

“I that is We, We that is I.”

Perspectives on Contemporary Hegel

*Social Ontology, Recognition, Naturalism, and the
Critique of Kantian Constructivism*

Edited by

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Hegelian Resources for Contemporary Thought: Introductory Essay

Italo Testa

This collection of essays focuses on the formula, to be found in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, "I that is 'We' and 'We' that is 'I' [*Ich, dass Wir, und Wir, dass Ich ist*]"¹. Its aim is to explore the many facets of this formula, which expresses the recognitive, intersubjective, and social structure of human life, in Hegel's Logic, Ontology, Philosophy of Nature, Moral and Social Theory, and to use it as the guiding thread for the theoretical reconstruction and critical reassessment of Hegelian arguments that are of great relevance for contemporary thought. The book gathers together a selection of papers presented on the occasion of the third international conference "Contemporary Hegel", bringing together an international group of contemporary philosophers and Hegel scholars.

The discussion sets out from a hermeneutic hypothesis: namely, that it is possible to read Hegel as a protagonist of contemporaneity once again only if one brings to light the Hegelian roots that underlie the crucial questions of current debate. That the present-day horizon be interpreted anew as the result of a Hegelian turn in philosophy is the wager that the essays presented here place on the philosophical table. This move, at the same time, revives the possibility of judging the merits of the theoretical solutions that an innovative reading of Hegel makes available to contemporary thought. The operation demands both some historical examination of Hegel's work and a precise articulation of what is at stake. For this reason the essays have been organized around a number of precise theoretical focal points corresponding to the sections of the book, with each section designed to verify Hegel's influence on the genesis and structure of specific aspects of the contemporary constellation: the socio-ontological approach to social theory, its historical and conceptual origins in Hegel's theory of spirit and social institutions (*part one*); the action-theoretical model in moral and social philosophy, its connection with the metaphysics of sociality, and its relevance for the criticism of radical constructivist approaches to social practices (*part two*); the question of naturalism, the reassessment of the

1 PS § 177, 110 (GW 9, 108).

cruciality of work and power for our understanding of human life, and its relevance for the criticism of idealist interpretations of Hegelian spirit (*part three*); the intersubjective turn, its consequences for our understanding of the logical structure of subjectivity, and its relevance for a critical confrontation with phenomenological and hermeneutic approaches (*part four*).

Hegel's thinking thus provides the historical and textual material, in which some hidden paths underlying the present can be rediscovered, as well as the conceptual tool capable of defining the reciprocal relation with aspects of the contemporary horizon that have emerged in differentiated and often non-communicating sectors of philosophical knowledge. For many years this path was blocked due to a number of obstacles that stood in the way of the pioneering efforts that in Europe date back to the 1960s. Philosophy had first to free itself from the prejudices of an analytic tradition that proclaimed Hegel to be its greatest enemy and that, in continental philosophy, influenced by the historicist, phenomenological and hermeneutic tradition, branded him as the last and culminating exponent of onto-theology, seeing his opus as a metaphysics of Cartesian subjectivity. This work on the plane of the history of thought, now underway even if still far from complete, is of fundamental importance in responding to the need to liberate and renew the theoretical potential of a series of Hegelian ideas that have long remained invisible, because they have been stifled by interpretative prejudices. But work on historical contexts and on the interpretations of texts must be accompanied by an effort of translation designed to transpose the Hegelian lexicon into a contemporary vocabulary, and therefore must aim to clarify the conceptual content of Hegel's solutions in this light, evaluating their validity and feasibility in the present. What is needed, then, is a hermeneutic circle that links past and present, historical interpretation and conceptual analysis, and that finds its prime justification precisely in the dialectical procedure of comprehension that shapes both Hegelian systematic thought and philosophy of history. It is thus opportune to view the essays presented here as moves and steps within a long operation of historical examination and clearing away: only in this vein will it be possible to appreciate their value adequately and to see them as synthetic results of previous studies and as innovative steps within this research context.

In this introductory chapter, we will first briefly outline some aspects of renewal of Hegel's interpretation in twentieth-century European philosophy. In paragraph 2 we will sketch out some aspects of the confrontation of Hegelianism with American pragmatism and analytic philosophy, and how this has developed since the 1990s in a new strand of interpretations. In paragraph 3 we will focus on the exigencies to go beyond some limits of these interpretations which have emerged more recently and are expressed in the essays

presented in this collection: providing a chapter-by-chapter summary of the rest of the book, we will underline the most important conceptual novelties these essays offer to our understanding of the contemporaneity of Hegel.

1 The Twentieth-Century European Demand for a “Contemporary” Hegel

The demand for a “contemporary” reading of Hegel, through a translation of his vocabulary, and thus through a theoretical reform of the dialectic, was powerfully voiced in the first half of the twentieth century in Europe by Italian neo-Hegelianism, with the work of Giovanni Gentile and, particularly, of Benedetto Croce.² The reform of the Hegelian dialectic championed by Croce—according to the well-known formula of the ‘dialectic of distincts’—lent new centrality to objective spirit, understood in historical, social and intersubjective terms, within a revival of the Hegelian idea of history as a history of freedom. But Croce understands history as an open process, which does not contemplate systematic closure through some form of absolute knowing. On another front, regarding the reading of the Hegelian spirit in an intersubjective vein, the influence of Alexander Kojève’s work is still very great. Kojève, in his lessons on the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in the 1930s, was the first philosopher to place the concept of ‘recognition’ (*Anerkennung*) at the center of the interpretation of Hegel, albeit in the context of an eminently anthropological interpretation of the dialectic and, as was the case with Croce, whilst prioritizing the philosophy of history.³ Kojève’s interpretation left its mark not only on the subsequent tradition of Hegelian studies in France, but also on French philosophical culture of phenomenological, existential and structuralist orientation, becoming an important point of reference for intellectuals such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, and later Judith Butler.

But it is in the German tradition that Kojève’s intuition will be liberated from its unilateral aspects dictated by anthropological and existential Marxism, to be presented as a possible, coherent model for the interpretation

2 See Giovanni Gentile, *La riforma della dialettica hegeliana* (Messina: Principato, 1913); Benedetto Croce, *Ciò che è vivo e ciò che è morto della filosofia di Hegel* (Bari: Laterza, 1907); Croce, *Indagini su Hegel e schiarimenti filosofici* (Bari: Laterza, 1952).

3 Alexander Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel. Leçons sur la Phénoménologie de l’esprit*, professées de 1933 à 1939 à l’École des Hautes Études, Raymond Queneau (Paris: Gallimard, 1947).

of Hegel's practical philosophy. In this regard the tradition of Frankfurt critical theory, and especially of Jürgen Habermas, was decisive. Habermas begins, on the one hand, with the historical and social approach to the dialectic already matured within the philosophy of Theodor W. Adorno—whose *Negative Dialektik* (1966) represents another chapter of the twentieth-century theoretical reform of Hegelianism, based on opposition between the open and negative spirit of the dialectic and the positive closure of the system.⁴ On the other hand, Habermas reads Hegel also on the basis of the historicist, dialogical and linguistic approach to *Geist* formulated by Hans-Georg Gadamer in *Wahrheit und Methode* (1960), rediscovering and reviving the continental hermeneutic tradition.⁵ Accordingly, Habermas, in *Arbeit und Interaktion* (1967), presents an interpretative model of the Jena conception of spirit as an ensemble of the “middles” of labor, language and recognition.⁶ Interweaving historico-philosophical investigation and conceptual analysis, Habermas essay—from which he would draw the ultimate consequences forty years later, precisely in an engagement with the new interpretations of Hegel developed in the 1990s⁷—made it possible to read Hegel for the first time as the philosopher whose youthful intuitions anticipated and prepared the pragmatic and intersubjective turn at the center of the contemporary constellation: an anticipation of future trends, moreover, that for Habermas was immediately negated by the successive subjectivistic closure of Hegel's mature system. The problem with this reading, however, was that it completely expunged the role of the *Phenomenology*—the very text that stands at the center of the current Hegelianism—while delivering Hegel to the metaphysically-oriented subjectivist tradition.

It will be, then, from the meeting between the theoretical work of the Frankfurt School and the exegetic and history-of-philosophy current of Hegelian studies—centering, from the 1960s, around the *Hegel-Archiv* in Bochum—that the Hegelian theory of recognition, thanks to the work of Ludwig Siep, by the late 1970s would enter the German interpretative tradition no longer as a particular aspect but rather as the general principle for the

4 See Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1966).

5 See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1960).

6 Jürgen Habermas, “Arbeit und Interaktion. Bemerkungen zu Hegels Jenenser ‘Philosophie des Geistes,’” in *Natur und Geschichte. Karl Löwith zum 70. Geburtstag*, eds. Hermann Braun and Manfred Riedel (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1967), 132–155.

7 See Jürgen Habermas, “From Kant to Hegel and Back Again,” *European Journal of Philosophy*, 7, 2 (1999): 164–189.

comprehension of Hegel's practical philosophy.⁸ Reconnecting with Habermas's reading and, in particular, with Siep's studies on Hegel's Jena writings, Axel Honneth, from within critical theory, with his *Kampf um Anerkennung* (1992) would then make a decisive contribution to the affirmation of recognition as a new paradigm of contemporary social and political philosophy;⁹ and this, in the same year in which, on the American side, Robert Williams' first work on the ethics of recognition is published.¹⁰ This paradigm—again, in 1992—would be relaunched by Habermas and Taylor also within the dawning philosophico-political debate on multiculturalism; a debate that, not by chance, was marked by the meeting of a European philosopher with a North American one whose philosophical position was shaped by an intense engagement with the contemporary legacy of Hegel.¹¹ Then, 1994, with the simultaneous publication of works by Pinkard, Wood, and Hardimon,¹² and of McDowell and Brandom's major works, is the year in which American Hegelian studies and *the* neopragmatism of Sellars and Rorty began to forge strong links and to present themselves jointly as a new model for approaching Hegel. In successive years also the European philosophers would begin to engage with this new American Hegelianism, an engagement whose first important consolidation would come in 1999 with the publication of a monographic section of the *European Journal of Philosophy* dedicated to the theme of *Hegel's Legacy*¹³ and then, in 2001, with

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- 8 See Ludwig Siep, "Der Kampf um Anerkennung. Zu Hegels Auseinandersetzung mit Hobbes in den Jenaer Schriften," *Hegel-Studien*, 9 (1974): 155–207; Siep, *Anerkennung als Prinzip der praktischen Philosophie* (Freiburg: Alber Verlag, 1979).
- 9 Axel Honneth, *Kampf um Anerkennung. Zur moralischen Grammatik sozialer Konflikte* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992).
- 10 Robert R. Williams, *Recognition. Fichte and Hegel on the Other* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992); Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, New York: University of California Press, 1997).
- 11 See Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and the "Politics of Recognition"*, ed. Amy Guttmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992). We also wish to recall the awarding of the Hegel Prize to Donald Davidson in 1991 (Davidson, *Dialektik und Dialog. Rede anlässlich der Verleihung des Hegel-Preises*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1993), which may have seemed strange at the time but gained very different meaning in the successive years.
- 12 See Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology. The Sociality of Reason* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Michael O. Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy: The Project of Reconciliation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Allen W. Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
- 13 See *European Journal of Philosophy*, 7, 2 (1999).

a direct moment of wide-ranging and articulated debate on the occasion of the first Venice conference on *Contemporary Hegel*.¹⁴

2 Pragmatism, Analytic Philosophy, and the New Approaches to Hegel in the 1990s

With the publication in 1994 of Robert Brandom's *Making it Explicit* and John McDowell's *Mind and World*—works in which Rorty and Bernstein see the opening of a third historical phase of the relationship between American pragmatism and Hegelianism, after the classical phase and the Sellarsian phase of the 1950s¹⁵—the paths of historiography and those of analytic and post-analytic philosophy, long on separate tracks, began to intersect, converging not only on the re-evaluation of Sellars as one of the most important philosophers of the second half of the twentieth century—a historiographic and theoretic operation to which Rorty and Brandom made a decisive contribution¹⁶—but

14 *Contemporary Hegel. American Readings of Hegel in Comparison with the European Tradition* (16–18 may, 2001), whose proceedings, including essays by main figures of the new interpretative wave such as Richard J. Bernstein, Robert B. Brandom, Ardis B. Collins, Vittorio Hösle, Stephen Houlgate, William Maker, John McDowell, Terry Pinkard, Robert B. Pippin, Paul Redding, Tom Rockmore, Richard Rorty, Robert R. Williams, have appeared in the volume *Hegel contemporaneo. La ricezione americana di Hegel a confronto con la tradizione europea*, eds. Luigi Ruggiu and Italo Testa (Milano: Guerini, 2003). Some other collections in different languages have subsequently been devoted to the theme of Hegel's contemporaneity, which gather many of the essays first presented at the Venice conference: see *Hegels Erbe*, eds. Christoph Halbig, Michael Quante and Ludwing Siep (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004); *Das Interesse des Denkens: Hegel aus heutiger Sicht*, eds. Wolfgang Welsch and Klaus Vieweg (München: Fink, 2007), and the monographic number of the French journal *Philosophie*, 99 (2009), devoted to the subject: "Hegel pragmatiste?". The proceedings of the second *Contemporary Hegel* international conference, on "The Social Space of Reason" (Venice, 28–30 September, 2006), have been published in *Lo spazio sociale della ragione. Da Hegel in avanti*, eds. Luigi Ruggiu and Italo Testa (Milano: Mimesis, 2009).

15 See John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge, MA.: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Robert B. Brandom, *Making it Explicit. Reasoning, Representing and Discursive Commitment* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1994).

16 See the edition with Brandom's commentary and Rorty's introduction of Sellars's essay (*Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, with an introduction by Richard Rorty, and a study guide by Robert Brandom, Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1997) and the edition of a collection of Sellars's fundamental essays, edited by Brandom (Wilfrid Sellars, *In the Space of Reasons. Selected Essays of Wilfrid Sellars*, eds. K. Sharp and R.B. Brandom,

also on the necessity of a return to Hegel within the contemporary constellation. This opened a new side to the question, in which historical research and the solution of conceptual problems are closely interwoven.

The line to which McDowell and Brandom's interpretation of Hegel can be ascribed originated, in fact, with the now classic *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (1956), which Sellars referred to as his "*Méditations Hégéliennes*." Going back to Hegel's critique of immediacy and of sense certainty, Sellars, in that work, attacked the empiricist foundationalism expressed in the "myth of the given." Sellars' intuition had a significant effect firstly on North American philosophers of the analytic school: on Charles Taylor and Richard Rorty in particular, who looked to the legacy of idealism for a way out of the tradition that had shaped them. Thus Taylor, back in the early 1970s, returned to the theme of critiquing the "myth of the given" and individuated in Hegel and in the romantic tradition an expressivist alternative to representationalism.¹⁷ Rorty and Bernstein returned, then, to the pragmatist aspect of the Sellarsian reading of Hegel, placing it within the American tradition going back to Dewey and, at the same time, valorizing its positive contribution to the linguistic turn.¹⁸

The re-evaluation of the pragmatist component of Sellars' thought and thus of his connection with Hegelian philosophy in fact played a decisive role in the attempt to develop a new narrative on the history of analytic philosophy. It was a question here of revising the constitutively anti-Hegelian prejudice

Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2007), as well as some comprehensive studies on Sellars: James O'Shea, *Wilfrid Sellars: Naturalism with a Normative Turn* (London: Polity, 2007); Joel Rosenberg, *Wilfrid Sellars: Fusing the Images* (London: Oxford University Press, 2007). Different Sellarsian readings of Hegel had been developed by Kenley Dove, *Hegel's Phenomenological Method, The Review of Metaphysics*, xxiii, 4 (1970), 615–641, and Kenneth Westphal, *Hegel's Epistemological Realism* (Kluwer, Dordrecht 1989). For the reprise, again influenced by Sellars, of the metaphor of the "social space" within Kantian and Hegelian studies, see Joel Rosenberg, *The Thinking Self* (Temple University Press, Philadelphia 1986); Willem A. de Vries, *Hegel's Theory of Mental Activity* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca 1988).

17 See Charles Taylor, "The Opening Arguments of the *Phenomenology*," in *Hegel: a Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. A. MacIntyre (Garden City: Doubleday, 1972), 151–188; Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

18 See Richard J. Bernstein, "Why Hegel Now?," *The Review of Metaphysics*, 121, 1 (1977), 29–60; Richard Rorty, "Dewey's Metaphysics," in Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982); Rorty, "Transzendente und holistische Methoden in der analytischen Philosophie. Zur Einführung," in *Kant oder Hegel*, ed. Dieter Henrich (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1983); Rorty, "Dewey between Darwin and Hegel," in *Truth and Progress. Philosophical Papers, Volume 3* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 290–306.

of the founding fathers of analytic philosophy—shaped, nonetheless, in the sphere of British neo-idealism—canonized with George E. Moore’s celebrated *Refutation of Idealism* (1903);¹⁹ a prejudice that was imported to the United States with the arrival of logical empiricism between 1933 and 1940 and historiographically canonized by Bertrand Russell’s *A History of Western Philosophy* (1946).²⁰ By contrast, the new historiographic narrative sought to show how, under the official ideology of neo-positivist orientation which was dominant in the United States beginning in the 1940s, motifs ascribable to pragmatism continued to be present; and such motifs, at least since the 1950s—and here again Sellars was decisive, working behind the scenes—allegedly gave rise to a subterranean tremor, whose full range and consequences were not measurable before the end of the century.²¹

Allegedly, then, this underground current set in motion a process that—as Sellars foresaw—eventually renewed in a new context the critique of sense certainty broached by Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*. As the story goes, the progressive re-emergence of pragmatism has effectively set in motion a sort of dialectic within analytic philosophy, a return to Hegel—at first only implicit—within which the empiricist assumptions of the official ideology progressively undergo self-criticism, and then emerge at the moment in which Hegel’s presence becomes explicit, or in a decidedly post-analytic climate (Rorty and McDowell’s preferred narrative), or in the *Aufhebung* of analytic philosophy in a sort of “analytic pragmatism” (the narrative Brandom prefers).²²

At the same time, this historical narrative—as had already been suggested at an important Hegel congress in 1983²³—made conceptual tools available that are capable of translating the theoretical potential of Hegel’s critique of the representationalist and foundationalist assumptions of empiricist epistemology into contemporary vocabularies, and thus of rereading central themes of Wittgenstein, Quine, Davidson, and even of Gottlob Frege, in the light of

19 George E. Moore, “The Refutation of Idealism,” *The Monist* (1903), reprinted in Moore, *Philosophical Studies* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1922).

20 Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1945).

21 For a comprehensive picture of the role of pragmatism for this movement see Richard J. Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn* (London: Polity, 2010).

22 See in this regard Brandom’s John Locke Lectures: *Between Saying and Doing: Towards an Analytic Pragmatism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). On Hegel and analytic philosophy see in particular Tom Rockmore, *Hegel, Idealism, and Analytic Philosophy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); Paul Redding, *Analytic Philosophy and the Return of Hegelian Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

23 See Richard Rorty, “Transzendente und holistische Methoden in der analytischen Philosophie”.

dialectical logic.²⁴ This idea was systematically taken up by Brandom, with a sharp turn to the semantic, in his vast hermeneutic fresco *Tales of the Mighty Dead*.²⁵ Hegel's dialectical mediation thus became the keystone which was used, historically and theoretically, to bridge inferentialistic logic, semantic holism and the pragmatic conception of meaning as use.

This perspective has merged in recent decades also within Hegelian scholarship thanks, in particular, to the works of Robert Pippin and Terry Pinkard.²⁶ Revisiting the post-metaphysical interpretation of idealism as a theory of categories advanced by Klaus Hartmann in the 1990s,²⁷ and combining it with theoretical tools akin to Sellarsian pragmatism and Brandom's semantics, these authors have proposed a renewed image of idealism, understood as an entirely intersubjective philosophy that thematizes the essential sociality of reason—whose normative structure they interpret in fundamentally Wittgensteinian terms—arousing interest that goes beyond the specialistic studies on Hegel, and becoming the principal interlocutors of the “Pittsburgh neo-Hegelian School”—as Rorty defined it.²⁸

The new readings of the history of pragmatism and of the history of analytic philosophy, combined with a new and powerful revisitation of that crucial point—both historically and theoretically—represented by the transition from Kant to Hegel, thus provided an important drive towards an overcoming of the great divide that marked the relationship between analytic and

24 The path to a reading of Hegel in relation to Wittgenstein was opened—with very different slants, aims and outcomes—first by John N. Findlay (*Hegel: a Re-examination*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1958) and then by David Lamb, *Language and Perception in Hegel and Wittgenstein* (Avebury, 1979).

25 See Robert B. Brandom, *Tales of the Mighty Dead. Historical Essays in the Metaphysics of Intentionality* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2002). See also the introductory essay in Brandom, *Articulating Reasons. An Introduction to Inferentialism* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2000).

26 See Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism. The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Pippin, *Idealism as Modernism. Hegelian Variations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology. From the standpoint of a reading of Hegel's conception of institutions and of freedom in terms of social philosophy*, see also the important works by Alan Patten, *Hegel's Idea of Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Frederick Neuhouser, *The Foundations of Hegel's Social Theory: Actualizing Freedom* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2000).

27 See Klaus Hartmann, *Hegel: A Non-Metaphysical View*, in *Hegel: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Alasdair MacIntyre (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press), 101–124.

28 See Richard Rorty, “Robert Brandom on Social Practices and Representation,” in *Truth and Progress*, 124.

continental philosophy for a full century. Hegel, in fact, had long represented the most galling case—the name on which the two traditions were divided, also historically. Reweaving the threads of the Hegel-Kant relationship—Kantian philosophy had already been rehabilitated for some time, at least by major sectors of practical philosophy of analytic orientation—authors such as Brandom, McDowell, Pippin, Pinkard, Paul Redding,²⁹ and others, provided an interpretative framework within which to recreate a dialogue also between Hegel's philosophic discourse and, at least, that political philosophy of normative orientation which has dominated the scene in recent decades.

The European tradition, both in the Italian historicist and neo-idealist aspects, in the French existentialist and Marxist elements, and in the German theoretico-critical and hermeneutic currents, had already brought to light diverse aspects of the practical, linguistic, social, historical, intersubjective and recognitive turn inspired by Hegel's philosophy.³⁰ Nevertheless, in most cases this model of interpretation remained operative within an opposition between spirit and system, young Hegel and mature Hegel, open character of the dialectical method and closed character of the systematic edifice: a reading that effectively concluded with Hegel's liquidation. This, in fact, was an interpretation dictated first of all by the idea that, beginning with the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and to an increasing extent in the later works, Hegel's philosophy progressively took the form of a metaphysics of the subject, at once the ultimate expression and the completion of Western metaphysics—a form that, in its monological and closed structure, allegedly came to stifle the social, historical, linguistic and intersubjective openness of *Geist*.³¹ The principal novelty of the 'post-metaphysical' interpretations consisted in its reversal of this thesis by

29 See Paul Redding, *Hegel's Hermeneutics* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996); Redding, *Analytic Philosophy and the Return of Hegelian Thought*.

30 These threads have been woven together into a unitary interpretation by the Venice School in relation both to the early and Jena writings (Luigi Ruggiu, *Logica metafisica politica. Hegel a Jena*, Milano: Mimesis, 2009; Ruggiu, *Lo Spirito è tempo. Saggi su Hegel*, Milano: Mimesis, 2013; Italo Testa, *Hegel critico e scettico. Illuminismo, repubblicanesimo e antinomia alle origini della dialettica (1785–1800)*, Padova: il Poligrafo, 2002; Testa, *La natura del riconoscimento. Riconoscimento naturale e ontologia sociale in Hegel (1801–1806)*, Milano: Mimesis, 2010), and to the mature writings (Lucio Cortella, *Dopo il sapere assoluto. L'eredità hegeliana nell'epoca postmetafisica*, Milano: Guerini e Associati, 1995; Cortella, *L'etica della democrazia. Attualità della filosofia del diritto di Hegel*, Genova: Marietti, 2012; Alessandro Bellan, *La Logica e il suo 'altro'*, Padova: il Poligrafo, 2002).

31 Emblematic in this regard is the title of an important study, of Marxist orientation, by Heinz Kimmerle: *Das Problem der Abgeschlossenheit des Denkens: Hegels „System der Philosophie“ in den Jahren 1800–1804* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1982²).

highlighting the systematic bond that weaves these threads together more consistently than Habermas had done (as Habermas himself will acknowledge),³² reformulating all these elements in a vocabulary compatible with that of normative practico-political philosophy, and thus extending the social, linguistic and intersubjective reading of *Geist* also to the mature Hegel, and to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in particular.³³ (This operation had in some respects already been attempted by Vittorio Hösle³⁴ with his presentation of an intersubjectivistic reading of the mature system, mediated theoretically by Karl Otto Apel's transcendental pragmatics; an operation that, within an ongoing debate with the Pittsburgh neo-Hegelian School, will then be attempted with other instruments by Pirmin Stekeler Weithofer, in the context of a semantic interpretation of logic as a critical theory of meaning.)³⁵

On this interpretative basis the new pragmatist interpretations developed from the 1990s, presented—as Habermas, somewhat reductively, termed it—a “deflationist” and, above all, undeniably post-metaphysical version of *Absolute Spirit*, no longer understood as a manifestation of the monological closure of thought but rather as an expression of the inner historical and critical self-reflection of modern social practices. As we can well imagine neither Habermas nor interpreters such as Rolf-Peter Horstmann³⁶ were in agreement with this interpretation, nor was the Münster School of Siep's followers, who have nonetheless engaged in fruitful dialogue with the epistemological and normative readings of Hegel.³⁷ This model has found new theoretical support in the revisitation, mediated by neo-pragmatism, of the antirepresentationalist and antifoundationalist range of Hegel's epistemology. This is the most important theoretical novelty recognized as positive by Habermas himself,

32 See Jürgen Habermas, “From Kant to Hegel and Back again,” *European Journal of Philosophy*, 7, 2 (1999), 164–189.

33 For a reconstruction of this interpretative paradigm see now Luca Corti, *Ritratti hegeliani. Un capitolo della filosofia americana contemporanea* (Roma: Carocci, 2014).

34 V. Hösle, *Hegels System* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1998).

35 Pirmin Stekeler-Weithofer, *Hegels analytische Philosophie. Die Wissenschaft der Logik als kritische Theorie der Bedeutung* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1992); Stekeler-Weithofer, *Philosophie des Selbstbewußtseins. Hegels System als Formanalyse von Wissen und Autonomie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005).

36 Rolf-Peter Horstmann, “What is Hegel's Legacy and What Should We Do With It?,” *European Journal of Philosophy*, 7, 2 (1999), 257–287.

37 In addition to the works of Siep, see the contributions of his followers: Christoph Halbig, *Objektives Denken. Erkenntnistheorie und Philosophie of Mind in Hegels System* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: frommann-holzboog, 2002); Michael Quante, *Hegel's Concept of Action* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

who, not by chance, has taken Robert Brandom as one of his privileged interlocutors:³⁸ a novelty destined not only to clarify and widen the range of the pragmatic turn opened by Hegel in philosophy but also to influence the affirmation of the recognitive paradigm—as we see, for example, from the new theoretical reading both of Hegel and recognition put forward by Axel Honneth in his second book on Hegel.³⁹ Now the recognitive paradigm could be read also in its epistemological and semantic consequences and has therefore started to be increasingly understood as the global hermeneutic principle of Hegelian philosophy, no longer limited to the practico-political domain. On the other hand, the re-evaluation of the phenomenological concept of experience (*Erfahrung*) carried out with particular efficacy by McDowell, mediating the Sellarsian reading of Spirit (*Geist*) as space of reasons with the lessons of practical Aristotelianism and Gadamerian hermeneutics, along with the concept of “second nature” that McDowell has made the focal point of his interpretation of Hegel, have stimulated many to work towards an embodied, historical and concrete vision of human rationality.

3 Articulation of the Book and Chapter-by-Chapter Outline

In this way the Hegelian theory of Spirit (*Geist*) came back into play in the contemporary arena as a model through which to rethink the full range of the intersubjective and historical mediation of human rationality, and thus the social articulation of its structure. It is once again possible to “use” Hegel as an alternative to the abstract, formalistic and disembodied conceptions of rationality that continue to circulate in contemporary thought. So, today, readers of Hegel have to measure the value of the interpretations developed in the last two decades above all in relation to their normative approach, matured within a rereading of the legacy of Kant, whose conception of autonomy as normative authority—in Robert Brandom’s version—Hegel supplemented by a social and recognitive comprehension of its genesis and structure.

38 See the debate between the two philosophers hosted in 2000 in the *European Journal of Philosophy*: Jürgen Habermas, “From Kant to Hegel: On Robert Brandom’s Pragmatic Philosophy of Language,” *European Journal of Philosophy*, 8, 3 (2000), 322–355; Robert Brandom, “Facts, Norms, and Normative Facts: a Reply to Habermas,” *European Journal of Philosophy*, 8, 3 (2000), 356–374.

39 See Axel Honneth, *The Pathologies of Human Freedom. Hegel’s Social Theory*, Trans. Ladislaus Löb (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

From this standpoint, the next step forward in the reading of Hegel's legacy appears to require a close scrutiny of the limits of the normative and neo-pragmatist approach, and in particular of the shortcomings of the Kantian and constructivist understanding of social practices and practical rationality it involves. The confrontation with the socio-ontological model is also destined to shed new light on Hegel's approach to metaphysics and to put into question some presuppositions of the post-metaphysical interpretative paradigm. Furthermore, it is required a renewed engagement with the European interpretative traditions of Marxism and of structuralism that focused their Hegelian reflections on that nexus between power and authority which was overlooked by many normative and neo-pragmatist readings, intent as they were on a conciliatory interpretation of modernity and of social space. Getting beyond this vision of rationality as, basically, an expression of conciliation appears to demand further engagement with the critical tradition, which had grasped the connection between the historicity of rationality and its mediation in practical interests and hence with contemporary critical theory, which with the model of the 'struggle for recognition' had grasped in an articulated and profoundly dialectic manner the link between social conflict, genesis of norms and social structure. Furthermore, the anti-naturalistic tendency of the normative interpretation of Hegel seems to be put again into question by the pressure of contemporary naturalism, and the need arises to regain some strands of Hegel's philosophy of nature to better understand his comprehension of social life.

In this light we can now appreciate the value of the essays presented in this collection as both being connected to previous studies and also introducing innovative steps within this research context. It is the *recognitive paradigm* that emerges in this collection as the model that appears to characterize the specificity of the Hegelian approach to the various domains of philosophical knowing, and thus to weave into a single theoretical fabric the various "turns" that shape the contemporary constellation. Thus the notion of recognition is not the theme of a single part of this book, but is rather the guiding thread through the different essays, which offer a close reading of all the implications of the formula "I that is We and We that is I" for different aspects of Hegel's thought. This allows the authors to reformulate anew the notion of "recognition [*Anerkennung*]" as an interpretative key to Hegel and to his contemporaneity.

The book is divided into four parts. The first part focuses on Hegelian social theory as an alternative to contemporary socio-ontological models and addresses the role recognition theory plays in this context. The second part discusses the relevance of Hegel's socialized action theory for overcoming the limits of both contemporary constructivism in moral and political theory and

constructivist interpretations of Hegel's theory of ethical life. The third part focuses largely on the contribution that Hegel's theory of subjectivity, recognition and work may bring to the contemporary debate on naturalism and social theory. The fourth part addresses the underestimated (at least in recent literature, mainly focused on the *Phenomenology of Spirit*) logical and systematic aspects of Hegel's theory of intersubjectivity and their importance for the confrontation with contemporary phenomenological, hermeneutic, and post-structuralist criticisms of Hegel. Although the parts have been arranged thematically and the chapters are conceptually intertwined, all of them are also stand-alone essays, capable of being read on their own in any order.

3.1 *Part One: Hegelian Social Ontology*

The first part of the collection focuses on Hegelian thought from a socio-ontological standpoint. Whereas the interpretative paradigm formed in the 1990s was mainly concerned with epistemological, pragmatic and normative aspects of Hegel's understanding of social practices and ethical life, an ontological turn has occurred in more recent approaches to Hegel's philosophy of sociality. Once we assume, as many do, that recognition is the core of Hegel's theory of spirit, then we cannot overlook the fact that, understanding it as playing a constitutive role as for both individual and collective self-consciousness and social institutions—as the phenomenological formula “I that is We and We that is I” seems to involve—then we are already implicitly characterizing recognition as a mechanism from which the very being of social phenomena ontologically depends. But this appreciation of the socio-ontological role of recognition also has consequences which can lead us to question some aspects of the post-metaphysical interpretations of Hegel. Whereas Habermas attacked Hegel as a metaphysical thinker insofar as he is assumed to still be indebted to the metaphysics of subject, interpreters such as Pippin and Pinkard, as we have seen, have defended a post-metaphysical interpretation of Hegel's spirit as consisting of a radically intersubjective, historical and pragmatic theory of social practice. But once we appreciate the not eliminable socio-ontological side of the Hegelian theory of intersubjectivity, then we are in a different position to evaluate the distinction between metaphysical and post-metaphysical thought,⁴⁰ since we can now see that the former may well be compatible with the intersubjective turn, allowing for a socialized understanding of what

40 For a discussion of the merits and limits of post-metaphysical interpretations of Hegel, see *Hegel au présent. Un rève de la métaphysique?*, eds. Jean-François Kervégan and Bernard Mabilie (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2012). For new interpretations of some aspects of Hegelian metaphysics, see in particular Robert Stern, *Hegelian Metaphysics* (Oxford

metaphysics is, or else we must acknowledge that the so-called ‘post-metaphysical thought’ cannot be emancipated from some ontological aspects of metaphysical thought.⁴¹ The four essays of the first part (by Frederick Neuhouser, Heikki Ikäheimo, Jean-François Kervégan, and Luigi Ruggiu) deal with the socio-ontological turn in the interpretation of Hegel’s spirit, addressing issues to do with the way Hegel’s metaphysics cuts across the distinction between nature and spirit (Neuhouser), with the proposal of Hegel’s recognition theory as a viable alternative to both Weberian theory of social action and Searlian social-ontology (Ikäheimo), and institutional theory of right (Kervégan), and finally with the idea that in the Hegelian approach social ontology takes the place of ontology as such (Ruggiu).

In Chapter 2, titled “Hegel on Social Ontology and the Possibility of Pathology”, *Fred Neuhouser* argues that Hegel offers us a social ontology which cuts across the distinction between nature and spirit insofar as it conceives of what society is on the model of life understood as immanent purposiveness. On this understanding, what is distinctive of human spirit is conscious life, which allows it to operate with internal self-conceptions and strive towards a final end which is not merely maintenance and reproduction, but also freedom. Furthermore, whereas the “I that is We” part of Hegel’s formula already captures the immanent relation of individuals to their species in natural life, the “We that is I” part better captures the constitutive relation of the ‘I’ to the ‘We’ in spiritual life, where individuals structurally aspire to a certain degree of independence from the ‘We’ they compose. This life-based socio-ontological approach results in a criticism of hypernormative understandings of spirit understood as something entirely cut off from life, and in criticism of those “all or nothing” notions of freedom that cut it off from naturalness, such as those involved in the bootstrapping model favoured by Pippin.⁴² Moreover, this approach permits us to regain a certain materialist strand of Hegelian thought,

University Press, Oxford 2009); James Kreines, *Reason in the World. The Philosophical Appeal of Hegel's Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

41 On the socio-ontological role of recognition see the important collection *Recognition and Social Ontology*, eds. Heikki Ikäheimo and Arto Laitinen (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2011), which gathers many contributions that deal directly and indirectly with Hegel. See also Michael Quante and David Schweikard, “Leading a universal life—the systematic relevance of Hegel’s social philosophy,” *History of the Human Sciences*, 22 (1) (2009), 58–78; Italo Testa, *La natura del riconoscimento. Riconoscimento naturale e ontologia sociale in Hegel*.

42 See, for instance, Robert Pippin, “Hegelian Sociality: Recognitive Status”, in *Hegel's Practical Philosophy. Rational Agency as Practical Life*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 202.

insofar as spirit's recognitive patterns are to be understood as something for which it is necessary to be enacted in material practices and intertwined with the natural functions of life. Such intersubjective practices can result in pathological forms of social embodiment, which are to be understood as a specific manifestation of the more general tendency of life's phenomena to falling ill, all of which leads Neuhouser to his proposal to ground the notion of social pathology and the diagnostic role of social philosophy on a life-based ontology.

In his essay "Ethical Perfectionism in Social Ontology—A Hegelian Perspective" (Chapter 3) *Heikki Ikäheimo* contrasts Hegel's social ontology with ethically neutral models such as Max Weber's theory of social action and John Searle's notion of acceptance/recognition as constitutive of social facts. Whereas Weber and Searle end up contradicting themselves and cannot *de facto* succeed in keeping the foundational level of social ontology neutral with regard to ethical evaluation, on Ikäheimo's view Hegel offers us a more consistent approach, which is characterized by what the author names 'normative essentialism': freedom, understood as 'concrete freedom'—as *being oneself in otherness*—would be the 'concept', that is the 'normative essence' distinctive of human life form. Such an essence or concept has to be understood as the immanent criterion which can be instantiated at various degrees by spiritual phenomena, which correspond to different degrees of ethical perfection. Applying this interpretative model in particular to the chapter "Self-consciousness" in the section on the Philosophy of Subjective Spirit of Hegel's Berlin *Encyclopedia*, Ikäheimo offers an analytical articulation of the 'I-We' relation contained in *Phenomenology's* formula, introducing a distinction between the 'horizontal axis' of intersubjective recognitive relations between individuals (which can be pure or institutionally mediated), and the 'vertical axis' of recognitive relations between individuals and institutions (which can have upwards and/or downward direction). This distinction allows us first to see some shortcomings of contemporary socio-ontological approaches which, such as Searle's, articulate acceptance/recognition only on the vertical axis and thus neglect its intersubjective horizontal axis. Furthermore, Ikäheimo introduces a distinction between two 'dimensions'—'axiological' and 'deontological'—which recognitive relations (both horizontal and vertical) can have, and two 'modes'—'conditional' (obedience or respect for authority)—and 'unconditional' (concern for the well-being of the other)—that these dimensions can assume. He finally argues that on this view the ethical goodness of horizontal and vertical relations—whose fullest realization, according to the immanent ethical principle of concrete freedom, would be 'unconditional' recognition—is the intrinsic ideal of our life form.

In “Towards an Institutional Theory of Rights” (Chapter 4) *Jean-François Kervégan* sketches out an institutional approach to law inspired by Hegel’s understanding of ‘right’ in § 4 of *The Elements of the Philosophy of Right* as ‘second nature’—as quasi-nature. Such Hegelian intuition allows Kervégan to critically revise and to combine in a unitary scheme socio-ontological tools offered by different authors such as Adolf Reinach, Maurice Hauriou, John Searle, Wesley N. Hohfeld, and Carl Schmitt. On Kervégan’s view institutions are normative systems which combine the action of individuals and groups, and which have their origin in constitutive rules (Searle) rather than in nature. Furthermore, institutions have objective ideality, that is, are organized around an idea (Hauriou) which has an objective nature in a Hegelian sense, that is, is embodied in a collective mode of being and acting. Moreover institutions, characterized by temporal duration, have both a procedural and ritual character. Translating Hegel’s idea of the identity of obligation and right into Hohfeld’s idea that right and duty are correlative concepts, Kervégan can adopt Hohfeld’s typology of rights (right, privilege, power, immunity) to criticize the bifurcation between negative and positive rights (rights to receive and rights to do), and as a basis to reconceive rights in institutional terms. Rights as institutions can be conceived as second nature, as something that is not natural without being a mere matter of convention, hence going beyond the division between natural and positive rights. This institutionalized notion of right leads to a de-transcendentalized reformulation of Reinach’s deduction of civil law, since now the idea of right can be conceived in a Hegelian way as its rational kernel, rather than as some kind of mysterious juridical essence, as put forward by Reinach. Finally, Hegel’s idea, developed in his analysis of the civil society, that liberal rights are valid inasmuch as they form a network with other rights, is the conceptual tool which, according to Kervégan, makes it possible to revise Carl Schmitt’s notion of “institutional guarantee”—rights understood as a statutory position held within an institution—and to reformulate it as a framework for an institutional theory of liberal rights, in a way which is also compatible with Searle’s approach to rights in general as deontic powers inherent to social status functions.

In Chapter 5, “Reason and Social Ontology”, *Luigi Ruggiu* contrasts Hegel’s social ontology with Searle’s, arguing that whereas according to Searle social ontology is a special ontology (whose domain, for instance, is different from that of the natural physical world and of the individual mind), according to Hegel social ontology is a general ontology. Hegel’s idea of the “essentially social valence of the nature of spirit”, understood as the expression of the primacy of mediation, would lead us to reconceive being as such as having an

essentially social structure. Even the formula “I that is We and We that is I” should be reconsidered from this radically ontological point of view: sociality is not a deduction, the result of a process of self-constitution of human, the mere product of the self-reflexive activity of consciousnesses—be they individual ‘I’ or collective ‘We’—which would appear abruptly as a sort of bootstrapping process. Sociality has rather to be understood as the progressive discovery of something that is already there but not yet known, a sort of unconscious background of our practices. And this process, which describes the transition from merely natural life to the human form of life, is mediated by recognition, but the latter doesn’t have to be understood in radical constructivist terms as a bare process of subjective constitution, but rather as a complex interweaving which can exist only in a social dimension that comes to light gradually with the construction of the selves. On this view the rediscovery of this ‘unconscious side’ of the process of recognition also leads us to the appreciation of the fact that opacity, tension and conflict are immanent to it. Hegelian recognition is always deeply embedded in social life, and the recognitive interplay always involves a plurality of subjects, which have a certain amount of opacity and resistance, and thus—*pace* those who see Hegel as the theorist of complete transparency—must be effected in spite of the fact that in social life perfect and total transparency is impossible.

3.2 *Part Two: Social Action, Ethical Life, and the Criticism of Constructivism*

The second part of the collection has five essays (by Robert Stern, Arto Laitinen, Francesca Menegoni, Axel Honneth, and Lucio Cortella) focusing on Hegel’s theory of action, its connection with Hegel’s social metaphysics and theory of modern institutions, and its relevance for the criticism of Kantian and constructivist approaches in contemporary moral, social and political philosophy. A major achievement of the neo-pragmatist interpretative paradigm which has been formed since the 1990s was to highlight the crucial role which action theory plays in Hegel’s practical philosophy and to uncover the peculiarity of Hegel’s theory of social action with respect to contemporary Humean, utilitarian and Kantian models more inclined towards an individualistic paradigm.⁴³ But such an understanding of action was then combined with

43 See on this point Michael Quante, *Hegel’s Theory of Action*; Robert Pippin, *Hegel’s Practical Philosophy*, and the collection *Hegel on action*, eds. Arto Laitinen and Constantin Sandis (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). See also chapter 4, “Hegel’s Expressive Metaphysics of Agency”, in Robert Brandom’s forthcoming book *A Spirit of Trust: A Semantic Reading of Hegel’s Phenomenology*.

a model of practical rationality based on a Kantian notion of normativity as rational autonomy, although socialized in a certain Hegelian fashion through the means of a pragmatics of social attribution.⁴⁴ We have already seen how the socio-ontological turn can bring into question the idea that such pragmatics of social attribution can exhaust both the recognitive interplay and the meaning of social and ethical life. This poses anew the problem of the relation of Hegel's theory of action and ethical theory to his social metaphysics and theory of subject, as well as of its relation to moral realism (Stern, Laitinen, and Menegoni). Another problem connected with this discussion and which has emerged in recent literature, concerns the idea that even a socialized constructivist perspective cannot escape the paradox of normative rational autonomy, which in order to work has to be based on presuppositions it cannot account for.⁴⁵ Such a problem is explored in this collection in relation to action theory, as well as to Hegelian criticism both of constructivist approaches in practical philosophy (Honneth, Cortella) and of radical constructivist interpretations of Hegel which do not fully get the point of Hegel's criticism of Kant.

In Chapter 6, "Does Hegelian Ethics Rest on a Mistake", *Robert Stern* discusses the connection, in Hegelian philosophy, between two main theses, that is, the ethical 'self-actualization thesis'—the idea that self-realization is a central issue in moral life—and the metaphysical 'social holism thesis'—according to which individual agents must be seen as essentially tied up to the social whole of which they are part. Stern addresses here Harold A. Prichard's Kant-inspired thesis, according to which the model of Hegelian ethics, endorsed by British Idealists such as Thomas H. Green and Francis H. Bradley, would be mistaken because it would consist in an attempt to address the threat of the egoist, who asks for some reasons to be moral, by appealing to the social holism thesis: hence, giving him some non-moral reasons to be moral. But in Stern's view the social holism thesis, as it becomes more clear if one turns to Bradley's interpretation of Hegelian ethics, is not an answer to moral egoism, but rather a metaphysical answer to a problem which arises for Kantian universalism at

44 See for instance Robert Brandom, "Some Pragmatist Themes in Hegel's idealism: Negotiation and Administration in Hegel's Account of the Structure and Content of Conceptual Norms", *European Journal of Philosophy* 7, 2 (1999): 164–189; Robert Pippin, "Hegelian Sociality: Recognitive Status", 196 and 197.

45 For a summary exposition of this paradox, see Terry Pinkard, "Das Paradox der Autonomie: Kants Problem und Hegels Lösung" in *Paradoxien der Autonomie*, eds. Thomas Khurana and Christoph Menke (Berlin: August Verlag, 2011), 25–60. Christoph Menke has convincingly argued that the interpretation of autonomy as participation in social practices developed by Pippin and Pinkard does not solve this paradox (see Menke, "Autonomie und Befreiung", *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 58, 5 (2010): 675–694).

the level of his action theory. The problem is that agency always requires that we will something particular, but this is destined to seem inadequate from the Kantian universal standpoint. On Stern's view Hegel's social metaphysics of the participation of individuals in the whole and their integration within plural subjects, is rather to be understood as a critical integration to Kant's impartialism, insofar as, according to Hegel's account of the freedom of the will in §§ 5–7 of the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, it is only the participation in a social community which makes it possible that individuals, while pursuing their own self-realization and acting in a determinate way, nonetheless contribute to the general whole.

The contribution by *Arto Laitinen* (Chapter 7), “Hegelian Constructivism in Ethical Theory?” addresses three different takes on the question of how Hegelian Ethical theory would socialize Kant's moral theory. The first is what Laitinen calls the ‘standard story’ and corresponds to radical constructivist interpretations developed by authors such as Pippin, Pinkard and Brandom. Such an interpretation relies on an argument from autonomy to constructivism—assuming that moral autonomy implies that moral agents do not presuppose objectively valid moral contents. Moreover, it addresses the paradox of Kantian self-legislation—the fact that self-legislation is in danger of being either “arbitrary self-launching” or presupposing some form of moral realism—through a social constructivist reading of Hegel, since it assumes that the legitimate law-giver is the community of subjects, structured by recognitive relations. But the problem with radical constructivism is, according to Laitinen, that it threatens to make the community an infallible source of value, since it cannot offer independent reasons that could be used as criteria according to which something can be judged as mistaken. The second strategy Laitinen addresses is what he names the ‘hybrid story’ and attributes to interpreters such as Robert Stern. This strategy would consist in answering the problems posed by radical constructivism by appealing, with a sort of McDowellian move, to some form of moral realism concerning moral contents. This view is hybrid insofar as, whereas moral contents are assumed to be objectively given, it is social command which makes them obligatory. Here Laitinen objects that such a fork between rightness and obligatoriness would be consistent with Kant but not with Hegel. Finally, Laitinen articulates and defends a third strategy, which he names ‘mediated realism’ or ‘sublated constructivism’. Accordingly, historical forms of life must be judged according to objective metaphysical criteria of progress (subjectivity, conscience, autonomy as actualized freedom) which give independent reasons to judge and revise our historical formations. Social construction still plays an epistemic role here, since objective contents are not

directly and positively accessible but only via negation through the device of social misconstructions such as negative experiences of misrecognition.

In “Hegel’s Theory of Action: Between Conviction and Recognition” (Chapter 8), *Francesca Menegoni* discusses the relation between individual and social dimensions of action, with reference to the final section of the Spirit chapter in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, which allows us to see how the ‘I’ and ‘We’ perspectives are closely intertwined but not mutually reducible. Menegoni defends the thesis that the individual element of personal conviction is a necessary element for the production of an action, and as such cannot be fully reduced to intersubjective factors of social construction. Still, this moment is not sufficient for an action to be real (*wirklich*). The latter involves the determination of the qualitative element, of the value of the act, which requires an external factor depending on the intersubjective practices of a social community. For the action to be real, its value has to be valued by mutual recognition of free consciousness: but the ‘We’, the recognizing community, still involves a not eliminable role for the ‘I’, for individual self-consciousness, which has to freely declare itself in front of other self-consciousness in order for genuine recognition to take place. Menegoni also underlines that in Hegel’s analysis the social recognitive community, which alone can guarantee the value of the action, is based on the element of language: and inasmuch as not every form of recognition will do (for instance, patterns of recognition which have the master-servant form do not), not every form of language is adequate to express the recognition which is required for free mutual acknowledgment to take place, but only a language practice such as the “reconciling yea”,⁴⁶ endowed with certain qualities which again involve a decisive role for individual self-consciousness. Hence, the Hegelian model of action requires a virtuous circularity between ‘I’ and ‘We’ to be established in the community of the agents.

Chapter 9, by *Axel Honneth*, “The Normativity of Ethical Life”, presents the theory of recognition as an answer to the problems of Kantian constructivist and the grounding of an alternative strategy, namely ‘Hegelian Reconstructivism’. Accordingly, Hegel’s critique of the Kantian moral standpoint and of the groundlessness of constructivist moral theory is a peculiar strategy to face the already mentioned paradox of self-determination: constructive self-determination presupposes a kind of freedom that can in turn be explained only by recourse to already existing moral norms. In Honneth’s view, Hegelian reconstructivism is an alternative conceptual method, which reconstructively extracts principles from norms already in existence, and which

46 *PS*, § 671 (*GW* 9, 362).

can be defended against the charge of conventionalism, since it can provide immanent criteria to distinguish between valid norms and merely accepted ones. A key role is played here by recognition: the first criterion that validates these norms is that they be generated by a set of social actions that exhibit the structure of reciprocal recognition, understood as a practice of reciprocal empowerment and authorization, whereas the second requirement is that participants in these practices can view such norms as conditions of their self-realization. Such a model of recognition is articulated by Honneth on an action-theoretical level and assumed to be compatible with a socio-ontological account based on collective intentionality. And criticizing authors such as Brandom, who tend to reduce recognition to the ascription of deliberative autonomy, Honneth defends a pluralized view of these practices, which include the ascription of other forms of personality (love, social esteem). Finally, according to Honneth one does not need to appeal to an objectivist philosophy of history to defend Hegelian reconstructivism against the charge of conventionalism and prove that some norms are valid not just in relation to a particular human group. The model of the 'struggle for recognition', understood as a practice characterized by an ineradicable element of historical revisability and openness, can provide here a different basis for addressing this charge, allowing for a concept of moral progress and history as an unplanned learning progress which leads to an increasing generalization and differentiation of social norms.

In his "Freedom and Nature. The Point of View of a Theory of Recognition" (Chapter 10), *Lucio Cortella* develops a model of recognition as minimal fundamental ethics which, along with Honneth, is understood as something presupposed by constructive morality and which, against Habermas' discourse ethics, cannot be constructed through argumentative procedures. On this view the ethics of recognition can satisfy the Kantian rooting of morality in freedom better than the constructivist models, and also answer the unacceptable Kantian assumption that freedom be conceived as completely separate from nature. In the Hegelian model the relation of recognition is assumed to be constitutive of subjectivity and characterized by reciprocity, and understood as an objective learning process, rooted in the natural structure, but always fragile and questionable; a process through which individuals learn to be autonomous, and acquire autonomy as their second nature. In this sense this definition of ethics is both rooted in nature and beyond nature, since it answers to a certain logic—the logic of freedom, which is not present in first nature but which in another sense constitutes our acquired nature as autonomous animals. But the logic of reciprocal recognition is not one of pure transparency and accomplished self-mastery: the fragility of the process of

recognition, which always involves an imitative dynamics, is constitutive of our identity as limited and finite subjects, vulnerable and exposed by this very process to specific possibilities such as the risk of suffering misrecognition and humiliation.

3.3 *Part Three: Naturalism, Work, and Power*

The third part of the collection has four essays (by Luca Illetterati, Emmanuel Renault, Paolo Vinci, and Italo Testa) addressing the relevance of naturalism for Hegelian philosophy, its materialistic strands, and the question of social power. The normative and constructivist reading of Hegel which formed the core of the interpretative paradigm that has been forming since the 1990s, was accompanied by an understanding of the relation between spirit and nature which, notwithstanding McDowell's suggestions, insisted on an interpretation of spirit and the social sphere as a strong bootstrapping process, a network of normative social practices which self-launches and self-justifies, and has no footing in naturalness.⁴⁷ Against such anti-naturalistic consequences a new interpretative model is now emerging,⁴⁸ presented here by Illetterati, Testa, Renault, and Testa, which re-evaluates the naturalistic side of Hegel's take on sociality and on this basis reads anew the notion of subjectivity as well as the constitutive role recognition plays for it. The normative neopragmatist approach to Hegel was also characterized by a rather thin, idealist understanding of sociality/spirit as consisting of a set of normative practices of reciprocal attribution, thus underestimating the role played in Hegel's philosophy by the materiality of social practices and their intertwinement with the process of social production and with the phenomena of social power. These aspects are treated by the essays of Renault, Vinci, and Testa, where the materialist and naturalist impulse of Hegelian thought is revisited in comparison with the European tradition of Marxist readings of Hegel, as well with contemporary post-structuralism.

47 See for instance Pippin's criticism of McDowell in "Leaving Nature Behind: or Two Cheers for Subjectivism," in *Reading McDowell. On Mind and World*, ed. Nicholas H. Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), 58–75.

48 See in particular the monographic number on "Nature in Spirit" of the journal *Critical Horizons*, 13, 2 (2012). On this subject see also Italo Testa, "Hegel's Naturalism, or Soul and Body in the Encyclopedia", in *Essays on Hegel's Philosophy of Subjective Spirit*, ed. David Stern (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2012), 19–35, and the (partial) correction of his previous perspective in Terry Pinkard's most recent book *Hegel's Naturalism. Mind, Nature, and the Final Ends of Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

In Chapter 11, “Subjectivity and Freedom. Moving from Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature”, *Luca Illetterati* proposes a naturalistic reading of the roots of subjectivity in the *Encyclopedia’s* Philosophy of Nature and Philosophy of Spirit. Qualifying in § 337 of the *Encyclopedia* animality as subjectivity, Hegel introduces the notion of freedom already at the natural level, in order to characterize the animal subjectivity’s capacity to free itself from the bond of external forces. Once we realize that natural animality is already endowed with a certain degree of self-movement and self-determination, as well as self-feeling as feeling of loss (or desire), we are in an ideal position to appreciate the fact that there is in Hegel a certain form of naturalization of the subject, which counters contemporary interpretations assuming that Hegel’s Spirit would leave nature behind and that freedom and subjectivity would be merely normative phenomena that would appear only after nature within attributive social practices. On the other hand, introducing notions such as ‘subjectivity’ and ‘freedom’ already within the natural process, Hegel’s move implies a redefinition, in non-reductivist terms, of the notions of ‘nature’ and ‘naturalism’ as they figure in contemporary debates.

Emmanuel Renault’s essay, “Social Self and Work in the Phenomenology of Spirit” (Chapter 12), argues that contemporary theories of recognition, both intersubjectivistic ones (such as Honneth’s) and neopragmatist or idealist ones (such as Brandom’s, Pippin’s, and Pinkard’s) suffer from a twofold shortcoming: they underestimate the natural presuppositions of recognition, and tend to reduce sociality to a poor model of recognition, understood apart from material processes of work. As for the first point, he argues that Hegel’s spirit is not just a process of normative authority which posits itself—which is the case by Fichte—but rather a relation to itself through its externality, that is, a process of theoretical and practical appropriation of the conditions of its freedom. Accordingly, the chapter on Self-consciousness of Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, results in a proto-materialist criticism of idealistic models that do not take into account the internal relationship between life and self-consciousness, and leads to an understanding of the struggle for recognition as a movement of progressive appropriation of its own natural presuppositions. As for the second point, Renault argues that the socio-ontological role of recognition cannot be fully appreciated if we do not take into account its relation with work. In chapters IV and VII of the *Phenomenology* work is not only formative activity, but also a shape of self-consciousness—an idea which would later be developed by John Dewey—which is constitutive of the social world and intertwined with the notion of freedom as *being oneself in otherness*. From this point of view, the fundamental concept of Hegel’s social ontology would be the notion, to be found in his *Objective Logic*, of *Wechselwirkung*

(reciprocal interaction), of which recognition and work, the latter including not just intersubjective relations, but also material interaction with external objects (both natural ones and artefacts), would be distinct manifestations.

In his “The Form of Labor: Individuation and Socialization” (Chapter 13), *Paolo Vinci* traces the roots of Marx’s analysis of labor in *Das Kapital* back to Hegel’s chapter on Self-consciousness. First, Marx would inherit from Hegel a notion of work or labor which goes beyond the Aristotelian opposition between *poiesis* and *praxis*, understanding it as transformative praxis, that is, as a process of self-production of the essence of human beings. The constitutive role of labor for the nature and self-conception of human beings, in Vinci’s view, can not be understood separately from the dynamics of recognition—of a subjectivity which objectivates and finds itself in the other—of which labor would be a decisive moment, even if a partial one, since it lacks the symmetrical movement on the side of the object required by accomplished recognition. A second important aspect of Marx’s Hegelian heritage is the way the internal relation between recognition and work allows for an account of the intertwinement between individuation and socialization. And here Vinci finds the roots of the formula “I that is We and We that is I” in the Jena Manuscripts, where labor is qualified as universal recognition, and commonality, the ‘We’ moment, is understood as something which is not superimposed, but comes from beneath, being the result of the activity of one and all individuals.

The contribution by *Italo Testa* (Chapter 13), “Attractors of Recognition”, proposes a new approach to recognition as a metaphysics of social power, resulting from a conceptual analysis backed by the reconstruction of some passages of Hegel’s Jena manuscripts and of the Self-consciousness chapter. Arguing that the passive power of being recognized is ontologically prior over the active power of recognizing (which is usually privileged by attributive and normative models of recognitive practice), he then introduces the notion of ‘attractors of recognition’ to qualify the bio-power to attract recognition from others that is universally, even if asymmetrically distributed between individual bearers of our specific life-form. In this way he manages to characterize recognition in socio-ontological terms which are compatible with a naturalistic approach based on the notion of habituation, as well as understanding recognition as a social power in the strict sense, that is as a power to induce some effects on other agents, whether they want it to or not. After introducing the notion of ‘recognitional authority’, understood as the authority to let others recognize or be recognized, whether they want to be or not, Testa argues that an approach based on this model is in a better position than those which characterize recognition from scratch in intentionalist and normative terms, to grasp within recognition theory wider pre-intentional aspects of social power that

normally fall within the ambit of Foucauldian bio-political theories. In particular, this model of recognitive attractors could be used to develop a socio-ontological analysis alternative both to Foucauldian and Searlian models of the power of socialization that is the background power of our social practices, and could frame power relations that subsist not only at the inter-individual level but also between individuals and institutions.

3.4 *Part Four: The Logic of Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity*

The Hegel renaissance of the 1900s was centred on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*—which has led to the publication of a number of new commentaries of this work—as a key to understanding also crucial aspects of the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. As for the systematic works, the post-metaphysical readings, with some exceptions,⁴⁹ have so far devoted less attention to the *Science of Logic*, which, along with the philosophy of history, is still the aspect of Hegel's system that needs more efforts to be emancipated from old, dismissive interpretative models which used to think of Hegel as the bad, foundationalist metaphysician of absolute transparency. This situation is now changing and the essays gathered in the fourth section of the collection (by Alfredo Ferrarin, Franco Chiereghin, Leonardo Samonà, and Nello Preterossi) testify as to how fruitful a perspective centred on Hegel's mature systematic works can also be for those who, adhering to the intersubjective turn, are interested in understanding the relational structure of the spiritual social sphere and in countering the objections of those, such as interpreters inspired by hermeneutics, who usually criticize the mature system as being finally indebted to a monological perspective.

In his essay “‘I that is We and We that is I’. The Phenomenological Significance and the Logical Foundation of Intersubjectivity in Hegel” (Chapter 14), *Franco Chiereghin* understands Hegel's quote as expressing the formula of intersubjectivity and argues that this cannot find an adequate foundation in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Even the most concrete manifestation and reformulation of this principle at the beginning of the moment “Religion”, where spirit is characterized as “the universal *work* produced by the action of each and all”,⁵⁰ is accordingly still affected by immediateness, and thus expresses the limited and partial way consciousness experiences spirit rather than spirit as it is in and for itself. It is only in the “Logic of Concept” of the *Science of Logic* that the formula of intersubjectivity finds adequate foundation. According to Hegel's idea that “the concept is free”, intersubjective relations can find their ground

49 See for instance Pirmin Stekeler-Weithofer, *Hegels analytische Philosophie*.

50 *PS*, § 439, 264 (*GW* 9, 239).

only insofar as they incorporate within themselves the logic of the self-determination of the concept. But this does not result in a monological and solipsistic understanding, since the concept thus understood has rather a relational nature, consisting in its capacity of finding itself in the absolutely other.

In Chapter 15, “Self-consciousness, Individuality and Intersubjectivity”, *Alfredo Ferrarin* also argues that intersubjectivity cannot find its foundation in Hegel’s *Phenomenology* but only in objective spirit in its relation to the logical system. Ferrarin proposes distinguishing the notions of ‘recognition’ and ‘intersubjectivity’ and to use the former as a more restricted notion, which applies to the phenomenon of the reciprocity of self-consciousnesses analysed in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*—the realization that I depend on others as others on me—whereas intersubjectivity would apply to the sphere of social relations analysed in objective spirit and which are not reducible to the phenomenon of reciprocity. This would better explain why Hegel’s mature writings still have an intersubjective approach to the social sphere of “universal self-consciousness”, notwithstanding the fact that after the Jena writings the role of the recognitive analysis of these relations is progressively narrowed. Based on this, Ferrarin criticizes Pippin’s thesis⁵¹ that the self-consciousness chapter would be the most important of the whole work—arguing that the distinction between recognition and intersubjectivity could not be grounded at that level—and Brandom’s thesis that self-consciousness would be a social achievement—arguing, along the lines of Dieter Henrich and Manfred Frank, that there is a sense of the ‘I’s individuality which cannot be explained away by social interaction.

The essay by *Leonardo Samonà*, “The Community of the Self” (Chapter 16), addresses two main critical readings of the formula “I that is We and We that is I”, arguing that these can be countered only if we realize that this formula has its fullest completion at the level of absolute spirit. According to the first, traditional criticism, the ‘We’, Hegel’s universal self-consciousness, would eventually swallow up the ‘I’, absorbing the particular individualities into an encompassing whole dominated by a non-relational, monological logic. On Samonà’s view this criticism of Hegel, often seen as a direct consequence of his metaphysical social holism, overlooks the dynamizing force of the formula and reads it unilaterally, neglecting the fact that Hegel’s social holism involves also a movement from the universality of the ‘We’ to the plurality of the ‘I’s’, requiring the radical freedom of the other as its condition. The second criticism of the formula reconsidered by Samonà is the one formulated by hermeneutical

51 See Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel on Self-Consciousness*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), vii.

interpreters such as Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, who do not charge Hegel's formula for swallowing up the other, but rather for pursuing a project of familiarization with the extraneous, with the 'otherness' of the other. Hegel's dialectics of recognition, as Emmanuel Lévinas and Paul Ricoeur have argued, would first, at the level of objective spirit, submit reciprocity to equality, losing sight of the structural asymmetrical side of human reciprocity—of its difference—and eventually leaping from objective to absolute spirit, eliminate this asymmetry through the subjection of difference to the identity of the self-thinking subject. But according to Samonà this criticism ontologically reifies the despotic conception of a hierarchy order in human relations which is not eliminable at the level of finite, objective spirit. Moreover, it does not realize that it is only through the leap to absolute spirit that we can be emancipated from these limits in love as unity of plurality (Religion), in the self-recognition of individual self-consciousness in universal self-consciousness (Philosophy), and in the non despotic conception of the divine involved by this sphere.

In "The Political Surplus Value of Subjectivity in Hegel" (Chapter 17), *Geminello Preterossi* argues that, reconsidering the relation between Hegel's *Science of Logic* and the conception of politics developed in *The Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, we can obtain a notion of subjectivity which remains viable even after the postmodernist deconstruction of the modern subject and competes with post-structuralist understandings of the process of subject formation. Describing in § 278 of *The Elements* the logic of individualization of the universal which constitutes the sovereignty of the state, Hegel would uncover the political traits of the notion of subjectivity, connecting the constitution of the subjectivity of individual subjects with the constitution of political plural, collective subjects. Moreover, understanding in § 278 the sovereign will in logical terms as "absolute and self-determining ground", and connecting in § 13 its movement of self-determination with the logical and practical problem of "decision" for the finite, Hegel would unveil the constitutive role that decision plays both for the subjective moment of individual and collective will, allowing us to revisit in a new light the debate between Hans Blumenberg and Carl Schmitt on sovereignty. On this view subjectivity can thus be re-evaluated, even within recognitive and intersubjective patterns, as that groundless moment which has a surplus value insofar as it does not consist in a positive content, but rather in a negative function which permits us to distance ourselves from the given, to filter and creatively re-elaborate it.