



Opposition instead of recognition: The social significance of “determinations of reflection” in Hegel’s Science of Logic

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Abstract

Axel Honneth reconstructs Hegel’s social and political philosophy on the basis of the concept of recognition. For Honneth, recognition is a constitutive relation between individuals that is in principle symmetrical. By conceiving recognition through symmetry, Honneth effectively bans the inclusion of power within recognitive relation. He thus regards the relations of power as cases of non-recognition or misrecognition. In this paper, I develop an alternative theory of the constitutive relation between individuals for Hegel, one that is based on the asymmetrical relation of power. To this aim, I focus on the chapter of “determinations of reflection” in the *Science of Logic*. Through a close analysis of Hegel’s *Logic*, I argue (a) that the most fundamental form of relation between individuals is the relation of opposition, (b) that individuals are solely constituted in and through the relation of opposition, and (c) that the relation of opposition is essentially asymmetrical. Together, these claims establish that, for Hegel, power is not external to the structure of individuals, but is constitutive of them. Finally, in order to illustrate the social ontology based on Hegel’s conception of opposition, I discuss Catharine MacKinnon, who argues that the male and female genders are solely constituted through the relation of power of the former over the latter.

Keywords

Hegel, science of logic, power, opposition, recognition, social ontology, determinations of reflection, contradiction, Axel Honneth

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The critique of the symmetrical relation of recognition

In recent years, Axel Honneth has undertaken a project of “normative reconstruction” of Hegel’s social and political philosophy on the basis of the concept of “recognition.”¹ From the point of view of social ontology, recognition implies (a) that there are no individuals prior to and independent from the relation obtaining between them and (b) that the relation between individuals is reciprocal. Importantly, Honneth regards the reciprocity involved in recognition to be symmetrical.² This implies that the recognizer and the recognizee depend on and determine each other to the same extent. Thus, it is supposed that individuals in recognitive state are equal with each other: A holds B accountable to the claims that B makes to the same extent that B holds A accountable for the claims that A makes.

Arguably, such a normative conception of symmetrical recognition does not do justice to contemporary realities, where the relations between individuals are structurally saturated with power. For example, consider that the relationship between some particular capitalist and some worker of his cannot be, even remotely, symmetrical. This has nothing to do with moral integrity of the capitalist in question, but with the institutional and economic organization of capitalism, which produces and maintains the relation of asymmetry. As Marx has shown, the function of capital necessarily causes massive unemployment. Within the capitalist framework, the unemployed, taking on the form of an “industrial reserve army,” significantly reduce or eliminate the bargaining power of workers. This economic arrangement makes workers inherently subordinate to capitalists; if ever a worker insists on his demands, the capitalist can simply replace him with one of those in the “reserve.”

Honneth simply regards reciprocal relations that are based on power as cases of “non-recognition” or “misrecognition.” Thus, he clearly implicates a strict dichotomy between relations characterized by recognition and relations characterized by power; and so, he effectively bans the inclusion of power within recognitive structure. In this way, Honneth conceives of power relations as “social pathologies,” which are mere aberrations from the otherwise healthy norms of the bourgeois-capitalist social order.³ While recognition constitutes the basis of sociality in this social order, such cases of “non-recognition” or “misrecognition” spark a “struggle for recognition” which has the potential to restore the normal recognitive structure.⁴

It is appropriate to emphasize that the view that Honneth represents—the view that holds recognition to be symmetrical—has become widespread in current scholarship on Hegel. According to Robert Pippin, the “conditions of successful agency” for Hegel

cannot be satisfied unless individuals are understood as participants in an ethical form of life, *Sittlichkeit*, and finally in a certain historical form of ethical life, in which such relations of recognition can be *genuinely mutual*, where that means that the bestowers of recognition are themselves actually free, where the intersubjective recognitional (sometimes called “communicative”) relation is sustained in a *reciprocal* way (Pippin 2007, 67, emphases added).

Similarly, Robert Brandom holds that “recognition is an equivalence relation.” He argues that “*reciprocal* (i.e., *symmetric*) recognition” (original emphases) is a “necessary

condition” for an individual’s recognition of himself as an individual; symmetrical recognition is therefore constitutive of the individual:

Insofar as recognition is de facto not *symmetric*, it cannot be *reflexive*. I cannot be properly self-conscious (recognize myself) except in the context of a recognition structure that is *reciprocal*: insofar as I am recognized by those I recognize (Brandom 2007, 137).

It is certainly true that, for Hegel, reciprocal [*gegenseitig*] relation is a necessary condition for reflexivity, and reflexivity is that which constitutes the individual qua individual. Yet, by conflating reciprocity with symmetry, Brandom, quite like Honneth and Pippin, plainly assumes that recognitive relation is devoid of power.⁵

I concede that Hegel, in the *Philosophy of Right*, presupposes recognition as a symmetrical relation that undergirds modern social institutions. Nonetheless, given the blatant presence of power relations in the modern capitalist world, I believe it is necessary—despite the *Philosophy of Right*—to explicate an account of constitutive relation between individuals that is structurally asymmetrical. To look for such an account, the obvious choice within Hegel’s oeuvre is the dialectic of lordship and bondage in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. There, Hegel does not discuss power as an aberration from, and therefore external to, the recognitive structure, but rather he discusses power as constitutive of this structure.⁶ Yet, the dialectic of lordship and bondage is already profusely discussed in the literature, and I do not intend to go over this well-trodden territory. Rather, in order to explicate the asymmetrical character of the relation between individuals, I turn to a much less obvious case, namely, the chapter, “determinations of reflection” [*Reflexionsbestimmungen*], in the *Science of Logic*.⁷

Given the subject matter of the *Science of Logic*, Hegel in his exposition of the determinations of reflection does not refer to recognition, or to any other explicitly social or political issues. Rather, as I will show, he discusses the general “logical” structure of individuals, and he does so, *solely* through examining the relations between individuals. Although I will not ground this claim in this paper, the logic of the determinations of reflection in the *Science of Logic* is indeed akin to the logic that underpins the relation between lord and bondsman in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.⁸ Our present focus on the *Science of Logic* is even more justified in virtue of the fact that the experiential content of the *Phenomenology*, and Hegel’s discussion of self-consciousness, desire, and labor within the context of the dialectic of lordship and bondage, might distract us from the current project of carving out the social ontology undergirding that dialectic.

In the chapter “determinations of reflection,” Hegel discusses the structure of individuals through various relations that obtain between individuals. These relations include “identity” [*Identität*], “difference” [*Unterschied*], “diversity” [*Verschiedenheit*], “opposition” [*Gegensatz*], and “contradiction” [*Widerspruch*]. I will argue that Hegel’s discussion of the determinations of reflection establishes (a) that there is no pre-relational individual. Rather, individuals are *solely* constituted in and through relations; (b) that the most fundamental form of relation between individuals is the relation of opposition; and (c) that the relation of opposition, in its adequate form, is essentially asymmetrical. As the asymmetrical relation is a relation of power, these claims together demonstrate that—contrary to Honneth, Pippin, and Brandom—for Hegel power is not

external to the structure of the individuals, but is *constitutive* of it. As I will show, for Hegel the asymmetry that obtains through the relation of opposition has a complex structure. Namely, it does not obtain in *exclusion* of symmetry and equality, I argue, but has a necessary moment of symmetry and equality built into it. Such symmetry and equality function as an illusion—indeed a constitutive illusion—that conceals the asymmetrical relation of power.

In what follows, I begin with a general account of the determinations of reflection, what they are, and how they are interrelated. Then, I give a close analysis of the dialectic of the determinations of reflection in order to show how Hegel proves that opposition, along with the contradiction that ensues from it, grounds the structure of individuals. Next, I discuss how opposition, in its adequate form, is essentially asymmetrical. I also sketch the social significance of Hegel's conception of opposition by invoking Simone de Beauvoir and Karl Marx. Subsequently, in order to better understand why Hegel thinks opposition is more fundamental than diversity, I discuss and answer Benedetto Croce's objection to Hegel on this point. Then, in order to illustrate Hegel's opposition, I discuss in detail Catharine MacKinnon's conception of gender formation. According to MacKinnon, the categories of male and female are *solely* constituted through the relation of domination of the former over the latter. Finally, I briefly indicate how for Hegel the relation of opposition between individuals is grounded in the "totality" of relations, and, then, recapitulate my discussion by comparing a social ontology based on the asymmetrical relation of opposition with one based on the symmetrical relation of recognition.

The determinations of reflection and the fundamentality of opposition

Let me begin with a brief explanation of the term "reflection" to which the expression "determinations of reflection" refers. Hegel grounds the logic of essence on the basis of the concept of reflection. In the logic of essence, reflection does not denote a subjective activity of reflection, which takes certain content, that which is reflected upon, as independent from reflection.⁹ Rather, Hegel, here, talks of "reflection in general" [*Reflexion überhaupt*], which is a process of relationality that is *immanent* to all things or individuals, and constitutes them as what they are (WL II 30, SL 404)¹⁰. Hegel defines reflection as the "*movement from nothing to nothing and so back unto itself*" [*Bewegung von Nichts zu Nichts und dadurch zu sich selbst zurück*] (WL II 24, SL 400, original emphasis)¹¹. What Hegel means by this seemingly enigmatic formulation is that reflection is a relation that does not presuppose any independent, or "given," things or individuals. Rather, "reflection is *pure mediation* as such [*reine Vermittlung überhaupt*]," while "*pure mediation is pure relation*, without any related terms [*reine Beziehung, ohne Bezogene*]" (WL II 81, SL 445, original emphases).

By beginning the logic of essence with reflection, Hegel initiates his strategy to develop an ontology, which is based on the priority of relations over things and individuals. As George Lukács has emphasized, this is indeed *the* "revolutionary act" of Hegel's philosophy (Lukács 1984, 533). While the history of metaphysics had previously been directed in general by Aristotle's metaphysics of substance, wherein things and individuals are conceived to have priority over relations, Hegel's logic *derives* the

structure of things and individuals from relations. For Hegel, it is not the case that *first* there are some individuals, which *then* relate to each other; rather the individuals, from the beginning, are constituted in and through the relation that obtains between them.¹² It is therefore appropriate to designate Hegel's ontology in the logic of essence as "the ontology of absolute relationality."¹³ This, however, does not mean that Hegel is a Heraclitean philosopher; that is to say Hegel is not one who regards everything to be in the state of constant flux such that no ontological identity could possibly obtain. For Hegel, there *are* individuals, but these individuals are solely derived from the relations that obtain between them. The task of the determinations of reflection is precisely to capture the structure of individuals through relations.

Hegel's discussion of the determinations of reflection begins with the relation of (A) "identity," and then continues to the relation of (B) "difference," and ultimately concludes with the relation of (C) "contradiction" (the letters are Hegel's). "Difference" itself is conceived in two ways: the difference that is "external" or "indifferent," which Hegel calls "diversity" and the difference that has a "determinate" form, which is "opposition." The determinations of reflection, according to Hegel, are "categories" that "are *valid for everything*" (WL II 36, SL 409). They can thus be expressed in propositional form in the following way:

Identity: "Everything is identical with itself; $A = A$," or its negative expression: "A cannot at the same time be A and not A" (EL §115, WL II 36, SL 409).

Diversity: "Everything is diverse," or its negative expression: "There are no things that are perfectly equal to each other" (EL §117; see also WL II 52, SL 422).

Opposition: "Everything is opposite" (EL §119Z), or "Everything is an opposite, is determined either as positive or as negative" (WL II 73, SL 438).

Contradiction: "Everything is inherently contradictory" (WL II 74, SL 439).

Hegel criticizes representational thought in that it merely "enumerates them [i.e., these categories] *one after the other*; so that there does not appear to be any relation between them" (WL II 38, SL 411). By contrast, Hegel argues that the "truth" of the determinations of reflection "consist *only* in relation to one another" (emphasis added). These categories for Hegel are in a strong sense internally inter-related, such that "each in its very concept contains the others" (WL II 73, SL 438). This implies that for Hegel everything is *at the same time* identical, different, diverse, opposite and contradictory.

However, this claim—that each of the determinations of reflection contains the others—does not mean that they are the same for Hegel. Rather, he thinks there is a *progressive* dialectical movement from identity, to difference, to opposition, to contradiction, such that contradiction should be considered as the one that is "deeper and more essential" [*das Tiefere und Wesenhaftere*]. The proposition of contradiction, he emphasizes, "in contrast to others expresses more the truth and the essence of things" (WL II 74, SL 439). Thus, although the determinations of reflection are all interconnected, there is, to adopt a term from Klaus Hartmann, a "*Steigerungs-Kaskade*" (escalating cascade) from identity, to difference, to diversity, to opposition, to contradiction (Hartmann 1999, 179). Hegel himself uses the term "*zuspitzen*" (i.e., to sharpen, to pinnacle, to come to the point) to describe this dialectical progression. What is already present in its "blunt"

[*abgestumpft*] form in identity and diversity gets its “sharpened” form in opposition and contradiction, which are the most adequate determinations of reflection and make all things, Hegel asserts, “lively” and “active” (WL II 78, SL 442).

Later, I will argue (a) that contradiction for Hegel is an identity, which is achieved through opposition and (b) that opposition is principally an asymmetrical relation of power. These two claims, together with the claim already mentioned, that is (c) that contradiction expresses the “truth” of the determinations of reflection, establish that Hegel’s ontology, developed through the determinations of reflection, is an ontology of power. That is, for Hegel, power is not external to the structure of individuals, but is constitutive of them. In other words, individuals become individuals in the first place through being in a relation that is fundamentally and in its most sharpened truth a relation of power; and this is, then, to say that individuals become individuals through being either dominating or dominated. Clearly, this conclusion has radical social implications, some of which I will discuss later. For now, in order to understand how Hegel *proves* the fundamentality of the relation of opposition, and the contradiction that ensues from it, we need to closely track the dialectic of the determinations of reflection. This is the task that I now turn to.

The dialectic of the determinations of reflection

In the *Encyclopedia*, Hegel describes the general method of dialectical progression in his logic as “nothing other than merely the *positing* of what is already contained in a concept” (EL §88). It is only through adherence to the principle of making explicit what is already implicit in a category, Hegel thinks, that the “*necessary* progression” of categories can be established. In what follows, I detail how Hegel grasps the necessary progression from (a) identity to difference, (b) to diversity, (c) to opposition, and finally (d) to contradiction.

From identity to difference

According to Hegel, in the relation of identity $A = A$, the first *A* (which comes before the identity sign) is different from the second *A* (which comes after the identity sign). The first *A* *identifies* itself with the second *A*. But the second *A* is *being identified* with the first *A*. That is, in the very expression of the proposition of identity, the proposition of difference is already implied.¹⁴ Note that it is not the case that *first* there is identity to which difference is *then* added. Rather, the act of identification of (the first) *A* with (the second) *A* is *at the very same time* the act of differentiation of (the first) *A* and (the second) *A*. This means that identity and difference are entirely integral to each other.

From difference to diversity

Now, Hegel holds that difference implies that there are other individuals, from which *A* can be distinguished. This results in the relation of diversity, namely the relation between *A* and (say) *B*, which is a variation of the relation of difference. The two individuals that are in relation of diversity are identical with each other *in some respect* and different from each other *in some other respect*, but the internal unity of such identity and difference cannot be grasped. For this reason, in the framework of diversity, for Hegel,

identity and difference remain “external” and “indifferent” [*gleichgültig*] to each other, and to that extent the diverse individuals remain indeterminate (EL §117, WL II 48, SL 419). To give an example, if we understand the relation of races in terms of diversity, we can say that a black American and a white American are *identical* with each other, *with respect* to their both being American, and that they are *different* from each other, *with respect* to the color of their skin. However, in this way, the property of either white or black and the property of American are only pasted together externally, and the relation between the two merely remains a relation of indifference.

Hegel’s considered view is that within the framework of the relation of diversity, we should talk of the “equality” [*Gleichheit*] of individuals instead of their identity; since the concept of identity implies that the individuals are equal in *all* respects, rather than that they are equal in only *some* respects. Correspondingly, in diversity Hegel conceives of difference in terms of “inequality” [*Ungleichheit*].¹⁵ Equality and inequality are therefore not identity and difference proper, but “external identity” and “external difference” (WL II 49, SL 419, EL §117). The externality of equality and inequality implies that the individual in the relation of diversity is conceived as having an underlying substratum, to which the relations of equality and inequality to other individuals are *then* attached. That is, in diversity, there is a relapse to the traditional ontology, which regarded things to have priority over relations.¹⁶ It is exactly for this reason that Hegel calls the type of reflection involved in the relation of diversity as a “reflection alienated from itself” [*sich entfremdete Reflexion*]:

In reflection thus alienated from itself, equality and inequality appear as mutually unrelated, and in relating them to *one and the same* thing, it separates them by the introduction of ‘*in so far*’, of *sides* and *respects*. The diverse, which are one and the same, to which both equality and inequality are related, are therefore *from one side* equal to one another, but *from another side* are unequal, and *insofar as* they are equal, they are not unequal. *Equality* is related only to itself, and similarly *inequality* is only inequality (WL II 50, SL 420).

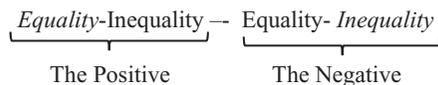
While the relation of identity and difference proper are constitutive of individuals, equality and inequality only exist, Hegel emphasizes, for an “external” or “third standpoint” which “compares” [*vergleichen*] the one with the other. That is, equality and inequality are not immanent to the individuals, but only obtain through act of comparing, which is “a subjective activity that falls outside” the individuals [*ein subjektives, außerhalb ihrer fallendes Tun*] (WL II 51, SL 421).

We can now understand why Hegel thinks the relation of diversity is inadequate; diversity renders individuals pre-relational and indeterminate. In diversity, the individuals are arbitrarily compared: *one time*, they are regarded as equal, and *another time*, they are regarded as unequal. In this way, equality and inequality remain externally and indifferently related to each other; that is to say, each falsely proposes itself as self-standing and unrelated to the other (“*Equality* is related only to itself, and similarly *inequality* is only inequality”). The transition from diversity to opposition is motivated by the quest for full determination of individuals. In order to determine the individuals, Hegel believes, it is essential to conceive equality and inequality in their unity. This will result in the relation of opposition, which I discuss below.

From diversity to opposition

So far, we have learned that the relation of identity (between A and A) presupposes the relation of diversity (between A and B). In a further dialectical move, Hegel shows that the relation of diversity, in its turn, presupposes the relation of opposition. The relation of opposition obtains between what Hegel calls the “positive” and the “negative,” and can be captured in terms of the relation between +A (or simply A) and –A. (Note that the “positive” in this context should not be confused with the mere given, as the phrases of positive social sciences, or positivism may refer to. There is no such givenness in the logic of essence. Positive and negative are both relational terms.) While in diversity, any arbitrary individual (be it B, C, D, etc.) can function as the other of A, in opposition the other of A is *entirely* grasped as *the* other of A, namely as –A and not as just any arbitrary other individual. Likewise the other of –A is *only* A and not any other individual (EL §119). In other words, within the relation of opposition, the law of excluded middle holds: “*something is either A or not A; there is no third*” (WL II 73, SL 438).¹⁷

Hegel defines the positive and the negative solely in terms of the relation that obtains between equality and inequality. Whereas in diversity equality and inequality simply refer to two aspects of individuals and fall apart from each other, in opposition equality and inequality form a unity. “Diversity whose *indifferent* sides are just as much simply and solely *moments* of one negative unity is *opposition*,” Hegel writes (WL II 52, SL 421). In order to understand how equality and inequality cohere with each other in opposition, let us focus on the definitions of the positive and the negative. Importantly, although the positive and the negative are defined solely in relation to each other, their definition is distinct. According to Hegel, “the self-*equality* reflected into itself that contains within itself the relation to inequality is the positive; and the *inequality* that contains within itself the relation to its non-being, to equality is the negative” (WL II 56, SL 424, original emphases). That is, in the positive, the moment of self-equality is the defining feature; the inequality of positive and negative is wholly for the sake of guaranteeing the identity of the positive. By contrast, in the negative, the moment of self-inequality is the defining feature, and self-equality has a subordinate importance.¹⁸ As the formulation of the *Encyclopedia* has it, the positive is “the identical relation to self in such a way that it is *not* the negative,” and the negative is “what is different on its own account in such a way that it is *not* the positive” (EL §119). That is, in the positive, the emphasis is on self-identity, and in the negative, the emphasis is on difference from the positive. We can thus depict the relation of the positive and the negative in the following way:



As this chart clearly indicates, for Hegel the positive and the negative are second-order relational structures that consist of two relational moments of equality and inequality. This is in a sharp contrast with the traditional ontology, where the individuals are ultimately defined as self-standing apart from relations. For Hegel, it is not the case that *first* the individuals are given, and only *then* they enter into a relation of opposition; rather the individuals are *derived* from the relation of opposition that obtains between them.

From opposition to contradiction

In the literature on Hegel, there is an abundant emphasis on the concept of contradiction. Given the centrality of contradiction in Hegel's philosophy, this emphasis is appropriate. Nonetheless, the focus on contradiction itself may draw our attention away from the *genesis* of contradiction through opposition. This essay's emphasis on opposition is justified when we consider that the transition from opposition to contradiction is minimal. Indeed, in opposition, contradiction is already contained.¹⁹ For, each of the positive and the negative consists of two moments of equality and inequality, which *simultaneously* cohere *and* exclude one another. According to Hegel, the positive and the negative are self-subsistent individuals that gain their very selfhood *through* their relation to each other; these individuals are entirely co-dependent at the very same time that each purports to exclude the other from itself. This is essentially what Hegel means by contradiction:

Since the self-subsistent determination of reflection [i.e. the positive or the negative] excludes the other in the same respect as it contains it and is self-subsistent for precisely this reason, in its self-subsistence the determination excludes its own self-subsistence from itself. [so schließt sie in ihrer Selbständigkeit ihre eigene Selbständigkeit aus sich aus] [. . .] And so it is *contradiction* (WL II 65, SL 431).²⁰

We can also make sense of Hegel's contradiction in the following way. In Hegel's ontology of absolute relationality, which is adequately articulated through the relation of opposition, each individual is solely the *result* of the relation of opposition. Yet, at the same time there must have been, *from the beginning*, individuals between which the relation of opposition could obtain. This state of affairs—where every individual is always already derived from a relation of opposition, while the individual asserts itself as self-subsistent and, as it were, as prior to the relation of opposition—is what Hegel calls contradiction.

Hegel holds that contradiction is “the opposition [that] is reflected into itself” (WL II 36, SL 409). That is to say, contradiction is the opposition that relates to itself and, in so doing, constitutes itself as a unity. The self-referential character of contradiction makes it an *individual* proper. Thus, in contradiction the individuality of the positive and the negative, the individuality that is already *implicitly* present in the relation of opposition, is *explicitly* attained. We can also infer this point from the architectonic of Hegel's exposition of the determinations of reflection: (A) identity, (B) difference, and (C) contradiction. As the order of the categories suggests, for Hegel the identity that is achieved through difference is contradiction. The fact that the determinate form of difference is opposition clearly indicates that, for Hegel, contradiction is the identity that is achieved through opposition. To put the same point in a metaphorical language, we may say that contradiction is an identity, which represents the *congealment* of the process of relationality of opposition, the congealment through which the positive and the negative are constituted as distinct individuals. We shall, therefore, conclude that, whereas the relation of opposition, precisely speaking, obtains *between* two opposing individuals, contradiction occurs *within each* opposing individual—contradiction for Hegel is primarily *self*-contradiction.²¹

The asymmetrical nature of opposition

In the relation of diversity, individuals are *symmetrically* related to each other; each individual is conceived to consist of a substratum, equally shared by all individuals, which ultimately remains untouched by their relation of (external) difference. By contrast, the relation of opposition is a relation of power, since it is essentially *asymmetrical*. Whereas the positive is a *self-centered* individual that relates to the negative only subordinately, the negative is a *de-centered* and *disjointed* individual that is defined by difference from its center in the positive.²² In order to illustrate this point, it is helpful to invoke de Beauvoir's conception of women as the "second sex." According to de Beauvoir,

The terms *masculine* and *feminine* are used symmetrically only as a matter of form, as on legal papers. In actuality the relation of the two sexes is not quite like that of two electrical poles, for man represents both the positive and the neutral, as is indicated by the common use of *man* to designate human-beings in general; whereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria, without reciprocity (De Beauvoir 1952, xxi).

And even more explicitly:

Thus humanity is male and man defined woman not in herself, but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being [...]. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the subject, he is the absolute – she is the other (De Beauvoir 1952, xxii).²³

In the relation of diversity, there is a third standpoint, that of an "impartial spectator" (Adam Smith's phrase) so to speak, from which the individuals are compared. The criteria by means of which the individuals are compared are located, precisely speaking, not in individuals themselves, but in the third non-situated "neutral" standpoint. Hegel's analysis of the relation of opposition shows us that such "neutral" standpoint is a mere figment of imagination; it is not objective *in* the individuals. Rather, the so-called "neutral" standpoint is the positive itself. It is the positive that provides the criteria both for itself and for the negative. (I will discuss this point in more detail in next section). In de Beauvoir's words, "man is at once judge and party to the case" (De Beauvoir 1952, xxxiii).

The asymmetrical relation of opposition is not limited to the case of men and women. Indeed, the social world is permeated with such relations of power. Consider a few examples: in international relations, it is the central capitalist countries that are the positive and the self-equal, and the peripheral countries that are the negative and the self-unequal; in race, it is white that is the positive and the self-equal, and black that is the negative and the self-unequal; in the realm of economy, it is the capitalists that are the positive and the self-equal, and the workers that are the negative and the self-unequal.

I have explained that the positive and the negative are both contradictory, in that each contains the other as its own constitutive moment; yet exclude it at the same time. It is important to emphasize that, the contradiction that obtains in the positive is distinct from

that of the negative, hence the corresponding asymmetrical, power laden, relation between them. According to Hegel, “the positive is only *implicitly* [an sich] the contradiction, whereas the negative is contradiction *posited*” (WL II 66, SL 432, original emphasis). Contradiction in the positive is *implicit*, since the positive is primarily defined in terms of its own identity, which is subordinately contrasted to difference. In contrast, the contradiction of the negative is *explicit*, since its very identity is primarily defined in terms of non-identity, that is, in terms of its difference from the positive. In order to illustrate this point, it is helpful to consider Marx’s conception of the relation of opposition between capital and labor, which, in his early work, the *Holy Family* (1845), he conceptualizes in the following way:

Proletariat and wealth are opposites; as such they form a single whole. They are both creations of the world of private property. The question is exactly what place each occupies in the opposition. It is not sufficient to declare them two sides of a single whole. Private property as private property, as wealth, is compelled to maintain *itself*, and thereby its opposite, the proletariat, in *existence*. That is the *positive* side of the opposition, self-satisfied private property. The proletariat, on the contrary, is compelled as proletariat to abolish itself and thereby its opposite, private property, which determines its existence, and which makes it proletariat. It is the *negative* side of the opposition, its restlessness within its very self, dissolved and self-dissolving private property (Marx and Engels 1960ff, 2:37, 1975, 4:35–6, original emphases).

According to Marx, thus, the workers and capitalists (in this passage, the “proletariat” and “wealth”) constitute a relation of opposition; the capitalists are the “*positive*” that are primarily self-identical (“self-satisfied”), and the workers are the “*negative*” whose identity are formed through their very difference (“restlessness within its very self”). The capitalists and the workers are both essentially contradictory, yet the former gets power through the contradiction that is constitutive of it, while the latter becomes powerless through its contradiction. As both are enmeshed in relations of power, both are alienated from what makes them human being; yet their modes of alienation are distinct. While alienation gives one power, it renders the other powerless:

The propertied class and the class of the proletariat present the same human self-alienation. But the former class feels at ease and strengthened in this self-alienation, it recognizes alienation as *its own power* and has in it the *semblance* of a human existence. The latter feels annihilated in alienation; it sees in it its own powerlessness and the reality of an inhuman existence. It is, to use an expression of Hegel, in its abasement the indignation at that abasement, an *indignation* to which it is necessarily driven by the contradiction between its human *nature* and its condition of life, which is the outright, resolute and comprehensive negation of that nature (Marx and Engels 1960ff, 2:37, 1975, 4:36).²⁴

It is important to emphasize that for Hegel, as well as for Marx, although the positive is in the position of power, it is the negative that is associated with “activity” and “liveliness” (Hegel’s phrases)—an activity that can potentially change the relations of power. This theme is explicitly discussed in the dialectic of lordship and bondage in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where the bondsman (or the negative) eventually, through his

labor, manages to abolish the relations of power that are constitutive of both the master (or the positive), and of himself. Similarly, for Marx, it is the positive that is associated with conservation of the relations of power, whereas the negative is potentially disruptive. “Within this opposition,” Marx writes, “the private property-owner is therefore the *conservative* side, the proletarian the *destructive* side. From the former arises the action of preserving the opposition, from the latter the action of annihilating it” (ibid, original emphases). That Hegel ascribes true agency to the negative is evidence that Hegel’s philosophy—despite its occasional reputation for being conservative—is revolutionary at its logical core. Since my concern in this essay is to carve out the logical “structure” of power, I leave the question of “agency” aside. I believe any such conception of emancipatory praxis presupposes an adequate understanding of the structure of power, and such a praxis should have as its starting point concerns similar to the concerns of this essay.

The logical proof for the asymmetrical nature of opposition

In this section, I focus on the dialectical development of the relation of opposition in order to show how Hegel proves that the relation of opposition in its adequate form is essentially asymmetrical. In doing so, I also show how equality and symmetry are integrated within the structure of power that obtains in the relation of opposition.

Consider the following two groups of examples of the relation of opposition. (1) One group includes the relation between up and down, right and left, north and south, east and west, etc. (2) The other group includes the examples that I mentioned in the previous section, namely, the relation between capitalists and workers, between men and women, between central capitalist countries and the peripheral ones, etc. In both groups, there is a relation of opposition between *relata*; each *relatum* is related, not to some *arbitrary* others (in plural), but to *its own* singular other, such that its (east, men) negation immediately results in the other *relatum* (west, women). Yet there is a distinct difference between (1) and (2), namely, it is only in (2) that the relation of opposition is explicitly *asymmetrical*. That is, it is only in (2) that the relation of power is being stabilized and secured.

Indeed, Hegel’s dialectical exposition of the relation of opposition goes through two consecutive stages that correspond to the two groups of examples that were considered above. Importantly, (1) and (2) are not simply two varieties of the relation of opposition that exist side-by-side each other. Rather, type (1) for Hegel is “the empty opposition of the Understanding” which “has its place in the context of such abstractions as number, direction, etc.” (EL §119), while in the more concrete instances, such as in the spiritual and social relations, the relation of opposition is of type (2).²⁵ From a logical point of view, there is a progression from (1) to (2), such that (2) expresses the relation of opposition more adequately. Hegel’s exposition of the relation of opposition in the main text (WL II 55–9, SL 424–7) is different from the Remark (WL II 60–4, SL 427–31), but the content is the same. In the main text, he conceives of (1) as “opposition in itself” and (2) as “opposition in and for itself.” In the Remark, in (1) he regards the positive and the negative equally as “opposite as such” [*Entgegengesetzte überhaupt*], whereas in (2) he regards the positive as “the non-opposed” [*das Nichtentgegengesetzte*], and the negative

as “the opposed” [*das Entgegengesetzte*]. In the following, I give a short account of the dialectical progression from (1) to (2).²⁶

“Opposition in itself,” or the “opposite as such”

The hallmark of the relation of opposition in this, first, stage—that is, for example, between “6 miles in an easterly direction” and “6 miles in a westerly direction” (Hegel’s example, EL §119)—is that the positive and the negative can be “exchanged” with each other. In the relation between east and west, either of east or west can be equally considered as the positive or the negative.²⁷ According to Hegel, whether east is positive or negative does not belong to the constitution of east itself, but it is only from an *external* point of view that it is regarded as positive or negative. The indifferent exchangeability of relata and their indeterminacy make relation of opposition in this stage similar to the relation of diversity. Indeed, Hegel calls the relata of this relation “diverse opposites” [*die entgegengesetzte Verschiedene*]:

This opposition, therefore, is not regarded as having any truth in and for itself, and though it does belong to diverse sides, so that each is simply an opposite, yet, on the other hand, each side exists indifferently on its own, and it does not matter which of the two diverse opposites is regarded as positive or negative. (WL II 60, SL 428)

In the Remark, Hegel analyzes the relation of “diverse opposites” to one another in the following way: The positive and the negative are “on the one hand, merely opposite as such” and “on the other hand,” they are “indifferent” towards each other (WL II 62, SL 429). Thus, in the relation of “6 miles in a westerly direction” and “6 miles in an easterly direction,” the two, on the one hand, are “merely opposite” insofar as they sublimate each other, and on the other hand, they are “indifferent” to each other, insofar as they are “simply 6 miles of way or space.”²⁸ To formulate it with a mathematical language, as Hegel himself does, “+a” and “-a” is an oppositional pair. Insofar as they confront each other, they are “opposition as such,” but insofar as each is “a” (without plus or minus sign), they are “indifferent” to each other²⁹:

The +a and -a are *simply opposite magnitudes*; the a is the *unity that stands in-itself* at the base of both [*zum Grunde liegende ansichseiende Einheit*] – itself indifferent towards the opposition and serving here as a dead base [*tote Grundlage*] without further conceptual consideration. The -a is indeed designated as the negative, the +a as the positive; but *the one* is just as much an *opposite as the other* (WL II 60, SL 428).

As we see in this passage, Hegel calls the “a” which underlies “+a” and “-a,” the “unity that stands in-itself at the base” of the opposites. Michael Wolff calls this underlying unity “reflection-logical substratum” [*das reflexionslogische Substrat*] (Wolff 1981, 113ff). I find this terminology unfortunate, as the term “substratum” might be associated with an Aristotelian *hypokeimenon*, which is a being that lies underneath, thereby independent from, the properties or relations of an individual. Yet, as Wolff correctly emphasizes, the reflection-logical substratum does not exist independently

from the relation of opposition; rather it is derived from such relation. In other words, it is not the case that *first* there is a substratum, to which *then* the character of the positive or the negative is added; but the so-called substratum is *already* produced through the relation of opposition; (hence, the term *reflection-logical* substratum).

“Opposition in-and-for-itself” or the “opposed” and the “not-opposed”

The relation of “opposition in itself” is not adequately determinate. Firstly, the two relata can *indifferently* be exchanged with each other. Secondly—and this point is related to the first—the constitution of relata consists of a reflection-logical substratum that relates to the positive or to the negative *indifferently*. In the second dialectical move, Hegel maintains that it is wrong to conceive of the reflection-logical substratum as a “dead base” that lies underneath the positive and the negative, rather—and I cannot over-emphasize this point—we should see that the so-called reflection-logical substratum is the positive itself. In other words, the common basis of the positive and the negative is not a common substratum that is equally detached/attached from/to them; instead, the basis is the positive itself. According to Hegel, this truth is also expressed in mathematics, since “a” in mathematics is identical with “+a” (WL II 62, SL 429). With this second dialectical move, we have the adequate conception of the relation of opposition that I explained in the previous section. The positive, Hegel in the Remark writes, is the “non-opposed” that is primarily self-identical, and the negative is “the opposed” that gets defined primarily in relation to the positive.

The move from conceiving of reflection-logical substratum as a neutral ground underlying the opposites to conceiving it as the positive itself is not explicitly addressed by Wolff. For this reason, his account falls short of understanding the relation of opposition as an asymmetrical relation of power. This move also shows how we should understand the relation of equality as an integral moment of the relation of power involved in opposition. The positive and the negative are equal with each other and have a symmetrical relation with each other; since they both share the same reflection-logical substratum. Nonetheless, they are at the same time in a relation of power; since the reflection-logical substratum is nothing but the positive itself. This means that the relation of equality of the positive with itself is imposed upon the negative; the negative is what it is only by conforming to the relation that the positive establishes within itself.

This conception of the interrelation of power and equality is extremely helpful for understanding modern structures of power, where the claims of equality have become common cultural assets across the world. In contrast to the pre-modern times, men and women are equal with each other; yet—as we will see in more detail later—the terms of such equality are defined by men. Consider also the relation of lord to serf in feudalism or master to slave in ancient Greece or Rome; neither socioeconomic order allowed for claims of equality. In modernity, by contrast, capitalist and worker, or employer and employee are equal with each other. We must notice, however, that it is in their very equality that they are unequal; it is the capitalist or the employer that ultimately defines the terms of equality (obtained in contract). Finally, and more broadly speaking, notice that the equality assured by law can provide no guarantee against the relation of power; although the powerful are (ideally) circumscribed by the equality under law, nonetheless,

the powerful are those who write and enforce the law. We should grasp, then, that neither equality nor reciprocity implies a symmetry—power is both consistent with and essential to a variety of modern systems that propound equality.

Croce's objection: Hegel's confusion of diversity and opposition

In *What is Living and What is Dead of the Philosophy of Hegel*, Croce identifies the source of what is dead in Hegel in “confusion of the theory of the different and the theory of opposites,” which “produces the gravest results; that is to say, from it arises [. . .] all that is philosophically erroneous in the system of Hegel” (Croce 1984 [1915], 99). According to Croce, reality, which is a pluralistic order, is constituted by the principle of difference. The problem of Hegel is that he forcefully applies his dialectical method, which according to Croce is based on the relation of opposition, to everything, including to those parts of reality that do not have an antagonistic character. Croce does not deny that there exists antagonism and opposition in reality; what he denies is the universality of antagonism and opposition. Thus he writes, “the organism is the struggle of life against death; but the members of the organism are not therefore at strife with one another, hand against foot, or eye against hand” (Croce 1984 [1915], 93).

Croce's criticism is acute, yet misses what Hegel is getting at. Hegel never denies that there is diversity in reality. As I have already indicated, his point is rather that the “truth” of diversity is opposition, and that it is opposition that is “deeper” and “more essential” than diversity. Opposition is deeper and more essential than diversity, since it is through opposition that individuals can be determinately identified; diversity always remains under-determinate. Consider, as one prominent example, what makes the essence of the political. It is through opposition that a polity can identify itself as a polity, and that it can thus become a distinct polity in the first place. Namely, the polity becomes what it is through excluding its own personal other, while at the same time such relation of exclusion is constitutive of, and thus contained in the said polity. Within the polity there is always diversity—diversity of, say, lifestyles, values, conceptions of good life, etc.—but such diversity is grounded on a deeper oppositional determination. (*Their way of life is fundamentally “opposed” to our way of life, and thus should not be tolerated in our otherwise “diverse,” “pluralistic” social order.*)³⁰

The example of the affinity of the political to the oppositional³¹ directs us to a pivotal point: Hegel's dialectical logic is not meant to apply to all spheres of reality in the same way and to the same degree. Rather, Hegel believes, as it were, in degrees of dialecticity in reality. Opposition as the most determinate form of the determinations of reflection is the category that captures the essence of human social and political world. By contrast, in the realm of nature, opposition is generally not the primarily relevant determination of reflection. In his *Philosophy of Nature*, Hegel writes,

It would be unphilosophical to try to show that a form of the Concept *exists universally* in nature in the determinateness in which it is as an abstraction. Nature is rather the Idea in the element of asunderness, so that like the Understanding it, too, holds fast to the moments of the Concept in their *dispersion*, and represents them thus in reality; but in higher things the differentiated forms of the Concept are unified to the extreme of concretion (EN §312).

In so far as a natural being is not in a relation of opposition with another natural being, it cannot constitute itself as an individual proper; rather it remains “*dispersed*” [*zerstreut*], and thus without concrete unity. Thus, Hegel regards nature as lacking power to adequately develop itself from diversity into opposition, and, so, as “powerless” to constitute itself as a unity proper. In the *Science of Logic*, insisting on the powerlessness of nature, Hegel writes, “it is the impotence of nature that it cannot adhere to and exhibit the rigor of the Concept” [*Es ist dies die Ohnmacht der Natur, die Strenge des Begriffs nicht festhalten und darstellen zu können.*] (WL II 282, SL 607).

Thus, contrary to Croce, for Hegel, there is no confusion between diversity and opposition. Diversity and opposition both exist; yet especially in social and political world, there is an objective tendency for diversity to generate—or to “sharpen” into—opposition, and so, opposition should be conceived as “more essential” than diversity. The transition from diversity to opposition is motivated by the by quest for “further determination” [*Fortbestimmung*] in order to abolish the indeterminacy inherent in the relation of diversity. I have explained the transition from diversity to opposition before, but I would like to emphasize that Hegel’s argument for the priority of opposition to diversity is not limited to the few pages of the chapter of determinations of reflection in the logic of essence. The main argumentative work about why external relations cannot be adequately determining occurs throughout logic of being, and that argument is already presupposed in the logic of essence.³² Moreover, and this is even more important, the priority of opposition to diversity is not limited to the discussions in the logic. Hegel’s philosophy in general is a philosophy of negation and negativity, and one prominent feature of negation in all its variations is contrastive exclusion. The relation of opposition expresses the truth of contrastive exclusion more adequately than the relation of diversity; since the relata in the relation of opposition are *solely* constructed through moments that mutually exclude each other.

Mackinnon’s conception of genders in terms of opposition

I have briefly indicated that de Beauvoir’s conception of the relation of men and women has a close affinity with Hegel’s relation of opposition. In this section, I focus on Catharine MacKinnon’s conception of gender formation, as primarily explained in her essay, “Difference and Dominance: On Sex Discrimination” (1987a). MacKinnon explicitly articulates the relation of men and women in terms of power, and radically pushes de Beauvoir’s argument to its logical conclusion. As we will see, MacKinnon’s theory neatly fits with Hegel’s conception of the relation of opposition, as I have presented it. Interestingly, MacKinnon does not invoke Hegel’s *Logic* in this essay, nor—as far as I can verify—does she explicitly discuss the *Logic* in any other of her works. In the following, I will give a close reading of MacKinnon’s essay, and I make copious references to the essay so as to avoid *forcing* a Hegelian interpretation on her work.

MacKinnon begins her essay with the query, “what is a gender question³³ a question of?” This query, she holds, can be answered in two ways: in terms of (a) sameness and difference or (b) dominance (MacKinnon 1987a, 32). Understanding gender issues in terms of sameness and difference is the prevailing approach, against which MacKinnon offers her own approach of dominance.

(a) According to the sameness and difference approach, “sex *is* a difference, a division, a distinction, beneath which lies a stratum of human commonality, sameness” (MacKinnon 1987a, 33). This approach undergirds the existing liberal legal and moral framework: as long as men and women are equal, the law should be gender neutral, disregarding the gender of the person in question; and as long as women are different from men the law should accommodate the difference, and should take an affirmative action to compensate for it. According to MacKinnon, there is a fundamental flaw in this approach:

Under the sameness standard, women are measured according to our [women’s] correspondence with man, our equality judged by our proximity to his measure. Under the difference standard, we [women] are measured according to our lack of correspondence with him, our womanhood judged by our distance from his measure. Gender neutrality is thus simply the male standard (MacKinnon 1987a, 34).

There is, in other words, no neutral point of view from which it can be judged in what respect women and men are the same, and in what respects they are different. Rather, that supposedly neutral standpoint is the male standpoint. MacKinnon gives a poignant example to illustrate her point: In anatomy classes in medical school, a male body is considered to be *the* human body, and the additional organs that women have are studied in obstetrics/gynecology (MacKinnon 1987a, 34). Similarly, according to MacKinnon, sports are generally defined with reference to men’s physiology, car and health insurance coverage with reference to men’s needs, and “workplace expectations and successful career patterns” with reference to men’s biographies (MacKinnon 1987a, 36). That is, there is no such neutral standpoint for the evaluation of so-called successful women; these women are, in general, those who have been able to construct a curriculum vitae that is close to the male norm (MacKinnon 1987a, 37). As the sameness/difference approach is blind to the “hierarchy of power” between men and women, it does not realize that “maleness is the referent for both” men and women (MacKinnon 1987a, 34). That is, the sameness/difference approach claims to treat men and women equally. Yet, as the criteria for such equality are defined by men, equality can never obtain. Thus, within the framework of sameness/difference, MacKinnon emphasizes, “sex equality is conceptually designed never to be achieved” (MacKinnon 1987a, 44).

(b) In reaction to the conceptual inconsistency involved in sameness/difference approach, MacKinnon offers her own approach, according to which the question of gender is primarily the question of domination of men over women. She writes:

Gender here is a matter of dominance, not difference [. . .]. Another way to say that is, there would be no such thing as what we know as sex difference [. . .], were it not for male dominance. Sometimes people ask me, “Does that mean you think there is no difference between women and men?” The only way that I know how to answer that is: Of course there is; the difference is that men have power, and women do not (MacKinnon 1987b, 51).

It is power, according to MacKinnon, which through constructing social reality “derivatively” produces the so-called sameness and difference between sexes. For

MacKinnon, the difference between men and women is not a difference that designates an equal value, but is a difference constituted by the relation of power. For her, the relation of power precedes gender: It is not the case that *first* there are self-standing genders, upon which the relation of power is *afterwards* superimposed; rather, gender from the beginning is, constituted by power.³⁴ “Gender might not even code as difference, might not mean distinction epistemologically, were it not for its consequences for social power” (MacKinnon 1987a, 40).

These two approaches in understanding social reality have radically different practical significance. From the point of view of the sameness/difference approach, “sex inequality would be a problem of mere sexism, of mistaken differentiation, of inaccurate categorization of individuals” (MacKinnon 1987a, 42). In other words, in the sameness/difference approach the status quo as a whole is regarded as just, as the standard, and the issue is merely identifying the aberrant forms of sex discrimination and sexism. From the point of view of dominance approach, MacKinnon believes, the sameness/difference approach “invisibly and uncritically accepts the arrangements under male supremacy.” In this sense, she concludes, the sameness/difference approach is “masculinist,” although it might be expressed by women themselves (MacKinnon 1987a, 43). In contrast, for the dominance approach the issue of inequality is not an idiosyncrasy or an exception. The inequality of power rather is that which makes genders what they are. Thus, the dominance approach focuses on the “systemic dominance” of men over women. Correspondingly, its focus is on “politics,” whose horizon is changing the *totality* of relations, not the individual cases of supposedly explicit sexism.

The resemblance of MacKinnon to Hegel is obvious. I will content myself with a brief summation of her points appropriately couched in Hegel’s language:

For MacKinnon gender is not a biological entity, originating from some *thing* like DNA, brain, hormones, genitalia, etc. but is fundamentally *relational*.

The sameness/difference approach regards the relation between male and female as an instance of the relation of *diversity*. According to this approach, men and women are *in some respects* equal, and *in some other respects* unequal. This is an instance of relation of *indifference* and *externality*, where each of the two relata ultimately exists independently from the other.

The dominance approach understands the relation between men and women as an instance of relation of *opposition*, where the *positive* is male, and the *negative* is female. The very categories of male and female are *contradictorily* derived from the relation of power of male over female.

The relation of dominance of male over female has an in-built relation of *equality* as its moment, insofar as male and female are equal with each other, of course, under the rules that male sets.

Conclusion: The necessity of totality

Hegel’s discussion of the determinations of reflection establishes that there are no pre-relational individuals, and that individuals are the product of the relations that obtain between them. The notion that individuals are constituted by their interrelation already implies that there is a close system of relationality that unites individuals. Hegel

conceives of such a “world of reciprocal dependence” of individuals (EL §123) as a “totality” [*Totalität*] (EL §132). And he discusses in detail the dialectical development of totality in the second and third part of the logic of essence. In this space, I cannot elaborate on Hegel’s conception of totality;³⁵ I only content myself to indicate that the most determinate form of totality in the logic of essence is “substance” [*Substanz*]. Hegel’s conception of substance is specific in two crucial respects:

Substance for Hegel is not an Aristotelian, pre-relational substratum; such pre-relational conception of substance is already refuted in the logic of being. Rather, for Hegel, substance is “the *relation* of substantiality,” which obtains solely through inter-relation of individuals (WL II 219, SL 555, emphasis added).

Hegel conceives of substance as an “absolute power” [*absolute Macht*], which is able to maintain itself through coercing individuals to follow its logic. For Hegel, substance has both “creative power” over individuals insofar as it can cause them to be, and “destructive power” insofar as it can cause them to cease to be (WL II 220, SL 556, original emphases).

From the social point of view, we can grasp that it is through the absolute power of the totality, of substance, over all individuals that the asymmetrical relation of opposition between two individuals, or two groups of individuals, becomes secure and stable. In order to illustrate this point, consider that the relation of power between capitalists and workers is by itself unsustainable. If the asymmetrical interdependence of capitalists and workers were all that there is to their relation, the workers could potentially change their situation (say, through exiting the said relation). The workers cannot simply escape such relation of power precisely because that relation is supported and stabilized by the “totality” of legal, social, and political institutions of capitalism—the presumed escape is possible only through changing the very totality of social relations in capitalism.³⁶

In light of the necessity of inclusion of the conception of totality for securing the relation of power between individuals, as a conclusion, let me recapitulate my view that I have developed through Hegel’s determinations of reflection with Honneth’s view. For Honneth, the basic form of social relation that obtains between individuals is recognition. Recognition is essentially symmetrical, and the asymmetries of power are merely aberrations from the recognitive state. The symmetry involved in recognition renders individuals equal. Although there are always cases of inequality, equality remains real. In a sharp contrast to Honneth, in my view, the basic form of social relation that obtains between individuals is opposition. The relation of opposition is essentially asymmetrical, hence, based on power. There is equality involved in opposition, yet the measure of such equality is always established by those who are already in power. This equality, therefore, can never be a true equality. It is rather a constitutive illusion that conceals the relations of power. Finally, corresponding to these two kinds of social ontology, there are two kinds of politics. In Honneth’s view, the totality of the bourgeois-capitalist social order is fine and healthy, and there is only need for piecemeal reform, aimed at correcting the deviant “social pathologies.” In my view, however, the problem is with the very totality of social relations in capitalism, and thus needs to be addressed at that root level.

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Notes

1. Honneth pursues this aim in several of his works. I content myself with citing two occasions in which Honneth clearly states his project: (a) “The ethical sphere [for Hegel] contains different classes of actions that are distinct in themselves but are *all* marked by the common quality of being able to articulate a certain form of reciprocal recognition.” (Honneth 2010, 51, emphasis added) (b) “In the *Philosophy of Right*, he [i.e., Hegel] explains *every* ethical institution with reference to a particular form of recognition” (Honneth 2007, 352, emphasis added).
2. Honneth explicitly uses the word “symmetry” to describe the relation of recognition. See, for example, Honneth (1995, 122, 128).
3. Honneth explicitly avows that his task is “to interpret bourgeois-capitalist society as an institutionalized recognition order” (Honneth and Fraser 2003, 138). This does not imply that he is not critical of capitalist economy; indeed there is much criticism of the current form of capitalist economy in his new book (Honneth 2014, 176–253). Nonetheless, he still argues that the asymmetrical relations of power in capitalism, manifested in the phenomena of “exploitation” and “enforced contracts,” are not inherent to capitalism; they are rather merely “deviations from the [recognitive] norms underlying the market system” (Honneth 2014, 196).
4. In one of his more recent essays, Honneth explicitly admits that he has defined recognition in exclusion to power: “Recognition has always been treated [by Honneth] as representing the opposite of practices of domination or subjection. Such forms of exercising power were to be regarded as phenomena of withheld recognition [. . .] such that recognition could never come under suspicion of functioning as a means of domination” (Honneth 2012,76). In order to address the issue of power, Honneth in the said essay endeavors to distinguish ideological instances of recognition, which secure social domination, from recognition in its normal function, which positively contributes to the formation of the autonomy of individuals. However, still he regards such ideological instances of recognition to be infrequent, and sees them as aberrations from recognition in its normal state, thereby reiterating the dichotomy between recognition and power in a different register.
5. Pippin’s and Brandom’s cases, however, are more nuanced than Honneth, as it seems that both Pippin and Brandom grant that the relation of power is already a relation of recognition, but they maintain that such a case of recognition is not a “true” or “successful” recognition (Pippin), or is a “defective” form of recognition (Brandom). Despite the difference, however, the two are very close to Honneth, insofar as all regard the symmetrical relation of recognition as the basis of unity in modern society, from which the asymmetrical relation of power is a deviation. See also (Pippin 2000, 156)
6. It seems that the dialectic of lordship and bondage for Honneth, Pippin, and Brandom simply belongs to the pre-history of modernity, or even prehistory of mankind, and in modern bourgeois-capitalist social order, such an asymmetry has given way to a genuinely symmetrical relation.

Indeed, as far as I see it, they regard the collapse of the dialectic of lordship and bondage in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as a kind of negative proof, which demonstrates the necessity of establishment of the symmetrical relation between individuals. I do not intend to question this way of reading of the dialectic of lordship and bondage, but this does not change the fact that Hegel there explicitly discusses power as constitutive of the structure of recognition. This is the reason that despite the systematic place of this chapter within the overall structure of the book, the dialectic of lordship and bondage in isolation from other parts of the book has served as an almost endless source of inspiration for Marxists, feminists, and other radical thinkers.

7. Hence, my approach is decisively distinct from Honneth, for whom in “our own post meta-physical standards of rationality” appealing to the *Logic* in the context of practical philosophy is not allowed (Honneth 2010, 5). Honneth’s reading of Hegel’s practical philosophy, as he himself avers, “does not depend on *any* argumentative backing by his logic” (Honneth 2010, 48, emphasis added).
8. Since Hegel never wrote a distinct “logic” of the 1807 *Phenomenology of Spirit*, there is an unsettled controversy about the nature of this logic, especially because he wrote the *Science of Logic* later (1812/13), and with a different conception. I do not want to enter into this controversy here, but I hope the reader who is familiar with the dialectic of lordship and bondage through this essay will realize that the logic of determinations of reflection in the *Science of Logic* is very similar to the logic that underpins the relation between lordship and bondage.
9. The subjective activity of reflection, the reflection that “starts from something immediately given which is alien to it [i.e., reflection]” counts for Hegel as a specific—and an inadequate—form of reflection, what Hegel calls “external reflection”(WL II 31, SL 405).
10. According to Hegel, it is exactly the *reduction* of reflection in general to external reflection that has brought the concept of reflection into disrepute, and has made it appear to be the “polar opposite and hereditary foe of the absolute method of philosophizing” (WL II31, SL 405). For a helpful discussion of the concept of reflection in general, see Jaeschke (1978).
11. See the references for the translations that I have used. I have occasionally modified the translations.
12. The logic that takes the individuals ultimately as given, the logic which roughly accords to Aristotelian metaphysics of substance qua *hypokeimenon*, is the first part of the objective logic – what Hegel refers to as the logic of being. The task of the logic of being is primarily critical; through this logic, Hegel aims to show that, *if* we take the individuals as pre-relational, that is, as simply given, then we fail to determine them—in the determination of individuals through the logic of being, there always remains some residue that cannot be conceptually accounted for. The collapse of the logic of being paves the way for the ontology of absolute relationality that Hegel develops in the logic of essence. Hegel explicates the distinction between the logic of being and the logic of essence in this way: “In the sphere of being, relatedness is only *in itself*, by contrast, in essence it is posited. This is then in general the difference between the forms of being and those of essence. In being, everything is immediate; in essence, by contrast, everything is relational” (EL §111Z).
13. See also Iber (1990), who defends the same thesis.
14. See Hoffmann (2012, 337).
15. Miller and Di Giovanni both translate *Gleichheit* as likeness, and *Ungleichheit* as unlikeness. I translate them, respectively, as equality and inequality, as I want to emphasize the social import of the *Logic*. Geraetes, Suchting, and Harris, too, use equality and inequality.

16. Or a relapse to the logic of being, which corresponds to the traditional ontology. See also footnote 12.
17. Hegel gives a special meaning to the traditional Aristotelian law of excluded middle. According to the traditional view, the law of excluded middle applies to the *properties* of an individual: The plant is green or not green. There is no third alternative. Understood in this way, Hegel asserts, the law is “so trivial that it is not worth the trouble of saying it” (WL II 73, SL 438). As is clear from my exposition, Hegel’s own version of the law of excluded middle applies to the *individuals* themselves, and not their properties.
18. See also Longuenesse (2007, 64).
19. This point is also made by Klaus Hartmann, who maintains that although Hegel treats opposition and contradiction separately, in contradiction “nothing new is added at any rate” to opposition (Hartmann 1999, 188).
20. I have used George Di Giovanni’s translation with minor modifications for this passage. See *The Science of Logic*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, 374.
21. This point—that dialectical contradiction is *self*-contradiction—is well grasped by Adorno: “The concept of contradiction will play a central role here, more particularly, the contradiction in things themselves, contradiction *in* the concept, not contradiction *between* concepts.” (Adorno 2008, 7, original emphases).
22. This conception of the positive and the negative is similar to Hegel’s discussion of lordship and bondage in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. From the logical point of view, the lord and bondsman reciprocally mediate each other, yet it is the lord that is eventually self-centered. Hegel defines the lord and bondsman in the following way: “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 former is the lord, the latter is the bondsman” (PhG §189).
23. When de Beauvoir claims that there is no reciprocity between men and women, or that women are only the inessential, one should not take her claim quite literally. There is of course a reciprocal relation between men and women—and for this reason, both are essential—yet this reciprocity is asymmetrical. De Beauvoir is perfectly aware of this point, as she emphasizes, “here is to be found the basic trait of woman: she is the other in a totality of which the two components are necessary to one another” (1989, xxvi).
24. It goes too far to immediately identify Marx’s conception of the relation of opposition between the capitalists and the workers in this passage with the Hegelian one. In Marx’s early writings, the concept of alienation presupposes a distinct understanding of human nature as a being that realizes self through work. However, from the Hegelian perspective that I have been advancing so far, there is no pre-relational human nature, and if there is anything like a human nature, it is solely *derived* from social relations. Arguably, Marx himself later abandoned the project of grounding his theory on the concept of human nature. In the *Grundrisse* he writes, “society does not consist of individuals, but expresses the sum of inter-relations, the relations within which these individuals stand” (Marx and Engels 1960ff, 42:189, 1975, 28:195). Thus, Marx’s mature theory is primarily based on the analysis of social *relations*, which is quite consistent with the ontology of absolute relationality in Hegel’s logic of essence.
25. One other example of the relation of opposition of type (2) is the relation of spirit and nature. Spirit and nature are interdependent—neither can exist without the other. Yet, the

- interdependence involved is asymmetrical. For Hegel, nature is primarily *external* to itself and exists *for* spirit (EL §119Z).
26. My account is indebted to Michael Wolff's insightful treatment of the subject (Wolff 1981, 1986), yet it is different from it in one crucial point, as it becomes clear later.
 27. "Although one of the determinacies of positive and negative belongs to each side, they can be changed around [*sie können verwechselt werden*] and each side is of such a kind that it can be taken equally well as positive as negative" (WL II 58, SL 426).
 28. Another example of Hegel is credit and debt. Insofar as they reciprocally sublimate each other, they are "opposition as such." But insofar as each is "a sum of money," they are "indifferent" to each other (WL II 61, SL 428).
 29. Wolff has shown that the "a" here (without plus or minus sign) is tantamount to the "absolute value" in algebra. Interestingly, according to Wolff, the concept of "absolute value" appears in mathematics in 19th century, contemporaneous with Hegel (Wolff 1981, 91f).
 30. I am following here Carl Schmitt's conception of the political, which he defines in oppositional terms, namely, through the opposition between friend and enemy: "The specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy" (1996 [1932], 28). For Hegel, opposition need not be explicit, yet opposition is the ground of diversity, and, so, diversity can always "sharpen" into opposition. Similarly, for Schmitt, what makes the essence of the political is the friend-foe opposition, but such opposition need not be always explicit. Schmitt writes, "the political enemy need not be morally evil or aesthetically ugly; he need not appear as an economic competitor, and it may even be advantageous to engage with him in business transactions. But he is, nevertheless, the other, the stranger; and it is sufficient for his nature that he is, in a specially intense way, existentially something different and alien, *so that in the extreme case conflicts with him are possible* (1996 [1932], 27, emphasis added).
 31. For a helpful discussion of the relation between dialectical opposition and politics, see Peter Furth (2006).
 32. See Wallace for a similar analysis (2005, 180).
 33. MacKinnon does not subscribe to the distinction between "sex" (i.e., based on biology) and "gender" (i.e., socially constituted), which is of pivotal importance for many second-wave feminists, and uses the terms "sex" and "gender" interchangeably. For her, there is no brute natural fact, which defines sex; sex is socially mediated through and through (see Allen 2014).
 34. MacKinnon gives a metaphorical account of sex differentiation: "On the first day that matters, dominance was achieved, probably by force. By the second day, division along the same lines had to be relatively firmly in place. On the third day, if not sooner, differences were demarcated, together with social systems to exaggerate them in perception and in fact, because the systematically differential delivery of benefits and deprivations required making no mistakes about who was who" (MacKinnon 1987a, 40).
 35. I discuss in detail Hegel's conception of totality in the logic of essence in Abazari (2017).
 36. Hegel's conception of totality in the logic of essence is not his last word. Rather, he argues that the logic of essence is ultimately unstable, and thus needs to be superseded in the logic of the Concept. Indeed, Hegel conceives of the Concept as a totality that has the structure of "concrete universality," where the totality does not dominate individuals, but helps them to fulfill their free individuality. Thus, the transition from the logic of essence to the logic of the Concept is the transition from relations characterized by power to relations characterized by

freedom. It is noteworthy that the relations of power in essence do not disappear in the Concept, but they are successfully tamed and contained by the Concept. From social point of view, Hegel holds that the transition from the logic of essence to the logic of the Concept has already attained in modern bourgeois capitalist social order, but there is no reason to accept his optimism. The stalled transition from essence to the Concept justifies my appropriation of the logic of essence to develop a social ontology, which adequately captures the structure of the modern bourgeois-capitalist social order. Correspondingly, I conceive of the revolutionary act that aims to change the totality of capitalism as an act that, if successful, effectuates the transition from a society based on the logic of essence to a society based on the logic of the Concept. See my Conclusion in Abazari (2017) for a more detailed discussion.

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