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SPECIAL ISSUE ON MISRECOGNITION IN WORLD POLITICS: REVISITING HEGEL

Frustrated sovereigns: the agency that makes the world go around

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Abstract

In this article, the introduction to this Special Issue, we underline the importance of the dynamics of misrecognition for the study of world politics. We make the case for shifting the focus from 'recognition', where it has long been cast in social, political and, more recently, International Relations theory, to *mis*recognition. We do so by returning to the original theorisation of misrecognition, Hegel's dialectic of the master and servant. Our point of departure is not only that the desire for recognition is key social dynamic, but that the *failure* to obtain this recognition is built into this very desire. It is a crucial factor for understanding how international actors behave, including, but not only, states.

Thus understood, the desire for recognition is not simply a desire for social goods, for status or for statehood, but for more agency – more capacity to act. We explore the logic of misrecognition and show how the international system is a symbolic structure that is ordained by an unrealisable ideal of what we call 'sovereign agency'.

Keywords: Misrecognition; Hegel; Sovereignty; Agency; the Negative; Recognition Theory; Constitutive Theorising; Systemic Theorising; Dialectics; Master–Servant; Desire

Introduction

Struggles for recognition have long interested social, political, and, more recently, International Relations (IR) theorists; ever since they were originally conceptualised by Wilhelm Hegel's dialectic of the master and servant. International struggles for recognition are bound up with sovereignty, insofar as mutual recognition is a formal condition of statehood in international law. In contrast to the domestic demands for the recognition of, say, minorities, or of a specific set of rights, these international demands have one of two logical outcomes. They either yield a state, when these demands are acceded to by established states. Or they are denied, which tips the struggle into a dormant or a latent conflict. Palestine, Taiwan, the Sahwari's struggle in Western Sahara, Catalonia, or the recent experiment to create an Islamic state, are instances of such non-recognition. Moreover, recognition has been a crucial historical shaper of our contemporary state system, in which a majority of states are postcolonial states, and many are born of anti-colonial struggles for recognition where a colonised 'servant', in Hegel's and Frantz Fanon's language, stood up against a colonial 'master'.

All three scholarships in social, political, and IR theory, however, have remained focused on the dynamics of recognition. Our contention with this Special Issue is that *mis*recognition, by which we mean the structural impossibility of actors being recognised in the ways that they want to be, is the phenomenon that Hegel originally circumscribed by way of the dialectic of the master and servant. Returning to how he did so holds significant promise for understanding the

social logics of world politics. For our purpose, Hegel's key contribution is to have underlined first, that recognition is a struggle to the death for the social actor. Second, that failure is the necessary, logical outcome of that struggle; even for the seemingly victorious party (the master), and even, or especially, if both parties survive. To survive, whether as a slave *or* as a master, is not to live as a fully recognised social actor. Yet, third, this failure, this short-of-being-recognised, is an ongoing feature of social life that actors are always contending with. It is the engine of human agency. In a Hegelian perspective, this agency is socially constructed all the way down. Moreover, it is necessarily apprehended in its dual dimensions, which are inseparable for Hegel, of a desire to be constituted as a subject *vis-à-vis* others (its subject-to-subject dimension), and to shape one's environment (the subject-object dimension).

The Hegelian dynamics of misrecognition reveal a form of agency that is especially relevant to the study of world politics. It is our focus in this Special Issue. This is an agency that is driven by ongoing, perpetually unsatisfied desire that international actors harbour to be more agentic then they are; to have what we call, borrowing from Patchen Markell, a 'sovereign agency'.[1] This desire underwrites aspirations to, but is distinct from, actual sovereignty. Markell traced the effects of this sovereign agency at the substate level. Our wager is that, because it captures something fundamental about human agency and the ways it is inextricably bound up with the desire for recognition the notion also helps parse state behaviour. Our contention, then, is that in a system where the state is the ultimate political actor – the actor endowed with the most agentic capabilities (at least of a political nature) – states continue to be driven by a continually frustrated desire to have more of the capacity to act autonomously that sovereignty represents and was meant to afford them. Focusing on the dynamics of misrecognition draws out that no matter how much actual sovereignty international actors, including (but not only) states already possess, *including* the most powerful states, they always want more of it. This holds true of substate groups who aspire to statehood, as well as for the hegemon who might undertake to 'make America great again'. This 'more' is what reveals a particular kind of idealised agency that international actors understand sovereignty to hold. This ideal is what we designate as 'sovereign agency'. It contains the notion of an un-opposable capacity to act, to roll out one's course of action unimpeded, which remains ultimately unrealisable. This unattainable ideal that the actors cannot seem to give up, we aim to show, with Hegel, is a continual driver of international politics.

We are not claiming that every outcome in world politics is best understood in terms of misrecognition. Nor are we claiming that misrecognition 'causes' international actors to choose particular courses of action. Our theory of misrecognition mobilises instead the constitutive logics that were first tabled in the study of international politics by both constructivist and poststructuralist contributions to the study of world politics. We use misrecognition to illuminate the sociopolitical logics of the international system, and to highlight sovereignty as a symbolic structure of that system. This symbolic structure constitutes the system's actors by way of an unattainable ideal of agency.[2] It does so by defining the meaning-structures through which actors must necessarily constitute themselves as states, as sovereigns. Our perspective is therefore self-consciously structural and state-centric.[3] This is why we focus mostly on Hegel's initial development of the master–servant dialectic, as this is where misrecognition emerges both as a central driver – an unattainable ideal – and as constitutive of the social. There are two key elements here.

[1]Patchen Markell, *Bound by Recognition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

[2]Our argument tracks close to Cynthia Weber and others' discussion of subjectivity and state performance as an ongoing effort that is never complete and stable. Our focus on agency differs by highlighting that subjectivity, like identity, follows from and is a result of (frustrated) efforts at achieving agency. See Cynthia Weber, *Simulating Sovereignty: Intervention, the State and Symbolic Exchange*, Vol. 37 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). See also Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997). For a similar point in IR, seeArjun Chowdhury and Raymond D. Duvall, 'Sovereignty and sovereign power', *International Theory*, 6:2 (2014), pp. 191–223.

[3]This does not mean, however, that the dynamic is limited to states, as we discuss below.

First, Hegel's dialectic of the master and servant is the first theorisation of constitutivity in modern social thought. The two roles in the interaction, that of master and servant, are generated by the struggle for recognition. They do not pre-exist it. But this is about more than about actors being constituted by a social relation. Rather, their struggle creates the space of interactions, the social space, in the first place. In this sense, Hegel identifies a generic social dynamic (the play of recognition and misrecognition) as ontologically primary. He thereby offers a different entry point into what both poststructuralist and constructivist theories refer to as the constitution of the social: it is in the first instance neither constituted by intersubjectively shared ideas nor discourses, but by how the actors struggle to prevail over the very social structures that constitute them as social actors in the first place. The symbolic structure of sovereignty is thus both what defines the states as the primary actors of the international system and yet, at the same time, what denies them the sovereign agency they lay claim to.

That the symbolic structure of the international system is defined by an unattainable ideal of sovereign agency only makes sense, however, when coupled with the second way in which Hegel's thought is important, the category of the negative. Hegel offers a crucial counterpoint to the positivist ontology that the discipline's enduring causal focus is bound up with. The negative, the second moment of the dialectic, destabilises the positive 'things' onto which the constitution of the social has been pinned in IR scholarship; whether these be ideas, norms, and identity in constructivism, or discourses and subject-positions in poststructuralism.[4] This destabilising effect of the negative allows us to rethink sovereignty and the specific form of political agency it is bound up with, where the symbolic structure of sovereignty is an *ideal* that structures the capacity to act that political actors (of different kinds) seek.

In the first part of this introduction, we establish the broader context for our theorisation of misrecognition. The dynamics of misrecognition reveal the symbolic structures of international politics that constructivist and poststructuralist scholarships have brought into focus and, in particular, the symbolic structure at play in sovereignty. We further develop the poststructuralist understanding of symbolic structures, but we do so by shifting the focus away from identity and towards agency.[5] Agency is here considered not as a given or a property of actors, but in terms of a desire that is always frustrated (although in different ways) by the fact that it is dependent on recognition from other actors. We then proceed, in the second part, to discuss Hegel's dialectic of the master and servant, after having established a few caveats that are necessary when returning to Hegel today, and we introduce the tradition to which our reading belongs. In the third part we discuss what is entailed in analysing the dynamics of misrecognition in world politics by introducing the contributions to the Special Issue.

I. Recognition, sovereignty, and the symbolic structures of the international system

Sovereignty as a symbolic structure

The social and symbolic structures underwriting international politics have been brought into focus for the discipline by constructivist and poststructuralist scholars. State actions, these two scholarships showed, are not merely mechanical reactions to an objective distribution of material capabilities that the first attempt to conceive the international system had held in its sights.[6] This system's structures, rather, shape state behaviour from within; they are internalised via their

[4]The category of the negative is explained and developed in Charlotte Epstein's contribution to this volume: Charlotte Epstein, 'The productive force of the negative and the desire for recognition: Lessons from Hegel and Lacan', *Review of International Studies*, 44:5 (2018), this Special Issue.

[5]See Charlotte Epstein, 'Theorizing agency in Hobbes's wake: the rational actor, the self, or the speaking subject?', *International Organization*, 67:2 (2013), pp. 287–316; Ole Jacob Sending, 'Agency, order, and heteronomy', *European Review of International Studies*, 3 (2016), pp. 63–75.

[6]Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979).

identities, and thereby integrated into their decision-making processes.[7] This entails that they are, first, *social* structures. They are shot through with the same dynamics that play out at the intersubjective (or 'micro' level, in Alexander Wendt's language) and intra-subjective level (dynamics that take shape within the psyche). Second, they are *structures of meaning*. Social actors, as Wendt again put it: 'act towards objects, including other actors, on the basis of the meanings that the objects have for them'.[8] Furthermore, 'it is collective meanings that constitute the structures which organize our actions'.[9] Lastly, these actions are made sense of by this structure's rules.[10] They are therefore symbolic structures in the sense that they order. By the 'symbolic structures of international politics', then, we refer to the structures of meanings and interactions that regulate the international system.[11]

Sovereignty is the paradigmatic symbolic structure of the international system. We differentiate between the formal-legal definition of sovereignty, which includes territory, a population, and legal recognition, on the one hand, and sovereignty as agency, on the other.[12] The formal-legal set of rules are enabling; they unlock the ability to partake in international organisations and the range of symbolic capabilities associated with statehood.[13] They are also constraining, and to the same degree as material factors. As most separatist groups well know, and as the failed attempt to establish a so-called Islamic State has illustrated, acting like a state takes more than having a territory and a population, or deploying force. It requires prior recognition of one's status as a state by other states. Our purpose in this Special Issue is to pair this basic insight into the constitution of the international system with a focus on the dynamics of misrecognition that are at work in the relations between states. Doing so reveals that misrecognition is not so much about the failure to be recognised as a sovereign state and admitted to the United Nations, but about the always frustrated efforts to be recognised by others as having a sovereign agency, as we set out below.

The two perspectives on IR's symbolic structures

Sovereignty has been apprehended as a social construct by both constructivist and post-structuralists. In this section we analyse the differences in the ways in which these two approaches apprehend sovereignty as intersubjectively constituted, as a social fact, and show why the poststructuralist perspective better renders the symbolic nature of the intersubjective, dynamic, and constitutive structure that Hegel first laid bare. These differences hinge, first, on

[7]Peter Katzenstein (ed.), *Cultures of National Security: Norms and Identity in the World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). For a discussion of recognition and identity, see Iver B. Neumann, *Uses of the Other* (Minneapolis, MI: Minnesota University Press, 1999).

[8]Alexander Wendt, 'Anarchy is what states make of it: the social construction of power politics', *International Organization*, 46:2 (1992), p. 396.

[9]Ibid, p. 397.

[10]Friederich Kratochwil, *Norms, Rules and Decisions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Nicholas G. Onuf, *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1989).

[11]Symbolic structure is thus distinct from social structure, in that the latter is typically meant to designate relations between groups (classes, etc). Our usage is closer to that used by Bartelson when he discusses sovereignty as a 'symbolic form', understood as 'structures used to organize what otherwise would be a disorderly experience into intelligible wholes. These structures can be understood as modes of objectivation that allow us to combine elements of experience according to generic principles open to endless modification, while existing independently of their end results.' See Jens Bartelson, *Sovereignty as Symbolic Form* (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 14.

[12]For a similar distinction between sovereignty as agency and sovereignty as statehood, see Chowdhury and Duvall, 'Sovereignty and sovereign power'.

[13]On the role of formal-legal sovereignty, see also Minda Holm and Ole Jacob Sending, 'States before relations: On misrecognition and the bifurcated regime of sovereignty', *Review of International Studies*, 44:5 (2018), this Special Issue.

the degree of stability that either ascribes to these structures, and whether, second, they are pinned onto an extra- or a pre-symbolic dimension.

How stable is sovereignty in these different conceptions? For Wendt, they are necessarily stable insofar they are institutions.[14] An institution, for Wendt, 'is a relatively stable set or "structure" of identities and interests'.[15] They are enduring 'objective social facts' that have sedimented over time, reinforcing certain behaviours and discouraging others.[16] Sovereignty is typically an institution 'and so it exists only in virtue of certain intersubjective understandings and expectations'.[17] The stability of institutions – the fact that they last, that they continue to regulate interactions – is in turn what makes them social structures. This stability, moreover, is what accounts for the fact that 'worlds of power politics', while they socially constructed, are not necessarily malleable.[18]

For poststructuralists, by contrast, this requirement of stability is an unnecessary add-on, dictated less by the structure's workings than by constructivism's strategic concern to occupy the discipline's 'via media'.[19] Constructivism's search for stability has, first, distracted from unravelling in full the implications of considering the symbolic dimension of these structures. It is as though constructivism wanted to embrace their social dimension, while refusing to take on the symbolic dimension that, for poststructuralists is its necessary corollary, in a properly intersubjective ontology, one that runs 'all the way down'.[20] Constructivists want to have their social theoretical cake and to eat it.

Apprehending the symbolic nature of these structures requires instead considering the ways in which meanings, or 'symbolic forms', are stabil*ised*.[21] Poststructuralists have thus decisively shifted the analysis of sovereignty, from understanding it as a stable 'social basis for the individuality and security of states',[22] in Wendt's words, to apprehending instead, as Cynthia Weber put it, 'how is the meaning of sovereignty fixed or stabilized historically'.[23] Far from being 'the fundamental point of reference in international relations', the 'ground' that both states and IR scholars take it to be, sovereignty, she shows, is a floating signifier whose meaning is temporarily settled by the actions performed in its name, such as interventions in another state's territory.[24] Hence rather than presume *a priori* the stability of symbolic structures, their *stabilisation* is instead moved to the centre of poststructuralist analyses, as shown in the works of Jens Bartelson, for example.[25]

The stability requirement, second, is tightly bound up, in constructivist theorising, with the need to pin these social structures onto a reality 'out there'.[26] Having begun to unmoor them from the material structures that the first generation of systemic theorising in IR was rooted in, these constructivists remain loath to embrace 'the primacy of discourse'.[27] They set out instead to search for alternative foundations or 'essences', beyond discourse, with which to re-moor

[14]Wendt, 'Anarchy is what states make of it', p. 412.

[15]Ibid, p. 399.

[16]Ibid, p. 411.

[17]Ibid, p. 412.

[18]Ibid, p. 411.

[19]Ibid.

[20]See Charlotte Epstein, 'Who speaks? Discourse, the subject and the study of identity in international politics', *European Journal of International Relations*, 17:2 (2010), pp. 327–50; and Epstein, 'Theorizing agency in Hobbes's wake'.

[21]Bartelson, *Sovereignty as a Symbolic Form*.

[22]Wendt, 'Anarchy is what states make of it', p. 412.

[23]Weber, *Simulating Sovereignty*, p. 3.

[24]Ibid, p. 1.

[25]Jens Bartelson, *A Genealogy of Sovereignty*, Vol. 39 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Bartelson, *Sovereignty as a Symbolic Form*.

[26]For a critique of Wendt´s *Social Theory* along these lines, see Roxanne Lynn Doty, 'Desire all the way down', *Review of International Studies*, 26:1 (2000), pp. 137–9.

[27]Bartelson, *A Genealogy of Sovereignty*, p. 69.

their analyses of social symbolic structures. This accounts for the first social theory of international politic's turn to a so-called scientific realism, for the promise of an unmediated access 'to reality out there' that it seems to hold.[28] For poststructuralists, this attempt to reconcile a social theoretical analysis of international politics with material structures is simply inconsistent.

Poststructuralists have sought to show the extent to which international institutions like sovereignty have no 'stable meaning and reference' beyond the different sets of practices that reproduce them[29] and that the effort to identify stable 'things' or foundations from which to theorise world politics creates a range of unintended problems.[30] While this critique is warranted, however, it also comes at a price. It reduces the significance of sovereignty as a mainstay of world politics, making it into a contingent entity produced by forces outside of it.

Revisiting the poststructuralist critique of sovereignty

The poststructuralist critique of sovereignty affords us our starting point for appraising the dynamics of misrecognition in international politics. Only we make a series of adjustments. The first is that we actually return to sovereignty. The work to unsettle sovereignty from its illusionary stable moorings marked a key moment in the broader emergence of a critical International Relations in the late 1980s and early 1990s.[31] 'Deconstructing sovereignty' was necessary insofar as it underpins the 'knowledgeable practices – interpretive attitudes and practical dispositions … that discipline interpretation and conduct …, constitute "modern subjects", effect the self-evident truths of the modern experience, and enable and dispose these subjects to the further replication and circulation of these practices themselves.'[32] The discipline's very *raison d'être* was in the balance in this undertaking; the possibility of IR establishing itself as a critical undertaking and of breaking its longstanding complicity in reproducing the international system's power relations, along with the fictions of stability underwriting them, to which constructivist analyses of sovereignty only further contributed. The poststructuralist critique of sovereignty is situated at the place where the epistemological meets the political.

However, there is a sense in which, having called sovereignty's bluff, the enterprise had also run its course. The emperor has no clothes and sovereignty, no essence, beyond the discursive practices that perform and reproduce it. But then, what? This epistemological tack has led into an impasse of sorts; to proclaiming both 'the end of sovereignty' and the impossibility of moving beyond it.[33] As a result, sovereignty has somewhat fallen to the wayside, hurried along in its theoretical demise by the proclamations that we have entered a 'post-sovereign' era.[34] What remains unaccounted for is the persisting desire for sovereignty, both among postcolonial states, who are keenly attached to their sometimes painfully acquired sovereignties, but also among more established states; and indeed as expressed in the waves of populism that have rippled

[28]See Wendt, *Social Theory*. For an extensive critique, see Bartelson, *A Genealogy of Sovereignty*, pp. 44–52; Epstein, 'Who speaks?'; Epstein, 'Theorizing agency in Hobbes's wake'.

[29]Bartelson, *A Genealogy of Sovereignty*, p. 53.

[30]Poststructuralists have, for example, drawn on the concept of desire and the Lacanian concept of fantasy. See Doty, 'Desire all the way down', p. 137. Similarly, Badredine Arfi has introduced Lacan's concept of fantasy to account for Wendt's undertaking. See Badredine Arfi, 'Fantasy in the discourse of social theory of international politics', *Cooperation and Conflict*, 45:4 (2010), pp. 428–48. This concept is at the heart of Epstein's contribution, where she uses it to analyse how an ideal grips into the actor's agency. Epstein, 'The productive force of the negative and the desire for recognition'.

[31]Richard K. Ashley, 'The poverty of neorealism', *International Organization*, 38:2 (1984), p. 269; Rob B. J. Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[32]Bartelson, *A Genealogy of Sovereignty*, p. 19; Richard K. Ashley, 'Living on the borderlines: Man, post-structuralism and war', in James Der Derian and Michael J. Shapiro (eds), *International/Intertextual Relations: Postmodern Readings of World Politics* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1989), pp. 260–1.

[33]Bartelson, *A Genealogy of Sovereignty*, pp. 246–48. See also Walker, *Inside/Outside*.

[34]Rebecca Adler-Nissen, 'Sovereignty', in Rebecca Adler-Nissen (ed.), *Bourdieu in International Relations: Rethinking Key Concepts in IR* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 181.

through both old and new states in the international system. Focusing on misrecognition allows us to account for this paradox by illuminating how sovereignty, as that which the international system's symbolic structure is founded on, is bound up with and nurtures an ideal of agency that is constantly frustrated by the actions state undertake in some of the ways that we will show.

Sovereignty: From an illusion to an agency-structuring ideal

The poststructuralist analysis has thus uncovered the layers of illusions folded into sovereignty. There is, first, the illusory stable structures undergirding the social world, that are always ultimately pinned onto sovereignty. Second, there is the perfectly rounded, complete, 'sovereign identity' projected onto and performed by the state.[35] This illusion is rooted, third, in another that runs deeper still, that of the sovereignty of the 'knowing subject'.[36] Looming large on the horizon of sovereignty, then, is the mythical 'sovereign individual … that master of free will', the foundational illusion that Nietzsche first excavated from the tales that modernity tells itself.[37] These illusions of sovereignty (or indeed sovereign illusions) thus operate at all of IR's levels of analysis, from the state to the individual.

This leads us to our second modification. Rather than considering sovereignty as states' (or the discipline's) enduring *ignis fatuus* (its fool's fire), we apprehend it instead as an *ideal* that structures the specific form of agency at play in international politics. We explore what this ideal *does for* states, and therefore how it accounts for state behaviour. This form of agency is what we term 'sovereign agency'. It is an idealised ability to act unimpeded that is projected onto the state qua the highest form of political authority. While states are most obviously associated with it, as the political entity set closest to attaining it, this ideal structures actions at the individual level as well. We thus retain the poststructuralist insight that the ideal operates at all levels of analysis. We will further expand on this notion of sovereign agency below by turning to recognition theory, but, before we do so, we consider the third amendment, which harks to the notion of agency.

From identity to agency

Our third modification is that we shift the focus from the nexus of sovereignty and state *identity*, to apprehending instead how it constellates with their a*gency*. Identity has been a crucial focal point for constitutive theorising in IR, across constructivism and poststructuralism. It has been key to breaking away from the narrowly causal theorising that had previously imposed as the only valid standard of scholarly research in IR. 'Identity' afforded the conceptual counterpoint to rationalist approaches' narrow focus upon 'interests' and their maximisation with which international actors' behaviour was studied. Identity, then, was considered the product of social or symbolic structures, as when Wendt writes that 'the terms of individuality refer to those properties of an agent's constitution that are intrinsically dependent on culture, on the generalized Other … . Hegemons and priests only exist as such when they are culturally recognized.'[38] Recognition is thus, for Wendt, 'a key link in the chain by which culture constitutes agents, since unless actors appropriate culture as their own, it cannot get into their heads and move them'.[39]

[35]Cynthia Weber, *Simulating Sovereignty*, p. 5. See also Constance Duncombe, 'Representation, recognition and foreign policy in the Iran–US relationship', *European Journal of International Relations*, 21:1 (2015), pp. 1–24; Rebecca Adler-Nissen and Alexei Tsinovoi, 'International misrecognition: the politics of humour and national identity in Israel's public diplomacy', *European Journal of International Relations*, Online First (January 2018), pp. 1–27, available at: doi.org/10.1177/1354066117745365.

[36]Bartelson, *Genealogy of Sovereignty*.

[37]Friedrich W. Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Carole Dieth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 36–7.

[38]Wendt, *Social Theory*, p. 182.

[39]Ibid, emphasis added.

The idea that actors are socially constituted through recognition in this way is at the heart of norms-focused constructivist research, in which norms figure as an operationalisation of the social and constitute identity, which in turn explains or accounts for action.[40] This view of the link between the social or culture, on the one hand, and actors' identity, on the other, bears a striking similarity to Talcott Parsons's theoretical effort to solve the problem of order by constructing, via Freud and Durkheim, an account of society as a set of normative structures that actors internalise and make part of their personality or identity, which in turn explain their action-orientations.[41] Having established this link, with identity constituted by social structures through recognition, it was a short step to defining a key drama of international politics around the degree to which specific norms were fully, partly, or not at all internalised.[42]

Our conceptualisation is different.[43] We explore how the very notions of individuality, subjectivity, and thus both the particular identity *and* the form of agency it sets into play, are 'an *achievement*, a result of a complex inter-subjective dynamic'.[44] Building on Hegel, we show how social actors never achieve the type of recognition that they seek. To borrow Markell's formulation 'each [actor] seeks to achieve a kind of masterful agency through recognition, yoking their acts to their own identities'.[45] But this sovereign agency, dependent as it is on recognition from others for the identity that they seek to act out, is not achieved. And this is not only because agency precedes identity – it is performed – but also because the identity that is being performed is founded in misrecognition.

In turning to agency in this way, then, we apprehend it not as a pregiven capacity or attribute of social actors; something that pre-exists the social and can be marshalled to understand the micro-foundations of international order.[46] Agency is instead that which needs to be accounted for, as part of the broader project of apprehending how the social is constituted in the first place. With Hegel we apprehend agency instead as something that *constantly needs to be acquired* by the social actor, and whose acquisition or accrual turns on their being recognised.

This focus on agency also marks where we differ from the most recent IR scholarship on recognition.[47] This is also what sets our focus apart from Rebecca Adler-Nissen and Alexei

[40]Katzenstein (ed.), *The Culture of National Security*; Michael Zürn and Jeffrey T. Checkel, 'Getting socialized to build bridges: Constructivism and rationalism, Europe and the nation-state', *International Organization*, 59:4 (2005), pp. 1045–79; Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, 'International norm dynamics and political change', *International Organization*, 52:4 (1998), pp. 887–917.

[41]The point is well made by Anthony Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure, and Contradiction in Social Analysis* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 1979), p. 102.

[42]James Fearon and Alexander Wendt, 'Rationalism v. constructivism: a skeptical view', in Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse, and Beth A. Simmons (eds), *Handbook of International Relations* (London: SAGE Publications, 2002), pp. 52–3. For a discussion, see Sending, 'Agency, order, and heteronomy'.

[43]Others have recently deployed a similar critique of the conceptualisation of how the 'social' or 'culture' is treated as a constituting and causal factor in international politics, focused on the conceptualisation of 'culture' as a bounded, homogenous entity that acts on actors in specific ways. See Christian Reus-Smit, 'Cultural diversity and international order', *International Organization*, 71:4 (2017), pp. 851–85.

[44]Robert Pippin, 'Recognition and reconciliation: Actualized agency in Hegel's Jena phenomenology', in Bert Van den Brink and David Owen (eds), *Recognition and Power: Axel Honneth and the Tradition of Critical Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 66–7; A similar sensitivity to agency as an achievement is found in Richard K. Ashley, 'The poverty of neorealism', *International Organization*, 38:2 (1984), pp. 225–86. See especially p. 260. On this, see Sending, 'Agency, order, heteronomy', pp. 6–7.

[45]Patchen Markell, 'Tragic recognition: Action and identity in Antigone and Aristotle', *Political Theory*, 31:1 (2003), p. 21.

[46]See David Dessler, 'What's at stake in the agent-structure debate?', *International Organization*, 43:3 (1989), pp. 441–73; Alexander Wendt, 'The agent-structure problem in International Relations theory', *International Organization*, 41:3 (1987), pp. 335–70; Wendt, 'Anarchy is what states make of it'. For a recent and useful overview, see Benjamin Braun, Sebastian Schindler, and Tobias Wille, 'Rethinking agency in International Relations: Performativity, performances and actor-networks', *Journal of International Relations and Development*, online (April 2018), pp. 1–21, available at: doi.org/10.1057/s41268-018-0147-z.

[47]Thomas Lindemann, *Causes of War: The Struggle for Recognition* (Colchester: ECPR Press 2011); Thomas Lindemann and Erik Ringmar (eds), *The International Politics of Recognition* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2012); Mikulas Fabry,

Tsinovoi's argument that misrecognition is linked to identity and identification in the 'international mirror'.[48] Our conceptualisation differs because we theorise misrecognition as integral to the desire for a particular kind of agency that is defined by the international system's symbolic structure.[49] It also differs from the rich literature on misrecognition in sociology, in the works of Marcel Mauss and Pierre Bourdieu in particular, as we build on their insights but focus less on misrecognition as a key ingredient of social mechanisms – as described in the logic of gift-exchange, for example – and more on its implications for our understanding of the constitution of actors and their quest for (sovereign) agency.[50] We thus move from considering how recognition plays into how states construct, reconstruct, and project a particular identity, to trying to circumscribe the specific form of agency that underwrites the frustrated and misrecognised attempts to construct unity and coherence as a sovereign agent. In focusing on agency in this way, we also add a new component to the recent efforts to 'theorise agency' in international relations.[51] In our conceptualisation, given our focus on the symbolic structure organised around the ideal of sovereignty, the question is how agency is performed through structures, not the degrees to which agency is shaped, or not, by structure.

Sovereign agency

Hegel's dialectic of the master and servant draw out the extent to which, for him, agency, like identity, is not a presocial given, but always precarious and in construction. That is, the actor does not mobilise an innate property or capacity in setting out to act in the social world. Rather, its capacity to act is achieved in the striving, and by being recognised as acting in *that* way by the other social actors – say, as a state, that does things that only states can do. This entails that the aim of this striving, of setting out to act in the world, is always dual. The actor wants to achieve a set of outcomes, of course. This explains why a particular course of action is undertaken, rather than others. But this first set of aims is always over-layered by another, which is built into in the logic, or structure, of the striving itself. Acting always entails a risk, not just that the actions will be unsuccessful in a practical sense, but that they will not accrue the anticipated recognition that they require to be fully successful. Conversely it also contains a promise, namely, of the very accrual of the capacity to act.

To put the point in different way: if the striving, the tending towards (a particular set of practical outcomes) is what accrues the capacity to achieve these goals, then it promises not only to realise these goals, but to increase the actor's capacity to act itself. This future-orientated promise is where the ideal lodges. The promise contains the incremental logic that finds its ultimate expression in what we have termed the 'ideal of sovereign agency'. Lining the striving, then, is a pining for a potentially limitless accrual of agency. More important still, even if the social actors know it to be unrealisable, to be 'just' an ideal, it continues to loom large on the horizon of any striving, which is always a dual leaning toward, both one's practical goal and this

Recognizing States: International Society and the Establishment of New States (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Hans Agné et al., 'Symposium: the international politics of recognition', *International Theory*, 5:1 (2013), pp. 94–176; Lisa Strömbom, 'Thick recognition: Advancing theory on identity change intractable conflicts', *European Journal of International Relations*, 20:1 (2014), pp. 168–91; Duncombe, 'Representation, recognition and foreign policy'.

[48]Adler-Nissen and Tsinovoi, 'International misrecognition', p. 3.

[49]Our emphasis on the systemic aspect of misrecognition – as expressed in the international system's symbolic structure, is discussed in some detail in Section III, below.

[50]See, for example, Pierre Bourdieu, *Pascalian Mediations* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000). For a good discussion of Bourdieu's social theory and the concept of misrecognition, see George Steinmetz, 'Bourdieu's disavowal of Lacan: Psychoanalytic theory and the concepts of "habitus" and "symbolic capital"', *Constellations*, 13:4 (2006), pp. 445–64. For a Bourdieu-inspired application that stresses misrecognition, see Ole Jacob Sending, *The Politics of Expertise: Competing for Authority in Global Governance* (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 2015).

[51]See Epstein, 'Theorizing agency in Hobbes's wake', pp. 287–316; Braun, Schindler, and Wille, 'Rethinking agency in International Relations', pp. 1–21.

promise. We are now in a position to return to the work that the ideal of sovereign agency achieves. To apprehend it we look, first, to recognition theory itself, and specifically to the work of Patchen Markell.[52] Second, we build on recent efforts to theorise desire in IR.

Markell has ushered in the concept of sovereignty into recognition theory, thereby etching the contours of a bridge to our discipline. This bridge is what we seek to firm up and travel down, and from Markell we borrow the original notion of a 'sovereign agency'. Like us, Markel shifts recognition theory's focus from identity to agency; from considering the demands formulated in the politics of recognition as identity claims, to considering them as claims to be able to act in the polity, hence to occupy one's rightful place within it. 'The pursuit of recognition expresses an aspiration to sovereignty', writes Markell.[53] Unlike us, because he focuses on the domestic politics of recognition, Markell does not begin from sovereignty. He starts instead from agency, and encounters sovereignty as the ideal that looms large on the horizon of all political action. 'The idea of state sovereignty is … one manifestation of a broader idea of sovereign agency, which can be attributed as easily to persons as to institutions', he writes.[54] The state is, for Markell, one but not the only expression of a broader 'desire for sovereignty' that undergirds human agency at large and at different levels of analysis.[55] Indeed, his purpose is to 'cultivate an appreciation of the unexpectedly wide range of ways in which that desire can find expression'.[56] Hence we carry some of Markell's insights into the discipline concerned with sovereignty by inverting his starting point.

Markell's identification of a desire for sovereignty as a powerful, insistent driver of human agency in political theory converges with the recent work in IR theory to reconceptualise political agency in terms of desire. As Charlotte Epstein has shown, the Lacanian theorisation of desire, in particular, affords the conceptual counterpoint, with regards to agency, to the temporarily fixed symbolic structures that poststructuralism has foregrounded.[57] It draws out that, like these structures, human agency is discursively constituted all the way down. It is structured by signifiers; hence by ideals – like 'sovereignty'. This is the work we expand upon here by returning to Hegel's dialectic of the master and servant. This is also where we part ways with Markell who, though begins to table the *problématique* of desire, looks instead to Hannah Arendt to apprehend human agency.

Desire and the work of the negative in IR

That the motor of world politics is a neverending, always recommencing, and ultimately unsatisfiable desire is hardly new in the discipline's history. Classical realists captured something of this incremental logic at work in world politics with their focus on a desire for power that is not satisfied by simply accruing more power. Otherwise, survival would not be the ongoing state pursuit and the shaper of their foreign policy.[58] If it could be secured once and for all, and guaranteed by sovereignty, then world politics would come to a standstill, or at least look very different. Classical realism thus already features, in its 'interests defined as power', this sense of an inherent gap between what the states want, security, and what they obtain, survival, which is only ever a precarious state of affairs *sans* guarantee, sovereignty notwithstanding.[59] Only, already implicitly at work in this 'tragic' mode of thinking that characterises classical realism is the category that Hegel first tabled for modern thought, the negative. Exploring the work of the

[52]Markell, *Bound by Recognition.*
[53]Ibid, p. 10.
[54]Ibid, p. 11.
[55]Ibid, p. 12.
[56]Ibid, p. 12.
[57]Epstein, 'Theorizing agency in Hobbes's wake'.
[58]Hans J. Morgenthau, *A New Foreign Policy for the United States* (New York, NY: Preager, 1969). See also E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis: 1919–1939* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1939).
[59]Morgenthau, *A New Foreign Policy.*

negative in international politics is one of our central purposes in returning to Hegel in this Special Issue. The negative is also what is at work in any promise or ideal, whose pull operates as something that is not (yet) there.

This chasm between *what the social actors want* and *what they obtain* is what Hegel theorised by way of his dialectic of the master and servant. The gap inheres in the very structure of the human desire, understood, not as natural need or a biological impulse, both of which are satisfiable. Desire, rather, is social; it is shaped by and deployed within specific symbolic structures. It is fundamentally meaningful, signifying and constituted by signifiers. But precisely because it is not biologically determined, it also fundamentally bound up with the questions of liberty, choice, and responsibility. This is why it is constitutive of political agency. Lastly, it is always dual: it is a desire *for* something, that also doubles up as *a desire to be recognised* in one's capacity as a rightfully entitled to be desiring that thing, and within the symbolic structure that sets the terms of this recognition drama.

One caveat is in order. We are not treating on the same level those international actors who do successfully become states, and those who do not.[60] We are, however, claiming that driving them both is a desire for a sovereign agency. What Hegel shows is that the impossibility of actually obtaining recognition is built into the very desire for it, and that it is an ongoing driver of human agency. International actors, then, whether established or aspiring states, desire recognition, yet *misrecognition* is what they obtain. To further explore this social dynamic, we now turn to the original model with which Hegel theorised it.

II. Hegel on misrecognition

Misrecognising Hegel?

Few theorists come with as heavy a baggage as the inventor of the modern dialectic; hence a few clarifications and caveats are necessary to preface our return to Hegel. It differs from three broad ways in which he has been used in the study of world politics. The first is the Marxian lineage.[61] The dialectic we mobilise is Hegel's, rather than Marx's interpretation of it. Nor, second, do we track down the untroubled path of liberal peace theories.[62] At issue in this scholarship is a problematic, teleological view of history as 'the rational and necessary evolution of the world spirit', that Hegel developed towards the end of his life and that underwrites these Hegelian theories.[63] This is what we call the world history of Hegel, of his *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* and his *Philosophy of Right* to a lesser extent, which we explicitly hold off-limits for our enterprise. This entails, third, that we also disassociate ourselves from the more diffuse yet broad influence that Hegel's vision of history as linear and progressive has born in the liberal strands of our discipline, and for which his tripartite scheme of thesis, anti-thesis, and synthesis is thought to have laid the bases (despite the fact that Hegel himself never actually used this formula).[64] There is no shortage of historical analyses that emphasise the uninterrupted steamroll of progress, whether in the norms constructivism scholarship or in the many scripts that foretell the end of history and the advent of a consensual international system, including those that underwrite theories of development, modernisation, and democratisation. This vision of history flushes out the agonistic dimensions that Hegel's dialectic of the master and servant was designed

[60]Indeed, our point here is that while our focus is on states, and on sovereign agency, the logic we identify is one that we also think hold for other actors in the international system, whose operations are also marked by a desire for sovereign agency.

[61]Andrew Linklater, *Critical Theory and World Politics: Citizenship, Sovereignty and Humanity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2007).

[62]Francis Fukuyama, 'The end of history?', *The National Interest*, 16 (1989), pp. 3–18.

[63]Georg W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 29.

[64]See Duncan Forbes, 'Introduction', in Georg W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. x.

to underscore in the first place. 'Such approaches' to draw on Hegel's own words[65] 'lack the seriousness, the suffering, the patience, and the labour of the negative'. The approach he puts forward instead, phenomenology, will 'surrender to the life of the object' it studies, letting itself and its readers become implicated in the adventures and misadventures that it traces.

For all this misplaced emphasis upon the third moment of the dialectics, the powerful insights yielded by Hegel's dialectics do not, in our reading, hinge upon it. They do not rest upon the tensions between the thesis and the anti-thesis being resolved into a synthesis. Quite to the contrary. As many Hegel scholars have conjectured, perhaps it is his own, excessive concern to bring the dialectic's ceaseless movement to rest that drove Hegel, towards the end of his life, to want to bring his extraordinary philosophical system to a new and unfortunate object, 'world history'. The history of Hegel's reception is a complex and charged one that we cannot undertake here.[66] What is significant for our purposes is the persistence with which Hegel scholars have underlined the extent to which this anxious quest for a synthesis has been overplayed in this reception; whether in Marx's adaptation of the dialectic, or indeed in Nietzsche's scathing rejection of it; even while Nietzsche's own thought exemplifies the work of the anti-thesis, or the negative, that Hegel circumscribed in the first place. In his introduction to his Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy*, Duncan Forbes underscores how end of history-type readings that approach history as a grand finale where all dialectic tensions ultimately resolve simply miss the key analytical drivers in Hegel's philosophy:

> It is clearly wrong to regard Hegel's philosophy as a variety of transcendental, reality-behind-appearance metaphysic, or optimistic pan-rationalism in the eighteenth-century mode … Views of this kind, commonly held, miss the whole point of Hegel's philosophy … Hegel's philosophy can be seen as an exhaustive working out, in ever-increasing fullness and complexity, of every possible variation, each growing out of its predecessor, on this theme of the unity of universal and particular. Any manifestation of the one contains and needs the other, which, if it is denied, will assert itself as alien …; and this is the negativity which is the principle of dialectical progression.[67]

Two features are important for our purposes. First, Hegel´s philosophy is concerned with identifying how historical 'forms' (such as religion or art) are yielded by the specific coming together of the universal and the particular. Consequently, particular objects and subjects belonging to these forms are relationally constituted. Hence they are also inherently unstable, dynamic, and interdependent. Second is the central role of the negative as a motor in how any relation unfolds. The upshot of this is that relations, understood constitutively, are inherently unstable, as rendered in the master–servant dialectic.

Although Hegel's thought has been mobilised to legitimise racialised and colonial enterprises,[68] the fruitfulness of his dialectic of the master and servant has also been mobilised within postcolonial thought, by Frantz Fanon among others, as several contributors to this volume underscore.[69] Second, a recent wave of Hegel scholarship has extensively underlined the crucial work that the anti-thesis or negative performs, as the engine of the dialectic.[70] As both of these

[65]Georg W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Terry Prinkard (2010), pp. 10, 32, available at: http://terry-pinkard.weebly.com/phenomenology-of-spirit-page.html

[66]But see Epstein's contribution in this Special Issue for some of it: 'The productive force of the negative and the desire for recognition'.

[67]Forbes, 'Introduction', p. x.

[68]See Babacar Camara, 'The falsity of Hegel's theses on Africa', *Journal of Black Studies*, 36:1 (2005), pp. 82–96.

[69]See discussion in Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

[70]See, for example, Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel and the Critique of Ideology* (Duke, NC: Duke University Press, 1993); Diana Coole, *Negativity and Politics: Dionysus and Dialectics from Kant to Poststructuralism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000); Benjamin Noys, *The Persistence of the Negative* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010); Rebecca Comay, *Mourning Sickness: Hegel and the French Revolution* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press,

scholarships illustrate, recovering Hegel beyond liberal thought turns on suspending the third moment, or synthesis, where the dialectical tension is resolved (‘*aufgehebt*’ is the German term that knows no exact equivalent in English) into a synthesis, in order to foreground instead the productive work of the negative.

The work of the negative is at the heart of our own return to Hegel to apprehend the dynamics of misrecognition in world politics. At the origins of this tradition was the series of lectures delivered by the Hegel scholar Alexandre Kojève at the École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris from 1933 to 1939, subsequently published in 1947 as his *Introduction to Reading Hegel*. The lectures, which were detailed readings of Hegel’s 1807 *Phenomenology of Spirit*, were attended by a dedicated audience comprised of key figures of the French postwar intellectual scene, which included, among many others, the IR theorist Raymond Aron, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Henri Corbin. Two especially important attendees for our purposes were George Bataille and Jacques Lacan, who, first, illustrated the pertinence of the Hegelian dialectic for gripping into the stuff that the social world is made of, and carried over to other fields, literature and political economy, in Bataille’s case, and the applied field of psychoanalysis for Lacan. Second, they foregrounded the negative, contained in the second moment of the dialectic (the anti-thesis) as constituting the central category of Hegel’s dialectic. By holding off, more even than Kojève did, the urge to resolve the anti-thesis and thus the steamroll of progress, they fully rendered the productiveness of the negative for social thought, thus paving the way for continuing to mine it for political and social analyses.

The foundations for Hegel’s discussion of misrecognition lie in his mature development of his master–servant dialectic in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, published in 1807. Hence we are not focusing on his earlier elaborations of the dialectic, notably in his so-called Jena lectures, which provided the starting point for an influential strand of recognition theory developed by Axel Honneth.[71] To shift the focus from recognition to misrecognition, we shift the focus back to the Hegel of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and in particular on its fourth part, which holds the master–servant dialectic.

Back to Hegel’s Phenomenology: the dialect of master and servant

Hegel staged his dialectic as an imaginary confrontation between two protagonists. The two important features of Hegel’s set up are, first, that, although it has come to be known as ‘the master–servant’, the roles are in fact undetermined prior to the struggle itself. Which protagonist occupies what place is established by the confrontation itself. The crucial purchase of Hegel’s scheme, then, is that the protagonists’ positions are not given outside of the relationship; they are negotiated and constantly renegotiated *in action*, through practices. Hence for a now two-centuries-old tradition of social theory, which includes Marxism, it has afforded an alternative to the liberal model that is both constitutive rather than causal, and that centrally foregrounds power relations.

Second, Hegel, in fact, originally conceived these two characters as two roles within the same consciousness. For the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is an account of the formation of the subject, or consciousness, at grips with the world and her experiences of it. In choosing existing social roles (a master and a servant), however, Hegel suggests that what takes place *within* a single conscience mirrors what takes place *between* social actors. In a social system, intersubjective dynamics and intrasubjective dynamics are coextensive and mutually reinforcing. Moreover, they account for the interdependence of the actors ‘all the way down’.[72] This parallel between the inter- and

2014); Andrew W. Hass, *Hegel and The Art of Negation: Negativity, Creativity and Contemporary Thought* (London: I. B. Taurus, 2014); Robyn Marosco, *The Highway of Despair: Critical Theory After Hegel* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2015).

[71]Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Grammar of Social Conflicts* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995).

[72]Epstein, ‘Theorizing agency in Hobbes’s wake’.

intrasubjective undergirds all social systems; that is, to restate an important point, any system whose actors are not atomistic individuals, but rather their interests and understandings are shaped by the system in which they interact with one another. Ever since the turn to the social in IR in the late 1980s, this parallel has provided ample ammunition for extensive critiques of the discipline's 'individualist' foundations.[73]

Recognition is what is at stake in the confrontation between the two protagonists. And the stakes are high, since recognition by another subject is necessary to become a subject in the first place; that is, to exist as a social actor *at all*. The master–servant dialectic is thus a crucial stage in the formation of the subject. It is the moment where consciousness (*Bewüßtein*) becomes a *self*-consciousness (*Selbstbewüßtein*). Yet this self-consciousness requires another consciousness to emerge at all. To put it differently, the self needs the other to become itself. Here is where desire enters the picture. The desire for recognition is the desire to be recognised by this other in order to be able to become oneself in the first place. The dialectic constantly loops back onto itself. 'Self-consciousness', writes Hegel,[74] 'exists *in* and *for itself* because and by way of its existing in and for itself for an other; that is, '*it exists only as recognized*'. The desire for recognition implicates the other, not tangentially but fundamentally, at the core of the crafting of the self. This, we argue, is the model on which to understand the desire for sovereignty in international politics.

How does one protagonist become 'the master' in Hegel's constitutive model? The party that prevails in the confrontation is the one that can show it is willing to stop at nothing to win the fight, not even at its own life. The master becomes a master by proving its contempt for its own mortality in combat. What the slave is enslaved to, first and foremost, is its spontaneous attachment to life. It would rather give up its freedom and submit to serving a master than die. For Hegel, the freedom exhibited by the master is a crucial expression of a particular kind of supranatural desire that only humans have. In proving its ability to negate its own survival instincts for the sake of winning the fight, the master evidences its ability to ignore its natural determinations and, centrally, its fear of death.

To the contrary, such is the master's desire for recognition that it would rather die than live without it – since living without it, the master understands, is to live not only without freedom, but without 'the satisfactions of self-consciousness'.[75] Simply put, the master, who is the first figure of self-consciousness, needs recognition, since it was willing to risk its life for it. And yet it is bound never to obtain it, or at least not the recognition it really wants. The recogniser, in this scenario, is not an equal, but a person it has submitted, and thus someone who lacks what it takes to properly grant recognition, namely, freedom. The key purchase, then, of Hegel having set up this exchange as an unequal relation – between master and servant – is to underscore that the desire for recognition is designed to flounder. Desire is a 'lack or gap' at the heart of self-consciousness.[76] It is in this way that recognition entails misrecognition, both in the sense that the recognition sought is not gained, and in the sense that whatever recognition is awarded entails some element of misrecognition of what the self seeks.

The dialectic does not stop there, however. While the master progressively loses its sense of self as a result of being served, the servant progressively gains in assurance through its labour, as it contends with the natural environment in order to collect the materials necessary to satisfy the master's needs. This labour, for Hegel, is profoundly formative: as the servant transforms natural materials into finished products for the benefit of the master, it begins to transform itself. 'He

[73]Friedrich Kratochwil and John Gerard Ruggie, 'International organization: a state of the art on an art of the state', *International Organization*, 40:4 (1986), pp. 753–75; Wendt, 'Anarchy is what states make of it'; Wendt, *Social Theory*. See also Epstein, 'Who speaks?'.

[74]Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, p. 178, emphasis added.

[75]Robert Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

[76]Robert Pippin, 'On Hegel's claim that self-consciousness is "desire itself" ("Begierde Überhaupt")', in Heikki Ikaheimo and Arto Laitinen (eds), *Recognition and Social Ontology* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), p. 66.

[the master] leaves the aspect of its self-sufficiency in the care of the servant …'. The servant, whose self was disintegrated by its fear of death (to the point of giving itself up to the master) begins to put itself back together. Through its labour the servant – another figure of the same consciousness – begins to learn to hold its natural desires in check. It learns to overcome its dependency on nature that it could not previously (since it gave in to the fear of death). In the process, it creates for itself a new kind of agency, that of labour. 'In his service [the servant] sublates all the individual moments in his attachments to natural existence, and he works off his natural existence … In contrast, work is desire held in check, it is vanishing, staved off, that is, work cultivates and educates.'[77]

In this way, Hegel reveals that the social activity of labour holds a rudimentary form of recognition. This stage of the dialectic opens up the relation between the master and servant to the material world, to the natural environment that surrounds them and from where the servant harvests the materials it needs to cater to the master's needs. Direct interpersonal recognition is impossible, and personal relations are always mediated by each person's own interactions with their environment. Thus, mediation is always necessary, whether it be through the objects produced by labour, through gifts, or, eventually, through the state.

III. Variations in misrecognition dynamics: Introducing the contributions

We have deployed our argument in its abstracted form in order to circumscribe the social logics brought into play when actors respond to frustrated recognition desires in their quest for absolute sovereignty. While we are making an ontic claim about the pervasiveness of the ideal of sovereign agency, we are conscious of the historical variation and the different manifestations that misrecognition may take depending on institutional conditions. An international system characterised by empire and suzerainty will look different from one defined by sovereignty, for example.[78] Moreover, some actors clearly have access to more (material and symbolic) resources than others, which means that the specific manifestation of misrecognition, and of the desire for sovereign agency, may differ between states, and between systems of states. For example, actors with fewer resources may accept and interiorise misrecognition, a phenomenon that Bourdieu has identified as 'symbolic violence'.[79] These actors may adopt distinct strategies for achieving sovereign agency by contributing to a hegemonic actor's project of political rule.[80] In actors with more resources, such as military capacity, the same desire for, and misrecognition of, sovereign agency may instead be expressed as anger.[81]

Thus, in this section we highlight the different ways in which misrecognition dynamics play out in a range of cases and topics explored by the contributions to this Special Issue. Three themes run through the contributions in this Special Issue, having to do, first, with the possibility of being a unified political actor; second, with the centrality of failure or lack, and hence of the negative, to social life, which calls into question core assumptions about the drivers of political action; and third, with the implications of treating sovereignty as the international system's

[77]Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, p. 171.

[78]See, for example, Barry Buzan, 'From international system to international society: Structural realism and regime theory meet the English School', *International Organization*, 47:3 (1993), pp. 327–52.

[79]Pierre Bourdieu, 'Social space and symbolic power', *Sociological Theory*, 7:1 (1989), pp. 14–25.

[80]Fanon has extensively documented these dynamics; see Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1967 [orig. pub. 1952]).

[81]Richard N. Lebow, *A Cultural Theory of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Michelle Murray, 'Identity, insecurity, and Great Power politics: the tragedy of German naval ambition before the First World War', *Security Studies*, 19:4 (2010), pp. 656–88; Michelle Murray, 'Recognition, disrespect and the struggle for Morocco: Rethinking Imperial Germany's security dilemma', in Lindemann and Ringmar (eds), *The International Politics of Recognition.*

symbolic structure, which in turn challenges theories that stress either its anarchical or its hierarchical features.

Unity and actorhood

A central theme to have emerged from our shift in focus from identity to agency is the particular kind of, necessarily frustrated, agency that is invested in establishing oneself in the political space as a unified actor; then in seeking to maintain, and to project before the others, this 'wholeness', this 'oneness', around a particular identity. We are not, of course, denying the importance of identity or broader cultural meanings for the understanding of political dynamics. Identity, subjectivity, and agency are profoundly implicated in one another; indeed, the latter in crafting the former two. Hence what we are suggesting is that because of the persistence of misrecognition – in the form of the ultimately unattainable recognition from others that is needed to secure such an identity – what we, in political analyses, conveniently call 'actors' are always, in fact, striving to be the unified actors they are not. They are always chasing after the image they craft for themselves and that serves to project this unity they do not have. As our contributors show, this is true of those actors we in IR designate as 'states' and of individuals as well. Julia Gallagher charts the formative period of Ghana after independence, showing how the quest for unity and the capacity to act was constituted through the forging of relations with international actors, thereby investing the state with a meaning based on a misrecognized sense of unity and autonomy.[82] Thomas Lindemann explores the effects of misrecognition at the substate level. Re-reading the Hegelian Marcel Mauss's writings on 'the gift', he argues that acts of giving are essential to the formation and maintenance of collective political agency and of a sense of belonging to a common political project.[83] Drawing on his first hand interviews of French jihadists, on the one hand, and members of peaceful and moderate Muslim groups, on the other, he captures the specific ways in which individuals who self-identify with political units or social groups that have little recognised agency feel slighted or non-recognised.

This theme of the actor's striving to hold oneself together is closely linked to another that we can call the specificity of political agency. Debates in IR have circulated around different logics of action for more than two decades, but all of these – consequences, appropriateness, habit, arguing, for example, arguably omitting from view what is distinct about *political* action. Our notion of political agency recalls Richard Ashley's, who portrayed it in terms of an 'unceasing struggle … to be empowered'.[84] Ashley's description captures, we think, what others also have emphasised in highlighting how the messiness of social and political should be the starting point for theorising about agency. As Epstein shows in her contribution to the Special Issue, misrecognition can form the basis for more general theorising about agency, but it is, we hold, particularly suited to capture the distinctiveness of political action, as the desire for sovereign agency is institutionalised in the symbolic structure of the system itself. Recall that Hegel's radical move was in part to 'offer an alternative to those "dogmatic" and "abstract" modes of philosophizing that treat truth as a bare result, cut off from the difficult path through reversal and contradiction by which it is achieved'.[85] Catarina Kinvall and Ted Svensson show how the Indian state is being rethought and reimagined through a combination of colonial practices and Hindu nationalist fantasies. At independence, imaginations of the Indian state were caught in the colonial legacy of empire, but they were also captured by the past truths of Hindu nationalism, thus creating a double bind of misrecognised imaginations.[86] The political subjectivity of India – *qua*

[82]Julia Gallagher, 'Misrecognition in the making of a state: Ghana's international relations under Kwame Nkrumah', *Review of International Studies*, 44:5 (2018), this Special Issue.

[83]Thomas Lindemann, 'Agency (mis)recognition in international violence: the case of French jihadism', *Review of International Studies*, 44:5 (2018), this Special Issue.

[84]Ashley, 'Poverty of neorealism', p. 260.

[85]Markell, *Bound by Recognition*, p. 93.

[86]Catarina Kinnvall and Ted Svensson, 'Misrecognition and the Indian state: the desire for sovereign agency', *Review of International Studies*, 44:5 (2018), this Special Issue.

a state – is thus defined in relation to two contradictory imaginaries, with far-reaching implications for how we should understand India's political agency. It is performed through colonial and pre-colonial imaginings that are both privileged and resisted. This theme is also explored by Minda Holm and Ole Jacob Sending as they discuss the similarities between the agency of leaders of fragile states and that of great powers.[87] These contributions open up new lines of thinking for how to understand political agency in terms of efforts to piece together and appear as a coherent actor with agency, one with the capacity to act on its environment and be recognised by relevant others.

Failure and the negative

It is our contention that theories that apprehend world politics as a social space have tended to implicitly assume that its actors have already recognised one another. In assuming such prior recognition, they miss, not only what it at stake in the process of recognition, but the effects that may be wrought by the actors having not been recognised in the ways that they want to be. In theories that rely on the concept of identity to account for interests, recognition is presumed in the possibility of having common definition of what is considered appropriate behaviour, or who constitutes the significant 'other' through which to secure a sense of self.[88] In others, recognition is assumed in the phenomenon to be explained. The concept of authority, for example, is defined by there being a prior recognition of a relationship of super- and subordination.[89] Moreover, recognition is that which determines differentiation between actors based on status-markers.[90] Ultimately what these approaches cannot explain is why these social actors continue to desire recognition if it has already happened. In shifting the focus to misrecognition we aim to open the constitutive effects of recognition dynamics to critical analysis, by considering the ways in which these are shot through with instability, and, ultimately, failure. It also serves to make room for this instability and for failure in international social theorising. More fundamentally still, it foregrounds the broader Hegelian category of the negative that has always played in the background of post-positivist IR, and remains crucial to cultivate explicitly in order to continue to move the discipline beyond its positivist confines. 'The productive force of the negative' is at the heart of Epstein's contribution. Tanjaa Aalberts draws out just how central the negative is to the very structure of international law.[91] Focusing on colonial-era treaty making practices, she captures the fundamental misrecognition that underwrites this legal order. She demonstrates how the doctrine of legal positivism produced its own denial, and a void at the heart of the Family of Nations it allegedly constituted/regulated, through treatymaking as its 'core business'. It did so because it depended on signatures of subjects that the law itself deemed ineligible for participation in that very legal order.

Sovereignty and the state system

Sovereignty, in our reading, is much more than an attribute of statehood. It is the international system's symbolic structure. It is a horizon that actors orient themselves towards,[92] and that colours the particular form of idealised agentic capability they pine for, which we have called 'sovereign agency'. It is, then, a 'generative grammar' that reveals itself through the effects that it generates, and that actors must draw upon to both act and to make sense of theirs and others'

[87]Holm and Sending, 'States before relations'.

[88]Katzenstein (ed.), *Cultures of National Security*. For a discussion of recognition and identity, see Neumann, *Uses of the Other*, pp. 223, 226.

[89]David Lake, 'Rightful rules: Authority, order, and the foundations of global governance', *International Studies Quarterly*, 54:3 (2010), pp. 587–613; Ole Jacob Sending, 'Recognition and liquid authority', *International Theory*, 9:2 (2017), pp. 311–28.

[90]Deborah Larson, T. V. Paul, and William Wohlforth, *Status in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

[91]Tanja Aalberts, 'Misrecognition in legal practice: the aporia of the Family of Nations', *Review of International Studies*, 44:5 (2018), this Special Issue.

[92]See also Raymond D. Duvall and Arjun Chowdhury, 'Practices of theory', in Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot (eds), *International Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 335–54.

actions in the international system.[93] The upshot of this is that we need to rethink how to conceptualise the logics of the international system, away from IR initial forms of systemic theorising. The models for these early theories were largely physical systems.[94] Turning to the quintessential thinker of social symbolic systems, Hegel, affords a crucial avenue for breaking open IR's systemic theorising to new ways of envisaging systemic logics. Specifically, it no longer requires bracketing the state, or 'second image' in order to bring the system, or 'third image' into view (nor indeed the 'first image').[95] Hence we also speak to the system's logic, but do so by reconceptualising its structure in terms of what was previously relegated to a 'second image' feature, sovereignty, conceiving it in terms of symbolic logics. Holm and Sending discuss what they call the bifurcated character of the symbolic structure of sovereignty, showing how a formal-legal concept of statehood as a permanent person with rights, created through a one-off recognition, operates in parallel with a sociopolitical register for recognition, which produces distinct forms of misrecognition.[96] Ayşe Zarakol follows a similar tack, but does so through historical analysis of how the idea of sovereign equality shaped twentieth-century international orders.[97] In particular, Zarakol draws out how the idea of sovereign equality – constitutive of ideas of states' political subjectivity – misrecognises the underlying structures that reproduces hierarchy.

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[93]Ole Wæver, 'Identity, integration and security: Solving the sovereignty puzzle in EU studies', *Journal of International Affairs*, 48:2 (1995), p. 389.

[94]In which we include economic systems; see Waltz, *Theory*.

[95]Ibid.

[96]Holm and Sending, 'States before relations'.

[97]Ayşe Zarakol, 'Sovereign equality as misrecognition', *Review of International Studies*, 44:5 (2018), this Special Issue.

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