doi:10.1017/hgl.2015.6
Hegel Bulletin, 36/1, 105–110

Review

Robert R. Williams. ***Tragedy, Recognition, and the Death of God: Studies in Hegel & Nietzsche***. **Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. ISBN: 978-0-19-965605-9, hbk, $99.00. Pp. 424.**

In several seminal books and articles over more than twenty years, Robert R. Williams has defended a distinctive interpretation of Hegel's view of recognition. For Williams, Hegel's recognition is not a psychological need — as it is for interpreters such as Kojève and Honneth — but rather the ontological basis of Hegel's theories of truth, mind, and ethics. In the present volume, Williams expands the notion of recognition further, showing how recognition even makes sense of Hegel's philosophy of religion. *Tragedy, Recognition, and the Death of God* represents an important addition to Williams' distinguished studies of Hegel.

Though this book is primarily about Hegel and the philosophy of religion, it also examines the relationship between Hegel and Nietzsche. In line with recent scholarship, Williams challenges the long-standing view that Hegel and Nietzsche were philosophical antipodes. On the contrary, Williams argues, Hegel and Nietzsche held similar views about the nature of community, tragedy, and theodicy, as well as the significance of the death of God. Despite Nietzsche's appearance in this book, however, Nietzsche seems to play the role of an unsuccessful epigone or perhaps a bumbling sidekick. Hegel anticipates Nietzsche's best insights, according to Williams, and where Nietzsche departs from Hegel, he goes astray.

As a result, this volume is really two books in one. The first book, on Hegel's philosophy of religion, is in my view more successful than the second book, on the Hegel-Nietzsche relationship. As I will suggest below, I think Williams could have given a more sympathetic hearing to Nietzsche in a few crucial places. In addition, it is not clear what ties these two books together. Recent scholarship on Hegel and Nietzsche elicits the deep commonalities between them while also arguing that they represent compelling alternatives in 19th century philosophy. Since Williams sees Nietzsche instead as a foil to Hegel's views, it is unclear why he included Nietzsche at all.

The book's four parts take up four themes: recognition, tragedy, the 'Kantian frame', and the philosophy of religion. In part 1, Williams puts Hegel and Nietzsche's master-slave struggles side-by-side, arguing that both

philosophers advocate neither master nor slave morality but the dialectical sublation of the two (50). However, what he takes to distinguish them — and to reveal Nietzsche as inferior — are their different understandings of the nature of community. Williams analyzes this difference by suggesting that each philosopher adopts one pole of Aristotle's ethics. Hegel builds on Aristotle's conception of friendship, according to which we achieve the good only through our activity for others. Nietzsche, by contrast, prizes Aristotle's magnanimity, according to which, as Williams puts it, community is base and degrading, and the best life is one led in solitude. However, for Williams, one cannot lead a good and a self-sufficient life on one's own, since goodness is a norm constituted through mutual recognition. Nietzsche partially escapes incoherence by developing a view of recognition in his vision of an agonistic community of rivals. At the same time, these agonistic relationships are merely 'instrumental and mutually exploitative' rather than being genuinely other-regarding friendships as for Hegel (90). The problem, in short, with Nietzsche's view of community is that there is 'no equivalent for the Hegelian "We" or spirit' (52). For Williams, 'Nietzsche's lauding of hierarchical asymmetry implies that there can be no authentic, non-contaminating relation or community' (99).

Williams' analysis of Hegel in this section is penetrating and astute. His examination of Nietzsche's agon in light of Hegel's view of recognition illuminates otherwise well-trodden territory in the scholarship. However, Williams' Hegelian lens obscures some features of Nietzsche's thought that could be a compelling alternative to Hegel's view. Williams assumes that Nietzsche's aristocratic hierarchy is incompatible with egalitarian recognition. This assumption, however, misrepresents the kind of recognition Nietzsche is interested in. To use Stephen Darwall's apt distinction, Nietzsche is concerned not with 'recognition respect' — the recognition we owe all human beings in virtue of their personhood, for instance — but rather with 'appraisal respect' — the recognition we owe those human beings who achieve excellence as human beings. (Darwall 1977) Nietzsche's worry with 'herd communities' is that they undermine the conditions for the possibility of human excellence by eliminating the notion of appraisal respect. Nietzsche lauds the aristocratic community, by contrast, because its structure promotes the achievement of human excellence. Nietzsche's alternative vision of human community, then, is not one of solitary *Übermenschen* far from the herd, but rather one in which human excellence in the form of the *aristoi* provide the 'meaning and highest justification' of a community (Nietzsche 2002). In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* for instance, Nietzsche lauds the aristocratic 'gift-giving virtue' as the 'highest virtue' that seeks to redeem humanity as a whole from 'degeneration' (Nietzsche 1966). In this way, it is inaccurate for Williams to claim that 'solitude is tops on Nietzsche's list of virtues' (72).

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In part 2, Williams compares and contrasts Hegel and Nietzsche's views of tragedy. Whereas Nietzschean tragedy has been extensively explored, Hegel's view of tragedy is understudied. Williams makes an excellent contribution to the literature by tracing Hegel's concept of tragedy from his *Early Theological Writings* through his late lectures on Aesthetics. With his notion of tragedy, Williams argues, Hegel challenges the 'legal penal vision of the world' according to which a monarchical god metes out justice to his human servants (120). Instead, tragedy represents a world in which claims to justice can come into conflict with one another and hence must be settled not beyond life but within it. In contrast to many readers of Hegel, Williams holds that Hegel's philosophy does not eliminate tragic conflict (290). Rather, tragic conflict is a perennial possibility for human society, since individuals can always fail to be rational and instead use their understanding to privilege one substantial ethical power over another, as, for instance, Sophocles' Creon does in upholding state over family in *Antigone*.

Williams' account is very helpful and also provocative. His claim that 'tragedy is not restricted to ancient Greek ethical life, for the analytical understanding is tragic' (292) is persuasive though oddly ahistorical. What this claim misses is Hegel's view of the historical development of ethical powers themselves, a development that mitigates the tragic conflicts among these powers. For instance, the transition from the Greek to Roman world involves the introduction of the category of the 'person' as comprising the community. The abstract notion of the person separates the 'private' concerns of family from the 'public' concerns of the state, which results in the attenuation of ethical life. Hegel's point, however, is that though tragic conflicts are always possible, humanity gets better and better at obviating them through more rational organizations.

Williams applies the notions of recognition and tragedy to Hegel's philosophy of religion in part 4. In order to understand the application of these concepts, Williams argues, we must grasp Hegel's relationship to Kant's philosophy. This is the topic of Part 3. The Hegel-Kant relationship has generated a good deal of controversy in the scholarly literature in recent years. For scholars such as Robert Pippin, Hegel is a Kantian, non-metaphysical thinker. For Frederick Beiser and others, by contrast, Hegel draws on Kant but develops a new form of metaphysics. Williams sides with Beiser, arguing that Hegel's notion of the 'true infinite' — the 'most important concept of all philosophy' according to Hegel (161) — is incomprehensible except as a metaphysical claim. Nevertheless, Beiser errs, Williams argues, in rejecting Hegel's theology as essential to understanding his metaphysics.

For Williams, Hegel breaks through Kantian subjective idealism through his 'recasting' of the ontological proof for God's existence. In this chapter, Williams outlines Hegel's difficult argument with exceptional clarity. On the one hand, Hegel sides with Anselm against Kant in arguing that existence is a predicate of

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the perfect being. On the other hand, Hegel sides with Kant against Anselm in arguing that the thought of the perfect being is not identical with its existence (208). Hegel brings Anselm and Kant together in his view that God's infinitude is abstract initially and must go through the process of self-actualization. For Williams, Kantian freedom as self-determination is foundational to Hegel's reformulated ontological argument.

In part 4, the longest part of the book, Williams explores the philosophical and theological implications of Hegel's reformulated ontological argument. He basically argues that Hegel offers a novel articulation and defense of 'panentheism'. Panentheism combines traditional theology and pantheism by overcoming their one-sidedness. Envisioning God as a monarch separate from His human servants, traditional theology fails to explain the relationship between God and humanity. Pantheism identifies God and humanity at the expense of excluding human freedom and responsibility central to the traditional theological view. Hegel's panentheism, according to Williams, consists in a community or 'reciprocity between God and world' (378). God is not separate from human efforts, but works through them, which 'implies not only the possibility of divine suffering, but also the possibility of divine consolation and divine empathy' (378). Hegel's panentheism is similar to later accounts such as A.N. Whitehead's, but Hegel's distinctive contribution is to interpret and transform Christianity — especially its doctrine of the trinity — as the consummate form of panentheism.

Hegel's panentheism, according to Williams, is motivated by the basic logic of recognition and tragedy. For Hegel, mutual recognition is the basis of normativity. The relationship between master and slave is an 'asymmetrical one' and hence unjust. Only the relationship of mutual recognition can generate genuine norms of justice. The same logic applies to our relationship to God. The 'traditional monarchical metaphor for God' is the 'world-monarch [who] issues laws and commands to his subjects.' This 'asymmetrical' relationship 'implies a view of the absolute as abstract universal, immutable, impassible substance, as lord and master' (293). God must instead engage in a reciprocal relationship with humanity. At the same time, however, God cannot be identified with us, as in pantheism, because for Hegel the relationship of identity is not a relationship at all. God must be one with us and at the same time other than us for us to experience divine love and consolation. Mutual recognition provides this logic of the unity of unity and difference.

Traditional theology and pantheism have difficulties in grounding a theodicy. The former places the responsibility for evil entirely on human free will, while the latter imputes it to the divine. According to Williams, panentheism incorporates a tragic worldview according to which evil is a necessary result of human freedom, but one that can be redeemed by God who takes on the suffering caused by sin through His own death. All evil is a form of negation, and death the greatest of all negations. The death of God and subsequent

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resurrection negates this greatest of all negations. That is, Hegel reads the crucifixion and 'death of God' as the way in which God guides the greatest of all evils toward the good. By taking on human form, God expresses the reciprocity characteristic of panentheism. However, God's redemption does not eliminate evil and tragedy — after all, the death and resurrection of God are unendingly repeated — but rather tragedy is integral to Hegel's panentheistic theodicy.

Williams' masterful analyses in this part revive Hegel's underappreciated philosophy of religion. At the same time, the argument at points relies a bit too much on Hegel's own jargon. This section could have benefitted from framing it in terms of contemporary philosophical discussions of panentheism and how Hegel could contribute to them. More broadly, however, Williams seems to take at face value Hegel's metaphysical-theological positions. Yet Hegel regarded religion as the penultimate moment of absolute spirit: religion takes place at the level of 'picture-thinking' (Hegel 1977). Williams' argument could have been improved by considering the relationship between Hegel's reflections on religion and on philosophy. Are we meant to take Hegel's theological views straightforwardly, or are they best understood, as Hegelians such as Pippin and Pinkard argue, as heuristics for humanity's own self-actualization?

Nietzsche appears again in the fourth part. Williams rightly challenges contemporary scholars for the tendency to psychologize some of Nietzsche's core doctrines such as the eternal recurrence and the will to power. If these are illusions of the subject or mere feelings, what kind of theodicy can Nietzsche offer us? Though Williams does not offer any novel readings of Nietzsche's mature views, he illuminates them through a comparison with Hegel, for instance by comparing Dionysus and the 'suffering God' of panentheism (289) or Hegel and Nietzsche on Heraclitus (335f). Williams' comparison of Hegel and Nietzsche on the death of God captures the existential malaise motivating both philosophers. However, they are said to differ drastically on the cultural meaning of the 'death of God'—Hegel draws on this phrase from its Lutheran theological meaning, whereas Nietzsche uses it to refer to the growing secularization of modern society.

In sum, Williams' latest work on Hegel impressively develops a theological Hegelian interpretation — a panentheistic Hegel — that will surely rival the currently more popular non-metaphysical interpretations. What makes this interpretation novel is that Williams builds it on the basis of a deeply egalitarian account of Hegel's recognition. Williams' newest work, like his previous work, rewards attentive study and provides us a distinctive interpretation of this inexhaustible thinker.

Jeffrey Church
University of Houston
jchurch@central.uh.edu

https://doi.org/10.1017/hgl.2015.6 Published online by Cambridge University Press

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https://doi.org/10.1017/hgl.2015.6 Published online by Cambridge University Press