



Universality, Resistance, and the Struggle for Recognition: Challenging the Inevitability of Hegel's Rabble

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Introduction

Axel Honneth's pioneering theory of social emancipation has influenced much scholarship concerned with Hegel's concept of recognition, rooted as it is in the Hegelian notion of *intersubjectivity* as a necessary condition for reciprocal recognition.¹ In so doing, Honneth aims to extend Hegel's theory of recognition beyond the sphere of Abstract Right or law, after which he believes Hegel abandons his project in favor of a 'philosophy of consciousness' (or, the concretization of Spirit in the form of the State). In contrast to Hegel's early writings on intersubjective recognition, the "struggle for recognition" as presented in the *Philosophy of Right* becomes subsumed under the institutionalized relations of social interaction and exchange that constitute the State. What Honneth exposes is an irreconcilable conflict between two different Hegelian frameworks of analysis that seem fundamentally at odds with one another: intersubjective recognition and institutional recognition. The result of this incompatibility, according to Honneth, is that relations of recognition at the level of the State unfold, no longer between individuals, but between individuals and the State itself, thereby robbing the *Philosophy of Right* of its ethico-political and emancipatory potential.

In this article, I rethink the conflict between intersubjective and institutional recognition—that which results in the failure of reciprocal recognition—in the context of

¹ Throughout this article, citations of Hegel's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* will be abbreviated to *PR* and the *Phenomenology of Spirit* will be abbreviated to *PS*. Rather than page numbers, I indicate section numbers where quotes appear so that they are accessible for readers regardless of translation or edition.

Hegel's infamous theory of the *rabble*. Despite his laudable recentering of intersubjective recognition in Hegel's political philosophy, Honneth curiously makes no mention of the rabble, which we might consider the "disrespected" subject *par excellence*. As such, he leaves unaddressed Marx's (and other similar) critique of Hegel's State as an immanently unstable enterprise that is continuously plagued by internal conflict—an internal conflict generated precisely by the incommensurability of institutional and intersubjective recognition. I address this lacuna by relocating the role of Hegel's "right of necessity" within the conceptual framework of reciprocal recognition and consider its implications on yet-unsolved puzzle of the rabble. By drawing on Honneth's writings on intersubjectivity and Robert Williams' influential formulation of the ethics of recognition, I suggest that there is a *right of resistance* embedded in the right of necessity that challenges the "inevitability" of the rabble in the modern State.

I. The 'Rational' Turn

Axel Honneth's critique is structured by a genealogical analysis of Hegel's theory of recognition: by turning to the pre-1807 *Phenomenology of Spirit* texts of Hegel's Jena period, Honneth characterizes the 'young' Hegel as an empirical, materialist philosopher concerned with the actualization of the human being understood as a socially- and historically-situated subject. It is in these texts—the 1802 *System of Ethical Life* and the 1805/6 *Realphilosophie*, both of which were deeply inspired by Johann Gottlieb Fichte's conception of recognition in "The Foundations of Natural Law"—that Hegel most robustly articulates the struggle between subjects as a conflict that results in "the recognition of claims to autonomy previously not socially affirmed."² Breaking away from the Cartesian-Kantian transcendental subject of freedom and autonomy, Hegel offers an empirical-material account of social conflict, self-reflection, and self-actualization that invites us to rethink the very ethos of modernity.

Emphasizing the primacy of reciprocity or *intersubjectivity* in Hegelian recognition, Honneth theorizes the struggle for recognition not merely as the precursor to concretized forms of social development, but also as that which allows for the individual to understand herself as a rights-bearing subject of individuated dignity with a claim to social and political *freedom*. In Aristotelian fashion, the dialectic itself can be divided into three stages of 'reciprocal recognition' that parallels both the teleological progression of Spirit and the natural development of man as a social and political being: (1) love, characterized by the affective relations of recognition where "human individuals are recognized as concrete creatures of need"³; (2) law, characterized by a cognitive-formal relations of recognition where individuals are "recognized as abstract legal persons"⁴; and (3) solidarity, characterized by "emotionally enlightened" relations of recognition at the level of the State, where subjects are "recognized as concrete universals, that is, as subjects who are socialized in their particularity."⁵ In the context of the *Philosophy of Right*, these stages correspond—though loosely—with Abstract Right, Morality, and Ethical Life.

² Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, trans. Joel Anderson (London: Polity Press, 1995), 69.

³ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

Because Hegel situates his work in the context of the modern state, however, the development of the ‘legal person’ (stage 2) emerges only against a backdrop of a universalist conceptualization of morality. Because the modern state is to be the actualization of rational freedom, morality itself is constituted by the institutional norms that are predicated on universal rather than individual right.⁶ More simply, we might say that rationality takes the place of morality within the State, insofar as the social and ethical mores of a society are implicitly reflected by and embedded in its political institutions.⁷ Hegel’s famous maxim—that the rational is actual and the actual is rational—should come immediately to mind here, and as Robert Williams has convincingly illustrated, the “actual” here refers to a universal, *ethical* rationality.⁸ In a similar spirit, Honneth suggests that “we must assume that our norms and values have absorbed enough rationality to be regarded as a social context whose moral guidelines we must generally consider to be beyond doubt.”⁹ Social and political institutions, as such, are to be interpreted as the objectification of the universal—the common good, *née*, rational, concrete freedom—within the sphere of ethical life. The real is not simply the rational for Hegel, then, but a rationality which is already intimately interwoven with the moral.

In the context of the State, according to Honneth, subjective morality—the sphere of reciprocal recognition—is abandoned for “an account of the organizational elements that are supposed to characterize political relations in ‘absolute ethical life.’”¹⁰ If we understand Hegel to be applying his logic to his political philosophy as it appears in the *Philosophy of Right*, however, this move is a necessary stage in the objectification of Spirit. Consequently,

neither the intersubjectivist concept of human identity, nor the distinction of various media of recognition (with the accompanying differentiation of recognition relations), nor, certainly, the idea of a historically productive role for moral struggle—none of these ever again acquires a systematic function within Hegel’s political philosophy.¹¹

Once this is conceptually articulated, the focal point of Hegel’s political philosophy transitions from the development of freedom to the institutionalization of Spirit.

If Honneth is correct, this is deeply problematic for theorizing the *normative consciousness*—that is, the consciousness of the “We” rooted in the concrete practices and habits of socio-

⁶ My understanding of “right” comes from Robert R. Williams’ deeply influential *Hegel’s Ethics of Recognition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). Herein, Williams defines “right” as “the relation of persons to each other, as they recognize (or fail to recognize) each other,” such that ‘right’ emerges alongside “the recognition of the other *as other*” rather than as an object to be negated (Williams, *Hegel’s Ethics of Recognition*, 117, emphasis added).

⁷ Indeed, it is for this reason that hyper-reflection engenders an endless cycle of moral deliberation that leads, ultimately, to total social paralysis—“indeterminacy”—and the death of the State.

⁸ On the question of the *Doppelsatz*, Williams writes that “[t]he actual, whatever else it may mean, is not everything that happens to exist; it implies a critique of the given and the merely traditional” (Williams, *Hegel’s Ethics of Recognition*, 23) such that, ultimately, “only affirmative and reciprocal recognition, in which the other is allowed to be and affirmed in his difference, embodies *actual*, that is, *ethical*, rationality” (25, emphasis added).

⁹ Axel Honneth, *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom: Hegel’s Social Theory*, ed. Harry G. Frankfurt, trans. Ladislaus Löb (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 41.

¹⁰ Honneth, *Struggle for Recognition*, 24.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 63.

historically situated subjects—grounding Hegel's entire political philosophy. Indeed, the brilliance of Hegel's theory of recognition is its acknowledgment that “freedom is intersubjectively mediated,” implying that theoretical individual autonomy is “an abstraction from autonomy as an intersubjective-social accomplishment and institution.”¹² In the sphere of Ethical Life, however, demands for recognition become subsumed under the *political education* of the citizen, which is to “produce afresh in every generation the behavioral dispositions that motivate the individual to take part in” proper and socially-approved intersubjective practices.¹³ The theory of recognition as one of dialectical overcoming and actualizing freedom has, we might say, already fulfilled its purpose by the time we arrive at the rational State.

The ‘rational turn’ that Hegel takes in his discussion of ethical life simultaneously shifts his focus to the positive relationship that subjects have, “*not* among each other, but rather with the State (as the embodiment of Spirit).”¹⁴ Problematically, Hegel does not discuss instances of non-recognition that might exist between subjects and the State as such, a conceptual gap which Karl Marx famously addresses in the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*.¹⁵ Therein, Marx—who, given his overarching interest in capitalist ideology, takes as the focal point of his analysis Hegel's understanding of “civil society” – radically asserts that “the opposition between state and civil society is thus fixed;

the state does not reside within but outside of civil society; it affects civil society merely through office holders to whom is entrusted the management of the state within this sphere. The opposition is not overcome by means of these office holders but has become a *legal and fixed opposition*. The state becomes alien to the nature of civil society; it becomes this nature's otherworldly realm of deputies which makes claims against civil society.¹⁵

As Marx illustrates above, the institutionalization of intersubjectivity through law in Abstract Right contours the threshold of recognition in a manner that is fixed and which—as Hegel himself notes—*inevitably* generates poverty. According to Honneth, however, this reification eliminates ‘intentionality’ from actions taken by subjects—and particularly actions of an otherwise criminal nature—in such a way that precludes the possibility of a *political* struggle for recognition. It is this omission that characterizes the crux of Honneth's critique, and it is this critical move that I now aim to investigate.

II. The Slave, the Criminal, and Reciprocal Recognition

Honneth's most compelling illustration of Hegel's ‘rational turn’ can be found in his discussion of the *criminal* in the Hegelian State. To explore the tensions embedded in reciprocal recognition, however, it is necessary to build a bridge between Hegel's conception

¹² Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition*, 48.

¹³ Honneth, *Pathologies of Individual Freedom*, 55.

¹⁴ Honneth, *Struggle for Recognition*, 59.

¹⁵ Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, trans. Annette Jolin and Joseph O'Malley, ed. Joseph O'Malley (London: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 49–50. Although they are conceptually distinct, I do not normatively differentiate between “civil society” and “the State” in this article. The primary reason is that Hegel himself is unclear as to the qualitative relationship between civil society and State in the *Philosophy of Right*, outside of identifying ‘civil society’ as the concrete, social sphere of capitalist relations of production and what Robert Williams calls “self-seeking exploitation.”

of the subject in his early writings—particularly as expressed in the infamous master-slave dialectic of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*—and his rearticulation of the recognition of subjecthood in the political context of his *Philosophy of Right*. By extending the master-slave dialectic from the *Phenomenology of Spirit* to offer a more robust account of the asymmetrical recognition that the criminal in the *Philosophy Right* aims to overcome, it is not only Honneth’s critique that will come into sharper relief, but also the shortcomings thereof from the perspective of the rabble.

The master and slave, Hegel writes in *Phenomenology of Spirit* §189-90, “exist as two opposed shapes” of consciousness in which the master “holds the [slave] in subjection.”¹⁶ The struggle between the two parallels the development of hitherto objective consciousness into subjective self-consciousness, or a consciousness-in-the-world opposed to and constituted by consciousnesses external to itself:

one is the independent consciousness whose essential nature is to be for itself, the other is the dependent consciousness whose essential nature is simply to live or to be for another ... the [master] relates himself mediately to the [slave] through a being [a thing] that is independent, for it is just this which holds [the slave] in bondage; it is his chain from which he could not break free in the struggle, thus proving himself to be dependent, to possess his independence in thinghood.¹⁷

Embedded in this dialectical move is the concomitant shift from a desire to negate to a need for recognition: having abandoned its desire to destroy the “independent object” opposed to it—since the destruction of the object necessitates, *ad infinitum*, the desire of a *new* object to destroy—the subject finds in the self-consciousness of the other an object that cannot be ‘destroyed’ and that therefore offers a means of affirmation that cannot be attained through negation. It is *self-consciousness* that the subject has need of securing.

Before the subject confronts an Other that she recognizes as possessing of self-consciousness, she embodies only an abstract and hollow notion of autonomy or what Williams calls *immediate* self-consciousness.¹⁸ For mediated self-consciousness to emerge, it is not only confrontation with an opposing self-consciousness that is required, but being *recognized by* this opposing self-consciousness: “self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, *it exists only in being acknowledged*.”¹⁹ What the master-slave conflict intends to show, then, is an *asymmetry* of recognition that undermines the subjecthood of both the master and the slave.

At the outset, the subjects have not “as yet exposed themselves to each other in the form of pure being-for-self”²⁰, and this can only be accomplished through what Hegel calls a “life-and-death struggle”:

They must engage in this struggle, for they must raise their certainty of being *for themselves* to truth, both in the case of the other and in their own case. And it is only through staking one’s life that *freedom is won*; only thus is it proved that for self-consciousness, its essential being is not [just] being, not the

¹⁶ *PS*, §189-90.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ See Williams, *Hegel’s Ethics of Recognition*, 47–52.

¹⁹ *PS*, §178.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, §186.

immediate form in which it appears, not its submergence in the expanse of life, but rather that there is nothing present in it which could not be regarded as a vanishing moment, that it is only pure *being-for-self*.²¹

The struggle itself cannot come to an end until one consciousness has asserted its dominance over the other (insofar as the death of one or both consciousness nullifies the dialectical struggle altogether). However, Hegel notes in *Philosophy of Right* §57, this does not result in the attainment of self-consciousness, but instead offers the ‘false appearance’ of freedom, the illusion that consciousness has overcome its immediate subjective standpoint. The master is not a self-conscious subject because, for her, the slave has been reduced to the status of *object*. And, because the master ceases to view the slave as embodied self-consciousness deserving of recognition, her attainment of true *self-consciousness* is doomed. The master is consciousness existing only *for herself*, and this solipsism precludes the possibility of recognition-in-turn.

Paradoxically, it is the *slave* who attains true self-consciousness within this struggle. In her servitude, the slave is the one who comes to recognize the vital role played by the Other in a way that the master does not. As a commodity beholden to the master, the slave’s relationship to the master is mediated through his *labor*. In his bondage, by channeling the “discipline of service and obedience” required in his work for the master, he comes to identify with the independent objects of his labor and sees his own independence manifested within them. “Although the slave lacks direct enjoyment of the products of his labor,” Williams writes in his compelling analysis of the master-slave dialectic, “he nevertheless comes to see that the shaping and producing of objects is the key to objective permanence and independence.”²² It is the praxis of the slave that allows him to see himself as an independent and self-determining actor, while the illusory independence of the master reveals itself as a relation of *dependence* upon the slave. It is the slave and not the master, thus, who attains self-consciousness and, with it, the possibility of freedom.²³

The existential freedom of the slave is a theme that very briefly reappears in the *Philosophy of Right*, although here the slave is theorized as being responsible for *securing his own freedom*: “if someone is a slave,” Hegel writes, “his own will is responsible, just as the responsibility lies with the will of a people if that people is subjugated.”²⁴ Will here refers to the “primitive” or “natural” will—will before it has recognized universal consciousness and become “rational”—and thus indicates the slave’s failure to possess himself as a rational, self-

²¹ Ibid., §187, my emphasis.

²² Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition*, 65–66.

²³ Hegel’s suggestion that the slave is the (existentially) freer of the two figures in the master-slave dialectic has been famously problematized by critical race and postcolonial theorists, many of whom draw on Frantz Fanon’s deeply influential meditations on colonial violence. By and large, these critiques question whether the master, in historical instances of colonialism or chattel slavery, has ever had any real need for the slave’s recognition of her ‘being’ (rather than her continued labor and politico-existential subservience) for her own constitution as a “self-conscious subject.” Given my concern with the *structure* of mutual recognition as it appears in Hegel’s and Honneth’s writings, I do not take part in this debate here—although I am sympathetic to and largely agree with these critiques—and instead direct readers to chapter one of Glen Coulthard’s *Red Skin, White Masks* (2014) for an excellent analysis thereof.

²⁴ PR, §57.

determining agent.²⁵ The slave's assertion and recognition of his own autonomy and self-conscious independence is a necessary step in the dialectic of freedom, part and parcel with the development of the State, which is where "the Idea of freedom is truly present."²⁶ Part of the struggle for recognition, then, is that the subject recognize herself *as* a subject before others can recognize her as a self-conscious, autonomous subject. Accordingly, it is not merely a necessity but an *absolute right* on the part of the slave to free himself, to "return into" himself and make himself "existent as Idea, as a person with rights and morality," and to possess these essentially as his own.²⁷ If one hopes to attain true, socially-mediated recognition—and, as such, actualized freedom—he is thus obligated to *assert himself* as a subject of equal standing with others.

The master-slave model offers a useful conceptual heuristic for a proper intersubjectivity that ultimately "emphasizes the need for universal recognition, the fact that in order to be genuinely recognized *I must recognize the other as my equal.*"²⁸ As Heikki Ikäheimo reminds us, however, Hegel never posits the master-slave relationship as "a correct construal of what mutual recognition that fully realizes *concrete freedom* actually is."²⁹ (It is perhaps for this reason that Honneth himself never addresses or makes reference to the master-slave dialectic in his own analysis of recognition and criminal motivation.) The attainment of intersubjective recognition is not sufficient for the attainment of ethical freedom; it is in the *State* that this universal recognition can be made *actual*, formalized through the law which has "its reality and support in something itself universal."³⁰ The bridge linking intersubjective recognition and ethical freedom—that from which law emerges—is the possession of private *property*.

Property and property ownership assume a central position in Hegel's discussion of "Abstract Right" in the *Philosophy of Right*, wherein property becomes the *externalization* of our free wills, the embodiment of our uniqueness made visible in a "thing," the beginning of legal personhood, and a theater of crime and punishment. As a dimension of the dialectic, however, property ownership (i.e. *law*) is a crucial stage in the teleological realization of freedom and reciprocal recognition. As Andy Blunden writes:

Existence means to exist *for others*. Subjects need to be recognized as *persons*, that is to say, to *exist* in an external world. Thus they must make their Will into something existent in the world, that is, own property [such that] it has its own existence, and remains so even in my absence.³¹

For Blunden, the introduction of property is a natural development in the teleology of Spirit because it is "secured by the universal imperative: 'Be a person and respect others as

²⁵ As Williams notes, arbitrary, subjective, and primitive will (*Willkür*) must come to "derive its content"—that is, its object of desire—from its concept" for man to actualize freedom, and this content is supplied by *practical reason* or *Wille* (Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition*, 122).

²⁶ Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition*, 122.

²⁷ See *PR*, §66.

²⁸ Eimear Wynne, "Reflections on Recognition," *Thinking Fundamentals*, IWM Junior Visiting Fellows Conferences, Vol. 9 (2000), 5.

²⁹ Heikki Ikäheimo, "Hegel's Concept of Recognition—What is It?" in *Recognition—German Idealism as an Ongoing Challenge*, ed. Christian Krijnen, 11–38 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 32, emphasis added.

³⁰ Honneth, *Struggle for Recognition*, 21.

³¹ Andy Blunden, *Hegel for Social Movements* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 192.

persons', independent of any particularity."³² Only once I externalize my will into a "thing" that others can acknowledge as *mine*—as my *property*—can the intersubjective notion of "ownership"—and with it, *contract*—emerge as a concretized, determinate, and universal manifestation of reciprocal recognition.

In keeping with this reading, Hegel theorizes the destruction of property or breaching of contract as a form of negation or *crime*; that is, as a manifestation of the criminal's desire to put his individual Will (*Willkür*) above universal Will (*Wille*), what Williams calls the "self-aggrandizement" of the individual.³³ Crime is not merely a harm to property alone, but a harm to the victim's 'personhood' and, in the sphere of ethical life, to civil society as a whole: "the fact that an injury to *one* member of society is an injury to *all* the others does not alter the nature of crime in terms of its concept, but in terms of its outward existence [Existenz]; for the injury now affects the attitudes [Vorstellung] and consciousness of civil society."³⁴ The criminal demonstrates a *rejection* of right by engaging in a criminal act, and this negation is 'corrected' through retaliation as a *negation of the negation*. Because the criminal has asserted his particular will as the universal will, and his particular will allows property and personhood itself to be taken or destroyed, the criminal has implicitly "consented" to having the same done to him. Much like the "life-and-death-struggle" between the master and the slave, however, the cycle of negating-negations, without some mediating body, inevitably devolves into a vicious circle of *revenge* taken by the descendants of victims against their oppressors. The criminal thus expresses the philosophical *limits* of Abstract Right and serves as the marker of transition to the sphere of Morality, where right becomes codified as law and the institutionalization of *punishment* serves to resolve the otherwise-insurmountable conflict that emerges between the universal will and the particular will.³⁵

Supplementing the structural reading from the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel offers a slightly different analysis of the criminal in his 1805/6 Jena "Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit." The will of the criminal, Hegel here writes, is understood by her *as the universal will itself*. When coerced by a law that ascribes its own conceptualization of the 'universal will,' the criminal suffers an existential injury—a lack of recognition—which she feels compelled to correct: "since it [my will] is injured, deprived of existence, I now produce it [i.e. re-assert it]—so that I negate the being which had posited his will as universal, opposed to my will which did not

³² Ibid.

³³ Importantly, Williams identifies three forms of wrong in Hegel's understanding of crime and punishment: (1) collisions of rights, as in a misunderstanding of the terms of contract; (2) fraud and deception, in which the semblance of universality and right is upheld; and (3) transgression or "crime" proper, which "attacks both the universal right in itself and the particular right of an individual, [leaving] the victim with neither the substance nor even the semblance of right" (Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition*, 153). Throughout this article, I am concerned with the third form of wrong—transgression or crime—as it presents the severest form of existential and phenomenological negation and the "primal, fundamental wrong and injustice" (ibid., 164).

³⁴ PR, §218.

³⁵ Formal punishment brings about the negation of the (criminal's) negation at the level of universal, social right such that the "failure to punish transgression would allow the transgression to stand and thereby become part of the accepted social order," equivalent to "recognizing wrong as right, injustice as justice" (Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition*, 170). Accordingly, punishment itself is "just" because the criminal, in committing the transgression, has implicitly "consented to the principle by which he is punished" (ibid., 175).

prevail.”³⁶ It is not so much the desire of the criminal to exert her own will *above* that of the universal, but rather the *desire to have her will recognized as the universal* (and thus, the only) *will* that motivates the criminal action.³⁷

If we compare Hegel’s conceptualization of the slave with his conceptualization of the criminal, rather stark similarities emerge. At the level of freedom, which for Hegel is always at the forefront of the metaphysical and political dialectic, both the slave and the criminal act out of similar motivations. Both desire to have their individual wills and autonomy *recognized by the Other*, insofar as “recognizing the other [...] is what makes [one] concretely free since it is what allows her to be conscious of herself in [the other].”³⁸ For the Hegel of the *Philosophy of Right*, the assurance of this mutual recognition and intersubjective relation of respect is codified in law and sedimented in political institutions. As Axel Honneth writes,

for social life, legal relations thus represent a sort of intersubjective basis, because they obligate every subject to treat all others according to their legitimate claims . . . it is therefore only with the establishment of the ‘legal person’ that a society has the minimum of communicative agreement-or ‘universal will’.³⁹

Despite his recognition of the practicality and necessity of Hegel’s understanding of law, Honneth believes the conceptual shift toward the institutionalization of freedom abandons the centrality of *intersubjectivity* for both reciprocal recognition and free action. Once normative and punitive standards have been ascribed, in other words, Hegel cannot—or at the very least, *does not*—speak to the “respect” and to “what degree legal persons have to recognize *each other* reciprocally.”⁴⁰ More broadly, once intersubjectivity becomes subsumed under the jurisdiction of social and legal institutions, Hegel’s robust theory of reciprocal recognition loses its driving force in the teleological dialectic of Spirit.

III. Recovering Dignity and the Right of Necessity

By re-centering intersubjectivity and reciprocal recognition, Honneth is concerned not merely with further theorizing the subject’s actualization of freedom, but also highlighting the inherent right that subjects have to personal integrity and *human dignity*. Freedom for Honneth cannot consist solely of institutional guarantees of intersubjective relationality, but is predicated more fundamentally on the subject’s development of an individuated identity, the realization of her aspirations, and her standing with and against others in a multitude of

³⁶ Leo Rauch, *Hegel and the Human Spirit* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1983), 129–30.

³⁷ Honneth, drawing on these early texts, offers a similar interpretation when he states that “Hegel traces the emergence of crime to conditions of incomplete recognition” (Honneth, *Struggle for Recognition*, 20). The criminal’s “inner motive” is thereafter driven by “the experience of not being recognized, at the established stage of mutual recognition, in a satisfactory way” (ibid.). Accordingly, Honneth concludes, “the reason why the socially ignored individuals attempt, in response, to damage the others’ possessions is not because they want to satisfy their passions, but rather *in order to make the others take notice of them*” (ibid., 44, emphasis added).

³⁸ Ikäheimo, “Hegel’s Concept of Recognition,” 24.

³⁹ Honneth, *Struggle for Recognition*, 50.

⁴⁰ Ibid, emphasis added.

institutionalized and non-institutionalized relational contexts.⁴¹ As Honneth writes, “the entirety of intersubjective conditions that can be shown to serve as necessary preconditions for individual self-realization . . . [and] the connection between the experience of recognition and one’s relation-to-self stems from the *intersubjective structure of personal identity*.”⁴² And as Hegel himself asserts, it is for this reason that asymmetrical recognition is insufficient for the dialectical progression toward freedom: recognition requires that the Other who stands in opposition to me recognizes me to the same degree to which I recognize her. My *dignity* is undermined in my relationship with the master precisely because she does not view me as a subject of equal claims to recognition.

It is in the sphere of Morality—emerging from Abstract Right and preceding Ethical Life—that Hegel shifts his focus to *intentional* action, those actions which are not merely purposive (those with aims that are willed by my immediate will or *Willkür*) but also made with intention, or, an understanding and endorsement of the impact that my action will have on civil society. Hegel asserts that the moral—and accordingly, rational and free—action is one which has in its sight both a subjective and objective understanding of freedom; that is, of how one’s particular interests are imbricated in the interests and mutually constitutive of the universal: “the transition from purpose to intention lies in the fact that I ought to be aware not simply of my single action but also of the universal which is conjoined with it.”⁴³ Morality’s emphasis on universal consciousness dispenses with the contingency of Abstract Right, bringing to the fore not merely what is externalized in property, but what *ought to be* as determined by the universal will—and with it, not only a negative relation with others, but a positive relation to others. Here there is a clear emphasis on *rationality* as that which ‘universalizes’ the will of all subjects, such that a subject’s intentional action should be intelligible not only to herself, but to others as well:

The universal quality of an action is the varied *content* of the action in general, reduced to the *simple form* of universality. But the subject, as reflected into itself and hence as a *particular* entity in relation to the particularity of the objective realm, has its own particular content in its end, and this is the soul and determinant of action. The fact that this moment of the *particularity* of the agent is contained and implemented in the action constitutes *subjective freedom* in its more concrete determination, i.e. the *right* of the *subject* to find its *satisfaction* in the action.⁴⁴

Drawing from the above passage, we might say that, insofar as my action adheres to the limits of the universal will, my actual intention and the intention others interpret in my action must coalesce. “The subjective will, or *Willkür*, has worth and dignity only insofar as its insight and intention conform to the universal will in itself”⁴⁵; only then will I not only break from my ‘natural’ and ‘immediate’ subjectivity and gain autonomy, but also be *recognized as* autonomous and free by others. It is for this reason that the sphere of Morality is incomplete for the full attainment of concrete freedom; the sphere of Ethical Life—in which relations of

⁴¹ Ikäheimo calls these two variations of recognition “*purely intersubjective recognition* and *institutionally mediated [...] recognition*” (Ikäheimo, “Hegel’s Concept of Recognition,” 17-18).

⁴² Honneth, *Struggle for Recognition*, 73, emphasis added.

⁴³ *PR*, §118.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, §121.

⁴⁵ Williams, *Hegel’s Ethics of Recognition*, 188.

recognition are *institutionalized*—is both presupposed by Abstract Right and Morality and simultaneously serves as the theater in which these one-sided realizations of freedom come together and find their completion in intersubjective relations of *mutual* or *reciprocal* recognition. In Ethical Life, equality exists not merely at the level of individual intersubjectivity, but as an *external relation* in which the “I” becomes the heterogenous “We” of civil society and social-communal universality.

As we have seen, Hegel’s writings on intention are integral to his conception of freedom, both in terms of the teleological development of Spirit as well as his quasi-Aristotelian reading of *happiness* as the highest aim toward which free agents strive in the context of the State.⁴⁶ It is not my particular happiness that I have in mind, however, but the aggregate happiness of all peoples within the political community, indicating both a subjective and an objective dimension to the attainment of happiness: my freedom is contoured, we might say, by a shared conception or system of value within the community of beings. The moral standpoint is freedom *for-itself* rather than merely *in-itself*. It is through free, self-reflective action—action oriented toward those projects which I undertake as a means to a happiness compatible with the common good—that I exist as a particular within the universal.

In the context of right—or the “free will”⁴⁷ which exists “only on the condition that it may be asserted or claimed by all”⁴⁸—Hegel reframes ‘happiness’ more simply as *welfare*:

Subjectivity, with its *particular* content of *welfare*, is reflected into itself and infinite, and consequently also has reference to the universal, to the will which has being in itself. This [universal] moment, initially posited within this particularity itself, includes *the welfare of others*—or in its complete, but wholly empty determination, the welfare of *all*.⁴⁹

Given its singular importance, Hegel theorizes the right to welfare as one which *supersedes* abstract right (i.e., property ownership). Insofar as the loss of life, the “totality of all ends”, would constitute the absolute negation of an individual’s right, there is no possibility for freedom *at all* if conditions for sustaining life are absent or inadequate. Indeed, so acute is the right to welfare in moments of dire need that the suffering life “may claim (not in equity, but as a right) a *right of necessity*.”⁵⁰ Given his otherwise orthodox interpretation of obedience to law, Hegel contextualizes the right of necessity only in cases “of extreme danger” and “in collision with the rightful property of someone else” as, for example, would be a situation in which one’s life could be “preserved by stealing a loaf.”⁵¹ Hegel further specifies that the right of necessity—which can “justify a wrong action”—belongs to one “whose life is in danger”

⁴⁶ The relationship between “happiness” and “freedom” is crucial here: freedom, for Hegel, is *the* ultimate end toward which human beings strive, but is intimately imbricated in our quotidian understanding of “happiness” as that which is engendered by self-actualization. As such, although we may not articulate “freedom” as our ultimate end, our attainment of happiness is itself a happiness that can be found only within a position of concrete freedom. Aristotle’s own notion of happiness—*Eudaimonia*, or human flourishing—is similarly situated socially and politically, insofar as it is only through political associations of relative freedom, buttressed by the mutual support exchanged therein, that individuals can truly flourish.

⁴⁷ PR, §29.

⁴⁸ Williams, *Hegel’s Ethics of Recognition*, 117.

⁴⁹ PR, §125.

⁵⁰ PR, §127.

⁵¹ Ibid.

in an immediate sense, such that “its omission would in turn involve committing [...] the ultimate wrong, namely the total negation of the existence of freedom.”⁵²

If it is the case that the right of necessity reveals the “contingency of both *right* and *welfare*”⁵³, as Hegel states in the *Philosophy of Right*, then a threat to one’s life seems to occasion the possibility of exerting one’s subjective will over that of the other’s—and hence, the universal—will. However, if the ultimate wrong is not only the negation of life but also the negation of *freedom* then, following Hegel’s own dialectic of reciprocal recognition, the appeal to necessity should extend to cases of asymmetric or withheld *recognition*—and thus, *dignity*—as well.

What is at issue is not merely attributing the other technical authority in the interpretation and execution of ends set by oneself, but taking her as someone who has an independent viewpoint on ends and commands authority on the norms and principles of co-existence independently of my viewpoint.⁵⁴

The asymmetry of self-possession coupled with the asymmetry of mutual recognition lays the groundwork precisely for some form of self-assertive resistance to promote one as having an individuality that demands to be recognized. And Aristotle himself notes in the *Politics* that “citizens rebel not only because of inequality of possessions, but also because of *inequality of honor*.”⁵⁵

If one’s integrity or dignity is constitutive of one’s self-actualization, then I suggest that the subject who is unrecognized as a subject—that is, as a person with the right to *freedom*—may call on the right of necessity to assert her status as a free and autonomous being. As such, insofar as he posits his critique as a means of theorizing disrespect as “motivation for acts of political resistance,”⁵⁶ Honneth’s critical social theory is incomplete without recognizing a *right of resistance* embedded within the Hegelian right of necessity. When one’s very claim to autonomy is rendered illegible, it is not enough to be granted the means needed for basic sustenance. What is needed for *concrete freedom* is a more robust understanding of the self as a being with possession of a unique and particular subjectivity which others both recognize and affirm. The absence of this criterion for freedom should thus grant the subject the *right to resist* the space or relation of asymmetry in which she finds herself as a means of asserting herself as a subject of equal *value* who is deserving equal “*opportunities* to realize [herself] in noncoercive and undistorted relations of reciprocal recognition.”⁵⁷

As should be apparent, this argument for the right of resistance is deeply compatible with Honneth’s critique of Hegel’s abandonment of intersubjectivity in the *Philosophy of Right*:

⁵² Ibid. Andy Blunden, in his recent monograph *Hegel for Social Movements* (2019), ties the right of necessity to the slave’s duty to resist asymmetric recognition and “free himself,” stating that “in a situation in which an absolute wrong is mandated by law, that law has no force over the moral subject, who has not only the right but the obligation to repudiate the supposed obligation” (Blunden, *Hegel for Social Movements*, 219).

⁵³ PR, §128, emphasis added.

⁵⁴ Ikäheimo, “Hegel’s Concept of Recognition,” 34.

⁵⁵ Aristotle, *Aristotle’s Politics*, trans. Hippocrates G. Apostle and Lloyd P Gerson (Grinnell: The Peripatetic Press, 1986), 52 [§1266b], my emphasis.

⁵⁶ Honneth, *Struggle for Recognition*, 143, my emphasis.

⁵⁷ Christopher F. Zurn, *Axel Honneth* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), 75.

The turn to the philosophy of consciousness allows Hegel to completely lose sight of the idea of an original intersubjectivity of humankind and blocks the way to the completely different solution that would have consisted in making the necessary distinctions between various degrees of personal autonomy within the framework of a theory of intersubjectivity.⁵⁸

According to Honneth, Hegelian recognition—which serves as the driving force of self-actualization and the development of Spirit until the emergence and codification of law—loses its potential as a critical social theory precisely where one would expect it to be especially robust, not merely existentially but also *politically*. Indeed, it is precisely the overcoming of disrespect at the level of the State that offers the possibility for reciprocal relations of *solidarity* that Honneth finds lacking in Hegel’s sphere of Ethical Life, the final stage of the concretization of Spirit in the *Philosophy of Right*

Overall, Axel Honneth provides a novel rehabilitation of Hegelian political philosophy by integrating Hegel’s early writings on reciprocal recognition with his teleology of the State in the *Philosophy of Right*. Notably, however, the discussion of the criminal that occupies much of Honneth’s *Struggle for Recognition*—which I hold as the linchpin of a radical rearticulation of recognition theory as social struggle—disappears in Honneth’s (as in Hegel’s) later works. It is for this reason, perhaps, that the *rabble* makes no appearance in Honneth’s own critical theory. By applying Honneth’s theory of criminal motivation to the sphere of the State, we might not only pick up where Honneth leaves off, but also offer a new way to address one of the most contentious dimensions of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*: the status of the rabble.

IV. Challenging the Universal — The Rabble’s Right to Resist

As we have seen briefly, Ethical Life is the sphere in which Abstract Right (property and abstract legal personhood) and Morality (intentional action and determinate universality) find their full realization in the institutions of State. In Ethical Life, the universal will is what gives substance to intersubjectivity at a level that goes beyond the particular individual. According to Honneth, the sphere of Ethical Life abandons the dialectic of reciprocal, interpersonal recognition in favor of a “drawn-out process of education.”⁵⁹ Once we arrive at the State, the subject is taken for granted as having come into actualized freedom through learning and developing the appropriate intersubjective habits required at the level of the family and of civil society. These interpersonal relations of recognition are what Heikki Ikäheimo calls “horizontal” relations of recognition, intersubjective encounters which are mutually constitutive of individuation and the affirmation of subjects who share in the common good. Just as Aristotle’s man is inherently a social and political animal who is incapable of living outside of the city, Hegel’s man exists in socially-mediated relations of interdependence that guarantee not only his individual freedom, but a rational and thus *social and political* freedom that cannot be attained outside of the State.

Both Hegel and Honneth focus almost exclusively on intersubjective relations as they exist *between individual persons*, as these relationships are precisely what drives the development of the individuated self. This, however, precludes any robust analysis of the relationship between groups of individuals and the *State*, which Ikäheimo suggests stands in a “vertical” relation of recognition which involves the “acknowledgment or acceptance of [the state’s] laws and norms, and the institutions that these constitute, as valid or legitimate.”⁶⁰ As such,

⁵⁸ Honneth, *Struggle for Recognition*, 30.

⁵⁹ Honneth, *Pathologies of Individual Freedom*, 62.

⁶⁰ Ikäheimo, “Hegel’s Concept of Recognition,” 28.

Hegel transitions from the problem of asymmetric recognition between individuals to the asymmetric recognition between social groups and *political institutions*—or, more simply, the State as the conglomeration of social, economic, and legal institutions—as they manifest as proper social and political struggles for recognition. Because the recognitive asymmetry is embedded within the institution-individual relationship, demands for recognition must be addressed “within [the] institutional frameworks” in which non-recognition is systemically embedded. It is for this reason that social and political movements so often address as their target *institutionalized injustices*. In the ladder of vertical relationality, the State towers as the master while those engaging in social struggles clamber at the bottom rung as slaves.

Hegel emphasizes the institutional dimension of mutual recognition by locating *civil society* as the concretized sphere of Abstract Right and the realm in which material inequalities are generated. As a corrective to this inevitability of civil society, Hegel posits within “civil society” *public authority* and *corporations* as institutions which are “to see to it that the general welfare and individual needs are actually met” such that civil society fulfills its duty to “oversee individual rights and welfare and make sure that the rights of freedom and satisfaction of needs are met as far as possible.”⁶¹ One problem, however, is that Hegel himself says little on how these institutions *function* to secure the welfare rights of all members of civil society—or indeed, how civil society relates to the larger category of “the State” altogether.⁶² The larger problem is that the rabble—which Hegel characterizes as the poor who have lost ‘hope’ that they will be recognized by the State—ceases to trust in the State altogether, rendering an *institutional* solution insufficient to restore their *dignity*.

It is for this latter reason that Honneth’s *social-psychological* approach to intersubjectivity and recognition is so compelling. Drawing thereupon, I suggest that instances of non-recognition—on the part of institutions toward particular groups of individuals—ignite struggles that evolve into social movements *precisely through these groups’ appeal to their right of necessity*. Insofar as historic struggles such as women’s suffrage, the Civil Rights Movement, and the contemporary Black Lives Matter movement are exemplary instances of *resistance*, the mechanisms of disobedience—such as public protests, disruption of traffic, and destruction of property—utilized therein are themselves justified by the Hegelian right of necessity. Beyond these historical examples, however, I suggest that this framework of struggle can be suitably applied to the more general conflict of *the rabble*.

Simply stated, the rabble denotes

a large mass of people sinks below the level of a certain standard of living—which automatically regulates itself at the level *necessary for a member of the society in question*—that feeling of right, integrity [*Rechtlichkeit*], and honor which comes from supporting oneself by one’s own activity and work is *lost . . .* despite an *excess of wealth*, civil society is *not wealthy enough*—i.e. its own distinct

⁶¹ Williams, *Hegel’s Ethics of Recognition*, 241.

⁶² A notable exception is Stephen Houlgate, who takes the concept of the “corporation” as Hegel’s ‘solution’ to the problem of poverty (see Houlgate 1991). However, this reading, as Robert Williams himself notes, is in the minority of Hegel scholarship; most scholars instead hold that “Hegel sees the inevitability of poverty and the creation of a rabble but fails to propose any solution to these problems” (Williams, *Hegel’s Ethics of Recognition*, 251).

resources are not sufficient—to *prevent an excess of poverty and the formation of a rabble*.⁶³

As mentioned in brief, poverty of the sort described above is generated at the level of the State (and more precisely civil society) and, due to the ethical crises immanent in civil society itself, is unavoidable. The existence of poverty alone does not generate a rabble, however; “rabble mentality” is an *attitude* that certain individuals or groups among the disenfranchised come to hold when they *lose hope in the institutions of the State*. The rabble “see themselves as victims of economic and social injustice and owe nothing to the system that exploits and deprives them.”⁶⁴ This attitudinal element is precisely why Hegel’s abandonment of intersubjective recognition is so troubling for Honneth: insofar as the rabble cease to rely on the institutions of civil society or the State for recognition, the rabble are not merely structurally or conceptually residual but more fundamentally feel *disrespected* and *robbed of their dignity*.

What we find, then, is that the rabble is disrespected on two counts: on the one hand, they lack the economic resources and property ownership needed for concrete social and political recognition; on the other, they stand in a relation of *contempt* toward the rest of the social body, resentful of their lot in the lottery of actualized freedom. In the context of the former, the rabble is incapable of attaining freedom by benefiting and participating in the common good, and in the latter is excluded from relations of *solidarity*—or what Hegel calls *honor*—that are meant to *exemplify* recognitive relationality in the sphere of Ethical Life. For Hegel, honor designates a “particular shape and instance of mutual-reciprocal recognition” at the level of institutions, not localized to particular social groups but which recognizes the dignity, universal worth, and particularity of each individual “to the community as a whole.”⁶⁵ When an individual is deprived of honor, principally through exclusion from (economic) institutions, he has “a deficient *self-identity*.”⁶⁶ Insofar as the State is the ultimate manifestation of Spirit, however, *it embodies universal consciousness itself*. As such, the rabble is disrespected not by another self-conscious subject, but the universal consciousness of the State as a unity. When considered in the Hegelian context of criminality, the rabble’s relation to the State is one in which the State imposes its will over and above the rabble’s fundamental right to *welfare* and, in so doing, *commits the ultimate wrong*. Given this infringement, it appears that the rabble can, on a critical social reading of Hegel’s view in which the logic of reciprocal recognition is restored at the level of the State, appeal to a *right of resistance* as a derivative of the right of necessity in which obedience to the law and universal consciousness is dissolved in response to the *criminality of the State*.⁶⁷

What the existence of the rabble reveals, then, is not merely a contradiction in the sphere of civil society, but more fundamentally a deficiency of *rationality* at the level of the State. The rabble is a material representation of the fundamental conflict between intersubjective and institutional recognition that renders nonviable any truly ethical reciprocal recognition in the State. As in the institution of slavery, the problem of a State which ‘inevitably’ generates a

⁶³ PR, §244-45, emphasis added.

⁶⁴ Williams, *Hegel’s Ethics of Recognition*, 248.

⁶⁵ Williams, *Hegel’s Ethics of Recognition*, 254.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 255, emphasis added.

⁶⁷ As Robert Williams reads Hegel, extreme poverty emerges as “a crime inflicted by civil society itself on its poor” (Williams, *Hegel’s Ethics of Recognition*, 249).

rabble is really “a problem of the inherent arbitrary incoherence” of the universal will.⁶⁸ (And as we know, this inevitability is amplified in contemporary capitalist society beyond even what Hegel imagined of poverty in the *Philosophy of Right*.) As such, the rabble shows us that the ‘universal will’ is not universal at all; instead “universal-social rationalism is not simply a given,” but “a task [yet] to be accomplished,” a task which becomes visible—and thus, realizable—in the conflict between intersubjective and institutional recognition.⁶⁹

Frank Ruda, in his many writings on Hegel's rabble, appeals to Hegel's right of necessity as an implicit affirmation that “an individual who is part of the rabble and suffers injustice does indeed have a right to claim his or her right and that, if it is refused to him or her, he or she is entitled to draw certain practical conclusions from this.”⁷⁰ Ruda provocatively characterizes the “right to have rights” in such instances as a *right of revolution* (which scholars of Hegel definitively disavow as a possibility within the State), qualified as “a right to transform the present state fundamentally into a new and better one.”⁷¹ Although excluded from institutional recognition, the rabble does not exist *outside* of the dialectical teleology of Spirit, however. A wholesale rejection of the State would therefore be incoherent. Recognizing this dimension of Hegel's theory of the State, Ruda asserts that the right of revolution must work *within* the framework of the State's positive constitution: “it is not, and cannot be, to my mind a right to abolish or fundamentally transform all coordinates of right.”⁷² Given the ambiguity of “revolution” as Ruda himself utilizes the term, however, I use “resistance” as a signifier for internal transformation in which, following Honneth, “legal definitions would have to change, other forms of political representation would have to be established, and material redistribution carried out for new modes of generalized recognition to be established.”⁷³ Resistance, then, does not imply a total failure of institutions that necessitates the *abolition* of the existing State, but works to “advance a critique of the status quo” as “part of the process whereby the rational becomes actual.”⁷⁴ Resistance works to drive the ever-moving dialectic of freedom to realize a more rational, respectful, and *truly universal* State.

It should finally be noted that Michael Thompson has implicitly addressed the problem of the rabble in his anti-capitalist reading of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. Herein, Thompson identifies a right of “nonobligation” or “dissent” embedded in Hegel's right of necessity, which emerges in spaces of “deficient modernity,” or, in spaces which challenge the morality and rationality of the universal, common good. In modern capitalist societies, Thompson writes, “the rational will be at odds with the institutions, values, and practices that do not aim at the universal” and thus theorizes a duty, on the part of individuals, to ‘correct’ these institutional injustices by means of dissent.⁷⁵

⁶⁸ Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition*, 78.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 320.

⁷⁰ Frank Ruda, “That Which Makes Itself: Hegel, Rabble, and Consequences,” in *Hegel's Elements of the Philosophy of Right—Critical Guide*, ed. David James (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 171.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 172.

⁷³ Axel Honneth, “Recognition as Ideology,” in *Recognition and Power*, eds. Bert van den Brink and David Owen, 323-47 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 345.

⁷⁴ Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition*, 260.

⁷⁵ Michael J. Thompson, “Capitalism as Deficient Modernity” in *Hegel and Capitalism*, ed. Andrew Buchwalter, 117-32 (Albany: SUNY Press, 2015), 122.

Thompson's understanding of dissent is in many ways analogous to the right of resistance that I have laid out in this paper, although Thompson's contextualization is distinctly contemporary while the right of resistance is one that can be found in Hegel's own theory of recognition. In both instances, nonetheless,

it is not simply those that are not served by the economic system—that is, the poor, the rabble (*Pöbel*)—that ought to dissent from these institutions and practices, but anyone who can grasp that they live in a world where only their particularity and the particularity of others is given primacy and where the institutions and practices of the community are prevented from realizing the universal, the common interests of the community.⁷⁶

For both Thompson and me, it is universal freedom itself, manifested as the rational, common good, which calls on a right of resistance in times of social, political, and economic injustice; in times, in other words, where there is a conflict of reciprocal recognition. Had Hegel extended his theory of recognition into the sphere of Ethical Life, as Honneth suggests he should have, he, too, may have been able to provide a solution to the problem of the rabble fully consistent with the rational, ethical, and political development of *his* modern State.

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⁷⁶ Ibid., 127.

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