

NATURAL IMPURITIES IN SPIRIT? HEGELIANISM BETWEEN KANT AND HOBBS

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Recognition is certainly *the* hot Hegelian topic today and Paul Redding is among the finest authors on it in the world. But what exactly is ‘recognition’ (*Anerkennung*)? Is there some unique phenomenon called ‘recognition’ that all of the recent debates in political philosophy, Hegel-scholarship and neo-Hegelian theoretical and practical philosophy are about, or could it be that different authors are talking about, at least partly, different things?

On the one hand, according to a view widespread in political philosophy today, recognition seems to be some social or psychological good that individuals and groups need and yearn, and sometimes struggle to get, from each other. On the other hand, according to neo-Hegelian philosophers like Redding, recognition is an *ontological* phenomenon thanks to which we are the kinds of beings that we are in the first place—not mere animals, but ‘spiritual beings’, to speak Hegelian. It seems related to this difference in views that in political philosophy the focus is usually on the significance of *receiving* recognition from others, or on being an *object* of recognition, whereas at least Redding’s focus has been more on the significance of recognizing others, or on being a *subject* of recognition.

So here is my first question. What would be interesting to know is how Redding conceives of recognition in the sense in which he talks about it—as constitutive of what we are—to be related to recognition in the sense in which people in political philosophy tend to talk about it—as a good among other goods (even if perhaps a very important one) that individuals and groups need, desire, claim and struggle to get from each other? Is what the explicit or implicit hopes and demands for recognition in the political arena—say, by ethnic, sexual and other minority groups—seem to be about the same thing as what Redding calls ‘recognition’? Or to put it simply, is the thing called ‘recognition’ that beings like us, according to the debates in political philosophy, need and desire from each other the same thing as the thing called ‘recognition’ that makes us the kinds of beings we are in the first place? Or if these are different issues, are there any interesting connections between them?

Now, if one then takes a look at Paul Redding's distinctive profile within the group of Hegel-scholars and neo-Hegelian philosophers who interpret recognition in Hegel as an ontological issue—as something that distinguishes us from mere animals—he stands out in quite an interesting way. Other prominent members of this group such as Robert Pippin and Terry Pinkard (and, at least until quite recently, Robert Brandom¹) have tended to emphasize the *discontinuity* between nature and spirit, or, animality and spirit. In Pippin and Pinkard this is to a large extent motivated by their opposition to various kinds of attempts at naturalization of the mind, intentionality, normativity etc. so popular in contemporary Anglophone philosophy, and reflects their generally Kantian, dualistic philosophical outlook. For Pippin and Pinkard 'spirit' is Hegel's name for "the normative", i.e. the space of norms and reasons, and it is something that stands in stark contrast with nature. How nature and spirit relate to each other, how the latter could ever emerge out of the former, or how a bunch of hairy animals could ever develop into beings like us who administer their life with collectively self-authorized norms, are not issues they have shown much interest in pursuing. Whereas Pippin and Pinkard are happy with what they see as Hegel's *socialization and historization* of spirit, or "the normative" that is, it is their worry about any hint of its *naturalization* that apparently inhibits them from saying much about anything about nature or animality in general or *in us* in particular.

In contrast—and I wonder if this is related to the fact that he also has a degree in medicine—Redding has shown a keen interest in the animal side in humans, or in those aspects of our being that we share with the 'non-spiritual' sentient and self-moving life-forms. For one thing, already in *Hegel's Hermeneutics*² Redding was a sharp-sighted and highly original interpreter of the particular animal phenomenon that in Hegel's account precedes recognition—namely desire (*Begierde*). On his reading consciousness (*Bewusstsein*) in Hegel stands more or less for what 'intentionality' stands for philosophers nowadays, starting from early twentieth century phenomenology.³ Importantly, desire is a primitive, animal form of consciousness or intentionality. One detail that I find especially interesting in Redding's interpretation of desire in Hegel is the connection that he draws between desire and the first part of Hegel's logic, the Logic of Being that is. Any form or mode of consciousness in Hegel is a particular mode of subject-object-relationship, or a particular way in which something is given as an object for a subject. What is specific about desire as a mode of object-relation is that in it the object is, *for the subject, identical with* some particular quality. What is still lacking is thus a differentiation, or *Urteil*, between things and their qualities or properties, which would be a determination of objects according to logical structures belonging to the Logic of Essence.⁴

This means that for a subject whose consciousness is immersed in, or cannot transcend, what Hegel calls desire, there are no subsistent objects that could survive a change of their qualities or properties. Furthermore, the qualities in light of which the desiring animal subject sees objects in the world, and with which objects for it are identical, are determined by the subject's physiological constitution and needs. To put it briefly, anything *can be for* a desire-driven subject only if it is, for it, immediately desirable, or (as we can easily continue Hegel's thought) immediately repellent.⁵

This single-minded, solipsist form of consciousness immersed in immediate practical preoccupation with immediately given objects—lacking any capacity to abstract from what pressing bodily needs determine as relevant—is then, in Redding's interpretation of Hegel, completely revolutionized in recognition. Recognition is or involves an acknowledgement of other intentionalities or other intentional subjects in the world, and—to make a long and complicated story very short—through it comes about a general mode of intentionality that embodies an acknowledgement of perspectivity. Perspectivity is inbuilt in this general mode distinguishing 'spiritual' from merely animal subjects *both* in the sense that the spiritual subject grasps itself as one subject among many subjects, *and* in the sense that it grasps the determinations or qualities in light of which it sees objects at any given time as a selection among many possible qualities in light of which they can be seen (and thus associated with other objects).⁶ In short, what is at stake in recognition is the coming about of the kind of socialized subjectivity aware of perspectivity that is defining of human persons.

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My second question is this: What, if anything, remains of the immediacy of desire, or immediacy more generally, in the socialized form of consciousness or subjectivity in Redding's view? As far as I can see, he does not pursue this question in *Hegel's Hermeneutics*. Interestingly however, his second book, *The Logic of Affect*, is all about the bodily, physiological, or animal immediacy in the constitution of human subjectivity. In comparison to Redding's discussion of desire in *Hegel's Hermeneutics*, *The Logic of Affect* does involve a refocusing however. Whereas desire, on Redding's interpretation of Hegel, is a primitive form of *intentionality*, in *The Logic of Affect* Redding focuses on the *pre- or sub-intentional* levels of subjectivity, on the affective or somatic self-givenness of the subject, especially in the practical dimension of emotions, and feelings of pleasure and displeasure.

The Logic of Affect is not primarily a book about Hegel, but on the one hand an argument for the importance of avoiding an exclusively cognitivist approach to emotions and subjectivity more generally, and on the other hand an archaeological investigation of the origins of the alternative somatist or affectivist approach to emotions and subjectivity in 19th century German philosophy and medicine. As in his third book *Analytic Philosophy and the Return of Hegelian Thought*,⁷ also in *The Logic of Affect* Redding makes a very powerful case for the claim that there is a much less radical break than is usually thought between the German idealists and subsequent movements of thought that were thought to put German Idealism to sleep for ever. In *The Logic of Affect* Redding argues that both William James and Sigmund Freud were influenced by streams of thought in Germany and in Britain that lead back to German Idealism—especially to Schelling's philosophy of nature—and that the German idealists were in many ways much closer to modern psychology than the usual stereotypes allow for.

To return to my theme, towards the end of this fascinating book Redding makes an intriguing proposal that seems to involve an answer to my second question, and I wonder whether this is actually an answer Redding endorses, or endorsed at the time of writing the book. Referring to Freud and the psychologist Silvan Tompkins, Redding writes (after several chapters of intricate historical and systematic discussion of the inevitability of accounting for the somatic and the affective in any serious account of subjectivity) the following: "The having of affects cannot be grounded on reason because reasoning relies on the strictly *irrational* rewards and punishments provided by the affect system itself."⁸ In Redding's view affective rewards and punishments, or in other words, the feelings of pleasure and displeasure are thus necessary moving or motivating elements in humans even as full-fledged persons. Yet, they are indeterminate and in order to play determinate roles within mental life they have to be incorporated in "representations" of the world, or in other words given an object-directed intentional form.⁹

Even if Redding does not discuss it at this point, this seems to relate closely to the themes of desire and recognition in his earlier book. Hegel, in his *Anthropology*, gives the feelings of pleasure and displeasure an important role in that they mediate between, on the one hand, the outer sensations given in the outer senses, and, on the other hand, the organism's inner states.¹⁰ To cut again a long story short, desirable objects are those that arouse sensations of pleasure in the desiring subject. Here the association of (pre- or sub-intentional) bodily sensations of pleasure and displeasure with determinate objects in representations (i.e. in states with the intentional subject-object-form) apparently takes place instinctually. To achieve any capacity to orient in a space of reasons in which one can grasp objects as also independent of their instinctually salient qualities, the subject has to become a socialized subject and in the Hegelian account this requires relations of recognition where other subjects are acknowledged and accepted as independent perspectives on objects. This centrally involves developing the capacity to defer, or resist, the innersubjective pulls and pushes of pleasure and displeasure associated with objects as actually moving one to action (or better, behaviour) with regard to these objects. This is what is apparently at issue in the Hegelian *Aufhebung* of mere desire-orientation through the check by, and recognition of, irreducibly other subjects.

My third question is this: Assuming that the affects of pleasure and displeasure are necessary for motivation, what role do they play in the acts or attitudes of recognition? One way to go here might be to say that whereas recognizing others involves displeasure,¹¹ being recognized by others involves pleasure, and one cannot have the second without the first. Probably there are other ways as well to grasp the roles of pleasure and displeasure

in recognition, but whichever way one goes there is a worry. If it is true that pleasure and displeasure are *necessary* moving or motivating ingredients in anything humans do even as full-fledged persons—which is what I understand Redding to be saying in *The Logic of Affect*—then it seems that the immediacy of animal motivation is, in fact, not overcome in recognition. Moreover, since *recognition itself* is something humans do, and thus, following Redding’s suggestion, driven by immediate affects, it is difficult to see how it could even in principle effectuate the kind of abstraction or emancipation from natural immediacy it is supposed to.

One option that comes to mind would be to understand recognition as a process where subjectivities driven by desires and aversions become mediated by the desires and aversions that other subjects are driven by. Thus, pure solipsism would be overcome. Yet, the result of such mediation would seem to be at best some kind of interlocking system of desires and fears, not a sublation of or emancipation from them. Whereas this might well be an accurate picture of the life of social non-human animals, spelling out Hegel’s idea of the state of mutual recognition in terms of it would seem to make Hegel some kind of an elaborate Hobbes. (One can imagine the cynicism that would result from applying such a broadly Hobbesian view of recognition in the analysis of claims, desires and struggles for recognition in the political realm—assuming of course that this is not a completely different theme, which is what my first question was about.)

One way to construe what I am asking here is the following. Are philosophers of recognition locked in a dilemma of *either* having to let nature into recognition and thereby undermining its emancipatory significance (for surely emancipation is at least as much about overcoming as it is about remembering or acknowledging nature in us), *or* having to act as if there were no problem, by simply avoiding too much talk about nature in us, in recognition, *or* in Hegel’s view of us and recognition?¹² Or is this—*either* naturalizing recognition, *or* talking about it *as if* it were unproblematically purified of any natural taint—perhaps a false dilemma, or a misrepresentation of what the stakes really are in conceiving recognition as making us more than merely natural beings?

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NOTES

1. For a while Brandom seemed to be drawing a very rough divide between the realms of nature and spirit—lumping the rusting of chunks of iron and the behaviour of animals such as parrots together in the former realm as examples of “natural responses” to environment (see Robert Brandom, *Articulating Reasons: An Introduction to Inferentialism*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2000, 48), and insulating the human “conceptual responses” embedded in intersubjective practices of norm-administration from nature (thus arousing worries in McDowell and others of “frictionless spinning”). However, more recently (see Robert Brandom, “The Structure of Desire and Recognition: Self-consciousness and self-constitution”, *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, vol 33, no 1, 127-150; reprinted in Heikki Ikäheimo & Arto Laitinen, *Recognition and Social Ontology*. Leiden: Brill, forthcoming) Brandom has started, as it were, crossing the divide from the side of nature—and arguably in a way that involves a degree of naturalization of the realm of spirit that could scarcely be acceptable for the more unambiguously Kantian neo-Hegelians.

2. Paul Redding, *Hegel's Hermeneutics*. Ithaca N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996.

3. *Ibid.*, 77.

4. *Ibid.*, 105. The connection with the Logic of Being is made more explicit in Paul Redding, *The Logic of Affect*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999, 141-143, but if I am right the idea is there already in the earlier book.

5. Redding, *Hegel's Hermeneutics*, 105.

6. See *ibid.*, 11-17, 102-103, 110-118.

7. Paul Redding, *Analytic Philosophy and the Return of Hegelian Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007

8. Redding, *The Logic of Affect*, 157.

9. *Idem.*

10. G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Subjective Spirit*, ed. M.J. Petry. Dordrecht: Reidel, 1978-9, Volume I, 163, 177; volume III, 243.

11. Recognizing other subjects as independent centres of intentionality and thereby giving up the sovereignty of one's own perspective is, it would seem, not a pleasurable experience. It is not in Hegel's story of the lord and the bondsman (or slave), and it is not always in real life either (especially thinking of the pain and potential trauma of separation in early childhood). In Hegel's story of the “struggle of recognition” it seems to be exactly the violence or shock of the non-reducibility of the other subject to one's solipsistic viewpoint that decentres the immediate desire-driven mode of consciousness, and makes it conscious of its perspective as one among many.

12. Pinkard seems to make a rhetorical volte-face from a Kantian Hegel who is quietist about nature to a version of Hegel who appears very much like an elaborate version of Hobbes, when he conceives of freedom as standing in a relation “of being both ‘master’ and ‘slave’ to another agent (who also stands in that relation to oneself)” (Terry Pinkard, *German Philosophy 1760-1860: The Legacy of Idealism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, 283.) This makes it seem as if mutual recognition is a matter of mutual fear and the natural end of survival (since clearly the slave is bound by fear for his life), and thereby reducible to natural motives—something that looks like a parody of the Kant-Hegelian idea of *freedom* as government by collectively self-authorized norms. This is certainly not a construal of his position that Pinkard would be happy with, but the problem is that, in avoiding thematizing the question about the role of naturality in recognition itself, a Kantian-Hegelian position easily ends up being conceptually so vague that it does not have the means to discern when nature (and Hobbes) has in fact slipped in. Robert Pippin's resoluteness in saying as little as possible about the psychological processes and capacities involved in recognition (see his *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008, especially chapters 2, 5 and 7) makes me wonder whether he is eventually on any safer grounds on this issue. I am asking how Redding—as a Hegelian who certainly does not avoid talking about nature and psychology—sees the options here.