or normative progress is also socially and historically situated. Like Hegel's claim about philosophy's dialectical superiority, it cannot be a "view from nowhere." Rather, it can only be made from a particular standpoint and relative to the alternatives that have appeared before it. As Pippin writes in his discussion of how the gender-based division of labor changed over the past century:

> One begins to become a 'Hegelian' with the simple realization of how implausible it would be to insist that the injustice of such a basis for a division of labor, the reasons for rejecting such a practice, were always in principle discoverable from the beginning of human attempts to justify their practices, and were 'discovered' sometime in the early nineteenth century. And yet our commitment to such a rejection is stronger than 'a new development in how we go on.' The past practice is irrational and so unjust, however historically indexed the 'grip' of such a claim clearly is.[172]

[172] Robert Pippin, "Back to Hegel?" *Mediations* 26:1 (Fall 2012-Spring 2013), 19.

A full account of the evolution of the gender-based division of labor over the past century would have to consider material causes; it would be naïve to deny that contingency, psychology, and material conditions played a role in shifting people's attitudes and opinions. But so did the processes of dialectical reasoning, by which implicit norms were made explicit, connected commitments were named and interrogated, and claims about which commitments and conclusions were justified were advanced and considered. This process included not only formal acts of communication like articles and declarations, but also the stories shared in consciousness-raising groups, the grievances aired and ensuing debates about how to respond to those grievances, and the public theater of marches and demonstrations. To view the achievements of these social movements as *progress*, one need not claim that Americans finally unearthed a set of timeless and universal reasons that support a more equitable distribution of labor across gender lines and that had been there, waiting to be discovered, all along. Instead, one can take a diachronic and dialectical perspective on what it took for current beliefs and actions to uphold the strengths and overcome the weaknesses of past views. Such a standpoint is always situated within the history of other norms.

The Hegelian view is spelled out in Kevin Hector's theological account of the role of social practice in the institution and transformation of Christian commitments and norms in *Theology without Metaphysics*.[173] Hector argues that theological concepts work in much the same way as ordinary concepts. Their content or meaning is specified through use.[174] When Christians use theological concepts in everyday life, they are both drawing on past uses of these

[173] Kevin W. Hector, *Theology without Metaphysics: God, Language, and the Spirit of Recognition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
[174] This is at odds with Kripke's account of names, according to which the referent of a name is fixed by a causal chain that goes back to an original dubbing. If Kripke is right, the dubbing fixes the referent through (one particular) use.

concepts and making judgments about how they apply in novel circumstances. When a theological concept is used in a new way, its meaning subtly shifts. The legitimacy of this new use and shifting meaning – whether the Christian is justified in using the concept in this way – is a matter judged by other members of the Christian community. In particular, Hector argues, legitimacy is judged in terms of "conformity to Christ" and the tradition that follows from him.[175]

While this idea of "conformity to Christ" may initially sound resistant to ongoing processes of dialectical reasoning and normative change, those processes turn out to be central to it. Christ is the standard against which theological concept use is judged; but it is the members of the Christian community who are the finite and fallible judges of whether a theological concept carries on the "normative Spirit" (at least on this side of the eschaton). In the past decade, many congregations and denominations have debated whether and how to consecrate same-sex partnerships. One of the concepts at the center of these debates is "marriage." Members of these congregations and denominations have asked, essentially, how does this concept of "marriage" apply to this novel situation? These debates are mainly about the *context* of application – does the concept of "marriage" apply to cases of commitments made between two men or two women? There might also be related debates about the *consequence* of application. If the concept of "marriage" is used to describe a particular situation, what follows? Are there certain expectations, responsibilities, or rights that follow from the application of the concept? These are also matters of potential debate. On Hector's account, Christians give and evaluate answers to these questions in terms of fidelity to Christ's example and to the Christian

[175] Hector, *Theology without Metaphysics*, 234.

tradition. At the same time, individual and collective judgments about what constitutes fidelity – even about what the relevant criteria are – remain contestable.[176]

Hector also highlights the Holy Spirit's role in the transmission of commitments and norms through concept use. He writes, "The Spirit is publicly mediated, yet cannot be identified in advance with the authority of any person or the configuration of any prevailing order; rather, the Spirit's work is continually reconfiguring that order from within."[177] Hector would likely disagree with Hegel about the referents of "spirit" and "the absolute," but by and large he appears to agree with Hegel's view of normativity.[178]

This account of how the processes of justification and normative change work together to authorize norms emerges from Hegel's own way of treating the shapes of spirit that appear before him in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. New norms gradually emerge out of what appeared, for a long time, to be intractable ethical conflict. Part of what it means to be justified in holding a commitment or endorsing a norm in the present is that the commitment or norm overcomes at least some of the weaknesses of past accounts and preserves at least some of its strengths. To have a commitment – or, at least, a self-conscious, justified commitment – is to believe that it is the best or truest one available, given the alternatives and given what is known and unknown about the matter.

The view of justification and normative change that follows from Hegel's social-practical account of authority is at odds with *some* religious (and non-religious) appeals to authority. It rules out, for instance, divine law as a free-standing source of authority. Hegel's criticism of this

[176] Hector's discussion of the struggle for emancipation is especially helpful on these points. See Chapter 6 of *Theology without Metaphysics*.
[177] Hector, *Theology without Metaphysics*, 286.
[178] Hector draws on Schleiermacher more explicitly than on Hegel, although it is worth noting that his reading of Schleiermacher brings these two figures much closer together than most traditional interpretations do.

view is found in his discussion of Greek *Sittlichkeit*. Likewise, the Hegelian view rules out the apocalyptic as a free-standing source of authority. This view, according to which there is the divine breaks in to history to establish a wholly and radically new order, shares the problem of Hegel's "unhappy consciousness," who acknowledges God as both radically other and as the standard of norms and normative authority. Hegel's charge, as we have seen, is that the unhappy consciousness's acknowledgement of God's authority is itself a move in the normative sphere of making claims, granting authority, and judging (including judging what the standard *is*). Likewise, the authoritativeness of the in-breaking depends on its acknowledgement as authoritative by members of a community – acknowledged, perhaps, because it fulfills promises described in scripture and carried down in the tradition. It only becomes the new standard of knowledge insofar as it is recognized as such. On the Hegelian view, that acknowledgement or recognition carries normative authority of its own, such that the in-breaking cannot be the self-sufficient and self-conscious standard but rather the in-breaking *and* the people and community who recognize it are, together.

To say that these standpoints are at odds with the Hegelian view is not to suggest that they are or ought to be eliminated from public discourse and reasoning. Rather, it is to say that the Hegelian view of authority, justification, and related matters is incompatible with these alternatives and takes itself to have given a compelling account of their weaknesses. This leaves their adherents in a position to now state why they are nonetheless justified in holding to them. In this sense, the Hegelian view is one more competing standpoint in a religiously-diverse society, advancing its own claims about truth, justification, and the standard of knowledge, and prepared to act, judge, confess to, and forgive as incompatibilities and conflicts arise.

As a practical matter, the Hegelian view suggests how impasses are overcome when people find that their conversations have stalled or that they are locked in a culture war. Faith and Enlightenment's view of justification leads them to invoke their fixed normative standards ad nauseam. It acts as a conversation-stopper, and impasses are not overcome through conversation-stopping practices. Instead, they might be resolved through the resignification of a term, the interrogation of a taken-for-granted assumption held by one or both sides, the humble renunciation of one's absolute self-certainty, or the admission of the other side's strengths. People need not endorse the social-practical account of authority before talking with those with whom they disagree.

Agonistic Engagement Across Difference

I have begun to answer the two questions raised at the outset of this chapter: (1) What does the social-practical account of authority have to offer a religiously-diverse society? And (2) is a commitment to the social-practical account of authority compatible with a commitment to pluralism? In response to the first question, I have argued that the social-practical account of authority offers a way of understanding the justification of commitments and the change of norms over time. This, in turn, both describes how impasses have been confronted and overcome and prescribes, as a practical matter, how people who disagree about norms and normative standards might engage with one another.

So far, my response to the second question has been more implicit. I have suggested that the social-practical account of authority is but one among many competing accounts in a pluralist society. To believe that the social-practical account of authority is correct is to believe that alternate accounts are incorrect or, at least, partially incorrect. If a commitment to pluralism

were to mean a commitment to the truth of every position held in a diverse society – or, at least, indifference to the truth or falsity of every position – then a commitment to the social-practical account of authority would be at odds with a commitment to pluralism. So would a commitment to any other account of authority. But that is not what I take a commitment to pluralism to be. Rather, I take it that pluralism is the state of affairs in which the inhabitants of a community have a variety of different beliefs, practices, and norms, some of which are at odds with those of others. A commitment to pluralism, on my view, is a commitment to the notion that this kind of community can be sustained without the requirement that its members agree in advance or for the same reasons. On this view, a commitment to the social-practical account of authority is compatible with a commitment to pluralism.

To further explore this claim, we might look at some recent accounts of conversation and collective action across religious and other differences. The cultural-linguistic approach to religion and theology, for instance, suggests a way of entering into conversations across difference that remain faithful to the particularities of Christian belief while engaging in processes of justification and normative revision. As George Lindbeck argued in *The Nature of Doctrine*, the cultural-linguistic approach treats religious propositions as a kind of grammar, "communally authoritative rules of discourse, attitude, and action."[179] Like grammatical rules, Lindbeck argues, doctrines are guides or principles that govern claim-making. In other words, they are norms. These norms guide the use of other theological concepts and claims, as judged by members of the community. Just as a speaker who uses English-language concepts but strings them together in an unintelligible sequence will be viewed as an incompetent language-user by English speakers, a person who uses concepts of God, sin, and grace but ignores the

[179] George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1984), 18.

Church doctrines that meaningfully structure claims about how these concepts apply to the world will likely be viewed skeptically by other Christians. As Lindbeck writes, doctrines "indicate what constitutes faithful adherence to a community."[180] This view of doctrine, of course, does not rule out the possibility of doctrinal dispute or even doctrinal change. English speakers can disagree about the use or application of grammatical rules without abandoning English grammar. Christians disagree about how doctrines ought to be used, revised, or discarded in changing circumstances, without abandoning Christian doctrine.

Cultural-linguistic systems – I will just call them "traditions" – change through dialectical encounters with the world. As adherents of a tradition encounter new situations or changing circumstances, they try to make sense of these with the concepts, doctrines, commitments, and norms that they already hold. As they do so, a number of things can happen. They may find that they are able to assimilate these new experiences into their existing set of commitments and norms. As Lindbeck argues, "the reasonableness of a religion is largely a function of its assimilative powers, of its ability to provide an intelligible interpretation on its own terms of the varied situations and realities adherents encounter."[181] It "absorbs the world" into its own commitments and norms. Alternately, adherents of a tradition may find that their experiences and encounters *cannot* be assimilated. In some cases, these experiences and encounters reveal inadequacies and inconsistencies among their previously-held commitments. The continued "reasonableness" (to use Lindbeck's term) of the tradition depends on revisions and resignifications that fix or eliminate the inadequacies and inconsistencies.

[180] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 74.
[181] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 131.

Similar challenges present themselves when traditions encounter other traditions.[182] Theologians like Bruce Marshall, William Placher, and William Werpehowski have all tried to show how the members of different traditions engage with one another across disagreements. All of them reject both the idea that such conversations must proceed on the basis of universally-acceptable reasons, as well as the idea that our differences are so profound that we cannot talk to one another at all. What Placher calls "unapologetic theology" and what Werpehowski calls "ad hoc apologetics" are approaches to pluralism that affirm real and abiding differences while encouraging the proliferation of conversations among people from different traditions. As Werpehowski notes, one perfectly good way to begin a conversation is to find a single point of agreement and to proceed from there.[183] This point of agreement need not rest on shared foundations, and there is no presumption that others would begin at the same point. Because justification is not a one-way street from foundational commitments to commitments being justified, people can begin anywhere and then move outward to other commitments, investigating and interrogating them as they go. Deeper agreement, if it comes at all, comes piece by piece.

What these theologians share with the Hegelian view outlined above is the idea that, in order to justify a claim or a worldview, one can only begin in the middle of things. In ad hoc apologetics, questions about justification are answered through dialectical, diachronic accounts of the strengths and weaknesses of alternative worldviews. As Werpehowski notes, "any argument for the scheme over religious and nonreligious competitors must be cumulative in character; it must show the way in which the scheme makes better sense of the features of reality

[182] MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises," 461.
[183] William Werpehowski, "Ad Hoc Apologetics," *The Journal of Religion* 66:3 (1986), 287.

than do the alternatives."[184] Arguments about which commitments are justified are context-dependent; there is no neutral standpoint that one can occupy in crafting or evaluating such arguments.

A theological account of dialectical reasoning and normative change is likely to employ some concepts and commitments that a social-practical account does not. For a Christian, these might include the sin that clouds understanding, or the grace that guides finite and fallible human beings from falsity toward truth. Even if Christians and Hegelian naturalists agree on something like the priority of social practices in the institution and justification of norms, they are likely to disagree about the persons who are engaged in these practices. As noted above, Hegel's spirit and Hector's Holy Spirit have distinctly different referents.

There are commentators among both the Christians and the naturalists who suggest that the substantive disagreements among people of diverse religious traditions are chasms.[185] Some of them, like Richard Rorty, say that religion is inherently a conversation-stopper. He argues that religion *always* operates in the way that Faith and Enlightenment do, with an insistent appeal to fixed standards or first principles that others may well reject.[186] (His argument, it seems to me, fails to make sense of the interfaith dialogues, ad hoc apologetics, and coalition politics pursued by some religious people and the conversation-stopping activities of some non-religious people.) Others commentators, like Alasdair MacIntyre, say that the practices of dialectical justification just aren't possible under modern conditions of religious and ethical pluralism. Our differences, he claims, are deep enough and wide enough to make conversations incoherent and

[184] Werpehowski, "Ad Hoc Apologetics," 287. See also p.292.
[185] I have in mind academics like Richard Rorty, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Stanley Hauerwas as well as cultural critics like the New Atheists and the Christian Coalition.
[186] Rorty, "Religion as Conversation-stopper."

impossible. On this view, these disagreements once again become the impasses of the culture wars, not the ad hoc contestations of agonism.

The social-practical account that I have sketched here views our current situation rather differently. It acknowledges that pluralism involves the proliferation of differences and disagreements, within and across traditions. But it views the commitments and norms held by members of these traditions as webs, rather than edifices. They do not stand atop fixed foundations, but are held together by countless intersecting strands. There is no "foundation" on this view; you need not enter at the ground floor. Conversations might begin here or there or anywhere. They can take the form of ad hoc apologetics, which begin with a single point of agreement and see where that leads. They can take the form of immanent critique that identifies the weaknesses of a tradition (either one's own tradition or a rival tradition) by identifying its inadequacies and inconsistences on its own terms. They can also begin when one tradition attempts to "absorb the world" into its own, to make sense of a rival tradition in light of the web of norms that it already holds.

Someone might object that Lindbeck's claim to "absorb the world" into the world of scripture is just one more way that a particular tradition can refuse to engage in conversation across difference. It effaces the difference between itself and the other, by translating the other into its own terms, rather than engaging in public discourse and critical self-examination. The criticism is fair enough. Lindbeck's way of talking about these matters, particularly his quietism on matters of truth and justification in *The Nature of Doctrine*, leaves him open to that kind of interpretation. Nevertheless, there are more generative ways of interpreting his claim. Bruce Marshall's work on theology, truth, and justification can help us see how. On Marshall's view, our judgments are made and evaluated in the context of other commitments and norms that we

hold. When we encounter something unfamiliar, we first try to make sense of it in light of whatever else we hold to be true. Donald Davidson calls this the principle of charity in interpretation: when I come across something that I cannot make sense of – particularly an utterance or claim from some other speaker – I begin to understand it by mapping its foreign concepts onto my own and by attributing more familiar commitments to the speaker that help me to interpret what it might mean, all the while presuming, to the degree possible, the truth of the utterance. Much of what is said will concern the world that speakers and listeners share, even if they grasp and express the features of this world in radically different ways. This fact is one of the bases of interpretation. Davidson is not calling on us to become more charitable in our dealings with one another. Rather, in his principle of charity in interpretation, he is describing how we actually go about trying to understand one another most of the time.

Drawing on Davidson, Bruce Marshall argues that "the goal of interpretation is to find a way of understanding a discourse which allows it to be held true, that is, to find a place for it within the world or 'domain of meaning' opened up by the scriptural text" (75). Marshall goes on to say that "the theological project of 'absorbing the world' is the ongoing effort by the Christian community and individual members to construe novel, unfamiliar, or 'alien' sentences in a way which *both* (a) constitutes the best available interpretation of those sentences and (b) allows them to be held true."[187] Ultimately, some claims will be unassimilable into the world of scripture; these claims will either be regarded by Christians as false or will be the starting point for critical scrutiny of the tradition itself. The adequacy of a tradition, according to Lindbeck and Marshall, depends on its "assimilative power," its ability to give an account on its own terms of a wide variety of claims made about the world. Because we continually find ourselves in

[187] Bruce D. Marshall, "Absorbing the World," in *Theology and Dialogue: Essays in Conversation with George Lindbeck* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 76.

novel situations, this is an ongoing process. Meanwhile, a pluralist society is one in which many such traditions can "reasonably claim significant assimilative power." The debates or disagreements among such traditions will be sorted out, if at all, "only gradually over a long period of time."[188]

What is Hegel doing at the end of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* if not absorbing the world in this way? Hegel ascribes true beliefs to Christians. He claims that revealed religion and philosophy have the same content – the absolute. But ultimately, he describes this content and Christian doctrines about it in terms of his own philosophical commitments. He claims that his account is the best one that anyone has been able to give so far. Like the Christian who "absorbs the world" into the world of scripture, Hegel places his own account at the end of a dialectic. He claims that his philosophical account of the absolute (a) constitutes the best available interpretation of Christian doctrines and (b) allows them to be held true, at least symbolically.

Hegel believes, from the standpoint of philosophy, that he has given a compelling account of the strengths of revealed religion. This account includes, prominently, revealed religion's ways of relating to the absolute through practices of confession, forgiveness, and sacrifice. Hegel believes that philosophy preserves these strengths in its account of recognition and reconciliation, while overcoming what he sees as the weaknesses of revealed religion – especially the lingering alienation between the human beings who engage in these practices and the absolute. From the standpoint of Hegel's philosophy, revealed religion makes true claims about the absolute while holding false presuppositions about the nature of the absolute.

It is not only Hegel, or Lindbeck, who engages in this kind of assimilative activity. In fact, it is something that all people do, much of the time, when they try to make sense of the

[188] Marshall, "Absorbing the World," 82.

world and to justify their own judgments about it. Moreover, whether or not one agrees with Hegel's claims about religion and philosophy, his account of dialectical reasoning helps us to see how we might approach the differences between them. If Hegel is right about the role of practices of contestation, recognition, and reconciliation in this process, there is no reason to be alienated by others' claims to dialectical superiority. In earlier chapters of this dissertation, I have highlighted the practices of confession, forgiveness, and sacrifice, and their role in avoiding and overcoming alienation and sustaining communities over time. Chapter 6 will say more about the relationship between these practices in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and their role in the diverse modern society.

A naturalist may agree with Hegel's assessment of revealed religion, while nevertheless recognizing the authority of someone else – say, an Augustinian Christian – to dispute this assessment. She can give an account of the other's strengths in light of her own commitments and norms. At the same time, she can regard the other as a potential judge and critic of these commitments and norms. She is open to the possibility that some of them will turn out to be inadequate or inconsistent, and that the other's account will expose this. She recognizes that she may need to confess to, or seek forgiveness from, the other for mistaken claims, judgments, actions, or attributions.

These practices show up in all kinds of relationships – within congregations, in ecumenical and interfaith dialogues, in coalition-building, and, more broadly, in and across pluralist states. Congregations and denominations regularly find themselves confronting and coping with disagreements – whether the clergy will officiate same-sex marriages, and, if they do, how to use and revise traditional liturgy in such rituals. Or, to take another example, whether an Orthodox synagogue should hire female clergy and how their responsibilities ought to differ

from those of the male rabbis. Many of these disagreements have to do with how concepts, doctrines, laws, and practices that are imbued with authority or sacred value ought to apply to new or changing situations. Community members and congregational leaders need good arguments, but also good practices of recognition and reconciliation, in order for their relationships to emerge intact.

Folks who don't worship together might still find common cause around a particular issue or set of issues and enter into political coalitions, despite different motivations or justifications for doing so. In Crown Heights, an array of interfaith groups sprung up after the riots in 1991, not to identify or resolve theological disagreements, but to see whether they might work together to address social and political problems in the neighborhood. One of these, Project CARE, was a coalition of rabbis, ministers, and other leaders from black churches and Lubavitch groups, as well as representatives of the police department, who worked together to address inequalities in the treatment of black and Jewish residents of Crown Heights. Mothers-to-Mothers was a more informal group of black and Hasidic women who met fortnightly for more than a decade to talk about childcare, education, and religious and racial tensions in the neighborhood and to figure out ways of tackling them.

Conclusion

Disagreements about God, authority, and the absolute remain. That is what it is to live in a pluralist society. The ethical conflicts that currently appear intractable in such societies – including conflicts over abortion, euthanasia, and same-sex marriage, among others – are not disconnected from these disagreements about God, authority, and the absolute. Certain ways of approaching these ethical conflicts harden the battle lines and stop the conversation. Who knows

if such disagreements will ever pass away? If they do, it is unlikely to be because people on one side or the other of a chasm won a war of attrition – refusing to engage with partisans on the other side – but, more likely, because they considered what they were justified in believing and doing, considered the strengths of the alternative position, and found ways into conversation in light of their experiences and encounters with the world and one another.

The social-practical account of authority that Hegel develops in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* offers a description of how such conflicts have been overcome in the past. It can also recommend an approach to overcoming such conflicts in the future. The practices of reciprocal recognition are intended to do this. Partisans interpret one another according to the principle of charity; they engage in immanent critique; they undertake ad hoc apologetics. Any of these may be sufficient to overcome a perceived impasse, to keep conversations going, or to make coalitions possible.

While the social-practical account of authority is at odds with some religious views, it has much in common others. Moreover, those religious (and non-religious) views with which it is at odds are not excluded from conversation or coalition-building. Whether one deems Hegel's conclusions about religion and philosophy to be true or false, he shows us how we can come to such a determination, how we can argue about it, and how we can justify our views of the matter whether or not we ultimately agree. On this account, the Christian and the Hegelian naturalist may view one another as *partially* right, insofar as each gives an account of the absolute in which humans are caught up through their social practices, even as each views its particular account of the absolute as dialectically superior. Whereas the Hegelian naturalist may argue that the absolute involves the self-conscious and self-sufficient practices of human beings, the Christian may contend that the self-sufficient absolute ultimately transcends human social practices but

nevertheless stands in relationship to human beings. The Christian hopes for enduring reconciliation with God, while the Hegelian naturalist hopes for moments of peaceable and just reconciliation with other human subjects. In both cases, it turns out that the object of hope is a person and a relationship. There is much more to be said about *that* – and I trust that we will find ways to say it, despite our many differences.

CHAPTER SIX: Democracy's Dialectic

> To identify sacred mystery with every individual experience, every life, giving the word its largest sense, is to arrive at democracy as an ideal, and to accept the difficult obligation to honor others and oneself with something approaching due reverence. It is a vision that is wholly religious though by no mean sectarian, wholly realist in acknowledging the great truth of the centrality of human consciousness, wholly open in that it anticipates and welcomes the disruption of present values in the course of finding truer ones.
>
> Marilynne Robinson[189]

The United States is a pluralist society, marked by multiple forms of difference. Citizens' commitments stem from different and, at times, incompatible sources. We disagree with one another, not only about public policies, but also about right and wrong, about the good and the sacred, and about which people, texts, and traditions have the authority to guide our decisions about contentious ethical dilemmas. At the root of such disagreements are not only citizens' diverse beliefs, but also divergent religious and cultural practices. Does Hegel's account of spirit speak in such a society?

I believe that it does. Although Hegel did not envision a pluralist society like ours, he faced a similar set of social and political challenges. As the sun set on the eighteenth century and rose on the nineteenth, Hegel grappled with questions of identity and difference. He wondered what would hold his society together. Its norms were no longer taken as fixed or given, as Greek *Sittlichkeit* had been. The social construction of the political community was becoming obvious. Would the existence of this obviously-constructed entity depend on the

[189] Marilynne Robinson, *When I Was a Child, I Read Books* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012).

domination of its citizens, like the rule of a master over a slave? Would it be held together by coercive force, like Roman legal society? Would it descend into interminable culture war, like Faith and Enlightenment? Would its inhabitants grasp at the abstract and contentless freedom that, like the French revolution, cast off one form of servitude and coercion only to instate another? If not, what other option was there? Hegel's account of absolute spirit, in which the community knows itself as the source of normative authority, is his philosophical reply to these questions.

Absolute spirit does not insist on the elimination of diversity and disagreement, although it does involve moments of self-emptying and reconciliation. I have argued that this self-emptying is the humility of the individual who recognizes his corrigibility in the face of the other. Reconciliation, meanwhile, depends on the other's recognition of the same. These reciprocally-recognizing individuals make claims upon one another, claims that are judged, contested, and, at times, revised. This chapter describes how Hegel's account of spirit might inform an agonistic democratic politics.

Agon as a Form of Conflict

In Chapter VI of the *Phenomenology of Spirit,* Hegel shows how different types of conflict emerge in communities with different sets of social arrangements. These conflicts also depend on different accounts of authority. At the end of Chapter VI, Hegel introduces a final shape of spirit, with a new account of authority, in the confession and forgiveness of the wicked and judging consciousnesses. This new shape of spirit is characterized by the social practices of acting, judging, confessing, and forgiving, practices that create and sustain authority. While many interpreters have noted the centrality of reconciliation in absolute spirit, I have highlighted

the importance of ongoing conflict. The form of conflict that characterizes absolute spirit is agon, the continuous contestation of beliefs, practices, and other norms. Agon differs from tragedy and culture war; it is a particular form of conflict, emerging from a particular set of social arrangements, and dependent on a particular account of authority. Let us briefly recall the characteristics of tragedy and culture war in order to assess how agon differs.

As a form of conflict, agon is distinct from both tragedy and culture war. Tragedy, in the narrow sense in which Hegel uses the term, is an irresolvable conflict between two or more goods or rights, in which the pursuit of one violates the other(s). Tragedy ensues when people see their identities, obligations, and norms as fixed and given – when they do not or cannot take responsibility for them. When these identities, obligations, and norms are removed from the processes of justification and contestation, the incompatibilities that arise among them become irresolvable. Hegel argues that tragedy plagued Greek *Sittlichkeit* because of the rigid social structure of that shape of spirit. Greek *Sittlichkeit* assumed that its norms were fixed, given, and immune from scrutiny or revision.

Culture war, meanwhile, is a form of conflict in which each side claims that its own judgments are justified while denying that the other's are. Each has a reductive account of the other's beliefs and practices; it casts them as mere ideology, psychology, or political expediency, while treating its own position as immune to such reductionism. Recall Hegel's discussion of Faith and Enlightenment. Enlightenment "exists in judging and discussing" but refuses to be judged or discussed itself (§539/399). It takes itself to be pure and uncontestable, in contrast to Faith, which Enlightenment sees as "a tissue of superstitions, prejudices, and errors," deluded by a priesthood and in collusion with despotism (§542/401). Yet Enlightenment, its professions of purity notwithstanding, also has commitments and social practices that are subject to critique and

revision. Faith sees this and returns Enlightenment's accusation of mere expediency and contingency. Each side hardens against the claims of others; each side refuses to recognize that it, like the other, stands in the position of agent, judge, confessor, and forgiver. Culture war depends on a failure of recognition, and it persists when partisans fail to acknowledge the intersubjective relations that generate and sustain normative authority.

The culture war that has raged between secularists and theocrats in the United States in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century has a similar form. Partisans on either side have hardened against one another, with each side trying to set the terms of public debate in a way that would eliminate the other. Concerned that the matters that they care about are being taken off the table, citizens who would otherwise reject both strict secularism and theocracy are tempted to join the ranks of one or the other.[190] This is not a tragic conflict, because it is not a conflict between two recognized goods or rights that spring from the same ethical source. It is not an *agonistic* conflict either, because the two sides do not recognize their epistemic symmetry. Rather, it is a stand-off between two "mutually uncomprehending positions" that are completely alienated from one another. Neither sees the other as a locus of normative authority.

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[190] In an article on Richard Rorty's views on religion and politics (and their troubling descent to the terrain of the culture war, Jeffrey Stout argues that the ideology of secularism "reinforces the idea that modern societies have only two choices: a political order in which everything is ideally to be decided in essentially secular terms and one in which a single religious vision dominates. The choice is between secularism and theocracy. Given these options, it is unsurprising that many religious people will opt for the second (527)." Stout, "Rorty on Religion and Politics," in *The Philosophy of Richard Rorty*, Randall E. Auxier and Lewis Edward Hahn, eds. (Chicago: Open Court, 2010). Lewis makes Hegel's challenge to Rorty more explicit. On Hegel's view of religion and politics, Lewis writes that "in viewing religion as making politically relevant claims, [Hegel] locates it within a broader public conversation. Viewing religious discourse in this way, however, Hegel opens it up to a challenge. Religion is not a 'conversation stopper,' and a simple appeal to conviction – religious or otherwise – does not in itself count as a substantial reason. Given the intricacy of his view, Hegel is impossible to locate in today's conventional categories of liberal, conservative, or communitarian, but rather challenges all sides in the discussion" (*Religion, Modernity, and Politics in Hegel*, 234).

While the antagonism of culture warriors seeks the elimination of objectionable difference, the agonism of reciprocally-recognizing subjects acknowledges its perpetuity. As a form of conflict, agon emerges from relations of mutuality. These are the relations of those who see themselves and others as, in Hegel's words, "selfsame" – individuals who see themselves and others as moving through their shape of spirit as both subject and object, agent and judge, confessor and forgiver, and who recognize their relation as itself carrying normative weight. This is the reciprocal recognition that *is* absolute spirit. When these relations are in place, antagonism is transformed into agonism. As political theorist William Connolly writes, "an antagonism in which each aims initially at conquest or conversion of the other can now (given other supporting conditions) become an *agonism* in which each treats the other as crucial to itself in the strife and interdependence of identity/difference."[191] Agonism is misunderstood when it is viewed as a celebration of tragedy or of antagonism. Agonism is perpetual contest in the context of reciprocal recognition – contest that is not only compatible with, but constitutive of peace and justice. What Hegel calls reciprocal recognition has a close kinship to what Connolly calls relations of "agonistic respect."[192]

Tragedy and culture war undermine the accounts of authority and the social arrangements from which they emerge. Hegel believes that he has shown how these accounts lead to impasses of these sorts and why they are no longer accounts that we are justified in holding. Agon, by

[191] William E. Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 178.
[192] William E. Connolly, "Agonism, Pluralism, and Contemporary Capitalism: an Interview with William E. Connolly," Interviewed by Mark Anthony Wenham, *Contemporary Political Theory* 7 (2008), 210. Connolly is more committed to a Nietzschean sense of the contingency of our epistemic foundations than I am (or than Hegel would be). He insists, however, that his vision of pluralism does not require everyone to "accept the fundamental 'contingency' of things. That would make it less pluralistic… The appreciation of contestability, not universal acceptance of contingency, sets a key condition of pluralism and pluralization" (ibid).

contrast, is built into the account of authority and the social arrangements from which it emerges. Agon is not incidental to the account of authority; it is implicit within it. This is because the social-practical account of authority knows that authority itself depends on the social practices of recognition, including practices of contestation. This contestation is therefore an inherent part of the process by which individuals and communities make and assess claims about what is true, good, right, or justified.[193]

The shapes of spirit, from Greek *Sittlichkeit* to conscience, try and fail to account for the authority of their norms. Situated within the history of these shapes of spirit, and reflecting upon it, Hegel believes that his readers now stand in a position to say why the normative stances that underlie tragedy and culture war are ones which they are not justified in holding. They are in a position to see that the members of Greek *Sittlichkeit* were the authors of their gender norms, for instance; that they created and maintained their social arrangements through kinship structures and practices of warfare and sacrifice and burial; that the tragedies they suffered were not only matters of fate and contingency but also the playing out of social roles that *could have been otherwise*. Hegel's readers are in a position to see that the early modern culture warriors abided by norms of self-sufficient authority that hardened them to those who did not share their views; that they were blind to the religious and scholarly practices that authorized their norms. Readers are in a position to see the ways in which *they* are the authors (and authorizers) of their own norms, including gender norms, religious commitments, social arrangements, and political institutions, and they are in a position to call themselves and their peers to account. They can ask: why do we have *these* norms, arrangements, and institutions?

[193] For a discussion of the relationship between this account of authority and Robert Brandom's Hegelian pragmatism, see Thomas Fossen, "Politicizing Brandom's Pragmatism: Normativity and the Agonal Character of Social Practice," *European Journal of Philosophy* 20:3 (2011).

These are political questions, and they are the subject of political discourse and debate. In a democratic society, ordinary citizens are the ones debating these questions, for ordinary citizens are the loci of authority. Their debates generate, question, and sanction the authority of these norms, arrangements, and institutions. For this reason, agonistic democratic theorists emphasize debate and contestation as central to political thought and practice.[194] As Bonnie Honig writes, "to accept and embrace the perpetuity of conflict is to reject the dream of displacement, the fantasy that the right laws or constitution might someday free us from the responsibility for (and, indeed, the burden of) politics."[195]

Authority and Democratic Accountability

If a present-day Hegelian begins with a social-practical account of normative authority, she ought to embrace an agonistic account of democracy, in which citizens engage in practices of contestation (and, as we will see, reconciliation) in order to generate, question, and sustain the authority of their norms. Slavoj Žižek's reading of Hegel appears similar on many points to the one for which I have argued. Žižek rejects the "end of history" reading of Hegel, and he stresses the impossibility, on Hegel's account, of overcoming conflict once and for all. Conflict is central to Žižek's Hegelianism, as it is to mine. Yet we come to dramatically different conclusions about what *sort* of conflict this should be, and what accounts of reason and authority underlie it.[196]

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[194] See, for example, Connolly, *The Terms of Political Discourse;* and Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).
[195] Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, 210.
[196] Pippin argues that Žižek's political prescriptions depend upon his Schellingian misreading of Hegel, particularly with respect to the relationship between reason and sociality. See Pippin, "Back to Hegel?" 19.

Žižek notes that the problem of authority has a distinct modern form.[197] Accounts of authority that attempt to ground it in immediate appeals to nature or divine will, and those that attempt to ground it in "reasons accessible to and approved by all rational human beings," no longer suffice.[198] For reasons that Hegel describes in his discussion of Greek *Sittlichkeit* and of Faith and Enlightenment, these are not positions that we are justified in holding. Žižek calls these two accounts "the Master's discourse (of traditional authority) and the University discourse (of modern power justified by reasons or by the democratic consent of its subjects)," respectively.[199] Of those who impute the latter to Hegel, Žižek demands, "Was not Hegel fully aware that true authority always contains an element of tautological self-assertion? 'It is so because I say it is so!' The exercise of authority is an 'irrational' act of contingent decision which breaks the endless chain of enumerating reasons *pro et contra*."[200] Žižek argues, instead, that Hegel stands *between* the Master's discourse and the University discourse. The ruler's authority comes from others' recognition of him as the ruler, but his exercise of authority turns out to have no rational basis.[201] Having lost the conviction that divine authority grounds politics, we moderns are stuck with its ultimate contingency. As Pippin writes in his review of Žižek's *Less than Nothing*, "The condition of modern atheism means for Žižek, in Lacanian terms, that there is and can no longer be any 'big Other,' any guarantor of at least the possibility of any resolution of normative skepticism and conflicts."[202] The trick for us, Žižek suggests, is to mask this contingency and arbitrariness with some emblem of universal authority, such as the sovereign.

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[197] Žižek, *Less than Nothing*, 428.
[198] Žižek, *Less than Nothing*, 429.
[199] Žižek, *Less than Nothing*, 429-30.
[200] Žižek, *Less than Nothing*, 430.
[201] *Ibid.*
[202] Pippin, "Back to Hegel?" 15

Žižek concludes that if the authority of norms cannot be taken as immediately given, as in certain accounts of divine authority, then it is no authority at all. Sounding more like Nietzsche than Hegel, he asks, "What kind of power (or authority) is it which needs to justify itself with reference to the interests of those over whom it rules, which accepts the need to provide reasons for its exercise? Does not such a notion of power undermine itself?"[203] This construal of authority is also similar to Carl Schmitt's, in which the sovereign, the absolute *political* authority, is always understood in terms of the moment of decision and, more precisely, of "exception." On Schmitt's account, the sovereign is the one who can declare the exception to the ordinary rule of law.[204] He is the one who can say with impunity: "It is so because I say it is so!" According to Žižek, this is the only kind of authority with which we are left in the absence of an ultimate, transcendent authority.

The political consequences of this interpretation of Hegel are apparent in Žižek's concluding chapter of *Less Than Nothing*, titled "The Political Suspension of the Ethical," in which he argues against any attempt to ground political action in ethical norms. Žižek writes, "What the inexistence of the big Other signals is that every ethical and/or moral edifice has to be grounded on an abyssal act which is in the most radical sense imaginable, *political*… The idea that one can ground politics in ethics, or that politics is ultimately a strategic effort to realize prior ethical positions, is a version of the illusion of the 'big Other.'"[205] The abyssal act is one for which no reasons can be given – it emerges from the abyss. For Žižek, political action must depend on *nothing*, on an utterly contingent sense of authority, ungrounded in tradition, reason, or normativity. Thus, for Žižek, the conflict that endures in Hegel's concept of absolute spirit is

[203] Žižek, *Less than Nothing*, 429.
[204] Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 5.
[205] Žižek, *Less than Nothing*, 963.

not agonistic but revolutionary. He writes that "our first choice thus has to be revolution, because it is only after we pass through the zero-level of revolution that the space for the modern rational state (always referred to by Hegel as the 'post-revolutionary' state) opens up: only the 'wrong' choice of terror creates the space for the choice of rational state."[206] On Žižek's account, the repeated three-part movement of the Hegelian dialectic is from *ancien régime* to revolutionary terror to post-revolutionary state, which eventually becomes the *ancien régime* again.

Žižek's account of political authority is *not* the only possibility for us, nor was it for Hegel. Whereas Žižek has Hegel combining the arbitrariness of the "Master's discourse" with the false universality of the "University discourse," I argue that Hegel provides an alternative that avoids the problems of both of these accounts. This alternative depends on Hegel's social-practical account of reason and authority (and here is the source of the different political conclusions at which Žižek and I arrive). To say that the University discourse is false is not to say that the legitimate exercise of power is not grounded in reasons. We can deny, as Hegel himself does, that there is a set of reasons that is "accessible to and approved by all rational human beings" without denying that socially and historically embedded reasons play a role in our practices of applying norms, making claims, issuing judgments, and so on. Pippin makes a similar point:

> No transcendent guarantor is not the same thing as no possible reliance on reason in our own deliberations and in our claims on others. Even a position (like Nietzsche's, say) which held that most conscious appeals to reasons are symptoms, that true reasons lie elsewhere (not the slave's virtuousness, but his

[206] Žižek, *Less than Nothing*, 70.

> *ressentiment* motivated by his submission), is committed to the link… To claim something or to do something is to offer to give reasons for the claim or the deed, and if there are reasons either to reject the reasons or to reject the claim of sincerity, we are still in, cannot exit, the space of reasons.[207]

Hegel puts these practices at the heart of his account of authority. For the exercise of power to be legitimate, it must be non-arbitrary and, hence, *authorized* by those engaged in these practices.

Honig gestures toward these implications in her recent book, *Emergency Politics*. Although Honig is responding to Schmitt rather than Žižek, her argument is instructive. If political authority is essentially about the power to decide the state of exception – and if, as Giorgio Agamben argues, the state of exception has become the permanent condition of politics – then it is unclear what power, if any, ordinary citizens hold. Rather than accept this incapacitating account of authority, however, Honig sets out to "explore alternative conceptualizations of the emergency and sovereignty that may better fit the needs of democratic theory and practice."[208] To do so, Honig de-exceptionalizes political decision-making. She casts it as an extension of ordinary practices of applying norms and making judgments. In so doing, she shows how the sovereign and ordinary citizens alike act as loci of normative authority, fit to be held responsible. "Enacting or exacting accountability," Honig insists, "is one of the essential responsibilities of democratic citizenship."[209]

To illustrate her point, Honig tells the story of Louis Post. Post was the United States Assistant Secretary of Labor during a series of bombings that took place across the U.S. in the

[207] Pippin, "Back to Hegel?" 15-16.
[208] Honig, *Emergency Politics*, xv.
[209] Honig, *Emergency Politics*, 69.

spring and summer of 1919. In the aftermath of the bombings, Post had the broad authority to decide whether to deport the thousands of aliens who had been rounded up and detained as communists, anarchists, and terrorist suspects. Post refused, however, to exercise his authority arbitrarily. Instead, he "bound himself by law." He developed decision-making procedures that were non-arbitrary, requiring high standards of evidence and due process in each deportation case. Post "used all his powers of reasoning and all of the law's resources to find in favor of aliens marked for deportation whenever possible,"[210] resulting in the release of several thousand detainees. When Post was called before the House Committee on Rules to provide a public account of his decisions, he did so. He not only described the procedures and legal standards that he had applied to the cases, but he also articulated a compelling rationale for having done so. He made a moral claim about the centrality of rights and non-domination in a democracy. It was a claim that justified his decision-making procedure and his use of discretion; it was also a claim that was subject to the judgment of others who shared those norms. As Honig writes, "Post responded by enacting a counteraccountability, calling on Congress to live up to the democratic ideals it had abandoned in the context of the First Red Scare."[211] In the end, Congress (and the public) judged in favor of Post.

Post's story provides a concrete example of the way that democratic accountability – even in exceptional moments – stands within the broader context of *normative* authority. Contra Schmitt and Žižek, democratic authority depends upon the earned deference of citizens *within* the contested space of norms. If we see sovereign authority at work only in moments of decision-making – whether to torture the suspected terrorist in the ticking time-bomb scenario, for instance – we are blinded to the broader web of norms in which these decisions are made.

[210] Honig, *Emergency Politics*, 72.
[211] Honig, *Emergency Politics*, 69.

Among other things, this perspective obscures from view the individuals, groups, norms, and laws that influence political decisions before they are made; the role of citizens, legislators, and courts in making, contesting, and enforcing these decisions; and the laws and legal mechanisms designed to hold decision-makers accountable for their decisions. The ideology of sovereign authority tempts political elites to imagine themselves as heroic figures with the independent power to determine when they must follow the rule of law and when they may suspend it – without influence, contestation, or accountability to others.

Modern constitutional democracies, at their best, are designed to limit the sovereign authority of political leaders, placing checks and constraints on their power in ways that make them accountable to those whom their decisions affect. Democracies are designed to ensure that citizens are not dominated by unaccountable leaders. These checks and constraints take multiple forms. Some take the power to make some decisions out of the hands of individuals (like Presidents) and place it instead in the hands of representative legislative bodies (like Congress). The War Powers Clause of the Constitution (Article I, Section 8, Clause 11), for instance, gives the power to declare war to Congress, where the matter has to be debated in public by a legislative body that does not serve at the pleasure of the President. Other checks include procedures to delimit the power of the police, military, and government officials. The Fourth Amendment to the Constitution, for example, is designed to protect citizens from arbitrary search and seizure. It reads: "The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized." After the fact, there are legal

mechanisms in place for contesting the decisions of political leaders – these may include domestic courts, Congressional hearings, and international tribunals.

Of course, these laws, norms, and institutions function with varying degrees of success. Honig notes that things have gotten more difficult for modern-day Posts; we now have "only the shadows of the rights for which Post fought."[212] The last two U.S. Presidential administrations have seized broad discretionary power in matters of civil liberties and foreign policy. Constraints on what the sovereign *can* do and what the sovereign *ought* to do on behalf of the citizenry are all too often absent or ignored with impunity. The Department of Justice, for example, has recently authorized the use of lethal force against U.S. citizens suspected of terrorism if "an informed, high-level government official of the U.S. government has determined that the targeted individual poses an imminent threat of violent attack against the United States."[213] This is an immense amount of power to rest in the hands a single official. It is not at

[212] Honig, *Emergency Politics*, 81.

[213] "Lawfulness of a Lethal Operation Directed Against a U.S. Citizen Who is a Senior Operational Leader of Al-Qa'ida or An Associated Force," Department of Justice White Paper, http://msnbcmedia.msn.com/i/msnbc/sections/news/020413_DOJ_White_Paper.pdf, accessed on February 6, 2013. As Ta-Nehisi Coates suggests in his discussion of the white paper, there's something Orwellian going on here. The white paper claims that the U.S. government is authorized to kill individuals who pose an "imminent threat" to the U.S., not only when those individuals are engaged in an offensive operation but also when they are elite members of a group whose general goal is to attack the U.S. (such as Al-Qaeda). The administration has turned "imminence" into a meaningless concept. Coates concludes, "I understand that on some level a democracy generally elects human leaders who will not abuse the spirit of the law. I think Barack Obama is such a leader. That is for the historians to determine. But practically, much of our foreign policy now depends on the hope of benevolent dictators and philosopher kings. The law can't help. The law is what the kings say it is." Coates, "What Would Orwell Make of Obama's Drone Policy?" http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2013/02/what-would-orwell-make-of-obamas-drone-policy/272882/, accessed on February 6, 2013. Coates is at once more optimistic about human nature in the face of this lack of accountability than I am *and* more resigned to it. As I see it, leaders who are not constrained by law and norms, and who do not reasonably expect to be called to account for their actions, will be tempted to abuse their power. Whether they do or not, however, they are in a position of domination insofar as they *could* exercise their power arbitrarily, at will and with impunity. But citizens are not consigned

all clear that laws and practices are in place to prevent the abuse of this power. Similarly, regarding the definition of torture, the monitoring of citizens' communications, and the legality and ethics of "kill lists," a small number of high-level officials have acted with limited transparency and relative impunity.

Where the rule of law is undeveloped, degraded, or challenged, citizens may *wish* that their political leaders would exercise discernment, take responsibility for their decisions, and account for them in public, but we often feel powerless to make it so. Meanwhile, as economic power and social influence are concentrated in the hands of fewer and fewer people, political elites attend to the interests of this tiny but immensely powerful minority, while the rest of us have few means of holding them accountable. Citizens, churches, and civic organizations, for the most part, have not been able to generate the kind of counter-pressure necessary to wrest power from the elites. As long as this is the case, the deck will remain stacked against us.[214]

In the face of all of this, we might be tempted, with Žižek, to call for the violent overthrow of the present order in favor of a new political configuration. But an abyssal act of the sort Žižek advocates would substitute one sort of arbitrariness for another. What is needed is not the abandonment of practices of recognition, responsibility, and accountability, grounded in norms of justice and equality, but the proliferation of such practices.[215] This is not Žižek's

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to merely wishing for benevolent dictators and philosopher kings; they must be enlisted in the hard work of building relationships, coalitions, and institutions capable of wresting power from the elites and holding them accountable.

[214] Where citizens lack the power to hold elites accountable, those elites often act like Hegel's "conscience," the individual who attests to the sincerity of his convictions, while denying others the authority to do anything but nod in assent. We see this in President Obama's expressed confidence that N.S.A. surveillance programs have not been abused.

[215] Stout, *Blessed Are the Organized*. For an excellent discussion of broad-based organizing as an exercise of political voice, which draws on Stout's *Blessed Are the Organized*, see Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Exercising One's Political Voice as a Moral Engagement," in *Understanding*

dialectical materialism, but a kind of democracy characterized by agon and reconciliation. We can take heart – and take lessons – from citizens who have engaged in these practices to make their institutions and leaders more accountable, less dominating, and more democratic. Louis Post is one such exemplar. So are civil rights organizers like Ella Baker, Fannie Lou Hamer, and Myles Horton.[216]

These citizens recognize themselves and others to be co-equal loci of normative authority. They hold one another accountable. They build one-on-one relationships, political coalitions, and broad-based institutions to help them do so. They use democratic norms to name and to resist domination. They enact agonistic democratic politics, insofar as they acknowledge the finitude and corrigibility of human beings and, thus, the centrality of ongoing contestation in our pluralistic life together.

Agon and Reconciliation

I have said a good deal about practices of contestation and social critique. Implicit in this form of politics, however, are also practices of reconciliation that sustain the community over time. When relationships of reciprocal recognition are absent or undermined, when relations between individuals or groups within a community are characterized by distrust or despair, the moral fabric of the community is torn. Violence, domination, and other kinds of harm violate and damage the trust that is required for reciprocal recognition and for the generation of

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Liberal Democracy: Essays in Political Philosophy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 143-173.

[216] See Romand Coles's essay on Ella Baker in: Stanley Hauerwas and Romand Coles, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary: Conversations between a Radical Democrat and a Christian* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008), 45-86. Also see Charles Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997).

normative authority. To repair the moral fabric of the community, individuals must generate trust and hope where distrust and despair reign. This is the work of reconciliation. Practices of reconciliation may be as simple as two individuals' confession to and forgiveness of one another or as complex as South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but they share the aim of creating or restoring a kind of fellowship in the common good of the community.

Hegel highlights confession and forgiveness as sacramental practices that symbolize and actualize the reciprocal recognition that is absolute spirit. In the realm of democratic politics, however, what role might these practices play? And what do they have to do with justice? These are rich questions, which have been addressed by a vast body of scholarship in philosophy, political theory, religious studies, and ethics.[217] I can consider them only briefly here, hewing closely to the Hegelian social-practical account of authority and its relationship to practices of agon and reconciliation.

On Hegel's account, confession and forgiveness bring about reciprocal recognition and absolute spirit because, in word and deed, they realize the importance of social practices of acting *and* judging for normativity and authority. Through their confession and forgiveness, the wicked and judging consciousnesses make explicit their realization that their beliefs and actions

[217] Forgiveness is an astoundingly complex topic, about which there are a number of important debates and a vast quantity of secondary literature. For an overview of the literature, see Nigel Biggar, "Forgiveness in the Twentieth Century: A Review of the Literature, 1901-2001," in *Forgiveness and Truth*, Alistair McFadyen and Marcel Sarot, eds. (Edinburg and New York: T&T Clark, 2001). I have found the work of Margaret Urban Walker particularly helpful in constructing the view of forgiveness presented here (not least in her insistence that "forgiveness is a variable human practice and a practice with culturally distinctive versions.") See Walker, *Moral Repair: Reconstructing Moral Relations after Wrongdoing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 152. Like Walker's, my view of forgiveness is connected to a right-order account of justice. Although I disagree with Nicholas Wolterstorff on this and several other questions about what forgiveness is and entails, I have benefited immensely from engagement with his thoughtful and thorough account of forgiveness, particularly in *Justice in Love* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011).

are corrigible; that others stand in a position to judge those beliefs and actions; and that each individual must take up the positions of corrigible agent and judge, and, then, of confessor and forgiver in turn. Domination and other injustices, however, ignore these epistemic and practical realizations. They violate the relations of reciprocal recognition that constitute absolute spirit. They damage the trust that underlies these relationships. Someone who has been the victim of wrongdoing has good reason to refuse to recognize the wrongdoer as "selfsame," as himself a competent agent and judge. The wrongdoer is, with good reason, no longer in good standing.

Confession and forgiveness aim to right the relations of reciprocal recognition that have been damaged by injustice or harm. In confession, the wrongdoer acknowledges the injustice, the damage that it has done to the relationship, and his responsibility for it. In forgiveness, the wronged acknowledges the confession, and agrees to recognize the wrongdoer as a competent agent and judge once again.[218] Forgiveness, therefore, reconciles the wrongdoer and the wronged and restores their reciprocal recognition. They serve as entry moves into a relationship of reciprocal recognition when such a relationship has been damaged or non-existent. Institutional practices of confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation are critical when the wronged and the wrongdoers within a community or society must find ways to move forward together, to generate authority and accountability, and to build new political institutions and practices.

[218] Practices of rebuke, restitution, and punishment can also be part of the process of reconciliation, although I do not consider them here. Where these practices *are* utilized, they must keep the aim of reconciliation and restoration of right relationship in mind. As Walker writes, "communities certainly should avoid treatments of wrongdoers that are degrading and dehumanizing in ways that harden or brutalize the wrongdoers so as to render them unfit for morally responsible relationships. Such treatment would undermine the basis for renewing trust in and hope for wrongdoers" (139).

This view of forgiveness and reconciliation is therefore central to restorative justice, an alternative to traditional approaches to criminal justice. Restorative justice attempts to enact reconciliation by righting the relationships that have been sundered by a harm that was done, providing restitution for the violation while reinstating the wrong-doer as a member of the moral community. In her work on moral repair, philosopher Margaret Urban Walker writes, "Restorative justice embodies a view of crime or violence as a violation of people and relationships that entails an obligation to set things right, repairing victims and communities, and ideally humanizing and reintegrating offenders. The emphasis for restorative justice is on repairing relations through acknowledging the needs of victims and requiring accountability of those responsible for harm, through truth-telling, apology, and restitution or compensation."[219] The idea of restorative justice has informed practices, programs, and institutions on scales both small and large, from local programs like the Community Conferencing Center in Baltimore, which teaches and implements alternative conflict resolution strategies in public schools, to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which invited public testimony and discourse to grapple with the legacy of apartheid and armed resistance in South Africa.

This view of reconciliation also informs democratic practice outside of the organizational and institutional settings in which the principles of restorative justice have taken root. One particular challenge facing democratic communities is to create trust and reciprocal recognition where there is none. In some situations, *sacrifice* serves this function. In Chapter 4, I showed how sacrifice functions in Hegel's account of the absolute. In order to enter into a relationship of reciprocal recognition, each person must relinquish his or her sense of absolute self-certainty. They enter into this relationship at the moment that they recognize their epistemic parity or

[219] Walker, *Moral Repair*, 15.

symmetry. But because full-fledged reciprocal recognition must be actualized on both an epistemic and a practical level, we should also expect to find sacrifice in social and political relations. As Marcel Mauss notes in his work on the gift economy, non-instrumental social relations can be created and maintained over time through the giving and receiving of gifts. Ongoing practices of mutual gift-giving create a network of relationships of trust, hope, and mutual obligation.[220]

Sacrifice works in much the same way as gift-giving. In a sacrifice, one gives up a good that is her due for the sake of a relationship.[221] It is a kind of gift-giving which, when mutual, can sustain and even strengthen the bonds of reciprocal recognition between individuals. As Hegel suggests, however, a felicitous or effective sacrifice is tied to a particular account of authority, namely the social-practical account. As I argued in Chapter 4, the individual making the sacrifice must see herself as a locus of responsibility and must see her sacrifice as part of the process of creating and sustaining normative authority.[222]

Political theorist Danielle Allen describes what she calls *democratic* sacrifices along these lines. She argues that every democratic decision has winners and losers; in many cases, some citizens are called upon to make sacrifices for the sake of others. In a well-functioning, just, and democratic society, the burden of these losses is equitably shared among citizens; each can reasonably expect that his or her sacrifices will be noted and reciprocated by others. When

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[220] Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies,* trans. W.D. Halls (New York: Norton, 1990).

[221] I am grateful to John Bowlin for helpful conversation and questions about my account of sacrifice. In his forthcoming book on tolerance, Bowlin argues that sacrifice plays an important role in the exercise of the virtues of tolerance and forbearance.

[222] On these and related points, I have learned a great deal from Beth Eddy's work on sacrifice, scapegoating, and the distinction between the two. See Beth Eddy, *The Rites of Identity: The Religious Naturalism and Cultural Criticism of Kenneth Burke and Ralph Ellison* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), esp. 57-79, 120-38.

these conditions are met, these sacrifices serve the function of the gift, sustaining bonds of mutuality among citizens over time.

When that kind of reciprocity cannot be assumed, however, what Allen calls a "signal sacrifice" may begin to create it. In those cases, one person relinquishes a good that is her due for the sake of a relationship of reciprocal recognition that does not yet exist. Allen's example is Elizabeth Eckford, one of the Little Rock Nine, who in her first attempt to attend Central High School was surrounded by a mob of whites who cursed her and threatened to lynch her. Allen writes, "a signal sacrifice, like Elizabeth Eckford's, declares a context of equity, not rivalry, to obtain; her gift was one of faith."[223] Eckford's hope for a more democratic society, one in which a greater number of her fellow citizens would recognize her as an equal rather than a rival, motivated her sacrifice. If the sacrifice is acknowledged, it creates bonds of relationship that did not previously obtain.[224]

Of course, signal sacrifices are risky. Where there is no reciprocal recognition, where the bonds of mutuality do not yet exist, a sacrifice offered in the spirit of recognition and reconciliation carries the risk of rejection or refusal.[225] Just as the confession of the wicked consciousness was initially ignored by the judging consciousness, a sacrifice like Elizabeth Eckford's may be ignored by those who have oppressed her. We slide backward as often as we move forward; reciprocal recognition is never a given, and where it does exist, it is always in danger of breaking down. Practices of reconciliation, including sacrifice, are ways of resisting

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[223] Danielle S. Allen, *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship since Brown v. Board of Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 136.

[224] Nancy Jay argues that sacrifice is the means through which relationships are created and maintained. She is particularly interested in the role of sacrifice in maintaining patriarchal familial and spiritual lineages. Jay, *Throughout Your Generations Forever: Sacrifice, Religion, and Paternity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

[225] On issues of sacrifice, risk, and rejection, see Moshe Halbertal, *On Sacrifice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), especially 1-18.

and of responding to this break down. They are aimed at creating, sustaining, or repairing a "context of equity," relations of mutual trust and accountability. When these do not exist, practices of agon and practices of reconciliation may look much the same. Indeed, there is something artificial about distinguishing between them as I have done here. Eckford's signal sacrifice is both agonistic and reconciliatory; it implicitly criticizes unjust social arrangements even while it attempts to build relations of reciprocity. At their best, civil disobedience and non-violent direct action involve sacrifices for the sake of relationship that may not quite exist but which citizens hope to enact. In such situations, practices of agon and reconciliation are not at odds with one another; indeed, they are woven together.

Conclusion

This chapter opened with an epigraph from the American novelist and essayist Marilynne Robinson. She writes that to see the sacred in human experience and life is to "arrive at democracy as an ideal, and to accept the difficult obligation to honor others and oneself with something approaching due reverence." This vision, Robinson continues, "is wholly realist in acknowledging the great truth of the centrality of human consciousness, wholly open in that it anticipates and welcomes the disruption of present values in the course of finding truer ones."

This is, it seems to me, a deeply Hegelian sentiment.

Hegel claims that the absolute is both subject and substance, both human and divine. To see ourselves and others as part and parcel of the absolute, then, is to recognize both aspects of our individual and collective nature. It means, as Robinson notes, approaching ourselves and others with honor and reverence. It means treating differences and disagreements not as cause for despair or domination but as part of democracy's dialectic, in which norms are contested and

authority is generated. It means acknowledging that, as we face these differences and disagreements, there is no metaphysical guarantor *out there* whose authority we can immediately intuit or discern. There are just the corrigible beliefs and practices of diverse citizens and the shape of spirit that sustains them. The effort to get these practices right is an uphill battle. We all-too-often fail to recognize our fellow citizens and we fall into arbitrary and even dominating relations with one another. But as Robinson suggests, and as I have been arguing along with Hegel, when we can recognize the humanity, and the divinity, in one another and in our lives together, it might well be enough.

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