

Is there a struggle for recognition? In comparing Hegel and Honneth

Abstract

The present analysis tries to cast serious doubt about Honneth's connection between struggle and recognition and his pretension of finding its early essential and determinant theorization in some texts contained in Jena writings of young Hegel. Beyond Honneth's thesis results paradoxical in many respects and theoretically almost inconsistent, a mere baseless overlapping of what should mean both the more obvious notion and real existence of society as well as those of individual, his reference to Hegel's recognition idea, substantially linked to a 'pre-social', 'pre-political', as well as *naturally* primitive and eventual atmosphere and scenario, seems extremely inappropriate and variously arbitrary, although this operation shows an emphatical exigence of objective foundation of what is variously insidious and bids one of most inaccessible theoretic challenge.

Keywords: Hegel, Honneth, society, individuals, recognition

Volume 4 Issue 6 - 2020

Vittorio Ricci

Department of Letters and Philosophy, University Tor Vergata
Rome, Italy

Correspondence: Vittorio Ricci, Department of Letters and Philosophy, University Tor Vergata Rome, Via Camminate 78-03030 Posta Fibreno (FR), Italy, Tel 3312062137, Email riccivittorio@libero.it

Received: November 05, 2020 | **Published:** December 24, 2020

Introduction

The concept of recognition" (*Anerkennung*) is an increasingly important tenet in the philosophical area linked to political-social theories, above all by virtue of Honneth's reflections. It is impossible to examine his complex and vast elaboration developed in many several years and writings, outlined by him himself again in another latest book on this argument.¹ But the theoretical association between struggle and recognition is very labile, based rather on a contradictory attempt to found what cannot found in itself.² Such an association unveils rather a bivalent ambiguity, a conflictual aspiration towards an identity already immediately presupposed and on the other side a sort of teleology for something absolutely constitutive and always already necessarily non-ignorable. In other words, if the recognition is surely not suitable for imposition or competitive cogence, the recognition may not be an end of a human, however essential, activity. The recognition is indeed no quality or qualification, neither a practical or cognitive faculty, but a 'crisis', a gap of identity, not the proper or authentic identity, but an identity wanting, void, 'privative', quasi 'asocial', more pre-political than 'political' (perhaps also and then 'metapolitical'). Beyond this observation, historically the need of recognition and the same simple talking about it emerged in modern epoch because of increasingly acutedisorientation and final dissolution of subjectivity still unresolved.

The present research would aim almost entirely only at confronting Honneth's theory with Hegel's position, considering that Honneth himself explicitly declares to theoretically depend on scheme of the latter thinker. The contemporary philosopher considers very significant young Hegel's works related to his Jena lecturing, namely the *System of ethical life* (*Das System der Sittlichkeit* 1802/3),³ the third section of spirit's philosophy in *Das System der speculative*

Philosophie (*System of speculative Philosophy* 1803/4)⁴ and above all *Real philosophie* 1805/6.⁵ In these manuscripts Honneth believes to discover the notion of *struggle for recognition*, above all in *Kampf um Anerkennung* (1992).⁶ According to the contemporary theorist Hegel would describe conflict's category in recognition's domain

⁴Hegel GWF. *Das System der speculativen Philosophie, Gesammelte Werke VI*, hrsg.von Klaus Düsing und Heinz Kimmerle. Hamburg; 1975 (henceforth *GW* 6).⁴

⁵Hegel GWF. *Naturphilosophie und Philosophie des Geistes*, Jenaer Systementwürfe III, in *Gesammelte Werke VIII*, hrsg.von Rolf Peter Horstmann und Mitarbeit von Johann Heinrich Trede. Hamburg; 1976 (henceforth *GW* 8).

⁶Honneth A. *Kampf um Anerkennung. Zur moralischen Grammatik sozialer Konflikte*. Frankfurt am Main 1994. ID., *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, translated by Joel Anderson. Cambridge 1995.⁵ It is impossible here to present the criticism addressed to Honnethian notion of recognition, and in particular in this early fundamental publication. However, an aspect is to outline, attainable from the lexical choice related to the secondary subtitle, namely "The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts". Cf. for instance: Hennig Ch. *Normativer Überdruck. Übereinige Unklarheiten in Axel Honneths Anerkennungs theorie und ihren systematischen Grund*. *Allgemeine Zeitschrift für Philosophie*; 2010. 1-21 p.⁶, in which the following, paraps excessive, judgment lies: „In order to achieve this, the concept is emptied of any „immoral“ aspects, of contradictions and ambivalence. Thus, devoid of crucial elements of social reality, the notion becomes fruitless for empirical research and theoretically inconsistent.” (p. 1-2). Cf. also Deboer K. 'Kampf oder Anerkennung? Einige kritische Überlegungen zu Honneths Lektüre der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie', in *Alterität und Anerkennung*. Berlin 2010, p. 161-177;⁷ Sigwart HJ. "Axel Honneth. Kampf um Anerkennung. (1992)", in Brocker, M. (Hrsg.), *Geschichteder Kampf um Anerkennung*. Das 20. Jahrhundert. Berlin 2018, p. 789-804;⁸ Petherbridge D. (ed.) *Axel Honneth: Critical Essays. With A Replay by Axel Honneth*. Leiden-Boston 2011;⁹ Profumi E. "Per una comprensione del riconoscimento in politica: critica ad Axel Honneth", *Consecutio Rerum. Rivista critica della Postmodernità*, 2011, p. 1-25.¹⁰ What is too unclear, is to know whether it is plausible to talk about a *grammar* linked to a or the moral context, in addition completely marked by social conflictual situations. At first glance, a normativity of ethical type, similar to the laws of a linguistic *grammar* (not so much for the language in itself), is at least equivocal, little comprehensive. Secondly, the conflicts if due to the recognition should depend on a condition of 'primitive', spontaneous, indeed 'instinctive' dynamics, not quite on a 'positive' institutional or formalized ('grammaticalized') status and its establishment. Thirdly, a society might be conflictual or constitutively combative for the revindications of potential infractions or recognitions of denied rights of everyone or exclusively some specific group, which presuppose a basic already realized and *naturally* given recognition, or again for opinions' controversial confrontations.

¹Honneth A. *Anerkennung. Eine europäische Ideengeschichte*. Berlin; 2018.¹

²A diverse opinion, akin to Honneth, is expressed in Barba-Kay A. "Why Recognition Is a Struggle: Love and Strife in Hegel's Early Jena Writings. *Journal of the History of Philosophy*. 2016;54(2):307-332.²

³Hegel GWF. *Das System der Sittlichkeit, Schriften und Entwürfe (1799-1808)*, in *Gesammelte Werke V*, hrsg.von Manfred Baum und Kurt Rainer Meistunter Mitarbeit von Theodor Ebert. Hamburg 1988, p. 277-362 (henceforth *GW* 5). Cf. also ID., *System of Ethical Life (1802/3) and First Philosophy of Spirit (Part III of the System of Speculative Philosophy 1803/4)*. Edited and translated by T.M. Knox. Albany: State University of New York Press; 1979.³

through original idea of building a social theory on the basis of an inter subjectivist account, theme and methodology, abandoned by the idealist mature philosopher, simply for such an argument should be disappeared in his later works. Also the later Honnethian reflection on Hegel's philosophy of right keeps this critical criterion; above all in *Suffering from Indeterminacy* (1999)⁷ and *Das Recht der Freiheit* (2011)⁸ Honneth conceives and focuses the theoretical elements as inter subjective interaction of cooperating subjects and the social freedom in the form of self-recognition through activities confirming the realization of a human being.

However, this analysis would be limited to show that Honneth's interpretation about Hegel's description of recognising process is more or less a theoretic transfiguration, in which to retrace the genuine or literary Hegelian content is very difficult and own personal reinterpretations (indeed sometimes true mystifying traits) are highlightable. In fact, even if Hegel elaborates in several periods and steps his theory of *Anerkennung* with also different and relevant modifications from a lot of standpoints, his tenet is always and substantially inherent to the dimension of *consciousness* as a strategically vital self-building, but not strictly as true or accomplished political and social 'essence' or entity. Hegel conceives a recognition as a 'pre-political' motive with traits of historical type, necessary to the self-conscious or personal formation in order to conceptually justify the structure of philosophical system, but it is not always valid and above all for each consciousness or individual. The juridical determinations, the moral/ethical situations and the political institution are elements developed in a 'post-recognitive' *urgencies* and *agencies* so that individuals thereby are generally set already in a superior ambit with other dynamic articulations and cultural interactions including the education. *En passant* empirically, the noun *Anerkennung* has been very rarely found in Hegel's mentioned works instead of the verb *Anerkennen* in some of its possible conjugations.

After all, the recognition seems to be a simply 'archaic' instrument of transforming into a certain 'metaphysic' entity a mere empirical (self-)representative imagination (individual or collective – here it doesn't matter), an immediate (indeterminate) (self-)perception, that looks unnecessary, superfluous and above all 'pre-conflictual', whereby none of possible or cogent fights should subsist. In fact, the eventual negation of such a recognition shouldn't mean or involve its ontological elimination, but perhaps only it's being ignored. Besides, it seems necessary to distinguish a social recognition concerning a superordinate 'acquisition', something acquired, whereby a certain amount of social attestation is required (for ex. a scholarly degree or professional qualification), but this is illusorily 'hypertrophic' overlapping in the case of something innate or ontological more or less 'anthropologized'. Ultimately, 'sociologizing' the recognition and generally every notion concerning 'sociality' of the human being is deeply risky and too unfitting or non-performant because what 'society' means or effectively is, represents something extremely ambiguous and nearly insuperably difficult to delimit, despite the rational lucidity of Aristotle's definition *politicon zoon* and without thinking of what is individual and still more if one to recognize and in the same time as recognizing is really and permanently to consider one alone oneness. In the background of Honneth's social theory the powerful influence of structuralism and its intense consequences are perceivable. Nonetheless his proposal, enlightening in some

particularly respect, for instance the sense of indeterminacy or several insufficiencies about anthropological items and platforms, remains extremely considerable and magnificently articulated.

Honneth's hermeneutical perspectives about Hegel's notion of recognition

In the first of three parts composing *Kampf um Anerkennung*, beyond its very significant title "Historical Recall to Mind: Hegel's Original Idea" (*Historische Vergegenwärtigung: Hegelsursprüngliche Idee*), Honneth begins stating that Hegel by refuting Kant's mere ought-demand (*Sollensforderung*) inherent to his idea of individual autonomy presented theoretically it "as a historically already efficacious (*wirksam*) element of social effectiveness" (*alseinhistorischbereitswirksam der sozialen Wirklichkeit*).⁹ It is very difficult to understand the German word *Wirklichkeit*, generally translated "actuality" in English. *Wirklichkeit*, especially in Hegel's lexicon, hints at a dynamic reciprocal realization. Yet the present interest concerns mainly the adjective 'social' that should distinguish and characterize deeply the notion of recognition in Hegel's philosophy during his Jena phase, even if at the end nearly denied or deeply reviewed with semantical and theoretical differentiations impossible to explain here. It is necessary to understand whether Hegel intends to propose a description of recognition process as autonomous self-realization in social horizon and whether such an interest might be his philosophical aim. Honneth doesn't seem considering the sense of system within the Hegelian philosophy or at least as it should be required. Even in Hegel's early writings it is absolutely clear that this concept is not only fundamental, but also the essential principle, the unique fitting one to shed light on all elements of its construction. Honneth probably is not interested to textually interpret Hegel's reflections, even if he quotes several critical relevant studies on ethical doctrine of the idealistic thinker, especially in dealing with his theoretical evolution at Jena.¹⁰ A particular study on Honneth's critical sources regarding this point is very interesting. However, attribution of general social qualification to Hegel's conception of recognizing relationship without understanding the specific nature of its genuine mechanism and multifaceted polysemy in Hegel seems generally an unsustainable or too poor reading.

Although there are several also deep transformations of Hegelian approaches and frameworks in general and hence inherent to the

⁷Honneth A. *Suffering from Indeterminacy. Spinoza Lectures*. Amsterdam; 1999. ID. *Leiden an Unbestimmtheit. Eine Reaktualisierung der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie*. Stuttgart; 2001.¹¹

⁸Honneth A. *Das Recht der Freiheit. Grundriß einer demokratischen Sittlichkeit*. Berlin; 2011.¹²

⁹Honneth, *Kampf*, 11. In the footnote of the same page, some relevant essays about the relation between Kant's moral doctrine and Hegel's concept of *Sittlichkeit* are quoted, even though according to Honneth only in Jena years Hegel would have elaborated "ein theoretisches Mittel" with regard to the political task, Hegel himself would have undertaken in the time of his Jena lecturing, namely to criticise formalism of Kant's idea of ethical autonomy. The discourse should require a multifaceted reconstructive labour. Hermeneutically, even if Honneth cannot be expected to offer a complete and scientific study of Hegel's Jena philosophy, here a mere mention of Fichte's inescapable influence on Hegel's ethical thought cannot be ignored also in his young phase of theoretical evolution in Jena, period neither valuable monolithically, without even recalling Hegel's conception of *nature*, inherited from Fichte's *Naturrecht* and indispensable to focus more authentically and fully on his theoretical movement about the ethical framework also in this juvenile time (cf. Nance M. "Hegel's Jena Practical Philosophy". In: Moyer D. (Ed.). *Oxford Handbook of Hegel*, Oxford University Press; 2017. 31-37 p),¹³ even if Honneth shows *passim* to know perfectly these essential expletory elements. It is also worthy quoting: Testa I. *La natura del riconoscimento. Riconoscimento naturale e autocoscienza sociale in Hegel*. Sesto San Giovanni, 2010;¹⁴ Houlgate S. 'Hegel and Fichte: recognition, otherness and absolute knowing. *The Owl of Minerva*. 1994;26(2):3-19.¹⁵

¹⁰Cf. Forinstance Siep L. *Anerkennung als Prinzip der praktischen Philosophie. Untersuchungen zu Hegels Jenaer Philosophie des Geistes*, Hamburg; 1974.¹⁶

theme in question, it is not admissible to hypothesize a substantial change of its essence and function starting from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, as Honneth would interpret. What are historically and biographically real within Hegel's theoretical evolution are content, articulation and elements of spirit's science and particularly notion and function of consciousness inside it. The untranslatable German *Sittlichkeit*, after its occurrence in Hegel's early writing *System der Sittlichkeit*, appears as systematic element solely in the first edition of *Encyclopaedia* (1817), wherein it is configured as the third and last moment of objective Spirit. Honneth, at footnote 11 quotes Miguel Giusti,¹¹ in order to avail himself of his good judged presentation of concept *Sitten* (mores, customs), Hegel deals with in his Jena writing "Über die wissenschaftlichen Behandlungsarten des Naturrechts" (1802/3). However, concept of *Sitten* and that of *Sittlichkeit* do not seem to semantically be quite identical.

Hegel's ethical idea in *System der Sittlichkeit* (System of ethical Life) along with the various forms of recognition

Researching in this present analysis whether the aspect of sociality acknowledged by Honneth exists or not in Hegel's conception of recognition as described in his early works before *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), it is going perhaps to wonder whether the social dimension is indispensable in order to conceive and explain the recognition along with its struggle. Recognition within *System of ethical Life* concerning the knowledge of "idea of absolute ethical life" (*Idee der absoluten Sittlichkeit*), as written at its beginning, is a concept seeming pretty polyvalent but not pertinent to a social situation, at least in the sense of more or less 'organised' ensemble of human beings. The first occurrence of the term in the above-mentioned oeuvre is at a passage where the labour (*Arbeit*) is specified in its totality, notion associated to that of perfect individuality.¹² The theoretical reason resides in the particular relation defined as "solely persistent in the single one" (*nurbeständigimeinzelnen*). In the context Hegel evokes "the universal reciprocation and formation of themen" (*die allgemeine Wechselwirkung und Bildung der Menschen*). This relation is the temporal sum of all instants whereby the equality of opposites remains only interior; in fact, according to the universal reciprocation its absolute equality is inside the interiority. Hegel adds: "A recognizing, which is mutual, or the highest individuality and exterior difference" (*Ein Anerkennen, das gegenseitig ist, oder die höchste Individualität und äussere Differenz*). It means that the difference is exclusively exterior, something unsuitable to a real differentiation, only extrinsically perceived unable to produce the reality or the effectiveness of a mutual interior identity and inner entity to socially externalize and make authentic difference. Then the recognizing itself seems to get no social sense, to 'accidentally' install itself in a pre-ethical and so pre-institutional context at every level; indeed, I would dare say, this recognizing is a sort of 'pre-historical' phenomenon, in the complete natural indeterminacy, in a void interiority potentially open to every event, wherein all is possible to the consciousness, also to die simply and nothing else. Thereby there is no true (hi)story, even if expressed still in a merely intuitive modality, but only the absolute precondition of every historical determination and its eventual consequences.

¹¹Giusti M. *Hegels Kritik der modernen Welt: Über die Auseinandersetzung mit den geschichtlichen und systematischen Grundlagen der praktischen Philosophie*. Würzburg; 1987.¹⁷

¹²*GW V* 290,1-7.

The second occurrence lies in the passage concerning semiotic matter and precisely "phonetic language" (*tönende Rede*).¹³ In this case the recognizing means something like a mnemonic act of identification presupposing a similar previous act of knowing. Hegel distinguishes "a mute recognizing" (*einstimme Anerkennen*) or a mere physical, bodily sign not belonging to phonetic language if not partially as "an abstract Objectivity".¹⁴ Then he speaks of "the absolute recognizing"¹⁵ as articulation uniting objective and subjective entities belonging to phonetic language. This recognizing expresses the subjective form or the intelligence as something constituting the highest singularity and individuality; the psychological subjectivity ensures the precise and unmistakable entity necessary to a language and hence to the recognizing or re-identifying of an articulated semiotic element. Such a linguistic perspective is absolutely necessary to understand Hegel's concept of recognition, because it contains singularity's structure, individuality's form, that proper and exclusive of a human being, but it is going to pay attention, the question concerns only form without content, remembering that binomial combination *form/content* is singularly meaningful for Hegel's philosophical and systematic parameters. Individuality according to its only form is the proper constitution of transition from natural sphere or realm of *particularity* to spiritual or human sphere or better realm of *individuality* which remains substantially formal, uncompleted, unilateral in its early formation inside spirit's articulation and structure. The necessity of finding the content adequate to individual form, namely achieving its own universality and so equality, is the reason of ethical structure or *Sittlichkeit* in its systematic organization and modulation, whereby Hegel develops several modalities and conceptions during his all philosophical activity. In his first writing, *System of ethical life*, it is unequivocally neat that recognition is seen belonging to the only form of ideality with the consequence that it is previous to ethical substance or objectivity. In fact, the mentioned text continues to explain the individuality is not overcome, it is like "the abstraction of the highest rationality and shape of singularity" (*die Abstraktion der höchsten Vernünftigkeit und Gestalt der Einzelheit*). The cognitive base of recognition process is viewed by Honneth as well, but mainly on account of a particular study of Siegfried Blasche (birth of a new descendent).¹⁶

Hegel deals with the not linguistic recognizing, so to say, in the second chapter of the same first section concerning the relation of ethical life; it involves something different from the linguistic one, but doesn't surpass this individual formalism, as explicitly affirmed in the third and last point of the first moment of relation of universal to the particular through labour and possession (*Arbeit und Besitz*). Hegel writes in this passage fundamental for the present examination:

The subject is [not] merely determined, as one possessing (*einbesitzendes*), but taken up into the form of the universality, as a single in relation to others and universally negative, as one possessing who is recognized (*einanerkanntesbesitzendes*); because the recognizing is the being single, the negation so that it (*viz.* negation) as such remains fixed, but it (namely still negation) is ideal (*ideell*) in others, is merely the abstraction of the ideality not the ideality in them.

¹³*Ib.* 294,25ss.

¹⁴*Ib.* 294,28.

¹⁵*Ib.* 295,5.

¹⁶Honneth *Kampf um Anerkennung* footnote 18. „Natürliche Sittlichkeit und bürgerliche Gesellschaft. Hegels Konstruktion der Familie als sinnliche Intimität im entsittlichten Leben“. Hegel's conception of family is polymorphous as well. Despite his evolutive modifications, in principal this institution remains always in a *natural* signification.

It is doubtlessly evident that Hegel links this first conception of recognition to a purely individual subject and outlines an exclusively personal characterization like a qualitative determination of a thing. Among diverse possible valuations the aspect of abstractness is to stress and it induces to deny any inter subjective feature about the Hegelian perspective. The others do not share the same property they legally recognize and hence have to recognize so. Honneth believes that this early Hegel's account is due to his positive treatment of Fichte's theory of recognition in fundamental connection of "a »first« of human socialization" (*ein »Erstes« der menschlichen Vergesellschaftung*). According to Honneth, Hegel would have applied recognition model depicted in Fichte's "Grundlage des Naturrechts" to various forms of mutual interaction, in sense that the "interaction" (*Wechselwirkung*) among individuals in which Fichtian model consists as ground of "right's relation" (*Rechtsverhältnis*), is taken up by Hegel for projecting onto it "the inter subjective performance of a mutual recognition" (*den intersubjektiven Vorgangeiner wechselseitigen Anerkennung*). In other words, what in Fichte was transcendental-philosophical, in Hegel becomes social-practical. Honneth's exegetical filter in grasping this Hegelian thought is Aristotle's notion of *zoon politikon* unavailable in Hegel's *System of ethical life*, where in the recognition remains a relation of exclusively subjective type outside social and communicative context. Hegel's references to criminal cases also confirm decidedly his formalistic-individualistic vision and are esteemed only as possibility of their opposite cases, for instance the owner-property implies its contrary, namely its lesion through robbery and so on. Even if Honneth quotes passages in early Hegelian elaboration referred to criminal actions, as the heading of his second chapter indicates "Crime and Ethical Life: Hegel's new theoretical approach of Inter subjectivity" (*Verbrechen und Sittlichkeit: HegelsintersubjektivitätstheoretischerNeuansatz*), this reading is too excessive. A detailed examination is here impossible, but Hegel places various distinctions, for example between civil law and criminal law. It is sufficient to recall two details: 1) no ties of the recognising to the struggle relationship, almost in inter subjective horizon; 2) no tie to the scenario *Lordship/bondage* or *master/servant* and hence to the consciousness' context, due to a precise step of Hegel's systematic-speculative evolution.

Further Hegelian determinations of a singularity still incubated and latent despite the recognition

Honneth also senses the lack of consciousness' reference in *System der Sittlichkeit*,¹⁷ but explains it as a gradual substitution of Aristotle's "natural teleology" (*Naturteleologie*) with "a philosophical theory of consciousness". Instead of considering much more Hegel's fragments of *Philosophie des Geistes* (1804/5), his attention is too excessively focalized on *Real philosophie* (1806/07),¹⁸ as his entire third chapter dedicated to it demonstrates. Honneth seems to ignore the Hegelian horizon that delimits significantly the recognition by starting from the will up to "the effective Geist" (*Der wirkliche Geist*). However, Hegel's conspicuous philosophical transformation in his terms is really difficult to identify, but a relevant novelty is registered quite in the mentioned Jena fragments, not adequately evaluated by Honneth; the new entity is represented by the consciousness which seemed lost after the *System of ethical life*. Even if, to some extent, this entity is unlike its conception presented in the future *Phenomenology of Spirit* and more similar to the subject of objective spirit in the even later *Encyclopaedia*, it is the key for a correct interpretation of what is

¹⁷*Ib.*, 48.

¹⁸*GW* 8, 186ff.

trying to debate here. In the fr. 22 of the above mentioned *Philosophy of spirit*¹⁹ Hegel begins his description by saying:

It is absolutely necessary that the totality (*die Totalität*), the consciousness in the family has reached, knows (*erkennt*) itself consciousness in another such totality [knows] itself as itself (*I comment* it seems to be the notion of self-consciousness, yet unavailable); (*Hegel continues*) in this knowing (*Erkennen*) each is for another immediately an absolute single (*einabsoluteinzeller*). Each posits himself in the consciousness of the other one, sublates (*hebt [...] auf*) the singularity of the other one or each in his consciousness [posits] the other one as an absolute singularity of consciousness. This is the mutual recognizing (*das gegenseitige Anerkennung*) in general".

The terms of discussion are a bipolarization between consciousnesses claiming each other somehow to be a formal absolute totality. This totality represents the single one only as consciousness provided that every singularity of his possession and of his being is associated to his entire essence (entity). Then the struggle is not for recognition, but for the entire (*um das Ganze*), because at this level, Hegel says, "the thing is entirely negated, entirely ideal", that's undistinguishable from the essential relation to me, to consciousness' totality, the basis itself of consciousness' contradictory. The purely formal ideality is the reason of conflict until it involves the whole life, produces "the nothing of death" (*das Nichts des Todes*), because the "recognizing of singularity of the totality" (*Anerkennen der Einzelheit der Totalität*) is to be proved (*erweisen*) for the other consciousness, and it is impossible without the death. Hegel describes this phenomenon of recognizing in following terms: "Each one must know of the other whether he is absolute consciousness";²⁰ in order to gain this knowledge, it is necessary to go up to the death. Such a demonstration in every case results unrealizable because of its two possible conclusions: the first one is becoming slave (*Sklav*), if who goes up to the death, doesn't leave the life itself but shows only loss of possession or wounds, hence demonstrates to be no totality; the second conclusion is the mere impossibility of proving the totality itself, because who gives death, "sublates the strife for the dead one" (*den StreitvordemTödenaufhebt*), and so "he has neither proved himself as totality nor known the other one as such" (*so hat erwidersichalsTotalität erwiesen, noch den andernalsolchenerkennt*). What is to remain? The mere sublation is to remain. This point is very essential and inescapable for deeply comprehending the novelty and hence the true sense of Hegel's notion of recognizing. The struggle or better the strife is an action putting the end into the process rather than being its motivation with social purpose. What lets the recognising be, is the going to the death, namely "absolute contradiction" (*absoluter Widerspruch*), in sense that the consciousness becomes and is recognized solely as sublated. In other words, the consciousness is recognizable only in the case in which it cannot be recognized for what it ideally wanted and needed to be recognized. Honneth's recognition works out in quite opposite sense, it is what causes the ethical life; on the contrary, Hegel's scenario puts the origin of sociality quite into its impossibility, even though only initial, before every socialisation or institutionalisation of reciprocal respect or love ('agapic'²¹ externalization or interaction), wherefore to struggle. On the contrary,

¹⁹*GW* 6,307ff.

²⁰*Ib.* 311, 3ff.

²¹The sense of the *agape*, differentiated from *eros* and *philia*, semiotic distinctions owing to the Greek idiom, is subject of a interview addressed to Honneth and reproduced in Iorio G, Campello F. (a cura di) "La sociologia e l'amore come *agape*. Intervista ad Axel Honneth", a cura di. *Società Mutamento Politica*. 2011;2(4):257-262.¹⁸

the sublation of its becoming recognized and recognizing in general is the source of the real universal spirit, as it is capable to find the real, genuine, due content of a consciousness and thus spirit. The universal value of consciousness derived from its being recognized as single sublated totality gives its true absoluteness. Hegel wonderfully writes so: it (*viz.* consciousness) knows itself as sublate done, since equally it is only AS RECOGNIZED; it is not at all as not recognized as no other consciousness in the way in which it itself is; its recognized being is its existence and it is in this existence only sublated one.

Thus, the being recognized means sublating its singularity with consequence of producing the absolute consciousness which is any more “mere form of the singles without substanz”, namely “the spirit of a people”. In virtue of this absolute substance or absolute or universal ethical life (*absolute Sittlichkeit*) the single one is “fellow of a people” (*Mitgliedeines Volks*) and of consequence an ethical essence (*einsittliches Wesen*). The full structure of this ethical essence is “the living substance of the universal ethical life” (*die lebendige Substanz der allgemeinen Sittlichkeit*); otherwise the ethical essence as single is “an ideal form” (*eineideelle Form*), “one being only as sublate done” (*einesseyendennuralsaufgehobenes*). In order to become ethical essence, the sublation of the being recognized is absolutely necessary. At this point, Hegel seems to be unsatisfactory and to abandon an overly unilateral vision of recognizing while rethinking the philosophy of spirit in the Jena last manuscript. Above all, what is lacking in just described Hegel’s discourse? Clearly the other pole of recognizing development, namely the being not only recognized, but also one recognizing (*einanererkennender*). In order to conceive the process of one who must be not only recognized but also one who must recognize, it is indispensable an appropriate knowing and a minimum of (experienced) freedom, which Hegel believes to identify with the human will in the last Jena *Philosophie des Geistes* (1805/06), in which a consciousness’ doctrine lacks, mainly for the reason that, the preceding year by composing the so-called Jena logic (1805-06), Hegel had begun projecting and judging the consciousness entity no more suitable for a spirit’s philosophy, since it is configured as a specific metaphysical essence.²² As first immediate consequence the recognition remaining linked to the philosophy of spirit could not regard any more the consciousness, even if its process continues to be unavoidable in describing systematically the passage from nature to spirit and consciousness has to concretely act somehow in anthropic psychology, whereby it cannot but resurface in any way and sometimes stealthily for responding to impellent constraints of theoretical order like this context of recognition process. The unique place adequate to set a movement as the recognizing inside the philosophy of spirit could not be but the practical faculty or the will, because that theoretical faculty or intelligence has no content at all. Hegel rethinks his particular doctrine about the recognition by claiming some content for it, which he believes to find inside will’s practical life. But thinking of such a matter within a psychological description is a pure countersense, since the will as practical faculty can no more suffer natural conditions due quite to the lack of adequate content; and this wanting situation is no more possible at moment of exercising the will itself. However, in the last Jena manuscript Hegel writes at the ending of treatment of intelligence before entering will’s doctrine: intelligence’s liberty is “without content, at risk of which,

through the loss of which it has freed itself”;²³ the will must face such an empty, evil liberty and does so in several self-developing and gradually self-articulating modes based on the syllogistic movement (*Schluß*). The first mode significant for the theme in question is the love (*die Liebe*), defined a “knowing” (*Erkennen*) and explained “the movement of syllogism”, whereby “each extreme is filled of the ego, is so in the other one and only this being in the other one separates itself from the ego and becomes object to it”.²⁴ Hence not an indeterminate self-objectification of ego, neither a mere Honnethian reification or “self-making thing” (*Sich-zum-Dinge-machen*),²⁵ but a real objective determination operated by the ego over its own being in other one. In this cognitive situation of love each extreme is “recognized” (*anerkannt*) only as “determinate will” (*bestimmter Willen*), “natural individual” (*natürliches Individuum*), “uncultured natural Self” (*ungebildetes natürliches Selbst*). In order to overcome the just described natural being recognized and thus the natural dimension, something else should be inside the same recognizing. Hegel wonders: “What is right and duty for the individual in the natural state?” (*Was ist Recht und Pflicht für das Individuum im Naturzustand?*). He answers in not fully clear way, but he speaks of thought’s movement bringing the determination of right; the concept of individual produces a new condition, develops itself as a different relation, indicates it as person capable of right (*Rechtsfähige*), that is only subjective form, namely “this sign falls within me” (*diß Zeichen fällt in mich*), or the movement of my thought. Yet its content is the free Self (*das freye Selbst*) and “the right is the relation of the person in its relationship (that is of the person) to the (person)”, stressing attention to the dualism. Thus, the right is the limitation (*Beschränkung*) of empty freedom of the person. In such a conceptual limitation there is the object (*der Gegenstand*), namely “this producing the right in general that is the recognizing relation” (*dieses Erzeugen des Rechts überhaupt, d. h. der anerkennenden Beziehung*). Hegel continues:

In the recognizing the Self ceases to be this single one; it (the Self) is juridical (*rechtlich*) in the recognizing, that is no more in the immediate being-there. The recognized one (*Das anerkannte*) is recognized as immediately valid (*alsunmittelbargeltend*) [...] The man is necessarily recognized and is necessarily recognizing. This necessity is his own, not that of our thinking in contrast to the content. He himself as recognizing is the movement and this movement sublates quite his natural state”.

Honneth also quotes about this passage,²⁶ believing to find in it the original difference from traditional approaches and that should be a guarantee of “minimal normative consensus”, “for it is only in these mutual relations of competition that the moral potential evidenced in individuals’ willingness to reciprocally restrict their own spheres of liberty can be anchored” (still Honneth) “his (namely Hegel’s) crucial argument here is merely that all human coexistence presupposes a kind of basic mutual affirmation between subjects, since otherwise no form of being-together whatsoever could ever come into existence”. Yet it is to wonder: is this pre-contractual minimum of the being-together or coexistence the same mere human being?

On the contrary, Honneth does not seem to register Hegelian fundamental distinction between a passive and an active recognition.

²²Hegel GWF. *Logik, Metaphysik und Naturphilosophie. Systemsentwurf II, Gesammelte Werke VII*, hrsg. von Rolf Peter Horstmann und Johann Heinrich Trede. Hamburg 1971, p. 154ff., in which the practical ego also is inserted as an object of metaphysics. *En passant*, for the young Jena lecturer Hegel the logic was still separated from metaphysics.

²³GW 8, 201, 8-9.

²⁴Ib. 210, 18ss.

²⁵Honneth *Kampf um Anerkennung* footnote 10 Ernst Michael Lang: *Das Prinzip Arbeit*

²⁶Honneth. *Kampf*, p. 72-73.

Many reflections of various types should be done on Hegel's last Jena text on philosophy of spirit; here only two are sufficient: 1) the recognition involves no struggle but a natural becoming of human being, a human basic dynamics which lets individuals overcome the *state of nature* (*Naturzustand*), that Hegel calls mostly "being recognized" (*Anerkanntseyn*); the struggle is solicited and engaged in the case in which the being recognizing is wanting or transgressed, against who ought to be recognizing but is not so; 2) the horizon of recognizing is not developed by Hegel, but is limited to something juridical according to its active aspect requiring interpersonal relation, that is not only from person to person or from individual to individual, dimension requiring other factors and components, but also and previously from person to things as possession, ownership, legacy and so on. Not so much the recognition as the *being recognized* is what constitutes the human being in its own spiritual essence that has still to appropriately develop itself, although it inevitably remains in a mostly immediate sphere until its end, as far so it will be mediated at beginning of absolute spirit or the moment of art.²⁷ Its fundamental and decisive moment or movement is individualised in a "inequality" (*Ungleich*)²⁸ between two ego with the consequence of producing an extraneity in each one of the two until creating an extreme situation of going to the death; the reciprocal reflection of this deadly danger. In fact, in going to the death of the other (ego), to the related ego "as consciousness" (*als Bewußtseyn*) to go himself to the death, "to the own (death), to suicide" (*auf seine eigenen, Selbstmord*), appears (*erscheint*), because the same danger is reflexively shared.²⁹ Such a phenomenological happening with features of lethal risk so to provoke an *intuitive* immediate reaction, is the spring for establishing the recognizing in its fullest form. The aforesaid struggle lets that extraneity be discovered in its true value as ground of own *free Self*,³⁰ because the conscious ego (or one of the two extremes) in this struggle "intuits its sublated exterior being-there" (*schau also sein aufgehobenes äußerliches Daseyn an*),³¹ namely that exteriority-extraneity of this being-there has no effective validity, is in itself unworthy as such, is something vanished. So a knowing, precisely linked to the will, is formed, namely something properly 'cultural' in the structural feature has risen. In order to fill this knowing, the recognizing is activated as second more complete modulation (the first is indicated the love) and contextually assimilated to a repetition of the same knowledge,³² very akin to linguistic exercise or modality. A transformation or appropriation of this type, due to the recognising, implies necessarily a *struggle*, but not a struggle provoked by a social interest or wish or exigence, or worse some impulsiveness. This struggle is an exclusively extreme and extrimistic happening, that of life or death: it is the struggle to the life or the death to determine

²⁷It is to pay attention to the following sentence in *GW 8*, p. 278,1-2: "Being recognized is the spiritual element; but still indeterminate in itself, and therefore filled with manifold content" (*Anerkanntseyn ist das geistige Element; aber noch unbestimmt in sich, und daher erfüllt mit mannichfacher Inhalte*).

²⁸*GW 8*, p. 220, 4ff.

²⁹The mention of consciousness is an eloquent signal of the fact that this interior entity may not be evaluated metaphysically, indeed soon it is not any longer to be evaluated like this.

³⁰*GW 8*, p. 221, 12-13 "[to fill] with the recognizing, with them as free Self" (*mit dem Anerkennen, mithin als freyem Selbst*), unlike the love (*Liebe*) capable to produce only a unity of both extremes as *selfless*.

³¹*GW 8*, p. 221,5. *En passant*, Hegel seems retrieving a phenomenological content and process, which appeared till now nearly completely forgotten and occulted within the subliminal level of his soul, as well as the phenomenon of antithesis and duality of master-slave, just laconically mentioned in a marginal note (*GW 8*, p. 221, 23).

³²*GW 8*, p. 221, 15-16: "That knowing will recognize" (*Jenes Erkennen wird anerkennen*).

the cognitive process and the consequent freedom, to conquer the fundamental dimension already interiorly possessed but still unknown and unaware. The fatal struggle has nothing really combative or conflictual, rather activates a cognitive dimension consisting of a very essential acquisition of what really matters, the pure Self seen in the other one,³³ considering that this purity of will is explained on basis of the knowing qualifying both wills belonging to the two extremes of the relation. This new acquisition deprives the same both wills of all impulsivity, as Hegel unequivocally specifies: "it [*viz. the other extreme*] is a knowing of the will (*ein Wissen des Willen*)", situation representing the outcome of the above-mentioned struggle with the more determinate consequence "that the will of each one is knowing one (*wissender*), i.e. will reflected in itself perfectly in its pure unity, without impulse (*d. h. in sich vollkommen in seine reine Einheit reflectirter, Triebloser Willen*)".³⁴

For Hegel, however, the recognition remains something essentially original, pre-social, although it reverberates itself in other higher anthropological spheres with other modulations and meanings; and perhaps simply his conception of ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*)³⁵ does not coincide with Honneth's social idea or theory, as he himself somehow senses in the end of his interpretation, but not because Hegel changes the direction from some social horizon. In Hegel recognition's function is the base of building an ethical universality corresponding to a constitution of state, an objectivity in which each individual sees and comprehends his real, full freedom. This freedom is not solidarity or participation in inter subjective sense, but something radically deeper, what everybody must become and be in order to realize himself in his entire true essence and existence, even if crossing necessarily also ethical activities like these inter subjective manifestations. At the moment of the end of Jena period, the recognition in its early, primitive essential essence is inadequately encapsulated, enclosed in will's concept and doctrine. Hegel, starting from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, will understand the impossibility of such a perspective over recognition's phenomenon, that is to belong exclusively to consciousness' sphere, precisely self-consciousness' sphere in which the equality of the being recognized and recognizing is issued, gained, entirely performed, but in view of achieving human (limited, phenomenological) rationality, despite the predictable ulterior effect along with the whole system. However, this equality in which nobody needs no more to struggle for his not recognized being, is the same universal self-consciousness, the third and last phenomenological stage of self-consciousness' evolution which is still unavailable to him at Jena time, and it is a historical determination, happened in some cases in order to empirically configure the spiritual reality.

Some conclusive impressions

The struggle for recognition seems to be a hypertrophic inconsistent imagination in itself; the social or merely human recognition results to be an immediate, undeniable *conditio sine qua non*, the same

³³*GW 8*, p. 221, 16-18: "The movement is the struggle to life and death (*not for something*). From this (*struggle*) it emerges [so] that the other one is seen as pure Self" (*Die Bewegung ist der Kampf auf Leben und Tod. Aus diesem geht jedes hervor, daß es das andre als reines Selbst gesehen*).

³⁴*GW 8*, p. 221, 18-21.

³⁵Empirically, Hegel seems to put apart the noun *Sittlichkeit* after the attempt of its theoretical approach in *Das System der Sittlichkeit*. This noun reappears as a species of *apax legomenon* in one passage in the last writing on *Realphilosophie* (*GW 8*, p. 222, 2-4), in occasion of distinguishing it from right by defining the *person* in which is reconciliated the universality (identified with the will) and singularity (identified with the being recognized), whereby he affirms: "the universal is the singular – ethics (*Sittlichkeit*) in general, but immediately right". This brief flicker to postpone the *Sittlichkeit* to the right is very pregnant at every level, but now seems to be forgotten.

existential necessity of everyone and even of everything. Its Hegelian narration in its essential wholeness also is something substantially mythic, legendary, an imaginative possible reconstruction rather than a philosophical paradigm or elaboration. The recognizing should be only essentially a (repetitive) representational perception concerning a being as anything else, in order to immediately determinate an identity and to distinguish it from all others - for this innate and almost mechanical or instinctive reaction of each one, there is nothing to struggle. There should be no human being who is not even naturally and *de facto* social, as Aristotle teaches and the registry office should prove by registering a new-born. A human being is equally and in the same time both individual and social. Different thing is the building and understanding of a human society or more societies in its or their complexity at all level.

The social mechanism of struggling for recognition should be thinkable as a process constituted by several, complicate and polymorphous (almost magmatic) intertwinings of components, forces, correlations, different weights, unforeseen events, and this process depends on a fact classifiable in the series of possible violations, lesions and so on, or 'unmoral', 'non-ethical' behaviours. The speech might become much more philosophical (rather than merely reflective and in some respects arbitrary theorisation) to investigate whether both notions of society and individuality are eventually and previously referred to something really founded and definable or to more or less imaginary (iconic, paraps theatrical) configurations useful to more or less valid, appreciable anthropological approaches. Such a discussion is not feasible now.

Acknowledgments

None.

Conflicts of interest

Author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

References

- Honneth A. *Anerkennung: Eine europäische Ideengeschichte*. Berlin: Suhrkamp; 2018.
- Barba-Kay A. Why Recognition Is a Struggle: Love and Strife in Hegel's Early Jena Writings. *Journal of the History of Philosophy*. 2016;54(2):307–332.
- Hegel GWF. Das System der Sittlichkeit', *Schriften und Entwürfe (1799-1808)*, in *Gesammelte WerkeV*, hrsg. von Manfred Baum und Kurt Rainer Meist unter Mitarbeit von Theodor Ebert. Hamburg: Meiner Verlag; 1988, p. 277-362. ID., *System of Ethical Life (1802/3) and First Philosophy of Spirit (Part III of the System of Speculative Philosophy 1803/4)*. Edited and translated by TM Knox. Albany State University of New York Press; 1979.
- Hegel GWF. *Das System der speculativen Philosophie, Gesammelte WerkeVI*, hrsg. von Klaus Düsing und Heinz Kimmerle. Hamburg: Meiner Verlag; 1975.
- Honneth A. *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*. Cambridge; 1995.
- Hennig Ch. Normativer Überdruck. Über einige Unklarheiten in Axel Honneths Anerkennungstheorie und ihren systematischen Grund. *Allgemeine Zeitschrift für Philosophie*; 2010. 1–21 p.
- deBoer K. 'Kampf oder Anerkennung? Einige kritische Überlegungen zu Honneths Lektüre der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie', in *Alterität und Anerkennung*. Berlin; 2010. 161–177 p.
- SiGwart HJ. Axel Honneth. Kampf um Anerkennung. (1992)", in Brouck M. (Hrsg.), *GeschichtederKampf um Anerkennung*. Das 20. Jahrhundert. Berlin 2018, p. 789-804.
- Petherbridge D. (ed.) *Axel Honneth: Critical Essays. With A Replay by Axel Honneth*. Leiden-Boston; 2011.
- Profumi E. Per una comprensione del riconoscimento in politica: critica ad Axel Honneth. *Consecutio Rerum. Rivista critica della Postmodernità*. 2011;5:1–25.
- Honneth A. *Suffering from Indeterminacy. Spinoza Lectures*. Amsterdam; 1999. ID. *Leiden an Unbestimmtheit. Eine Reaktualisierung der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie*. Stuttgart; 2001.
- Honneth A. *Das Recht der Freiheit. Grundriß einer demokratischen Sittlichkeit*. Berlin; 2011.
- Nance M. Hegel's Jena Practical Philosophy. In: Moyar D. (Ed.). *Oxford Handbook of Hegel*. Oxford University Press; 2017. 31–37 p.
- Testa I. *La natura del riconoscimento. Riconoscimento naturale e autocoscienza sociale in Hegel*. Sesto San Giovanni; 2010.
- Houlgate S. Hegel and Fichte: recognition, otherness and absolute knowing. *The Owl of Minerva*. 1994;26(2):3–19.
- Siep L. *Anerkennung als Prinzip der praktischen Philosophie. Untersuchungen zu Hegels Jenaer Philosophie des Geistes*. Hamburg; 1974.
- Giusti M. *Hegels Kritik der modernen Welt: Über die Auseinandersetzung mit den geschichtlichen und systematischen Grundlagen der praktischen Philosophie*. Würzburg; 1987.
- Iorio G, Campello F. La sociologia e l'amore come *agape*. Intervista ad Axel Honneth. *Società Mutamento Politica*. 2011;2 (4):257–262.