

Second Nature and Recognition: Hegel and the Social Space¹

Italo Testa

Translated by G. Donis

Abstract: In this article I intend to show the strict relation between the notions of “second nature” and “recognition”. To do so I begin with a problem (circularity) proper to the theory of Hegelian and post-Hegelian *Anerkennung*. The solution strategy I propose is significant also in terms of bringing into focus the problems connected with a notion of “space of reasons” that stems from the Hegelian concept of “Spirit”. I thus broach the notion of “second nature” as a bridge-concept that can play a key role both for a renewal of the theory of *Anerkennung* and for a rethinking of the “space of reasons” within the debate between Robert Brandom and John McDowell. Against this background I illustrate the novelties introduced by the dialectical conception of the relation between first and second nature developed by Hegel and the contribution this idea can make to a revisited theory of recognition as a phenomenon articulated on two levels. I then return to the question of the space of reasons to show the contribution the renewed conception of recognition as second nature makes to the definition of its intrinsic sociality as something that is not in principle opposed to a sense of naturalness.

Keywords: recognition, second nature, Hegel, Brandom, McDowell

1. Introduction: the background of the question

The aim of this paper is to bring into focus the notions of second nature and recognition (*Anerkennung*) in their reciprocal connection, both historically and theoretically. Let me begin, then, by outlining some premises for the discourse I wish to develop here.

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1. Previous drafts and parts of this paper were presented at the 14th International Colloquium Evian, “What is Second Nature? – Reason, History, Institutions” (13–19 July 2008) and at the Joint International Conference of the Society for European Philosophy and of the Forum For European Philosophy, University of Sussex (8–10 September 2007). I would like to thank all the participants for their helpful comments. I am also grateful to an anonymous referee for his/her very valuable and helpful comments on the paper.

1.1 Recognition revisited

A general objective of my study consists in elaborating a renewed vision of the theory of *Anerkennung* by broaching a distinction between two levels of recognition.

1.1.1 A problem in the theory of recognition

The broaching of this distinction is justified by the need to solve a problem that emerges in the theory of recognition, which we can illustrate by clarifying two sides of a dilemma connected with it:

- *Circularity*: recognition appears to presuppose itself. A version of this problem is the one originally noted by Fichte and later re-proposed by Dieter Henrich,² for which if reflexive self-consciousness constitutes itself through the process of recognition then to recognize reflexively I must already have a pre-reflexive familiarity with myself.³ Thus the cognitive theory of self-consciousness, to avoid falling into a vicious circle, apparently ought to renounce explanation of the self-referential structure of self-consciousness and admit the primitivity of a notion of subjective self-reference of a pre-reflexive type.⁴
- *The insufficiency of constructivism*: the constructivist models of recognition assume that recognition be a question of attribution, such that the status of

2. See D. Henrich, "Selbstbewußtsein: kritische Einleitung in eine Theorie", in *Hermeneutik und Dialektik*, I, R. Bubner (ed.), 257–84 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1979) and "Noch einmal in Zirkeln. Eine Kritik von Ernst Tugendhats semantischer Erklärung von Selbstbewusstsein", in *Mensch und Moderne*, C. Bellut & U. Müller-Schühl (eds), 93–132 (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1989).

3. The German word *Reflexion* indicates in Hegel the logical structure of self-reference. The term is applied by Hegel to natural processes that for an external observer exhibit a form of self-reference; at a higher level it is applied to consciousness, understood as immediate *Reflexion* (see G. W. F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse*, W. Bonsiepen & H.-C. Lucas [eds] [Hamburg: Felix Meiner, [1830] 1992], published in English as *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, W. Wallace & A. V. Miller [trans.] [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971], hereafter *Enz.*: §413), a form of self-reference accompanied in itself by some type of awareness of objects; and to self-consciousness, understood as *gedoppelte Reflexion* (see G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, W. Bonsiepen & R. Heede [eds], in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 9 [Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1980], published in English as *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, A. V. Miller [trans.] [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977], hereafter *PhdG*: 108), a form of self-reference accompanied for itself by self-awareness: hence as *Reflexion* that makes itself explicit. However, when we speak in our text of "pre-reflexive familiarity" and "reflexive self-consciousness" we are using the English term "reflexive" in a different sense from Hegel's use of the word *Reflexion* and its adjective *reflektiert*, indicating with "pre-reflexive" a form of self-reference that functions spontaneously without being accompanied by self-awareness, and with "reflexive" a form of self-reference that is accompanied by self-awareness. Note that for Hegel both these forms of experience exhibit at different levels the logical structure of what he calls *Reflexion*, a term best expressed in English by the noun "reflection" and its adjective "reflective".

4. See M. Frank, "Wider den aprioristischen Intersubjektivismus", in *Gemeinschaft und Gerechtigkeit*, M. Brumlik & H. Brunkhorst (eds), 273–89 (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1993).

what is recognized depends for its being so on the attitudes of the attributor who recognizes this status. If the theory of recognition has to explain the structure of self-consciousness, then it turns out that the property of being self-conscious is itself a status that depends for its existence on the fact of being recognized through attribution.⁵ But a pragmatics of recognition resolved in terms of reciprocal attributions of status is faced with the problem that the act of attributing seems to presuppose the capacity of performing acts of attribution in he who performs it. Such a capacity cannot, in its turn, simply be the product of an attribution but must in some way pre-exist as a property of the individual who exercises it, otherwise this individual would never be capable of beginning and performing even the slightest act of attribution. If, then again, this presupposed capacity were identical with the fully developed capacity of performing acts of cognitive attribution – understood as that through which self-conscious knowing constitutes itself – then the theory of recognition would explain nothing, because it would end up presupposing that which it ought to explain.

1.1.2 Proposal for a theoretical solution of the problem

One way of getting out of this *impasse*, responding to the problem of circularity without, however, falling into a subjectivist theory, consists in my view in admitting the existence of two levels of recognition – a proposition that can also be justified empirically:⁶ namely, an intrinsically pre-reflexive level, connected with natural functions of identification, and a spiritual level that develops in the process of formation (*Bildung*) through which the natural functions are reshaped as second-order capacities. This second-order level can become reflexive, despite its necessarily being connected for its functioning to the pursuit of a pre-reflexive form of habitual automatism. Thus the fact that the reflexive recognition of self-consciousness presupposes a primitive form of pre-reflexivity does not mean that we have to abandon the theory of recognition in favour of a subjectively oriented theory, since such a capacity of pre-reflexive self-reference can in its turn be explained in terms of pre-reflexive cognitive capacities that are activated in the natural interaction between living beings.

5. See R. B. Pippin, "What is the Question for which Hegel's Theory of Recognition is the Answer?" *European Journal of Philosophy* 8(2) (2000), 155–72.

6. See I. Testa, "Riconoscimento naturalizzato: Una soluzione scettica al dibattito sull'autocoscienza tra Henrich, Tugendhat e Habermas", in *Ragionevoli dubbi. La critica sociale tra universalismo e scepsi*, P. Costa, M. Rosati & I. Testa (eds), 67–90 (Rome: Carocci, 2001) and "Naturalmente sociali: Per una teoria generale del riconoscimento", in *Hegel e le scienze sociali*, A. Bellan & I. Testa (eds), *Quaderni di Teoria Sociale* 8 (2005), 165–218.

1.1.3 Historical justification and hermeneutical advantages of the theoretical model

This theoretical model for a solution to the problem of the theory of recognition also enjoys historical support. In my view it can in fact be shown that in Hegel's pre-phenomenological writings a distinction is at work between two levels of recognition – “natural recognition” and “spiritual recognition” – that operate according to the logic we have illustrated with reference to our theoretical model.⁷ In light of this interpretation of the Jena writings it is possible, then, also to propose an unprecedented reading of the theory of “Self-consciousness” in the *Phenomenology*. In the transition from *Begierde* – understood as appetite or instinctive desire (see *Enz.* §426) – to perfected self-consciousness, in fact, Hegel appears to presuppose a theoretical acquisition of his previous writings, setting out with a new language the – ever problematic – process of integration between the two levels of recognition. And in this respect the revisited theory of recognition, based on the dialectical relation between the two levels, appears able to make a theoretical contribution also to the definition of the conceptual bases of the notion of *Kampf um Anerkennung* that Axel Honneth views as central to the task of a reappropriation of Hegel's legacy within contemporary social philosophy.⁸

1.2 Understanding the “space of reasons”

Now that I have sketched the general theoretical background for the question I intend to tackle, I want to give a preliminary idea of how this question is connected with a broader theme. A specific objective of this paper, in fact, is that of contributing to an adequate understanding of the notion of “space of reasons”. Many of us today find this formula of Sellars's to be an interesting point of departure for a reappropriation of some fruitful motifs of the Hegelian notion of reason within the contemporary constellation.

1.2.1 A problem in the theory of the space of reasons

It is also true, however, that current interpretations of the space of reasons have drawbacks that continue to render them unsatisfactory with respect to the *desiderata* that the Hegelian notion of spirit appears to pose for an adequate notion

7. For a detailed exposition of this reading of the pre-phenomenological writings see I. Testa, *Riconoscimento naturale e autoscienza sociale: Ricostruzione e ripresa della teoria hegeliana dell'Anerkennung*, dissertation, Università Ca' Foscari, Venice (2002), reprinted as *Riconoscimento naturale e mondo sociale* (Milan: Guerini, 2009) and Testa (2008 [1]).

8. See A. Honneth, *Kampf um Anerkennung: Zur moralischen Grammatik sozialer Konflikte* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1992), published in English as *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, J. Anderson (trans.) (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).

of reason. In this regard we find a theoretical bifurcation that is emblematically expressed by the positions of John McDowell and Robert Brandom. The bifurcation assumes the following form:

- *McDowell: space of reasons with nature but without social recognition.* On one hand McDowell wants to convince us that we are not obliged to understand the logical space of reasons as opposed to the logical space of nature, as long as we admit that the latter be broader than the realm of laws proper to modern science.⁹ In this respect for McDowell it is possible to reconcile the normativity of reason with naturalness in so far as we are willing to make room for an extended conception of nature and to re-include the Aristotelian and Hegelian notion of second nature within it. Reason can thus be understood as the individual's second nature in so far as it consists in a certain type of reactivity to the environment – a disposition to react to reasons – that organizes our natural way of being. However, this re-naturalization of the space of reasons does not imply its socialization. In fact this move is combined in McDowell with a Platonist and anti-constructivist option, on the basis of which the normative structure both of self-consciousness and of the space of reasons cannot in its turn be explained on the basis of social interactions of a recognitive type but is, so to speak, presupposed to them as some sort of irresolvable givenness.¹⁰ McDowell's position thus appears unsatisfactory with respect to the *desiderata* posited both by the Hegelian theory of *Anerkennung* and by the Hegelian conception of second nature, which does not regard subjective spirit alone, as in McDowell, but objective spirit as well: that is, the second nature of social institutions.
- *Brandom: space of reasons with social recognition but without nature.* Brandom's conception of the space of reasons accounts for its social structure in so far as he explains the form and the content of rational normativity as the product of recognitive interactions between individuals. But then again, at least in the first phase of his interpretation of Hegel,¹¹ Brandom elaborated a model of recognition in terms of a normative pragmatics of attribution that appears to lead to a form of social constructivism little inclined to account for the connection between the recognitive attitudes and natural capacities of individuals. In this respect Brandom's theory of recognition appears

9. See J. McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994; 2nd edn, 1996).

10. See J. McDowell, "Selbstbestimmende Subjektivität und externer Zwang", in *Hegels Erbe*, C. Halbig, M. Quante & L. Siep (eds), 184–208 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2004).

11. See R. B. Brandom, "Some Pragmatist Themes in Hegel's Idealism: Negotiation and Administration in Hegel's Account of the Structure and Content of Conceptual Norms", *European Journal of Philosophy* 7(2) (1999), 164–89, reprinted in his *Tales of the Mighty Dead: Historical Essays in the Metaphysics of Intentionality*, 210–34 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

to move mainly within the social dimension of objective spirit and of its logical relation with absolute spirit, without accounting for the Hegelian connection between subjective spirit and objective spirit, individual capacities and social construction. Then again, Brandom has expressed himself a number of times in favour an interpretation of the space of reasons, which presupposes a clear-cut discontinuity between nature and social normativity and which appears to be unsatisfactory with respect to Hegel's demand to go beyond all the dualisms that paralyse thought.

1.2.2 Strategy for a solution of the problem

My own point of departure is that an adequate conception of the space of reasons, to be faithful to the phenomenon it describes and also to satisfy the *desiderata* of the Hegelian conception, would have to dissolve the bifurcation illustrated above and thus account for both the intrinsic sociality of its normative structure and for the fact that this normative space must not be conceived in opposition to the space of nature.¹² Here, the most promising strategy to dissolve the bifurcation appears to consist in developing a conception that connects the theory of recognition and the theory of second nature on a new basis, thus making it possible to arrive at a conception of second nature broader than the merely subjectivistic one developed by McDowell and, at the same time, at a conception of recognition that is thicker than the objectivistic one developed by Brandom.

2. The theory of second nature as a bridge between the two problems

Having placed our specific objective of understanding the social space of reasons against the general background of the question of recognition revisited, we can now come to grips with the theme of the relation between second nature and recognition. In fact, the solution to the problem of how to conceive of a space of reasons that is understood both as social and in second-nature terms, and the solution to the problem of the theory or [2] recognition, appear at this point to pass through the same door. Thus the conception of recognition as an interweaving of two levels – natural recognition and spiritual recognition – precisely in so far as it can be read in relation to the question of the relation between first and second nature, can make a contribution to the task of thinking the sociality of the space of reasons.

12. For an illuminating account, directed towards a different end, of the dialectical relation between Brandom and McDowell, see D. Macbeth, "Un'antinomia nel giudizio empirico: Brandom e McDowell", in *Lo spazio sociale della ragione*, L. Ruggiu & I. Testa (eds) (Milan: Guerini, 2008).

Hence the theory of second nature appears able to play a key role in this strategy. To be able to develop an adequate conception of recognition and, together, of the space of reasons, it thus appears necessary:

- to formulate a theory of second nature clearly and coherently;
- to present a renewed vision of the theory of recognition in light of the theory of second nature.

Both these tasks are still far from having found satisfactory fulfilment. In the first place no fully fledged theory of second nature exists, and also the references to this concept to be found in McDowell and in the authors who have followed him are altogether fragmentary and limited for the most part to references to the authority of Aristotle or of Hegel. In the second place a model of recognition in the light of second nature has yet to be achieved: while its idea may have been sketched, its systematic form remains to be defined.

2.1 Historical justification and hermeneutical advantages of the theoretical model

The unsatisfactory character of the conception of second nature circulating in contemporary philosophy of Hegelian inspiration is due, moreover, to the fact that such philosophy limits itself to taking up this or that aspect of the concept unilaterally, unconcerned with shedding light on its theoretical consistency, or on its historical development, or on the comprehensive form it assumes in Hegel's thought.

It appears, then, that access to a theory of second nature must be prepared through:

- (i) an analysis of the concept's structure (§3.1.1);
- (ii) a historical overview of the concepts regarding the lexical development of the expression (§3.1.2);
- (iii) an overview of some aspects of the evolution of this notion within the history of thought (§3.1.3);
- (iv) a systematic interpretation of the implicit and explicit role the concept plays in the evolutive history of Hegel's philosophy (§3.1.4);
- (v) an overview of the textual passages in which the notion recurs in Hegel's texts (§3.1.5).

The task of reconstructing the Hegelian conception of second nature and of making its conceptual role explicit is not, however, an end in itself but, from my perspective, makes both a historiographic and a theoretical contribution to the theory of recognition. In fact it is possible, in my view, to recover traces of the connections between the two problematics both in the lexical structure of the two concepts and in the pre-Hegelian history of the concept of second nature.

Furthermore, the very evolution of Hegel's thought from the writings of his youth to those of his maturity reveals a strict connection between the problematic of second nature and that of *Anerkennung*. This connection can be stated in the form of the following argument:

- *argument of the second-nature embodiment of recognition*: recognition can be "real" for Hegel only if it is objectified in a second nature that is both subjective and objective (§3.3).

This argument can then be justified (§3.3.1) through an articulate interpretation of the "Self-consciousness" section of the *Phenomenology* and then (§3.3.2) through an interpretation of the systematic connection between this text and the section of the *Encyclopaedia* in which Hegel develops the theory of second nature as habit.

Since this second aspect is strategic in the development of our theme, our attention will be prevalently focused on it. At the end of our investigation we shall attempt to see what conclusions can be drawn from all this for the question of the understanding of social space. To this end we shall show that the argument of embodiment is in the final analysis the keystone for arriving at a conception of second nature that is broader than McDowell's – which is limited to internal second nature – and, at the same time, thicker than Brandom's, whose first model of recognition privileges the level of spiritual recognition and appears incapable of rooting such recognition in individual capacities (i.e. in subjective spirit).

3. Second nature and recognition

3.1 *On the theory of second nature*

3.1.1 Structure of the concept: spheres of reference

The expression "second nature" (*natura altera, secunda natura, zweite Natur, seconda natura, deuxième nature*) is typically used as a predicate, to qualify something, rather than as a noun: thus one says of something that it is second nature, rather than defining second nature as thus and so.¹³ Accordingly, in the history of thought habits, customs, characters, the virtues proper to human individuals or determinate forms of life (*Bildung*, technicality, ethical life, culture, Right, the State) have been characterized as second nature. We can thus distinguish two principal spheres to which the notion can refer, namely:

13. See N. Rath, *Zweite Natur: Konzepte einer Vermittlung von Natur und Kultur in Anthropologie und Ästhetik um 1800* (Münster: Waxmann, 1996), 121.

- subjective;
- objective.

The first case refers to an individual's dispositions, capacities and attitudes qualified as second nature, while the second refers to forms of life, social relations and institutions. On this basis we may operate a further distinction between:

- internal second nature;
- external second nature.¹⁴

Here, the first case refers to the internal constitution of individuals, of the way in which they are made, as the result of a process of development and construction that nonetheless does not prevent them from acting with a spontaneity analogous to that of the simply instinctual and genetically programmed first-nature processes; while the second case refers to external nature understood as an ensemble of the forms of objectified interactions together with the institutions of the social space in which individuals find themselves operating, presenting an immediacy analogous to that of the first-nature environment. In the history of the notion of second nature the first of the two senses has clearly been prevalent, at least up to the conceptual operation performed by Hegel, who – as we shall attempt to show – makes room for both senses and systematically unifies them in a dialectical conception. Misunderstanding of this decisive aspect of the Hegelian appropriation of second nature determines the peculiarly unilateral character of the current interpretations, which end up by concentrating exclusively on individual internal second nature, as in McDowell's case, and thus losing sight of the notion's socio-dialectical profile, or else on external second nature, insisting on the institutional and objective character of second nature *qua* ethical life, but ending up by losing its anchorage in individual capacities and in the causal powers connected with them.¹⁵

3.1.1.1. First and second nature. The notion of second nature is delimited, then, by contrast with respect to a correlative notion of “first nature”, often not explicitly defined and taken as obvious, but which indicates, at various times: merely animal first nature *versus* the second nature of man as a cultural animal; the first

14. On this distinction, and for a detailed critique of McDowell in this respect see I. Testa, “Criticism from within Nature: The Dialectic between First and Second Nature from McDowell to Adorno”, *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 33(3) (2007), 473–97.

15. Robert Pippin's institutional conception of the Hegelian notion of freedom is typical of the second direction (see R. B. Pippin, “Hegel e la razionalità istituzionale”, in *Hegel contemporaneo: La ricezione americana di Hegel a confronto con la tradizione europea*, L. Ruggiu & I. Testa [eds], 97–128 [Milan: Guerini, 2003]).

nature of merely causal processes *versus* the second nature of rational processes; in a broader interpretation, the first nature of objectified processes that have to be made intelligible in so far as they are subjected to the mere nomological nature of modern science (and that are hence considered methodologically as of themselves without meaning and normative connections) *versus* the second nature of the processes that come within the domain of normatively structured practical rationality.¹⁶ Beyond these various differences, that which constitutes the *analogon* of first in second nature, at least as far as internal second nature is concerned, appears for the most part to consist in the traits of vitality, animality, reactivity (disposition to react to environmental stimuli), and spontaneity (*autokinesis*). Thus for example external second nature, in the authors that theorize its existence,¹⁷ is understood for the most part as an inorganic nature, the result of a process of objectification that such philosophers as Hegel and Lukács will see as petrification of ethical life and congealment of spirit.

3.1.2 Some aspects of the lexical development

The lexical history of the expression “second nature” is worthy of our attention, for its wealth of implications both in general and in reference to our specific theme.¹⁸ Democritus, for instance, maintained in one of his fragments (DK 68 B 33) that education was similar to nature: just as nature has productive force – the capacity of changing something – so education has the capacity of changing man, producing a new nature (*physiopoietē*) in him. Democritus, then, saw habit as something that, while the product of an educative mediation, nonetheless acts in the individual with the irreflexive immediacy, authority, causal power and necessity of nature. Democritus, however, did not use the term *etera physis* (other nature), which we find only in Aristotle, to indicate the dyad from which for the Platonists all numbers were produced (*Met.* A 6, 987b33): a linguistic use that nevertheless does not directly invest the phenomenon of ethical *hexis* – of the moral disposition acquired through educative development and the habitual stabilization of natural functions – which is the full and proper domain of reference of internal second nature. With Cicero the naturalness of habit already

16. The first interpretation of second nature as the logical space of causality is to be found, for example, in Habermas (see J. Habermas, *Wahrheit und Rechtfertigung: Philosophische Aufsätze* [Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1999], 32ff.; and *Zwischen Naturalismus und Religion: Philosophische Aufsätze* [Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2005], 155ff.). McDowell, by contrast, speaks out against the identification between the logical space of natural science (and thus of the first-nature objects that fall within it) and the logical space of causality; he understands first nature as simply the domain of legality, that is, as nomological nature, not excluding that the notion of causality can regard also the logical space of second nature (see McDowell, *Mind and World*, XVIII [3], 70–73).

17. See *ibid.*, 84.

18. On this history see G. Funke, “Natur, zweite (I)”, in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. 6, 484–9 (Basel: Schwabe, 1984).

comes to be indicated as “*natura altera* (other nature)”. This expression – which will give rise to the rhetorical *topos* of *consuetudo quasi natura altera* (custom is second nature) – is used by Cicero not only to refer to the habits of individuals but also in an objective sense, to indicate for example the natural environment modified by human intervention through agriculture (*De natura deorum* 2, 60, 52). Qualified by Galen as “acquired nature (*physis epiktetos*)” (*De motu musculorum* 2, 7), it becomes with Augustine literally “*secunda natura*” (*Contra Julianum* 1, 69, 14) – taking on a theological shading extraneous to the Greeks and the Latins, since habit is here understood as what links us to the bad second nature we have acquired after the Fall. This expression, along with “*natura alia*” and “*natura altera*”, will then give rise to their equivalents in the principal modern languages.

3.1.3 An aspect of the idealistic history of the concept of second nature and of its interweaving with *Anerkennung*: Fichte and the pre-reflexive principles of reciprocal action

The interweaving of second nature and the theory of recognition can begin to be appreciated if we dwell on a particular moment of the fortune of second nature in classical German philosophy. In the philosophy of Fichte – the author from whom Hegel will take up the theory of *Anerkennung* – we in fact find a use of second nature as a category of social acting. Fichte writes in *Die Grundzüge des gegenwärtigen Zeitalters* (1804) that: “Custom consists for us in the principles of reciprocal interaction between men, made habitual and come to be second nature through the entire stage of culture: principles that thus do not wholly emerge in clear consciousness”.¹⁹

Second nature, designated with the term “*andere Natur*” – in conformity with the Latin “*natura alia/natura altera*” – is understood here as ethical custom, individual habit produced through the cultural process of education. Furthermore, this internal second nature is also understood – on a par with the Aristotelian dispositions to friendship (*philia*) (*Et. Nich.* VI, 13, 1144b9) – as the form that certain individual dispositions to social interaction assume. Ethical custom, precisely in so far as it becomes a second nature for the individual, can in fact function as a “principle of reciprocal action” between men. Thus social interaction can be instituted and develop only in so far as it takes root in the dispositions of individuals as a second nature with which they are endowed. What is more, let us

19. “Sitte ... bedeutet uns ... die angewöhnten und durch den ganzen Stand der Cultur zur anderen Natur gewordenen, und ebendarum in deutlicher Bewußtseyn durchaus nicht vorkommenden Principien der Wechselwirkung der Menschen untereinander” (J. G. Fichte, *Die Grundzüge des gegenwärtigen Zeitalters*, in his *Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, vol. 1, 8 [4], R. Lauth & H. Gliwitsky [eds], 189–396 [Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, (1804) 1991], 365).

note that the principles of social interaction that have the form of second nature for Fichte are such that they are not present in “clear consciousness” (*deutliches Bewußtseyn*). These, then, are principles that, while they can be made explicit, usually function while remaining outside the range of reflexive consciousness. Note that also the Fichtean use of the notion of second nature is predicative. Also, that to which second nature is referred is some type of disposition that makes possible and coordinates the interaction between human individuals. With this we have reached the point that interests us: in fact, the disposition in question can most certainly be identified with the disposition to recognition. Fichte, in fact, in his lessons on the *Bestimmung des Gelehrten* (1794) was already asking himself how the concept of “society (*Gesellschaft*)” was possible – the idea, that is, of a reciprocal relation between rational beings²⁰ – reaching the conclusion that this concept presupposes that a human being assume the disposition to “recognize (*anerkennen*)” that there are other rational beings besides himself. This, then, will be described in §§3–4 of the *Grundlage des Naturrechts* (1796) as a pre-reflexive disposition to react to the stimulus of the presence of others by activating a cognitive response – “recognizing”, that is, “treating” such a stimulus *as* an “exhortation (*Aufforderung*)”, an “invitation”. This pre-reflexive disposition to recognize the “exhortation” of the other is in *Die Grundlage* [6], what explains the very possibility of reflective practical self-consciousness and of freedom – which would otherwise only presuppose itself and thus be endangered by circularity (§3). Such a disposition, in *Die Grundlage* already understood as something developed in the process of education, is what Fichte in the later *Gründzüge des gegenwärtigen Zeitalters* (1804) will then sketchily understand as something that has to be made habitual as a custom and thus come to be second nature.

3.1.4 The Hegelian revolution: the explicit role of second nature in Hegel

Hegel’s theory of second nature remained in a fragmentary state, as, for that matter, did his theory of *Anerkennung*. Confronted with a variety of implicit and explicit uses of the notion of second nature, we find no textual passages in which Hegel deliberately collects the material accumulated in his various writings within the frame of a unitary theory. However, this does not mean that – making reference principally to the exposition of the notion in *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* and in the *Encyclopaedia* – we cannot reconstruct a profile of the Hegelian conception as having distinctive characteristics, marking a break with previous tradition. This operation is, on one hand, a contribution to the interpretation of Hegel; on the other, in so far as we attempt to delineate a full and proper theory, the interpretative reconstruction of the Hegelian conception

20. See J. G. Fichte, *De Officiis Eruditorum. Einige Vorlesungen über die Bestimmung des Gelehrten*, in his Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, vol. I, 3, [5], R. Lauth & H. Jacob [eds], 25–68 [Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, (1794) 1962]).

is carried out in light of the theoretical horizon of contemporary philosophy and thus of a possible systematic contribution of the Hegelian legacy to the solution of present-day dilemmas. Let us, then, preliminarily state the main characteristics of Hegel's theory of second nature. This conception:

- attributes to second nature the conceptual structure of "immediate mediation (*unmittelbare Vermittlung*)". Second naturalness is predicated of something that operates with an immediacy, irreflexivity and spontaneity analogous to that of first-nature processes but that is nevertheless the product of a process of social and cultural mediation;
- distinguishes and unifies two senses of second nature as subjective second nature (organic: analysed in the *Encyclopaedia*) and objective second nature (inorganic: analysed in the *Philosophy of Right*). Second nature thus regards the structure of *Geist* in that it embraces determinations both of subjective spirit and of objective spirit;
- unites the ancient interpretation of *physis* as *autokinesis* with the modern mechanistic interpretation, in so far as the living and spontaneous process of objectification of spirit is understood as production of an inorganic second nature, of a petrified spirit, which living individuals have to introject in the educative process as their internal inorganic nature, until they transform the mechanism of habit into their spontaneous way of acting;
- is simultaneously descriptive and critical, showing on the one hand that individual powers and social institutions cannot be developed and exercised unless they assume the characteristics of immediacy, spontaneity and irreflexivity proper to mere natural occurrences, and that at this level they let themselves be described as second nature; but, at the same time, showing that this second naturalness, while operating with necessity in the individual, is "posited": it is also the product of a contingent process of social mediation;
- has dialectical structure: second nature is such because it is identical to its opposite, reflecting some of its traits, since second nature re-presents a form of constraint and necessity that binds the individual, but, at the same time, is other, because it discloses the possibility of free and critical acting.

Let us, then, define the principal characteristics on the basis of which Spirit, as the substance of individuals, acts on them as a second nature: in this way we can begin to understand in what sense normatively structured social space can have the traits of second naturalness.²¹ Spiritual substance has the traits of second nature in so far as it:

21. On the very idea of "social space" in Hegel's *Phenomenology* see T. Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

- acts as nature (has causal power over individuals);
- presents itself to the individual as mechanism and natural necessity, even though it is the product also of spontaneous processes that imply the possibility of deliberation;
- immediately exerts a power and an absolute authority over the individual;
- immediately operates in a pre-reflexive way in individuals and on individuals – as a background – even though it is also the product of an intentional and reflexive mediation;
- is nevertheless posited, so that its power and authority can be disclosed as the product of a social process, and the destiny with which it manifests itself as an appearance of necessity.

3.1.5 The explicit theory of Hegelian second nature: a survey of the textual passages

At this point we need to survey the Hegelian texts in which the notion of “second nature” is explicitly utilized, with particular reference to *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* and the *Encyclopaedia*. This will allow us to locate in Hegel’s writings the theoretical characteristics of the conception of second nature delineated above. Subsequently, we shall go on to make explicit in terms of second nature some implicit aspects of Hegel’s writings ranging from the earliest Jena period to the “Self-consciousness” section of the *Phenomenology*: this procedure will allow us to broaden our perspective on the problem of *zweite Natur* and, at the same time, to appraise its connection with Hegel’s conceptions of *Geist* and *Anerkennung*.

3.1.5.1 Objective second nature and ethical life in Elements of the Philosophy of Right In *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* of 1820 we find the explicit definition of external second nature. Here, according to the predicative use of second nature, it is predicated of ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*), in so far as ethical life to be such has to objectify itself in social habits of cognitive interaction stabilized through habit and internalized by individuals. In this way second nature presents itself as a determination of objective spirit and helps us to understand that spirit in general is something that is alive, a second level of the naturalness of life.²²

But if it is simply *identical* with the actuality of individuals, the ethical, as their general mode of behavior, appears as *custom*; and the *habit* of the ethical appears as a *second nature* which takes the place of the original and purely natural will and is the all-pervading soul, significance, and actuality

22. Hegel will call this second level, this potentiated nature, “a more beautiful nature (eine schönere Natur)” (G. W. F. Hegel, *Theorie-Werkausgabe*, E. Moldenhauer & K. M. Michel [eds] [Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970] [hereafter *ThWA*] 9: 537, §376, Zusatz).

of individual existence. It is *spirit* living and present as a world, and only thus does the substance of spirit begin to exist as spirit.²³

Following this use Hegel also qualifies the institutions of ethical life, on the basis of the system of right, in terms of second nature. These institutions, in fact, are such that they act upon individuals with the causality of second nature – which Hegel, after the Latin, also calls “*andere Natur*”.²⁴ Such institutions in fact present themselves to individuals as an independent and immediately given objective power, albeit produced by historical mediation, and act on them with the effect of ensuring the substantial base of the individual habits of interaction that make free acting possible.

The basis of right is the *realm of spirit* in general and its precise location and point of departure is the *will*; the will is *free*, so that freedom constitutes its substance and destiny and the system of right is the realm of actualized freedom, the world of spirit produced from within itself as a second nature.²⁵

Hegel shows, moreover, how the ethical substance of social institutions acts on individuals nearly as nature does, presenting itself to them as a sort of natural necessity that immediately exercises a power and an absolute authority over them. “In relation to the subject, the ethical substance and its laws and powers are ... an absolute authority and power, infinitely more firmly based than the being of nature”.²⁶

3.1.5.2 Subjective second nature and habit in the *Encyclopaedia* In the *Encyclopaedia*, in particular in the section dedicated to “Anthropology”, the notion of second nature is presented as a determination of subjective spirit, hence in its

23. “Aber in der einfachen *Identität* mit der Wirklichkeit der Individuen erscheint das Sittliche, als die allgemeine Handlungsweise derselben, als *Sitte* – die *Gewohnheit* desselben als eine *zweite Natur*, die an der Stelle des ersten bloß natürlichen Willens gesetzt und die durchdringende Seele, Bedeutung und Wirklichkeit ihres Daseins ist, der als eine Welt lebendige und vorhandene *Geist*, dessen Substanz so erst als Geist ist” (*ThWA* 7: 301, §151; Nisbet [Z]: 195).

24. “For this habit of [living in] safety has become second nature, and we scarcely stop to think that it is solely the effect of particular institutions [Dann diese Gewohnheit der Sicherheit ist zur andern Natur geworden, und man denkt nicht gerade nach, wie dies erst die Wirkung besonderer Institutionen sei]” (*ThWA* 7: 414, §268 Zusatz; Nisbet: 289).

25. “Der Boden des Rechts ist überhaupt das *Geistige* und seine nähere Stelle und Ausgangspunkt der *Wille*, welcher *frei* ist, so daß die Freiheit seine Substanz und Bestimmung ausmacht und das Rechtssystem das Reich der verwirklichten Freiheit, die Welt des Geistes aus ihm selbst hervorgebracht, als eine zweite Natur, ist” (*ThWA* 7: 46, §4; Nisbet: 35).

26. “Für das Subjekt haben die sittliche Substanz, ihre Gesetzte und Gewalten ... eine absolute, unendlich festere Autorität und Macht als das Seyn der Natur” (*ThWA* 7: 228, §146; Nisbet: 190).

sense of internal second nature, in the context of the discussion of “habit”: “Habit is rightly called a second nature; *nature*, because it is an immediate being of the soul; a *second* nature, because it is an immediacy *posited* by the soul”.²⁷ Here, in the clearest way possible, Hegel shows the logical structure of mediated immediacy as proper to second nature, thus equating first nature with first immediacy and second nature with second immediacy. Although he now considers habit only as a determination of the individual, it is nevertheless clear that in Hegel’s overall conception – and this is also the novelty in the history of the reception of second nature – internal second nature cannot exist without external second nature and vice versa. Also in internal second nature, as in the case of ethical life, first nature’s appearance of necessity is specularly [8] reflected. Habit can function, and ensure the base of the capacities that make us free, only in so far as it assumes the force of an automatic mechanism that appears to act necessarily and to exercise an internal dominion over the individual.

Consequently although, on the one hand, habit makes a man free, yet, on the other hand, it makes him its *slave*, and though it is not an *immediate, first* nature dominated by single sensations but rather a *second nature posited* by soul, yet it is all the same a *nature*, something *posited* which takes the shape of *immediacy*, an *ideality* of what is simply given, which is still burdened with the form of [mere] *being*, and consequently something not correspondent to free mind, something merely *anthropological*.²⁸

It is important to observe how Hegelian *zweite Natur* reflects features both of the Greek interpretation of *physis* and of the modern and mechanistic interpretation of nature. In fact, on one hand second nature is predicated of a living individual who acts spontaneously, but on the other such immediacy also has features of the mechanicity proper to the modern interpretation of nature as an objectified process.

The process of formation (*Bildung*) expressed through the education of individuals is, then, understood by Hegel as the sphere that mediates the dialectical relation between external and internal second nature. And it is precisely within

27. “Die Gewohnheit ist mit Recht eine zweite Natur genannt worden, – *Natur*, denn sie ist ein unmittelbares Sein der Seele, – eine *zweite*, denn sie ist eine von der Seele *gesetzte* Unmittelbarkeit” (*Enz.*: §410 A; Wallace/Miller: 141). See the lessons on the philosophy of religion: “Habit, which for us has become a second nature [Gewohnheit, die uns zur zweiten Natur geworden]” (*ThWA* 16: 189).

28. “Obgleich daher der Mensch durch die Gewohnheit einerseits frei wird, so macht ihn dieselbe doch andererseits zu ihrem *Skaven* und ist eine zwar nicht *unmittelbare, erste*, von der Einzelheit der Empfindungen beherrschte, vielmehr von der Seele *gesetzte, zweite Natur*, – aber doch *immer* eine *Natur*, ein die Gestalt eines *Unmittelbaren* annehmendes *Gesetztes*, eine selber noch mit der Form des *Seins* behaftete *Idealität* des Seienden, folglich etwas dem freien Geiste Nichtentsprechendes, etwas bloß *Anthropologisches*” (*Enz.*: §410, Zusatz; Wallace/Miller: 144–5).

this process, as we shall see in more detail, that mediation is performed between the mechanical conception of second nature, understood as inorganic nature of the spirit objectified in social institutions, and the spontaneous conception of the internal second nature of the living individual and of Spirit. In *Bildung*, in fact, the socially given second nature of institutions is the presupposition and, at the same time, the result of the individual process of internalization of the habits of interaction through which spirit as “second nature of the individual” is formed.²⁹ Hegel explicitly understands the process of formation (*Bildung*) – whose movement of recognizing constitutes the logical infrastructure – as the transition from merely animal “first nature” to spiritual “second nature”: “Education is the art of making human beings ethical: it considers them as natural beings and shows them how they can be reborn, and how their original nature can be transformed into a second, spiritual nature so that this spirituality becomes *habitual* to them”.³⁰

It is precisely the dialectical character of such transformation – whose internal tensions are expressed by the struggle for recognition as a permanent dimension of the interindividual formation of spirit – that defines, on one hand, the tragic character of human history, ever on the verge of falling back into the abyss of objectified first nature, particularly in the field of international relations, which for Hegel never come out of the state of nature. But, then again, this dialectical tension between first and second nature also defines the critical space of reason, which has the power of disclosing to itself, but not necessarily of dissolving, its constructions’ appearance of necessity.

3.2 *A renewed vision of the theory of recognition in light of the theory of second nature*

3.2.1 From recognition to second nature

Up to now we have attempted to shed light on the notion of “second nature”, supplementing our conceptual analysis with a series of considerations based on lexicography and the history of concepts. This approach was designed to provide some reasons for connecting the theme of *zweite Natur* to that of *Anerkennung* at different levels. Let us, at this point, state some theoretical conclusions that can be drawn from our previous considerations regarding how *Anerkennung* has

29. See *ThWA* 17: 146.

30. “Die Pädagogik ist die Kunst, die Menschen sittlich zu machen: sie betrachtet den Menschen als natürlich, und zeigt den Weg ihn wiederzugebären, seine erste Natur zu einer zweiten geistigen umzuwandeln, so daß dieses Geistige in ihm zur *Gewohnheit* wird” (*ThWA* 7: 301, §151, Zusatz; Nisbet: 195).

to be conceived, which will serve as guidelines for our interpretation of Hegel's texts. As a first approximation, it appears we can affirm that:

- recognition *qua* attitude hinges on a cognitive disposition;
- the disposition to recognition operates in an immediate and pre-reflexive manner;
- the disposition to recognition is nevertheless shaped by a social mediation;
- the disposition to spiritual recognition is thus conceivable in terms of Aristotelian *hexis*, that is, of an acquired disposition, a secondary disposition that is formed on the basis of first-nature cognitive functions;
- the disposition to spiritual recognition – to react to determinate stimuli as to requests, claims to recognition – has the form of a second nature (acquired nature), of a mediated immediacy.

Such considerations obviously do not rule out the possibility of exercising recognition in a reflexive and aware manner. They do indicate, however, that reflexive forms of recognition always presuppose the existence of other pre-reflexive forms of recognition. Moreover, the more that reflexive forms of recognition are exercised through practice and repetition, the more they function in an irreflexive way, thereby stabilizing themselves in a second nature: if this were not the case no stable human interaction would be possible, which means that no social space would be constituted. From this we can draw the further conclusion that:

- recognition constitutes the background of social space, the background for which I am disposed, before any belief, to recognize the other as partner in interaction, man, subject, self-conscious being – where background indicates the ensemble of capacities, dispositions, abilities, attitudes, pre-reflexive and proto-intentional practices that allow our reflexive and intentional states to function.³¹

These considerations give us some idea of just how composite, stratified and sedimented this cognitive background is, and what difficulties stand in the way of its theoretical understanding. If we reflect on the connection between cognitive disposition and Aristotelian *hexis* – *philia* in particular, understood as a disposition to interaction with other living beings – we can pose some important questions on the subject. The disposition to friendship has, in fact, a natural component – the dispositions that belong to children and beasts are natural (*Et. Nich.* VI, 13, 1144b9) and *philia* is proper also to many animals – but, at the same

31. On the notion of “background” see J. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995 ; 2nd edn 1996), 133.

time, in man it is an acquired disposition, of a moral type, that presupposes a previous experience of interaction and the possibility of practical deliberation.

The Aristotelian idea that there is a merely natural form of *philia* – proper to beasts and children – lets us glimpse the possibility of distinguishing between two levels of recognition, that is, the natural recognition of which we are capable simply as living beings, and the acquired recognition that we develop and become capable of exercising in so far as we form certain habits, since we are educated in a determinate form of life. Hence we can make an analytic distinction between two levels of the recognitive phenomenon – which can also constitute two moments of the same act and whose reciprocal relation varies from context to context – namely:

- first-nature recognition;
- second-nature recognition.

3.3 *The argument of the embodiment of Anerkennung and of Spirit*

3.3.1 The argument in the Phenomenology

A this point we wish to legitimize our reconstruction of *Anerkennung* in terms of second nature historically by briefly showing that it has a basis in the systematic argument underlying the pages on “Independence and dependence of self-consciousness (*Selbständigkeit und Unselbständigkeit des Selbstbewusstseins*)”, developed by Hegel in the sections on “Self-consciousness” and “Reason”. In fact, Hegel’s general argument seems to be in support of his thesis that just as the independence of self-consciousness cannot be achieved without the recognition of its recognitive dependence on other self-consciousnesses, so the autonomy of Reason in general cannot be achieved without the recognition of its dependence on natural and social being. In this respect the sections on Self-consciousness and Reason seem intended to show the failure of any dualistic understanding of the relation between reason and society, reason and history, reason and nature, while simultaneously making a case for the embodiment of reason in individual and social nature: where this embodiment is precisely the process of formation of what we have called internal and external second nature.³²

The “life and death struggle” too, which follows the analysis of the pure concept of recognition, follows the same line of argument. In fact the *pointe* of the analysis consists in showing that the attempt by the self-consciousnesses to assert their own autonomy by annulling any link with natural life is destined to

32. On this concept of “embodiment” see also J. Russon, *The Self and Its Body in Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 14.

produce a profound distortion. The lesson to be drawn from the life and death struggle is that for the desiring consciousness “life is as essential to it as pure self-consciousness (*daß ihm das Leben so wesentlich als das reine Selbstbewußtsein ist*)” (*PhdG*: 112; Miller: 115). Self-consciousness, while not identical to mere animal life, is not a pure disembodied spirit either. Rather, it tends to develop as potentiated life: it tends to acquire a second level of – subjective and objective – naturalness in which “comprehended life (*aufgefaßtes Leben*)”³³ expresses both necessity and freedom. Where self-consciousness is not capable of perceiving the second-nature aspect of itself and of other consciousnesses it is not capable of achieving a perfected recognition: it treats living being as a dead thing, as mere mechanical first nature, and is not capable of recognizing its “universal inorganic nature”. On the one hand desiring self-consciousnesses are already part of the movement of recognizing, and thus, in a certain sense, in the mere state of nature already have cognitive capacities, without which they would not be at all capable of coordinating their conflictual interaction. On the other hand the first-nature cognitive capacities they have at their disposal are still minimally developed and in Hegel’s design tend to be fulfilled at a higher level. If, in fact, the cognitive capacities and the relations to which they give rise did not come to be embodied in an internal and social second nature, relations between individuals would permanently have the Hobbesian structure of a life and death struggle and could not give rise to any social space. From this standpoint the conceptual link between the theory of *Anerkennung* and the question of second nature invests the very conceivability of a human social space: if recognition were to be comprehended with the categories of reciprocal interaction alone according to a methodologically individualistic approach – as is the case in many contemporary formulations – then such a model would in no way be capable of accounting for the structure of social space, since it would lack the conceptual resources to understand how it is possible for men to free themselves of cognitive conflict.

3.3.2 *Begierde* and the second-nature mechanism of habit: on the relation between the *Phenomenology* and the *Encyclopaedia*

In the development of our argumentation, at this point it is decisive to show the type of correspondence that subsists between the notion of *Begierde* considered in the *Phenomenology* and the section of the *Encyclopaedia* in which Hegel deals most explicitly with the theme of second nature. In this way we think it is possible to justify both theoretically and textually an interpretation of the phenomenological theory of recognition in terms of the dialectic of second nature.

33. The notion of “comprehended life [*aufgefaßtes Leben*]”, understood as potentiated nature – second nature, according to our interpretation – goes back to Hegel’s Frankfurt writings: see G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegels Theologische Jugendschriften*, H. Nohl (ed.) (Tübingen: Mohr, 1907), 307.

Begierde represents a type of animal consciousness, of self-consciousness still immersed and sunken in naturalness, whose structural presuppositions Hegel makes explicit in the section of Subjective Spirit dedicated to “Anthropology”, and further develops in the successive section, “Phenomenology”, which begins with a compendium of the “Consciousness” and “Self-consciousness” sections of his 1807 work. The “Anthropology” section of the *Encyclopaedia*, in fact, is concerned with immediate subjective spirit, which Hegel understands as “soul or natural spirit (*Seele* oder *Naturgeist*)” (*Enz.*: §387). The activities through which the soul develops are “sensibility (*Empfindung*)”, “feeling (*Gefühl*)” and “self-feeling (*Selbstgefühl*)”. We thus have a consciousness that moves in the state of nature with a pre-reflexive form of self-relation and a practical orientation in the environment. This self-feeling is characterized as a “particular embodiment (*ein besondere Verleiblichung*)” (§408) and will later present itself in Hegel’s treatment of self-consciousness within the struggle for recognition as the self-feeling of corporeal self-consciousness.³⁴ The body, seen as a vital manifestation of self-consciousness and its expressive sign, is precisely that which is affected by the further activity of the soul, namely “habit (*Gewohnheit*)”. Habit is understood here as a mode of natural existence (§409) – since it possesses the non-reflexive immediacy and the spontaneity of natural functions – that is nevertheless the precipitate of an activity through which corporeal dispositions are shaped and modified, through repetition and practice, until they form “aptitudes, or skills (*Geschicklichkeit*)” that function as “mechanisms of the intelligence (*Mechanismus der Intelligenz*)”: a “second nature”, as Hegel affirms with indirect reference to Cicero (*De finibus bonorum et malorum* V, 25, 74). Here it is interesting to note that habit as internal second nature is something that for Hegel can already be formed in living organisms that are still immersed in a first-nature environment, devoid of ethical institutions and complex forms of sociality: thus, for example, Hegel understands the upright posture of man as second-nature habit. From this standpoint, as we said, the relation between first and second nature is fluid and is never a clear-cut opposition. Then again, it is also clear that for Hegel the distinctive character of the second nature proper to human social space consists precisely in that reciprocal mediation between individual habit and social institutions which is lacking in merely animal forms of life. In the third place it is important to note the strategic meaning of Hegel’s statement that “the form of habit applies to all kinds and grades of the activity of Spirit (*die Form der Gewohnheit umfaßt alle Arten und Stufen der Tätigkeit des Geistes*)” (*Enz.*: §401A; Wallace:

34. “But this immediacy is at the same time the corporeity of self-consciousness, in which as in its sign and tool the latter has its own *sense of self*, and its being *for others*, and the means for entering into relation with them [Aber diese Unmittelbarkeit ist zugleich die Leiblichkeit des Selbstbewußtseins, in welcher es als in seinem Zeichen und Werkzeug sein eignes *Selbstgefühl* und sein Sein *für andere*, und seine es mit ihnen vermittelnde Beziehung hat]” (*Enz.*: §431; Wallace: 171).

142). In the “Anthropology” section, in fact, Hegel, while taking his distance from sensualism, nevertheless illustrates in his way a genealogy of spirit based on its natural conditions. Within this reconstruction he shows not only that Spirit emerges from nature, but also that its high levels of development continue to have nature as their condition and therefore do not exist independently of it.³⁵ The theory of habit – and thus the theory of internal second nature – is, indeed, the decisive junction for formulating the conception on the basis of which all properly so-called spiritual activities – from upright posture to the higher faculties of consciousness and reflexive self-consciousness – not only presuppose for their content the corporeal constitution of determinate aptitudes but are also accompanied at all levels by the form of second-nature immediacy. From the standpoint of that which we could call *the argument of the necessary embodiment of Spirit*, also the *cogito* implies the body and its habituation and can thus be qualified as having the immediate form of a second nature for the individual. Habit, understood as “mechanism of self-feeling (*Mechanism des Selbstgefühls*)” (*Enz.*: §410A), thus provides the basis for the existence of the “I” as a thinking being whose constitution is mediated by recognition’s movement of duplication.³⁶ This, in its turn, requires an expressive conception of the body, understood

35. A reading in this sense, regarding the relation between soul and body, has also been proposed by Michael Wolff, *Das Körper-Seele-Problem: Kommentar zu Hegel, Enzyklopädie §389* (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, [1830] 1992). For a different reading of second nature in the context of the systematic relation between Nature and Spirit in the *Encyclopedia*, see C. Halbig, “Varieties of Nature in Hegel and McDowell”, *European Journal of Philosophy* 14(2) (2006), 222–41. Then again, Alfredo Ferrarin, in his remarkable essay *Hegel and Aristotle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), reads the Hegelian theory of habit within an interpretation that postulates a clear-cut discontinuity between nature and spirit: the process through which spirit returns to itself from the exteriority of nature is, for him, nothing other than a movement of idealization in which nature must be negated and die if it is to be able to give life to spirit (*ibid.*: 237–8). In this light Ferrarin – for whom the Aristotelian element of the Hegelian conception of spirit is fundamentally derived from a neo-Platonic component – sees the formation of habits as a unilateral process of rupture with the corporeity in which nature ceases to be an external given and becomes an ideal possession of spirit (*ibid.*: 278ff.). It must, however, be noted that the process of idealization in Hegel is always accompanied – as, indeed, the theory of habit attests – by a complementary movement of embodiment: in this respect, habit is not just the activity that “produces spontaneity in receptivity” (*ibid.*: 280), but is also the moment in which spontaneous activities are embodied in second-nature receptivity. The dualistic readings of the relation between nature and spirit in Hegel spring, in my opinion, precisely from the tendency to neglect this second aspect and to accentuate unilaterally – in the idealist-subjective sense – the moment of idealization.

36. “Thinking, too, however free and active in its own pure element it becomes, no less requires habit and familiarity (this *impromptuity* [9] or form of immediacy), by which it is the property of my single self where I can freely and in all directions range. It is through this habit that I come to realize my *existence* as a thinking being. Even here, in this spontaneity of self-centred thought, there is a partnership of soul and body (hence, want of habit and too-long-continued thinking cause headache); habit diminishes this feeling, by making the natural function an immediacy of the soul [Das ganz freie, in dem reinen Elemente seiner selbst tätige *Denken* bedarf ebenfalls der

not as mere *Körper*, a mechanical object, but rather as *Leib*, the living body that is the means of our expressive self-relation (*Enz.*: §411). For Hegel, with this it finally becomes possible to reconcile the ancient sense of internal second nature as living spontaneity and the modern sense of external second nature understood as inorganic mechanism.³⁷

4. The social space of second nature revisited

At this point we wish to examine some possible consequences of the conception of second nature we have attempted to reconstruct in Hegel's texts for the comprehension of social space, particularly in relation to the post-Sellars interpretation of the space of reasons developed by neo-Hegelianism in the Pittsburgh School. First of all, according to our reading:

Gewohnheit und Geläufigkeit, dieser Form der *Unmittelbarkeit*, wodurch es ungehindertes, durchgedrungenes Eigentum meines *einzelnen Selbst* ist. Erst durch diese Gewohnheit *existiere* Ich als denkendes für mich. Selbst diese Unmittelbarkeit des denkenden Bei-sich-seins enthält Leiblichkeit (Ungewohnheit und lange Fortsetzung des Denkens macht Kopfweg), die Gewohnheit vermindert diese Empfindung, indem sie die natürliche Bestimmung zu einer Unmittelbarkeit der Seele macht]" (*Enz.*: §410A; Wallace: 143).

37. The genetic analysis of the evolution of spirit as process in which *consciential* [10] and social structures emerge from nature is a philosophical reconstruction that Hegel set against different systematic backgrounds in the various phases of his thought: in 1803–4 nature is understood phenomenologically as *Anderssein* (otherness) of spirit; in 1804–5 *Anderssein* is understood as the logical essence of nature understood as *Außereinandersein* (*asunderness* [11], separateness); finally, in the *Encyclopaedia*, spirit and nature will be understood systematically as modes of the Idea – *Außersichsein* (self-externality) and *Fürsichsein* (being-for-self). The alternation of these different meta-theoretical conceptions, however, did not modify the Hegelian reconstruction of the natural genesis of spirit. It appears to me, then, that this genealogy does not depend in its internal structure – or in its historical genesis either – on the systematic framework adopted from one time to the next. For this reason the Hegelian reconstruction has, in my opinion, an argumentative potential that lends itself to being re-actualized even in different theoretical contexts, which would continue to be valid even if in the end – contrary to my expectations – the traditional reading of the systematic conception of nature as idea in its otherness should prove correct: the reading for which, in the final analysis, this conception depends on a spiritualistic ontology that reduces nature to something insubstantial and always already spiritualized. Presenting a non-traditional, alternative account of the meaning of the systematic conception of nature is, unquestionably, a complex task that I cannot carry out here. I do believe, however, that this analysis of the natural genesis of spirit and of second nature, with its valorization of the constitutive value of embodiment (*Verleiblichung*) for all the moments of spiritual development, can provide at least some reasons for not being willing to take the traditional interpretation for granted. In this direction, moreover, one ought to explore the possibility of extending the recognitive reconstruction of subjective and objective spirit in such a way as to account for absolute spirit in terms of a meta-philosophy of recognition – which, as such, ought, in my opinion, to be reconstructed by valorizing the function of scepticism for a comprehension of the recognitive structure of the absolute as a relation of opposites.

- the Jena writings, the *Phenomenology*, the *Encyclopaedia* and the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* converge in the joint argument of the *necessary expressive embodiment of Spirit* or of the *necessary second-nature objectification of recognition*.

The thesis that habit is the universal form of Spirit requires, in fact, that Spirit have its manifestation in corporeal expressivity. The theory of second nature, in its dual subjective and objective aspect, also requires a dual aspect of embodiment. In fact, it is not only the forms of individual intentionality but also the forms of collective intentionality that manifest themselves in interindividual spiritual relations of a recognitive type that will have to be embodied in habits. If this were not the case, then life and death struggle would be the only possible form of relation between individuals. Spirit will have to be embodied both in the organic body of individuals and in the inorganic body of institutions. But then again, also social and institutional bodies – ethical substance – are not something merely artificial but manifest a certain continuity with nature in so far as they present the form of a social second nature, which has the stabilized configuration of the mechanism of habit, sedimented in social practices, and which acts on individuals with a first-nature appearance of necessity.

What consequences stem from this approach for the way in which we ought to conceive the relation between reason and social space? Reason comes to be understood in the Hegelian framework as manifestation of spiritual activity, in particular as the perfected manifestation of the relational structure of self-consciousness. Thus:

- reason has of itself an interindividual structure, in so far as its content and its form are posited through relations of recognition that institute the relational structure of self-consciousness;
- the intersubjective structure of reason is, then, intrinsically social in so far as, on the basis of the embodiment argument, relations of self-recognition and of recognition of others – self-consciousness and its duplication – cannot be phantasmatic and disembodied but must be embodied in individual and in social and institutional bodies;
- the social structure of reason is all the more strengthened by the dialectical mediation between objective and subjective second nature that is characteristic of institutionalized human society, in which institutional social bodies become more and more the external second-nature condition of the formation of the internal second nature of individual spiritual habits;
- the social space of reason, Spirit, is not another type of entity added to natural ones, but rather an expressive reconfiguration of the relations subsisting between natural beings. The sociality of reason has, for that matter, a natural genesis, in so far as spiritual recognitive relations have time and again

to emerge dialectically, and not without tensions, from natural recognitive relations. Also for Hegel man is – in a sense more complex than Aristotle’s but nevertheless in agreement with it – a naturally social animal.

Hegel’s legacy – even in light of the necessary distance dictated by the passing of time – does not cease to pose certain *desiderata* with respect to the contemporary demand to rethink the social space of reason, in particular as regards the necessity of not giving rise to an abstract, disembodied vision that postulates a clear-cut discontinuity between nature and spirit. It thus appears necessary to arrive – with respect to the normativistic conception that usually accompanies Sellars’s formula of the space of reasons – at a deeper mediation of the relation between the natural component and the normative component of spirit.

From this standpoint the demand, noted by John McDowell, to overcome the dualism between a naturalistic conception of knowledge as the exercise of natural capacities and a social conception of knowledge as normative status appears fully compatible with the basic idea of Hegelian argumentation.³⁸ Nevertheless, this demand cannot be satisfied in the least as long as the notion of second nature is limited – as occurs in McDowell – to the internal second nature of individuals and thus to the organic sense of second nature, and is not extended to inorganic external social nature, since in this way we lose sight of the very mechanism that renders the space of rationality intimately social and confers upon social rules both normative power and causal efficacy over individuals. Neither can the demand be satisfied if – as again occurs in McDowell – the connection between the sociality of space and the recognitive constitution of self-consciousness is not made explicit: in fact, if this passage is omitted one cannot but remain bound to a subjective conception of self-consciousness and thus of the space of reason.³⁹ In this way the space of reasons remains a Platonic normative space but does not become a social space. Robert Brandom has thematized the recognitive and social structure of rationality and its objective dimension in a more convincing manner.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, also Brandom fails to satisfy the demand posed by the Hegelian conception in so far as he ends up understanding normativity in radically constructivist terms, thus postulating a clear discontinuity between nature and culture:⁴¹ and this is due in the final analysis to the fact that his reconstruc-

38. See McDowell, *Mind and World*, 86.

39. Exemplary in this respect is McDowell, *ibid.*

40. On the “objective” side of recognition see Brandom, “Some Pragmatist Themes in Hegel’s Idealism”. On its “absolute” – that is, logical – side, see his “Holism and Idealism in Hegel’s Phenomenology”, in his *Tales of the Mighty Dead: Historical Essays in the Metaphysics of Intentionality*, 178–209 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

41. See for example R. B. Brandom, *Articulating Reasons: An Introduction to Inferentialism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 26–7, 33.

tion of the theory of recognition, at least in the first phase of his interpretation of Hegel, fails to grasp the relation between the natural level and the spiritual level of recognition and thus its connection with the question of second nature and of habit. As a result, Brandom tends to equate the structure of recognition with that of normatively structured discursivity, understood as the dimension that separates human creatures from other – natural – creatures, and ends up losing sight of the thickness of the Hegelian notion of *Anerkennung*, which does have an important dimension in language but cannot be reduced to it. It is not fortuitous that Hegel, in his lessons on the Philosophy of Spirit of 1803–4, was already intent on showing the limits of discursive language, maintaining that in it there is no “real recognition (*reales Anerkennung*)”: both the dialectical process and the normative structure of recognition are thus located for Hegel at a deeper level of discursive exchange.

Also the new model of recognition later presented by Brandom,⁴² broaching a distinction between simple recognition and robust recognition, appears capable of tackling the problems posed by the previous model – which had been developed solely in terms of a normative pragmatics of cognitive attribution – only in so far as it is detached from the discontinuistic vision of the relation between natural dispositions and secondary cultural dispositions of a normative type, reaffirmed by Brandom with his claim that “self-conscious beings don’t have natures, they have histories”.⁴³ If this condition is dropped, the distinction between simple recognition and robust recognition ought – in my view – to be reinterpreted in light of the Hegelian distinction between natural recognition and spiritual recognition; but this task cannot be performed unless one simultaneously elaborates a vision of the relation between first and second nature. The theory of second nature, in this respect, would be that through which the – otherwise unexplained – parenthesis contained in Brandom’s claim that human beings are “(partially) self-constituting creatures” could be made comprehensible. The partiality of such constitution is due to the fact that we are not simply creatures who “have histories” but rather are creatures who have a double-edged constitution, both historical and natural, resulting from the dialectical and contingent interweaving that operates from time to time between first and second nature, between natural and spiritual recognition.

42. See R. B. Brandom, “Selbstbewusstsein und Selbst-Konstitution”, in *Hegels Erbe*, C. Halbig, M. Quante & L. Siep (eds), 46–77 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2004).

43. See *ibid.*, 47.

5. Towards a phenomenology of contemporary social space

In conclusion I would like to remark briefly on a question that connects from a different perspective the theme I have discussed with the problem of understanding the social space of reasons. A theory of recognition revisited through a theory of second nature ought to make a contribution not only to the problem of bringing a theoretical model of the social space of reasons into focus but also to the problem of interpreting contemporary social space in this light. Naturally this is a vast undertaking that I can barely hint at here.

5.1 A problem in the interpretation of contemporary social space

The conception of the social space of reasons of a Hegelian matrix appears to meet with a number of problems in presenting itself as a model for understanding the current situation. Such problems appear to stem from two main causes:

- the unavoidable fact of the plurality of forms of ethical life;
- exhaustion of the belief that our form of ethical life is the only one that can make a claim to be rational.

In the presence of these conditions the virtuous circle between internal second nature and external second nature – their conciliation – that the model demands as a condition of the ethical stabilization of recognitive relations is no longer a *fait accompli* within the borders of the National State. Nor can we any longer be readily assured that our second-nature habits are good habits. Thus the first-nature anomie of the global space of international relations, which in the Hegelian conception was modelled on the state of nature of a struggle for permanent recognition without ethical stabilization, now appears to invest the very second naturalness of the social space of national communities.

5.2 Post-Hegelian conceptual resources for tackling the problem

In light of the problem posed it would appear opportune to begin to reconsider some aspects of the Hegelian theory of national and global social space. We do not believe, however, that this situation means the theory of second nature must be abandoned, even though the hope that it can give rise to a no longer revocable stabilization of our form of life has been dashed. In the theory of second nature, in fact, conceptual resources are available that can help us deal with several particular aspects of contemporaneity. In this respect:

- the *Hegelian discovery of the dialectical character of second nature*, radicalized by the school of suspicion and by the critique of ideology (Nietzsche, Lukács, Adorno) in terms of the *paradoxicality* of the relation between first and second nature,⁴⁴ can provide a model of epochal diagnosis for the analysis of the phenomena of social fragmentation typical of our time.

The revisited theory of recognition is thus also a gateway for these conceptual resources, at least in so far as an interpretation of the relation between the two levels of recognition in terms of a problematical co-presence rather than of a chronological succession – according to a fresh reading of the *Kampf um Anerkennung* – appears to be inseparable from that phenomenon of instability of the second nature which reveals itself in some aspects of contemporary social fragmentation.

Italo Testa is Aggregate Professor of History of Political Philosophy at the University of Parma and Visiting Professor for History of Philosophy at the Ca' Foscari University of Venice. He is author of *Hegel critico e scettico* (2002), *Riconoscimento naturale e autocoscienza sociale* (2002) and *Teorie dell'argomentazione* (2006), and co-editor of *Ragionevoli dubbi* (2001), *Hegel contemporaneo* (2003), *Hegel e le scienze sociali* (2005) and *Lo spazio sociale della ragione* (2009). He is also co-editor of the collection of classics on individualism and solidarism "La ginestra" (Diabasis Press).

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44. See T. W. Adorno, "Die Idee der Naturgeschichte", in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1, R. Tiedemann (ed.), 345–65 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1932).

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