
Introduction

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Framing the Issues

All too frequently in the contemporary world we find groups obsessed with asserting the “identity” or “sameness” of their members in order to affirm the contrast with what they perceive to threaten them as “different” or “other.” The perceived differences may belong to any number of familiar typologies, including race, religion, ethnicity, gender, class, sexual preference, or other status taken to be “fundamental” in some supposedly alarming sense. And of course some of the most violent boundary-drawing exercises occur where multiple attributes of perceived “difference” are thought to be simultaneously present, such as, for example, when a different religion, race, and ethnicity are all thought to characterize a specific “other” at once. Such particular manifestations of the politics of “group identity” are the frequently appalling stuff of daily news.

But not all construals of identity are motivated simply by the “political” desire to exclude some specific other. Prior to such potentially pathological forms of the construction of group identities there are a number of more fundamental and essential forms of identity to be achieved, in the absence of which we would be unable to construe ourselves as moral or political agents at all, indeed, in the absence of which we would be unable to construe ourselves as *selves*. These more fundamental forms include the constitution of self-conscious individual identity in relation to other individuals, the constitution of self-conscious individual identity in relation to some larger, all-embracing communal identity, such as that represented by the state, and the constitution of national identity in relation to other nations. (Each of

these aspects of identity constitution is treated by contributors to the present volume.)

Central to the challenge of constituting these various types of identities is the issue of how we negotiate the fact of *difference*. Obviously we cannot speak of identity without simultaneously speaking of difference, yet there exists a variety of ways to theorize the relation of identity to difference. Failure to grasp the implications of each of these distinct theories of identity and difference may ultimately lead to a failure of practice, or to an inadequate comprehension of practice. (1) Identity may be conceived as a practical matter of achieving *separation* from the different; (2) identity may be conceived in a purely formal way as a matter of identity of the object with itself (without logical connection to the other); (3) or, identity may be conceived as developing from, and essentially constituted through, the mutual recognition of samenesses and differences through relation to the other. In other words, difference may be thought to be logically involved in the constitution of identity. (This particular formulation is taken from Nuzzo's contribution.)

For example, the first of these theories of the nature of identity—that it is achieved through the mechanism of *separation* of the group from its other—may lead to the political demand for the simplest and crudest of solutions: driving the “other” away through violence. However, such a strategy of group (or national) autism, the construction of enclaves, will almost inevitably lead to the impoverishment of the very identity the protection of which is being sought (Nuzzo and Buchwalter). Still more pointedly, as one of the contributors here argues, the very act of drawing such a boundary is often a tacit confession that the asserted “identity” does not in fact exist; drawing the boundary and enforcing it is intended to bring the asserted identity into being (Nuzzo). Such an understanding of the constitution of identity is thus highly problematic.

A different sort of problem arises from the second theory of identity, as merely formal. The widespread assumption that this theory “must” be the only correct one at some fundamental level has long inhibited serious examination of the theoretical alternatives. This book is devoted, among other things, to encouraging just such an examination of alternative accounts of identity in relation to the abstract formal one (Yeomans, De Nys, and others).

The third theory of identity figures quite prominently in this book. It construes genuine identity as something constituted only through a process of mutual self-conscious recognition of one another as essential

to the construction of the identities that make us “the same,” where that sameness also necessarily involves difference. It is asserted that only such a mutually constituted identity could be something actual or concrete. Indeed, the theme of mutual recognition by one another of self-conscious selves is almost as central a focus of this book as the theme of identity and difference (Williams, Nuzzo, Buchwalter, and others).

These and other aspects of the problem of identity and difference are explored from multiple perspectives by the contributors here. It is a thesis implicit in several of the chapters that behind many of the manifestations of practical, political conflict over such issues of identity and difference, as well as failed attempts to theorize the nature of identity, lie some deeper philosophical confusions over the very concepts of identity and difference that tend to inhibit our ability to think through these challenges successfully.

A number of the contributors here find something crucial, potentially decisive, in Hegel’s account of identity and difference, and they attempt in various ways to show the fundamental importance of his approach for the resolution of certain of these difficulties. However, in much contemporary philosophical discussion there are two distinct barriers to the successful appropriation of Hegel’s contribution. The first of these is, in effect, a refusal to take Hegel’s approach seriously, to reject it out of hand as resting on a series of “obvious” mistakes, a view usually rooted in the assumption that only some version of the second theory of identity, mentioned earlier, the abstract, formal one, could be correct. This response has been characteristic of much analytic philosophy, at least until fairly recently. The second barrier has most often arisen in the context of continental philosophy, where one still finds widespread the conviction that Hegel’s own thinking of identity and difference privileges identity over difference to the ultimate exclusion of the reality of the other.

These two continuing barriers to the appropriation of Hegel’s thought on identity and difference are explicitly taken up in part 1 of this book in the hope that they can be set aside and will no longer stand in the way of an appreciation of the details of Hegel’s contribution, and hence of a more wide-ranging examination of alternative theories of identity and difference. The first two contributors (Maker and Williams) offer compelling arguments on behalf of the conclusion that Hegel’s theory privileges neither identity nor difference, and that claims to the contrary rest on misinterpretation. All four contributors in part 1 (Maker, Williams, Yeomans, and De Nys), plus Nuzzo in part 3, take

up the challenge of articulating the details of Hegel's treatment of identity and difference by engagement with alternative conceptions. Each in his or her own way attempts to show that the problems to which Hegel offered his theory as a solution cannot be set aside, and that none of the alternative theories clearly deals with that set of problems as successfully.

With these impediments to a more wide-ranging examination of possible theories of identity and difference hopefully diminished, if not removed, a number of more specific problems can then be explored. In the first of these Hegel's distinctive but neglected account of the development of the unity of mind out of the differences of psyche, consciousness, and intelligence in the third part of the *Encyclopedia* is illuminated by an important new reading that sketches an alternative program for contemporary philosophy of mind (Winfield).

Listing some of the other problems dealt with in the book, one might begin with what is arguably the most fundamental problem, that of self-identity. How is the identity of the self-conscious individual constituted? Our understanding of Hegel's famous argument, that such a process is to be understood as possible only via the mutual recognition of one another by a plurality of self-conscious selves, is here deepened by a radically innovative interpretation of dialectical mediation in Hegel's speculative thought as necessarily involving a *double transition* (Williams). That deepened understanding of dialectical mediation has implications for the theory of identity and difference itself as well as for the theory of recognition. The claim that recognition itself is essentially involved in the constitution of genuine, concrete identity is explored in this book not only by Williams but also by Nuzzo, Buchwalter, Howard, and Kowalski.

Another fundamental problem examined here from multiple perspectives is how the identity of the autonomous, freely willing individual can be thought to involve essential connection, even unity in some sense, with the universal ethical substance of the rational state even while that individual retains his or her individual autonomy. This is of course a classic problem of modern political theory, here cast in Hegelian terms. That problem is confronted explicitly by three authors (in a skeptical spirit by Flynn, and in a more affirmative manner by Howard and Kowalski).

Even if a generally convincing account of the moral and political agency of the autonomous individual in relation to the modern state could in principle be supplied, there remain other potential obstacles to the acceptance of such a view. Traditional political theories have typically

construed the forms of political agency made available to the individual in conspicuously patriarchal terms. Hegel's theory is a notorious offender in this respect: He treats feminine identity as a bar to full participation in the public activities of citizenship in the nation-state. Another contributor here teases out the ultimate conceptual sources of Hegel's apparently prejudicial treatment of the feminine in terms of his conception of the particular and its relation to the universal (Simpson).

Yet another problem arises in connection with the identity of the nation via other nations. If we take seriously Hegel's usual claim, that concrete identity can be achieved through a process of mutual recognition, then what sort of international order would be required such that the identity of one nation could be constituted through the recognition of others? Is not any such actual international order rejected by Hegel's political theory? But if so, how is genuine national identity possible? (Buchwalter)

Finally, a distinctive problem of racial identity affecting the proper interpretation of Hegel's account of the development of Greek culture from its Egyptian roots is examined, and a widespread but mistaken assumption concerning this aspect of Hegel's philosophy of history is corrected (Bernasconi).

Taken together, the chapters in this book illuminate the fundamental logic of identity and difference in a variety of practical contexts, invite consideration of the details of Hegel's contribution to the debate, attempt to remove some of the most enduring impediments to taking his views on identity and difference seriously, and in some cases offer path-breaking innovations in the interpretation of Hegel's texts. A brief synopsis of each of these essays, in sequence, is supplied in the following overview.

The Structure of this Book

Part 1. Identity and Difference in the *Science of Logic*

Part 1 of this book contains four chapters, each of which undertakes to explore some aspect of Hegel's treatment of identity and difference in the *Science of Logic*. In his contribution, William Maker issues a vigorous challenge to the familiar accusation that Hegel is the consummate *Identitätsphilosoph*, privileging identity and sameness over difference and otherness. On the contrary, he argues that "Hegel may fairly lay claim to being the philosopher of difference, otherness,

and non-identity.” Still more strikingly, Maker turns the tables and argues that the very demand for systematic completeness of thought evinced in the *Logic*, commonly held to be the ultimate source of an all-devouring identity of thought with itself that finally tolerates nothing that is not thought, leads on the contrary to the requirement of an ineradicable *difference* which is other than thought, in the absence of which thought could not achieve systematic completeness. The difference ultimately required for the completion of the system of thought is the other of thought: *nature*. Maker argues that this outcome can be seen as inevitable once we properly think through the implications of the demand that thought, in the context of the system, be both autonomous and self-grounding. This demand can be satisfied only if thought can be exhibited as self-determining, and the latter can be achieved only through a dialectic in which neither identity nor difference is privileged as an originary determining ground.

Just how the dialectic must be interpreted if neither identity nor difference is to be privileged is the problem taken up next by Robert R. Williams. In his contribution, Williams introduces the crucial topic of *double transition* in Hegel’s explication of speculative reasoning. This topic has been largely overlooked in previous Hegel commentary, but without a grasp of the role of double transition in Hegel’s argument, according to Williams, some of the most deeply contested issues of Hegel interpretation cannot be properly framed. The first of these issues to be addressed is the much-tortured question of identity and difference in the system. The conclusion that Hegel’s system ultimately eliminates genuine otherness, or difference, is among the most commonly offered grounds for a dismissal of his thought, or, justifications of the need to “move beyond” Hegel. Williams here calls that conclusion into question by drawing attention to a series of passages—especially to changes that Hegel himself introduced into subsequent editions of the *Logic* and the *Encyclopedia*—in which the idea of a *double transition* is advanced as crucial to the comprehension of dialectical mediation throughout the system. Williams’s thesis—that the standard reading of Hegel’s dialectic throughout the system must involve double transition—represents a major innovation and promises to have a significant impact on Hegel studies. He further illustrates the importance of such a reading by extending it to the theme of recognition, a topic on which he has written extensively elsewhere.

Christopher Yeomans next undertakes a particularly subtle analysis of the problem of identity and its intrinsic connection to difference as Hegel presents it in the *Science of Logic*. The framework of his analysis

is a logic of question and answer, an erotetic logic, modeled on Bas Van Fraassen's work, in which to put a question is to imply certain presuppositions in the context of which alone it can be determined what counts as a meaningful answer. Within such a framework Yeomans analyzes Hegel's treatment of identity as formulating the problem context within which the inquiry into identity makes sense, and he is then able to show how difference comes in as part of a meaningful answer within such a problem context. Yeomans develops his analysis by way of contrasts with a number of other treatments of identity in the current literature, including those by Colin McGinn and David Wiggins.

Martin J. De Nys also takes up the problem of Hegel's treatment of identity and difference in the *Logic*, though the scope of his discussion is broader—it eventually focuses on the general problem of the relation of thought and being in Hegel's philosophy, as well as on the significance of Hegel's treatment of identity and difference in the history of philosophy. De Nys situates his own account in relation to the accounts of Heidegger, Taminioux, Desmond, Di Giovanni, and Burbidge. His view supplies an additional standpoint from which to resist the conclusions of philosophers such as Desmond and Taminioux to the effect that difference does not receive its due in the Hegelian system. In this respect, his analysis converges with Maker's and Williams's.

Part 2. Identity and Difference in the *Philosophy of Mind*

In part 2 Hegel's doctrine of identity and difference is employed as a guide for interpreting a crucial section of the third part of Hegel's *Encyclopedia*, the *Philosophy of Mind*. In a path-breaking study of Hegel's account of how mind achieves unity in difference by integrating psyche, consciousness, and intelligence, Richard Dien Winfield lays out a new program for the philosophy of mind that constitutes a radical alternative to a widely familiar program in contemporary analytic philosophy, sketching out possible solutions to a series of impasses encountered by that theory.

The familiar standard program for the philosophy of mind in contemporary philosophy traces its origins to Descartes, then recapitulates Kant's distinctive contributions, along with the impasses to which it leads. These difficulties inherent in the Kantian perspective are widely supposed to have been overcome by a further development of the philosophy of mind emerging especially from the work of Wittgenstein, Sellars, and Davidson in the twentieth century. Proceeding from Wittgenstein's denial of the possibility of a private language, the

dominant contemporary conception holds that “the acquisition of the concepts making knowledge possible is bound up with the intersubjective process of learning and using a language.”

However, Winfield argues that this familiar holistic, relativist account is also beset by several deep difficulties, which he succinctly enumerates, and that it offers no prospect of ultimate success as a program for philosophy of mind. In Winfield’s view, Hegel’s much-neglected account of the unity of mind conceived through the differences of psyche, consciousness, and intelligence, as presented in the “Philosophy of Subjective Spirit” in the third part of the *Encyclopedia*, provides a thoroughgoing alternative program for the philosophy of mind, one that promises to avoid numerous impasses and lacunae afflicting the familiar conceptions from Descartes forward. He supplies a careful and clear exposition of the Hegelian account, tracing the emergence of mind through each of the three subordinate moments, indicating the outlines of a research program appropriate to the further development of this alternative concept of mind.

Part 3. Identities and Differences: Peoples, Genders, and Nations

The next series of chapters in part 3 of this book, turns more overtly toward the realm of the political, dealing with several of the issues described earlier.

Angelica Nuzzo proposes that we must first broaden our conception of the treatment of identity and difference in Hegel’s *Logic*, focusing not simply upon the moment of “identity” as a determination of reflection within the sphere of Essence but equally upon the Logic of Being, the Logic of Essence, and the Logic of Concept. In a sensitive rereading of the text as a whole, she argues that Hegel’s logical solution to the problem of identity and difference must be comprehended as a dialectical progression involving all three parts of the *Science of Logic*. In the successive moments of this dialectic she sees an explication of two fundamentally distinct conceptions of *political identity* in the contemporary world, one of which depends upon *separation* from the other, sometimes literally enforced by the construction of walls, and the other of which can be exemplified in the formation of a *cultural identity*, which depends upon a free interplay and interaction with *others* where differences as well as identities are constituted through mutual recognition.

This theme of *cultural identity* is taken up by the next contributor, Andrew Buchwalter, in an innovative analysis of Hegel’s conceptions of national identity and the nation-state within the international order.

He points out that much commentary on Hegel's conception of the international order has failed to notice that in his account *Ausserstaatsrecht*, often mistranslated as "international law" rather than as the more accurate "external law of states," contains two components: *Staatenrecht*, or interstate law, and *Völkerrecht*, the law of peoples or international law, properly speaking. *Staatenrecht* concerns the formal and external treaty relations among states and is appropriately conceived in terms of a realist view of international relations. On the other hand, *Völkerrecht* concerns nation-states in their *cultural* dimension, embracing relations of mutual cooperation and interdependency, presupposing reciprocal relations of mutual recognition, and developing toward a notion of common or "universal" human identity. On the basis of this starting point, Buchwalter is able to advance a very different analysis of Hegel's conception of the international order as a substantial corrective to those usually encountered in the Hegel literature.

In the following contribution Patricia Anne Simpson approaches the theme of identity and difference through an examination of Hegel's categories of the universal and the particular, more precisely, of the power of the universal over the particular, with respect to two important topics in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Philosophy of Right*: gender and nation. Hegel's treatment of the universal and the particular, as it intersects the themes of freedom and autonomy, has become the subject of a growing literature in the feminist and cultural studies approaches that inform her contribution. Exploring arguments offered by a variety of contemporary commentators, Simpson interrogates the category of particularity as it represents the feminine and the national in the context of Hegel's theory of the modern nation-state.

In the final contribution in this section Robert Bernasconi directs new light on a particular issue in Hegel's philosophy of history: the racial identity of the Egyptians. He points out that most discussions of Hegel's writings on the ancient Egyptians have proceeded, since the middle of the nineteenth century, on what is almost certainly a mistaken premise—that Hegel and the majority of his contemporaries would have believed the ancient Egyptians to be Caucasian. Instead, Bernasconi argues convincingly, on the basis of a painstaking reconstruction of the history of assumptions concerning Egyptian racial identity in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century European sources, that Hegel and most of his contemporaries would have believed the ancient Egyptians to be predominantly *black*. Since the achievements of ancient Greek civilization were in many instances said, by the Greeks themselves, to be inspired by Egyptian models, the

“hierarchy” of cultural achievements would contradict the parallel “hierarchy” of races increasingly promoted by white supremacists in the period following Hegel’s death—which eventually led to the “conversion” of ancient Egyptian racial identity from black to white in European texts. Correcting the anachronistic assumption of the “white” identity of the ancient Egyptians poses the necessity of rereading all of Hegel’s texts concerning the *cultural* identity of the Egyptians, their racial and cultural relation to the rest of Africa, Hegel’s notorious treatment of sub-Saharan Africa, and the role of the Egyptians in the dialectic of history. Bernasconi here makes a significant contribution toward this necessary, systematic rereading of the relevant texts.

Part 4. Identity and Difference in the *Philosophy of Right*

In part 4, the final section of this book, three contributors explore interrelated aspects of the theme of identity and difference, all focused on Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*. Erin E. Flynn raises the question of the extent to which the relation of the individual to the ethical substance (*Sittlichkeit*) can be successfully characterized as a unity of identity and difference. Recognizing that Hegel makes very strong claims of this sort, and also recognizing that an impressive array of recent scholarship testifies to the defensibility of Hegel’s claims that the “right of subjectivity” can nevertheless be sustained in this unity of the individual with ethical substance, Flynn chooses to test the plausibility of these claims from *within* the structure articulated in the *Philosophy of Right*. As a test case he takes up the problem of legal punishment, first in the context of civil society, and subsequently in the context of the political state. Flynn undertakes to show that an individual subjected to punishment as the outcome of a trial could not regard the enforcement of these legal norms as the actualization of his or her own freedom in any meaningful sense but must instead regard them as the intrusion of a “meaningless” external contingency thwarting the affected individual’s plan of life.

In the following contribution, Jason J. Howard accepts the challenge posed by this residual contingency and indeterminacy conditioning us as particular individuated subjects. He argues that the experience of this very contingency is essential to the individual’s development beyond the immediacy and potential alienation inherent in our individual self-certainties. Mediating this alienation inherent in being a particular, finite individual is necessary if freedom is to be realized as concrete or actual within the modern state. Howard approaches

the problem of the mediation of the individual as the emergence of “true conscience” out of “formal conscience,” focusing especially upon Hegel’s notion of *patriotism* as the highest and final form of true conscience (superseding *piety* within the family and *rectitude* in civil society). The development of patriotism enables individuals to recognize their own *accountability* within that larger community that is the politically governed state, mediating personal self-insistence with the universality of common purposes and goals. Such accountability demands that individuals submit their own private projects, interests, and visions of the good to the test of political participation and dialogue, obtaining recognition and confirmation from the wider community of the objective validity of what survives this process of dialogue and confrontation.

In the final contribution, Maria G. Kowalski explores this same theme of the requirements for the realization of substantial freedom in Hegel’s doctrine of the ethical state from a less familiar perspective: the identity of rights and duties. She explicates the process of the mediation of the individual will through inclusion in the political state as involving not merely the right but the *duty* of the free will to will the free will. That is, the duty to which she directs attention is not in the first instance a duty to the state but a *duty to self* that each individual has to actualize in order to achieve concrete freedom. Duties to the state arise only as a consequence of the prior duties the individual has to the self to realize freedom for the self. That duty then grounds a series of duties to produce and maintain the means to realizing one’s freedom, and these may ultimately constitute duties to the state. Kowalski develops this analysis of the identity of right and duty from its grounding in abstract right, through morality, to its realization in the ethical state. In particular, she argues that duties to oneself on Hegel’s account are not grounded either in the right to freedom or the well-being of other persons. Since the duties an individual has to belong to an ethical community and to fulfill the obligations of citizenship can be shown to be based on a prior duty to the self, she argues, a commonly encountered interpretation of Hegel’s political philosophy as anti-individualistic can be set aside.