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MOLLY FARNETH, *HEGEL'S SOCIAL ETHICS: RELIGION, CONFLICT, AND RITUALS OF RECONCILIATION*, PRINCETON, PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2017.

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In the first part of the 20th century, Alexandre Kojève stands out as one of the key interpreters of the social dimensions of *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and more precisely, of the idea of reciprocal recognition: the heart of Hegel's social ethics. By opposing Kojève's interpretation of this question, Molly Farneth is trying to paint a different picture: one where reciprocal recognition does not end stuck in a permanent state of masterdom and servitude, but where this state can be overcome through confession and forgiveness. The figures of that process are not two consciousnesses striving for recognition from which the paradigmatic figures of Master and Slave appear, but the wicked and judging consciousnesses which come to terms with each other by means of "rituals of confession and forgiveness through which their ongoing conflict might be mediated" (p. 58). From this point of view, Hegel's ethics finally arrives at the point where conflicts can be solved not through domination and submission but mutual recognition.

The book is divided into seven chapters, which can be (as the author points out at end of chapter one) separated into three parts. The first part (chapter one, entitled "Social ethics in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*") serves as the introduction to the main goals of the book and explores the

stances and contradictions in the different earlier readings of Hegel. The author attempts to introduce Hegel's social ethics as something not secondary to his epistemological project but, quite the opposite, essential to its understanding.

The second part (chapters two to five) is an attempt of re-reading certain parts of Hegel's *Phenomenology* (on Antigone, Faith and Enlightenment, Wicked and Judging consciousness) in a new way. Chapter two, "Tragedy and Social Construction of Norms", and chapter three, "Culture War and Appeal to Authority", both discuss the shapes of spirit that "collapse under the inadequacies of its beliefs and practices" (p. 97). "Rituals of Reconciliation", chapter four, deals with the relationship between the figures of *wicked* and *judging consciousness*, as well as analogies between Lutheran theology and Hegel's account of confession and forgiveness. The next chapter, "Religion, Philosophy and the Absolute", further reflects on the relationships between social practices and norms.

Finally, the third part (chapters six and seven, "Commitment, Conversation, and Contestation" and "Democratic Authority through Conflict and Reconciliation") have a more "practical" purpose: it explores how we can apply this interpretation of Hegel's social ethics in mitigating conflicts,

contradictions or problems in societies of today's world (such as the abortion debate or religious differences inside communities). There is no avoidance of conflict nor perfect and just laws that will free us from the burdens of politics (p. 128). Instead, Farneth recommends, as an alternative, the dialectic of democracy: an endless mediation without closure that cultivates the

practices of reciprocal recognition and that avoids, by recognizing each other as the *loci* of authority, the burdens of partisan conflict, culture wars and tragedy. Such a reading not only sheds new light on Hegel's social ethics but also gives valuable insights to new ways through which we can attempt to overcome conflicts in today's diverse societies.