Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy, vol. 3, nos. 2-3, 2007

BOOK REVIEW

RECOGNITION OR DECENTRED AGENCY? PHILOSOPHICAL CULTURE AND ITS DISCONTENTS

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Elliot L. Jurist, *Beyond Hegel and Nietzsche: Philosophy, Culture, and Agency*, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2000, ISBN: 0262100878 (available through Footprint Books in Australia).

> We Germans are Hegelians, even if there had never been any Hegel.
> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §357

Nietzsche's scattered remarks on Hegel are striking, though not surprising, for their seeming disparity. On the one hand, Nietzsche praises Hegel's historical sense, his grasp of the *becoming* of reason in history; on the other, Nietzsche attacks Hegel's Socratic optimism concerning the power of reason to reconcile us with the modern state. If Hegel had never existed, Nietzsche might have quipped, philosophers would have had to invent him. How do things stand, then, with these two giants of modern thought? Given their importance for the development of contemporary 'Continental' philosophy, it is surprising that there are relatively few studies dedicated to examining their philosophical relationship. Here we could mention Daniel Breazeale's seminal essay on the 'Hegel-Nietzsche problem', Stephen Houlgate's excellent study, *Hegel, Nietzsche and the Criticism of Metaphysics*, and Will Dudley's very interesting work, *Hegel, Nietzsche, and Philosophy: Thinking Freedom*.[1] Elliot Jurist's *Beyond Hegel and Nietzsche* is a welcome addition

1. Daniel Breazeale, 'The Hegel-Nietzsche Problem', *Nietzsche-Studien*, vol. 4, pp. 146-164; Stephen Houlgate, *Hegel, Nietzsche, and the Criticism of Metaphysics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986; Will Dudley, *Hegel, Nietzsche, and Philosophy: Thinking Freedom*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002. One should also mention Yirmiyahu Yovel's fascinating *Dark Riddle: Hegel, Nietzsche, and the Jews*, Pennsylvania University Press, 1998.

to this small but significant body of literature. Rather than defending Hegel against Nietzsche, or vice versa, Jurist develops a more general argument challenging the received view that Hegel and Nietzsche represent opposing, even antagonistic poles in contemporary thought. As against the 'separatist' view that Hegel and Nietzsche are simply irreconcilable (represented by Deleuze and Habermas), Jurist argues for a philosophical 'rapprochement' between Hegel and Nietzsche. He thus attempts to place 'Hegel and Nietzsche in conversation' (2) in order to show the complementarity of their approaches to culture, agency, and the 'psychology of knowledge'.

Both philosophers, Jurist argues, attack the 'Cartesian myth' of the dehistoricised, disengaged subject of knowledge, and both also present complex concepts of culture incorporating the related senses of culture as shared custom, as subjective self-development [*Bildung*], and as 'self-fathoming' (a complex hermeneutic negotiation between these subjective and objective dimensions of culture). Both philosophers are also concerned with overcoming the dissatisfactions of modern culture, whether through the articulation of agency-enabling forms of mutual recognition (Hegel), or through the promotion of life-affirming, affectively-driven 'decentred agency' (Nietzsche). Jurist thus aims to show that we need to rethink the received opposition between Hegelian agency (centred on notions of recognition) and Nietzschean challenges to the autonomous subject ('centred' on decentred agency) in order to capture the interplay between individuality and intersubjectivity—or narcissism and relatedness—both within and between Hegel and Nietzsche.

At the same time, Jurist acknowledges the tensions between Hegel and Nietzsche, particularly with regard to the problem of agency. To put it simply, Hegelian recognition is oriented towards the development of autonomous agency whereas Nietzschean will to power is oriented towards the affective, unconscious decentring of the autonomous subject. In order to address this tension, Jurist argues that Hegelian recognition could benefit from attending to the decentring of the subject explored by psychoanalysis, while the latter could benefit from developing a more normatively oriented account of the conditions of rational agency. Jurist's interest in bringing psychoanalytic perspectives to the Hegel-Nietzsche relationship is the most original aspect of his study, opening a space for productive dialogue between critical theory neo-Hegelians and poststructuralist neo-Nietzscheans.

At the same time, there is much here for more specialised readers of Hegel and Nietzsche to ponder. The theme of culture has been somewhat neglected in Anglophone scholarship, and it is a virtue of Jurist's approach that he foregrounds this theme as a way of articulating Nietzsche's and Hegel's approaches to the problem of *dissatisfaction* in modernity. Jurist thus sheds helpful light on the significance of the relationship between Greek culture and modern culture for both Hegel and Nietzsche, and the ways in which this affects contemporary debates concerning the meaning and viability of modernity. For both Hegel and Nietzsche, as Jurist notes, Greek culture is considered as a counterpoint to modernity; the tragedy of modernity, however, is that in realising freedom it has also emptied subjectivity, whether through processes of one-sided

rationalisation or nihilistic forms of moral-cultural valuation. As ever, when Hegel and Nietzsche are brought together, tragedy is never far away. Nietzsche's fascination with the death of tragedy at the hands of Socratic rationalism, for example, stands in stark contrast to what Hegel called the prose of modernity—the less heroic, more rational, yet ambivalent satisfactions offered by modern social institutions. Jurist's illuminating discussion of Hegel and Nietzsche on tragedy, moreover, contrasts Hegel's Christian-inspired, reconciliationist model (reconciling individual and community) (74-79) with Nietzsche's anti-Christian, 'aestheticist' model (the affirmation of the value of human life—above all through art—in response to the abyss of meaninglessness opened up by Dionysian insight) (79-84).

This contrast in attitudes to tragedy is explored further in Jurist's discussion of the *dissatisfactions* of modern culture. Such dissatisfaction—at once cultural, social, philosophical, and psychological—is expressed in the familiar schisms between subject and object, individual and society, reason and its other, all the diremptions and dichotomies of modern experience. Both Hegel and Nietzsche agree that the dissatisfaction, or even nihilism, of modern culture articulates a threat to rational agency manifested in an empty or merely formal subjectivity. But Hegel and Nietzsche clearly differ over the source of this threat to autonomous agency. Hegel regards it as the product of a detachment of subjectivity from social identity, which risks degenerating into a form of alienated narcissism. Nietzsche, by contrast, argues that that it is due to the spread of a levelling social conformism—the poisonous fruit of Judeo-Christian slave morality and its secular avatars in modern egalitarianism—that will eventually lead to the despicably anodyne 'happiness' of the 'last men' of modernity. Here again an apparent common concern conceals an underlying difference or tension. What Hegel describes as the modern experience of alienation and its overcoming through recognition becomes, with Nietzsche, an ambivalent despair at, but also exultation in, the nihilism of modernity, which can only be overcome by an aestheticist transvaluation of values.

The other innovative feature of Jurist's study is his focus on the psychological dimensions of Hegel's and Nietzsche's accounts of knowledge, culture, and agency. For Hegel, the important operative concept—rather neglected in recent scholarship—is that of 'satisfaction'. Hegel's slogan, Jurist remarks, might well be: '[s]atisfaction is impossible without fathoming dissatisfaction' (148). Dissatisfaction names the experience of failing to integrate being-for-itself and being-for-another, or put differently, self-regarding and other-regarding aspects of intersubjectivity. Genuine satisfaction, by contrast, depends upon 'integrating being-for-another and being-for-itself' (148); a task that Hegel conceptualises through the concept of intersubjective *recognition*. Hegel's theory of agency thus tracks the dialectic of satisfaction and dissatisfaction through various configurations of subjectivity; and it is through these dialectical experiences of recognition (and misrecognition) that the outlines of a Hegelian theory of agency become discernible. Jurist thus follows neo-Hegelians (such as Taylor and Honneth) in arguing that recognition is the path to the development of rational agency; but it is also the key, so Hegel contends, to overcoming the dissatisfactions of modernity, indeed for achieving the kind of reconcili-

ation with social reality that still raises suspicion among friends and foes of Hegel alike.

Before commenting further on this point it is worth outlining what is perhaps the centrepiece of the book: Jurist's reading of the theme of recognition throughout the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The distinctiveness of his approach lies in foregrounding the theme of recognition in the *Phenomenology* without emphasising the famous master/slave dialectic (though there is a fine discussion of Kojève's *politically motivated* reading of Hegelian recognition—a point often lost on more academic readers of Hegel). Unlike Habermas and Honneth, who argue that the Jena Hegel theorises intersubjective recognition whereas Hegel's *Phenomenology* reverts to the monological subject-object model of the 'philosophy of consciousness', Jurist traces the importance of the theme of recognition throughout the whole of the *Phenomenology* and even in Hegel's mature philosophy. Against Kojève's erroneous but influential emphasis on the master/slave dialectic, Jurist points out that this account of unequal recognition merely sets the stage for the further elaboration of structures of recognition in the later chapters on Reason and Spirit. This dialectical career of rational freedom, from failed to increasingly mutual recognition, commences with the inadequacy of the concepts of natural and ethical recognition in ancient Greek culture, dramatised in the tragic conflict between individual and state (Antigone). It then passes through the development of legal recognition and abstract personhood in Roman culture, the mediating term between ancient and modern culture. Finally, it concludes with Hegel's hopes for the historical achievement of mutual recognition (described in the chapters on Morality and Religion) in which the philosophical self-understanding of modern subjects finally makes possible a genuine reconciliation with modernity. Hegel's hope, Jurist claims, is that the empty subjectivity of modernity can be overcome through philosophical self-enlightenment: that 'the achievement of self-knowledge (self-recognition) leads to the restoration of social integration (mutual recognition)' (190). Being-for-itself and being-for-another are reconciled through mutual recognition between subjects as well as between subjects and the universal of the community (the dialectically connected institutions of family, civil society, and state). Though Jurist emphasises that he is interested in defending an 'anthropological' reading of recognition, the task of mutual recognition remains philosophical rather than political; he does not elaborate how the structures of mutual recognition are constituted in the modern state, or how these recognitive structures make possible the development of free subjectivity in modernity. It is an anthropological without being a 'Left Hegelian' reading of recognition, which makes sense, perhaps, when one considers that Jurist is attempting to reconcile Hegel and Nietzsche.

Instead, Jurist questions Hegel's 'seamless web' of relations of mutual recognition, stretching from interpersonal to social recognition, which amounts to a teleological vision of social reconciliation. Such a vision of recognition, Jurist argues, suffers from an implausible view of human psychology (underplaying the element of aggression and conflict in human relations), and is in any case untenable given the 'strange multiplicity' defining modern societies: 'The hope that Hegel had for social reconciliation is no longer realisable in complex, multicultural societies' (285). Nonetheless, it is still possible,

Jurist contends, 'to reinterpret recognition without overestimating its importance (as Hegel does) or underestimating it (as Nietzsche does)' (285). Recognition is thus better conceptualised 'as a necessary but not sufficient condition for moral and social agency', one that 'cannot undo economic hardship and suffering' (285). To this end, Hegelian recognition could be supplemented, Jurist argues, by a Nietzschean conception of 'decentred' agency that emphasises affectivity; and by psychoanalytic perspectives on aggression and the ambivalence of desire. Jurist's conclusion, however, is still rather Hegelian, in that he argues for the unity of Hegel and Nietzsche despite their apparent differences; a synthesis of intersubjective recognition and decentred subjectivity that would overcome their apparent opposition.

To my mind, this is where the schism between Hegel and Nietzsche really lies: whether the dissatisfactions of modernity can be overcome through mutual recognition guided by norms of social reconciliation; or whether this vision of reconciled modernity *itself* needs to be overcome via a radical transformation in the very meaning of culture, subjectivity, and agency. Though Jurist acknowledges at times the sharp opposition between Hegel and Nietzsche on these topics, his later discussion shows where the attempt to reconcile the differences between them becomes rather strained. This is evident in the concluding discussions of selected thinkers who, in different ways, seek to extend or develop Hegelian and/or Nietzschean perspectives on subjectivity and agency (Honneth and Jessica Benjamin in the case of Hegel; Derrida and Judith Butler in the case of Nietzsche).

Jurist's discussion of Jessica Benjamin is interesting in this regard. She draws on the Hegelian account of a 'struggle for recognition' in order to theorise the developmental path towards autonomous agency, without, however, underplaying the role of domination and submission in intersubjective relations of recognition.[2] Benjamin is also an important reference point for Axel Honneth's theory of recognition, as Jurist notes, emphasising how both Honneth and Benjamin appreciate the 'affective side of recognition', strive to preserve its 'socio-political ramifications', and thus aim to show how recognition of others 'promotes the unfolding of a new sense of agency' (200). In this sense, Honneth also does justice to the role of *misrecognition* in any account of recognition, avoiding the tendency to read recognition primarily through the experience of love (as Robert Williams' 'Levinasian' reading of recognition tends to do). Jurist provides a deft summary of Honneth's revised version of Hegel's three spheres of recognition (201-203): love in the sphere of primary familial relations; rights in the sphere of legal and institutional relations; and social solidarity in the context of communal relations and social practices. But he also makes the point that Honneth favours Ludwig Siep's interpretation of Hegelian recognition as 'a theoretical outline regarding the moral development of societies', rather than Andreas Wildt's claim that recognition presents the germ of 'a theory of moral development of the self [*moralischen Bildung*]' (202-203). For Jurist, both aspects—the moral development of societies and the moral development of the self—should be

2. See Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love*, New York, Pantheon Book, 1987; J. Benjamin, *Like Subjects, Love Objects*, Yale, Yale University Press, 1995; J. Benjamin, *The Shadow of the Other*, London, Routledge, 1998.

thought together in any serious theory of recognition and social agency (a claim with which Honneth would doubtless agree). Where Honneth and Benjamin differ is on the emphasis given to the problem of domination and submission: for Jurist, Benjamin brings out the socio-political function of domination/submission relations—for which a psychoanalytical perspective remains essential—far more explicitly and pointedly than Honneth, who emphasises, rather, the moral core of social struggles for recognition, and also rejects the usefulness of Freudian concepts of death- or aggression drives.[3]

Jurist's interesting extension of the dialogue between Hegel and Nietzsche to contemporary neo-Hegelians and neo-Nietzscheans suffers, however, from being rather schematic and underdeveloped. The very brief sketches of Honneth, Derrida, and Butler can hardly do justice to the complexity of their theoretical positions on intersubjectivity, decentred agency, and the Hegel-Nietzsche relationship more generally. Jurist discusses Lacan under the rubric of 'Nietzschean agency', for example, despite the significance of Kojève's reading of Hegelian desire for Lacan's theory of the subject. This is surprising considering that that the 'decentred subject' in Lacan is strongly indebted to Kojève's theory of 'anthropogenetic' desire and the struggle for recognition. Jurist avoids this intriguing conjunction, however, arguing that Lacan is more Nietzschean than Hegelian, a contentious claim for psychoanalysts and Hegelians alike: 'As I read Lacan, the emphasis on the impossibility of reconciliation ultimately places him more in the Nietzschean camp' (273). Judith Butler, author of a fine study on Hegelianism in post-war French philosophy, is similarly placed in the Nietzschean camp.[4] Her interest in Nietzsche, Jurist remarks, 'follows from her interest in Foucault', but he does not mention the crucial importance of Derrida, nor how Butler draws explicitly on both Nietzschean and Hegelian perspectives on desire and embodiment in attempting to construct her own psychoanalytically-informed theory of subjection.[5]

Finally, for all the attention to reconstructing the concept of recognition in Hegel's *Phenomenology*, Jurist tends to present Hegel as committed to a utopian project of social reconciliation and a 'fixed' conception of recognition that would encompass all intersubjective relations, from the interpersonal sphere to that of social institutions. There is, however, also a 'tragic' reading of Hegel that Jurist ignores here, which questions precisely the possibility of such social reconciliation in modernity and remains undecided as to whether modernity will be able to sustain its fragile historical achievements. Jurist rightly argues, in my opinion, that it would be salutary to supplement the Hegelian concept of recognition with psychoanalytic perspectives; but this is arguably what Honneth has been attempting to do ever since writing *The Struggle for Recognition*. Nonetheless, it remains an open question to what extent Honneth brings out the 'socio-political function' of relations of domination and submission in the way that Jessica Benjamin does (203), which would also imply arguing, following Benjamin, that there are inherent lim-

3. See Axel Honneth, 'The Work of Negativity: A Psychoanalytical Revisioning of the Theory of Recognition', trans. R. Sinnerbrink, *Critical Horizons*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2006, pp. 101-111.

4. See Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1987.

5. Cf. J. Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1997.

its to what the neo-Hegelian discourse of mutual recognition and social reconciliation can achieve.

In any event, despite Jurist's will to rapprochement, the tension between Hegelian recognition and Nietzschean decentred agency in *Beyond Hegel and Nietzsche* remains largely unresolved. Hegel is praised for emphasising the constitutive role of intersubjective relations of recognition in the development of social agency, which Nietzsche is criticised for ignoring. At the same time, what Jurist describes as Nietzsche's troublingly 'one-sided' account of decentred agency is proffered as an important supplement to Hegel's sanguine vision of social reconciliation through mutual recognition. Jurist's otherwise admirably measured mediation between Hegel and Nietzsche thus remains caught in the opposition between intersubjective recognition and decentred agency that it seeks to overcome. In this respect, Jurist's sober examination of recognition and agency in Hegel and Nietzsche expresses an intriguing ambivalence between reconciliation with, and subversion of, the normative order of modernity—a conflict that nicely expresses the sort of dissatisfaction that we moderns, along with Hegel and Nietzsche, recognise very well.

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