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Volume 25, Number 1, 2003

Négociier la transcendance / Negotiating Transcendence

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/007126ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/007126ar>

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### Publisher(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

### ISSN

1481-5974 (print)

1708-0401 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

### Cite this article

Ormiston, A. (2003). Hegel on “Negotiating Transcendence”. *Ethnologies*, 25(1), 55–86. <https://doi.org/10.7202/007126ar>

### Article abstract

This article examines what Hegel's political philosophy might have to offer to contemporary thinking on transcendence. Hegel's thinking is seen to be significant because it explores the possibility of spiritual transcendence in the context of a modern consciousness that is secular in orientation, and relatively alienated from spiritual experience. Focusing on the experience of love in childhood, and the ongoing way in which love manifests itself in the life cycle of the modern individual, Hegel offers an idea of transcendence that is rooted in our everyday, secular existence, and expressed in our ethical and political engagement with others. It seeks to comprehend how we might overcome the rigid duality between finite and infinite, secular and religious, mundane and extraordinary, within our own existence.

# HEGEL ON “NEGOTIATING TRANSCENDENCE”

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The very idea that transcendence is something that must be “negotiated” highlights something peculiar about the modern, western consciousness. To “negotiate” transcendence implies that we take transcendence up as a goal, that we engage in a concerted effort and in carefully directed practices of self to find a route towards its achievement. It involves means-end rationality, and will. Paradoxically, however, the very experience of transcendence itself entails a release from this willful orientation towards the world. It involves a transcendence of the very self that would seek transcendence. For in ecstasy there is a giving up of self, of will, and a merging with the world around one. To “negotiate” transcendence, then, suggests the determined effort of a self to get beyond determination and effort — to get beyond itself.

What does the paradoxical nature of this concept of negotiating transcendence highlight about the modern, western consciousness? To be in the modern world-view is to be inculcated into the scientific viewpoint, a fundamentally skeptical and secular perspective. It is to abstract from the world, from one’s immediate nature and impulses, and to view the world with a dispassionate eye. It is to take up an Archimedean standpoint on the world, to suspend one’s self above it, and to see things in terms of the “facts.” From this viewpoint, the world comes to be seen as “disenchanted,” as devoid of meaning and significance, a brute substratum of morally indifferent facts. Our usual relationship to nature becomes marked by this “disenchantment,” by alienation, a sense of lost wholeness. We become suspended within ourselves, closed off to any larger meaning or call from the beyond. For

we who are dominated by the scientific mind-set, the religious experience is essentially eclipsed. Experiencing the divine thus becomes deeply problematic for modern individuals.

Contemporary discussions of religious experience seem implicitly to recognize that they must account for the central feature of alienation which constitutes the modern consciousness. To experience the divine today requires a new experience of ourselves, and a new experience of the world — it requires a change in our subjectivity. The skeptical, questioning self must be transcended, must be got beyond, in order to find meaning or excitement. Yet to get beyond it becomes a difficult affair. The abstract and dispassionate self must be dislodged from its dominant position within the modern subject. And that requires practices of self that get us out of our everyday, secular mind-set. The very theme of this issue, “Negotiating Transcendence,” seems to suggest this, as does the feminist theological notion of “enacting the divine” (Griggs 1994), the ecological emphasis on receptivity over conceptualization (Butala 2000; Ladkin 2001), and the romantic emphasis on feeling over reason (Andrzejewski 1999).

Understood in this sense, the theme of negotiating transcendence — the struggle to get beyond the ordinary and stubbornly secular mind-set of the modern individual — can be seen to be part of a long tradition of reflection and practice that has sought to respond to the deadening and de-spiritualizing effects of scientific rationality. In the eighteenth century in particular, when this rationality began to become an established and widespread reality, its dark side became the concern of sensitive thinkers and artists like Rousseau, Goëthe, Kant, Fichte, “the Romantics,” Schelling, and Hegel. These thinkers and artists saw most keenly, and felt most profoundly, the impact of enlightenment reasoning on the modern soul in terms of reducing spiritual experience, deadening our relationship to the world, and turning the human being into a calculable object of science. They sought to find an alternative understanding of self, and an alternative experience of the world, in the face of the reality of this reasoning.

Given our inheritance of the scientific revolution, the enormous spread of technology that has accompanied it, and its constitutive effects on nearly every one of us, it is no accident that these early thinkers continue to constitute a mine of philosophical resources for contemporary discussions of spirituality. One can consider the ongoing

attraction to Spinoza's ontology, which played such a profound role in Schelling and Hegel's development, as well as in the Romantics (e.g. Levene 2000). Consider also the importance of neo-Kantianism (Rawls 1971; Habermas 1999) in political theory as a bulwark against the dangers of a utilitarian conception of the individual.

In this article I would like to argue for the importance of Hegel in thinking about the reality and possibility of religious experience for modern individuals. Hegel developed his ideas at the end of the eighteenth<sup>th</sup> century, in response to two generations of thought about how to counter the de-spiritualizing effects of enlightenment reasoning. As I shall discuss, his position reflects the extraordinary wealth of this generation of German intellectuals, and contains insights that parallel the concerns of many participants in discussions of religious experience today.

### Hegel's Significance — an Outline

As Charles Taylor has discussed, the dominant response of modern thinkers, in face of the growing effects of enlightenment reason, was a turn *away* from the disenchanted, external world, and into the interior of the modern self (Taylor 1989). This interior, and our experience of it, was to provide the basis for spirituality and meaning in a de-spiritualized world. One of the most important thinkers who initiated this turn into the self was Kant. He emphasized the interior realm of "practical reason" or conscience as the basis of human dignity and of resistance to the mechanistic reductionism of modern science. And he sought to address the reality of enlightenment reasoning by showing this reasoning its own limits, by drawing a line beyond which it must not legitimately go, and by locating moral conscience on the *other side* of this line.<sup>1</sup> The basis of transcendence, in this conception, is to act in human society not primarily from the standpoint of one's technological reason, but from one's moral reason. One transcends the detached scientific self by acting according to one's higher moral self.

The unfortunate result of this way of limiting enlightenment reasoning, however, and of finding a space for spiritual experience within

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1. Kant's entire *Critique of Pure Reason* shows this, but the part which points towards the idea of empirical knowledge as presupposing a moral subject is found in "The Transcendental Deduction" of that book, and in a more simplified form in part three of *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*.

the modern self, is that it reproduces the same hierarchy between the mundane and the spiritual that characterizes many current conceptions of transcendence, and that has been so subject to criticism by feminist writers in particular, who have moved instead towards a more immanent conception of spirituality (e.g. Bednarowski 1999; Mellor 1996; Sharma and Young 1999). There is a tight distinguishing, in Kant, between the *noumenal* and the *phenomenal* self, between the rational and the emotional will; they remain rigidly divided off from one another (Kant 1959). Hence much of our ordinary reality is *split off* from the transcendent principle. Even if the ultimate goal is to extend the moral will *into* this world and transform it, this extension is conceived through a *mastery* of the more ordinary world of sense, as is evident in the pitting of reason against emotion in moral action.<sup>2</sup>

Hence while Kant sought to retrieve a basis of spirituality for moderns in the face of the reality of scientific reasoning, the world he promotes remains rigidly divided into the spiritual and the mundane. Despite his attempt to promote a spiritual meaning or higher existence within modern existence, his conception remains marked by the transcendent conception, with all of the problems of hierarchy in relationship to our everyday reality that tend to be bound up with this.

Like those feminists mentioned above, the response of various thinkers who came after Kant was to seek to avoid what they saw as the harshly dominating relationship to nature and the natural self in Kant. They did this through an emphasis on love and intuition as the source of connection to the divine. Rather than finding the source of spiritual experience in a reason abstracted from one's natural self, they sought to find it in an intuition that represents a unity of reason and emotion. For Hölderlin, Schelling and Hegel in particular, the sharp subject-object division which characterizes the modern consciousness is derivative of a more primordial unity of self and other, subject and world, and reason and emotion (Henrich 1971). According to these thinkers, this primordial unity, the "Absolute Identity," is the divine principle that runs throughout the human and the non-human world, and from which humans have become alienated by modern reflective reasoning. It is not through a further abstraction from nature of the sort that Kant

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2. This is most marked in *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*. For an argument that Kant shifted his conception in the subsequent *Critique of Practical Reason* and *Critique of Judgement*, avoiding this extreme polarization of morality and desire, see Rahbari (2000).

performs that we can return to a knowledge of any divine, but through a retreat into the deeper knowledge of artistic intuition or human love. In these experiences we come once again to a oneness between thought and emotion, and self and world; these represent a genuine experience of the divine in life.

The problem with this approach, as Hegel came to see in his eventual break from Schelling, is that this "intuition" requires an escape from the ordinary experience of life, from the subject-object relationship to the world that characterizes the modern consciousness, with all of its expressions of individual difference, and all of the world of private property relations that emanates from it. A return to the primordial unity of existence was possible only for the poetic few, and could be had only in rare fits of creative inspiration. Even the more democratic experience of love, upon which Hegel based his early ideas, while it does constitute a genuine knowledge of the divine, is a knowledge that cannot, in its immediate form, be realized in the actual world, that cannot accommodate the realities of abstract reasoning and private property that now fundamentally characterize that world<sup>3</sup>. Taking up the self-reflective standpoint of the modern individual disrupts the experience of love, divides the world once again into a rigid subject and object, encloses us firmly within ourselves. Thus, to experience the divine through love and intuition might be possible, but only at the cost of retreat from the world, only through cutting off a huge realm of modern existence. Even in this idea of spirituality, then, there is a strong division of the world into the spiritual and the profane, with a harshly negative judgement of the latter.

Hegel's mature concept of spiritual experience is constituted fundamentally by an attempt to transcend the polarization between self and world, spiritual and mundane, which characterizes both the Kantian and the Romantic approaches. Unlike Kant, Hegel does not ultimately privilege the moral over the material self; he does not seek to realize the higher self through imposing it on the senses. Nor does he advocate a strategy of retreat from the world of private property relations into an ecstatic experience of oneness, as we have with many of the Romantics. Rather, in his mature conception, the immanent knowledge of love could be developed in the modern world, *through* the very

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3. See Hegel's "The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate" (1948: II) for his own working out of the incompatibility of the early Christian community of love and the modern world and modern consciousness.

enlightenment reason and individualistic desires that appear to be so opposed to spirituality. Love is indeed in tension with this reasoning; taking up the standpoint of the modern reflective subject does involve our becoming alienated from the knowledge of love. However, it is in and through the expression of that modern subject, of its desires and impulses, that love finds a higher realization and development, one which brings the phenomenal or mundane self into harmony with the truth of love. Individualistic desires, which seem to disrupt the experience of love and to be resolutely secular in nature, in fact embody a deeper striving towards unity, according to Hegel, which is realized as a gradually developing moral consciousness. It is not necessary to stamp out individualistic desires or retreat into the self in order to relieve ourselves from them. Instead, it is in and through the expression of these desires that we come to find their limitations and transcend them. Furthermore, the external, secular world, dominated by self-seeking, should not be seen as irretrievably corrupt. For this world is capable of reform, of embodying our most essential moral truths. For Hegel, *noumenal* and *phenomenal* self, conscience and self-interest, love and the modern world, are not opposed, but implicitly identical, even if that identity needs to be developed.

What this means concretely is that the religious experience is not achieved merely through withdrawal from the world around one into the interior of the self. And it is not about setting up an ideal political community now or in some remote beyond. One might indeed have an ecstatic experience by turning inward, through love, or through religious practice. But these remain momentary, and singular. The “real” religious experience, the most genuine religiosity, is through an ongoing engagement in the existing social and political order, wherein one encounters the limitations both of one’s own narrow self-conception and of the world around one, and transcends these limits in a higher moral self-consciousness and in gradual political reform (Hegel 1971: 552)<sup>4</sup>. Through this, the religious or transcendent experience becomes something not momentary and extraordinary, but a recurring and progressively expansive experience within our daily lives.

It is this that I want to stress here as constituting the originality and the essence of Hegel’s conception. It is an attempt to conceive religious

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4. References to *Encyclopedia* and *Philosophy of Rights* are to section numbers, not pages.

experience *in the face of* the reality of alienation and disenchantment that characterizes modern existence, and to do this *without polarizing* that existence, *without hiving off* the rationality that causes the disenchantment, *without mastering* the phenomenal self and world by a transcendent principle. It is an attempt to conceive how the split between self and nature, spiritual and mundane, infinite and finite, could be gradually healed, in and through the daily life activities of the modern individual. Let us examine in more detail what such a conception implies.

### **Love as the Original Religious Experience in Modern Life**

For Hegel, the scientific and disenchanted mind-set of the modern individual is not something primordial, but is developed in us as we grow up. We begin our lives not from this standpoint, but from an experience of unity, in the love of the family.

As already suggested, this experience of unity for Hegel is an experience of the divine principle within human existence. While modern individuals experience the world in terms of polarities — between reason and emotion, self and other, finite and infinite —, these divisions are imposed by modern abstract reasoning. In Hegel's conception of the Absolute, the real truth of existence is in fact a primordial unity of self and other, reason and emotion, and finite and infinite. The separative influence of abstract rationality is derivative, and distorts the underlying unity of existence. It creates fundamental divisions between the self and its world which obscure the deeper truth of unity. However, in love we have a recapturing of what has been polarized by reason. Love is hence a transcendence of the position of abstract rationality, a re-finding or re-experiencing of a primordial experience of unity that is lost due to the separative influence of abstract reasoning. It is the overcoming of the subject-object divide.

To view love as a mere emotion is to view it from the reductive perspective of abstract reasoning. Rather, love is the experience of the harmony of mind and body, of reason and emotion. While love speaks in the language of emotion rather than in concepts, this must not provoke the view of it as "irrational," for it also embraces the rational. Action from love overcomes the polarization between morality and feeling. Rules are not imposed on being. Rather, love spontaneously calls forth action in a manner that shows a unity of law and being, reason and emotion (Hegel 1948: 217).



Love furthermore overcomes the atomistic separation of self and other. The idea that we are separate, self-interested creatures is a false idea, an appearance (*Schönung*), imposed by the separative influence of abstract reasoning. The deeper reality is that we are all bound together by a larger, metaphysical principle, which lives in and through us. And in the experience of love we find this truth of our unity. In love of the other, according to Hegel, one feels one's primordial unity with the other, a unity that is in fact the real truth of one's relationship to the other.

As the inclusion of the finite self in a larger unity, love also represents a genuine dwelling together of the finite and the infinite. The unity of self and other is an infinite principle that lives in and through the finite selves that we are, in and through the bond of love. We ourselves are not infinite. We live and die. But in our life, we can have an experience of the infinite through the bond of love. We have a knowledge of unity that can only exist in and through our emotional, embodied selves. Furthermore, love is not just experienced through our emotional finite selves, but is fundamentally about the inclusion of that self in a larger unity. In its ideal, love is an experience of unconditional acceptance, of being loved in all of one's finitude, neediness, frailty, and fallibility. Such love is not about the transcendence of the finite self, but about its *inclusion* within a larger whole.

In the family we experience this unifying principle in our daily lives. In the family, we know ourselves not as individuals, but as members of a larger whole (Hegel 1962: 158). Children in particular have a privileged access to the knowledge of the Absolute for their subjectivity *precedes* the divisions into this world and other, mundane and spiritual, finite and infinite, and self and other, incurred by reflective rationality. For them, the world remains an animated, enchanted, mysterious place, full of wonders, delights, and terrors. Further, unlike modern adults, children do not have a strong sense of differentiation between self and other. Rather, in the emotion of love, they experience themselves and their own well-being as continuous with that of the other members of the family (1962: 158A).

In emphasizing the importance of the emotional self, the self as constituted by relationship to others, and the divine as indwelling in the world, Hegel's conception of love has much in common with feminist thinking on immanence. What is interesting is how he understands the

immanent experience of love to be *developed* and *realized* in the context of the individual who is fundamentally determined by the separative influence of enlightenment reasoning. For while Hegel acknowledges love as a genuine knowledge of the divine, he does not believe that it is an experience that can be sustained, in its immediate form, in the life of the modern individual. As we shall see, love is disrupted by the developing individualism of the modern child.

### The Loss of Love

The disenchantment of the child's world, and the fragmentation of the bond of love, emerges gradually, with the development of the principle of abstract rationality. Abstract reasoning is inculcated in children by the modern, nuclear family, and by the impact of civil society to which the child is exposed (1962: 175). And the self-consciousness that develops in and through this reasoning is an atomistic one. Reflecting away from the emotional bond of love and back onto herself, the child comes to see herself as an isolated unit, as separate from others and from nature, as fundamentally private and self-interested. She comes to cultivate her own desires, interests, and ideas, different from the family's, and goes off to begin her own separate life (1962: 177).

That this kind of development can be culturally located is clear. It is the reality of modern, western, individualistic societies, where the nuclear family is the paramount reality. It can be contrasted with the extended families of traditional societies where such a dramatic severance, and the development of such an atomistic consciousness, rarely takes place. And its ultimate root lies in the development and cultivation of the principle of abstract reasoning that has become so dominant in modernity.

While the development of abstract reasoning and the individualistic consciousness that accompanies it does entail the disruption of the earlier bond of love, the loss of the deeper knowledge of unity, it also contains an essentially positive aspect. For learning to think of oneself as separate, as a distinct person with one's own ideas, desires, and interests, allows one to move into new possibilities of being, new prospects for freedom, which are foreclosed to traditional peoples where the idea of separation is rejected. Nevertheless, it also means that the experience of being part of something bigger than ourselves, which the child had known, is lost, and becomes something very difficult to achieve.

### The Re-capturing of Love, or, “Negotiating Transcendence”

It is because of the positive aspects of modern reasoning, and also because of its constitutive character in the modern consciousness, that Hegel seeks not a retreat but a *mediation* of the knowledge of love. There is no way of going back to a pre-reflective consciousness, for we are forever changed by the development of this principle within ourselves. The very notion of “the fall” in Judeo-Christian mythology, the loss of unity with God through the acquisition of knowledge and the being cast out of the Garden of Eden, reflects the irreparable nature of this break. But even though we have lost touch with the knowledge of love, it nevertheless continues to reside within us, as a memory, a *seed*, however unconscious it has become, however alienated from it we are. And it is this seed, this memory, which implicitly drives us forward towards a reestablishment of this unity in harmony with reflective thought. For the chief struggles in the life of a modern adult individual, the struggle to assert oneself in the world, to gain recognition, to form erotic partnerships, to have children, to form friendships, to establish a vocation, to participate as a citizen, and so on, all presuppose a deep, underlying conviction of the *worth* of the individual in all of his/her *particular qualities*. Such struggles presuppose an implicit unity between self and world, in the idea that the world *will* come to reflect our most important strivings, our talents, our abilities, our desires. Even the assertion of self in private property and personal taste can be seen by Hegel to be driven by the presupposition of a unity between ourselves and the world, that the world will reflect us in our self-expression. This implicit conviction of the worth of the self, and the idea that the world will in important respects reflect the self, comes from the earlier experience of love. Love continues to operate at an intuitive level, as a drive pushing us forward towards the reestablishment of a unity with the world.

In other words, the immanent knowledge of love, while it appears to be lost in the modern, atomistic consciousness, is in fact working itself out, *in and through* what seem to be purely finite desires and interests. Through the gradual expression of this drive to unity, in our everyday pursuits, in an ethical world with laws and institutions that reflect and allow us to develop these pursuits, we *come back* to the knowledge of love. And we come back to it in and through the very reasoning and the very individualism that have alienated us from it. Furthermore, it is a more *developed* knowledge, because it is come to

rationally, and because it *includes* the particular, individual desires and interests that previously seemed to be pitted against it.

Thus the significance of the immanent experience of love at the very beginning of one's life is foundational, in this conception. For without it, there would be no possibility of transcendence at a higher level, after the separation and fragmentation that result from the development of reflective rationality. Love continues to constitute a drive forward toward unity, even if this is no longer conscious. It is the basis of self-transformation, the basis of a movement towards transcendence of the self-interested mind-set, in the midst of the apparently finite and selfish pursuits of the modern world.<sup>5</sup> We see this first in the developing commitment to individual rights.

#### *The Commitment to Individual Rights*

At the beginning of adult life, for an individual who has been educated to a modern, reflective consciousness, one's own desires and interests, and perhaps the interests of one's immediate family, are viewed as the primary and chief reality (1962: 182). One is indifferent to the world at large, and the well-being of other individuals. There appears to be nothing that inherently connects one to others, beyond perhaps the coincidental overlapping of self-interest. The chief focus of one's reality is one's own self, and the realization of one's own aspirations.

Yet the expression of self-interest and personal self-seeking is not a purely finite and secular activity, the product of a completely de-spiritualized, bourgeois world. For such self-expression embodies the idea that individuals have an infinite worth, that they have a *right* to self-expression, and that they expect the world to recognize this. The very principle of private property rights, and the formal rights to choose one's own vocation, to separate from one's family and live independently, to choose one's own spouse, to go forth and make one's way in the world as an independent being, all of this implies the idea of the individual as *free* in a certain sense and as having a *right* to such freedom, to such self-expression. There is imbedded in these practices the notion that I as an individual possess some kind of dignity which grounds my

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5. The idea that love plays such an important role in Hegel's mature philosophy is a relatively unusual interpretation of his thought. See Ormiston (2002) and *Love and Politics: Re-Interpreting Hegel* (forthcoming) for a discussion of it in the context of Hegel scholarship.

right to self-determination, and that others around me will recognize this dignity and this right.

What this suggests is that the knowledge of love is implicitly at work, is ultimately behind the individualistic will in its drive to express itself in the world. For the individualistic self has some conviction of itself as having infinite value, conceptualized here in terms of its dignity and its right to freedom. And it can only have acquired this conviction from its earlier experience of love, where it came to an experience of itself as participating in the divine. Furthermore, the expectation that others will recognize my right to free self-expression, the need for recognition by the world, suggests an underlying conviction that the world will harmonize itself with me. This also presupposes the knowledge of love, where there was an experience of the unity between self and world. In other words, the apparently finite and self-interested modern will is implicitly mediating the knowledge of love and seeking to reestablish it in the world. There is a transcendent dimension to this form of self-expression. Self-interested willing is the beginning of a process of reestablishing the truth of love in the world, or of negotiating transcendence.

The reality of desirous self-expression as an implicitly spiritual activity, however, only really makes its way into individual consciousness through the experience of its violation, in crime, and through the turning to law as the place of upholding right. For crime is, by definition, the denial of the principle of right, the denial of our right to express ourselves (1962: 82). If allowed to stand, crime makes a mockery of individual freedom. Hence the desire for the punishment of crime, the feeling of its importance, is something much more than retribution. It is about the righting of a wrong, the upholding of an infinite principle in the face of its violation. The punishment of crime is a spiritual necessity that accompanies the very notion of the right to self-expression of individual desire.

Punishment expands our understanding of ourselves as individuals who express our individual desires, to the conviction that we are *morally responsible* individuals, that we are capable of choosing between right and wrong, and taking responsibility for the consequences of our actions. We see each other not merely as fellow property holders, or individual choosers, but as moral individuals; we *expect* moral behaviour from ourselves and from each other. We are disappointed and feel alienated

from one another when this breaks down. Further, it is in and through the experience of crime that we begin once again to come to a sense of our unity with one another, to our commonality as moral beings, and to the necessity of mutual respect as based on this commonality.

The expression of the infinite principle of right is found in the law, and is upheld in a system of justice that promulgates the principles of law in an active fashion in individuals' lives. The laws of a liberal market<sup>6</sup> society reflect a recognition of the formal, universal rights of all citizens. Thus these laws explicitly embody, or articulate, the idea of the infinite worth of each individual, an idea that forms an underlying basis of unity among individuals in market societies. For the law, articulated in terms of individual rights, expresses the unifying idea of "infinite personality," the equal worth of each and our corresponding right to express our own ideas, desires, and interests in the world (209). In acknowledging one another, and in working in concert with one another in a complex, interdependent society, we implicitly acknowledge each other as "infinite personality." We implicitly acknowledge our *sameness* with one another.

It is through the experience of interacting with one another in a liberal society, with a developed division of labour, of seeing our interdependence, that we come to understand that: "A man counts as a man in virtue of his manhood alone, not because he is a Jew, Catholic, Protestant, German, Italian, etc." (209). The very abstract notion of humanity, and our commitment to it, is a product of the educative forces of relating to one another in such an environment, where individuals are formally free to express themselves in various and diverse ways, and where there is no immutably fixed hierarchy at the beginning.

The acquisition of the knowledge that I am the same as you, that we have a common humanity, regardless of the particularities that divide us, is the beginning of the transcendence of the individualistic consciousness in the life of the modern adult individual. It is the beginning of a spiritual experience, in the secular, disenchanted world, and it happens *in and through* the expression of self-interest in a developed system of needs, *in and through* an abstract rationality that

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6. Whether we really inhabit a "market" society today, in an era of advanced capitalism, is highly questionable. It was the market in Adam Smith's understanding of the term, entailing a class of merchants, that Hegel had in mind here (1962: 204).

originally separated us from one another. In this mutual recognition, we begin to come back to the knowledge of our unity we had known in love, and from which we became separated by abstract reasoning.

The achievement of an awareness of our common humanity, even in this most abstract form, is a spiritual achievement in the history of the west. And it is one not to be underestimated, as we can clearly see in the resurgent tribalism that continues to characterize our times. Such a reality shows that the achievement of a humanistic consciousness depends on far more than an abstract idea. It depends for its very existence on a *cleaving* to the law, a reverence for it, at the level of individual conscience. And this is achieved, on a widespread scale, only through the educative effects of living under liberal institutions that embody and uphold the idea of humanity in our everyday lives.

In societies where the principles of abstract right are more substantially upheld, we can clearly see that the commitment to these rights and to a system of justice that upholds them has deep roots in the conscience of the citizens, in the political culture at large. The commitment to rights entails more than a calculation of self-interest; it is more than something instrumental. And this can be seen in the people's relationship to the law in particular instances. Cases of unjust conviction, of wrongful imprisonment, for example, cause powerful emotional reactions among citizens looking on. Here, there is an identification with the individual who is wrongly treated, even though we do not know him/her personally. We are united with him/her in and through a sense of justice, a sense of how individuals should be rightly treated. We have a knowledge of our unity with this other through the principle that is enshrined in the law. There is clearly a kind of transcendence here, a spiritual stirring of the senses, which depends on a reverence for the law in the consciousness of modern individuals, a holding of it in esteem as the embodiment of an essential aspect of ourselves.

#### *The Commitment to a Welfare State*

In spite of the experience of transcendence articulated through the formal rights of property and individual freedom, this is a limited transcendence, a limited recapturing of the earlier unity of love, and the world organized around these individualistic principles remains plagued by experiences of loneliness, alienation, inequality, and a rude

insensitivity to the natural environment. As both Hegel and Marx understood, a society founded upon the idea of a community of individuals freely expressing their formal rights, who are moral only in the sense that they recognize each other's right to individual self-determination, including and in particular their right to property, logically leads to socioeconomic inequality; it leads to class division (Hegel 1962: 185; Marx 1978: 329-403). However, an essential part of Hegel's idea of "negotiating transcendence" is that through the very experience of living according to such a limited idea of ourselves and our unity, the idea of an abstract humanity, we necessarily experience its limitations and move beyond it to a larger basis of unity, and a more expanded concept of freedom and spiritual existence.

This is precisely what happens here. A society based purely on formal rights leads to socioeconomic inequality, distress, alienation, and environmental devastation. Thus *by its own logic* it points towards a society contained by a larger sense of moral responsibility and an idea of a genuinely common good. It becomes clear that the mutual recognition and respect for each other as rights holders, as moral beings, becomes meaningless if individuals are denied, at the very beginning of their life, the foundation upon which to exercise such rights.

It is ultimately our *experience* with the limitations of a purely rights based system, our confrontation with the cases of distress and the inequality which emerge from such a system, that is responsible for our transcendence of this limited conception. In confronting cases of distress, of poverty, homelessness, physical disability, neglect, and cultural disintegration, we come face to face with the *vulnerability* of individuals in the system of rights. And this vulnerability is something that we *all share*; it is something that afflicts everyone. For we are all embodied. We are all mortal. We are all born into a state of utter dependence. And we can all fall into distress as adults — become ill, lose our money, our job, become disabled, grow old and decrepit.

Beyond this, it becomes clear from experience that not all individuals can fare equally well in the system of rights because not all start from the same place. Some begin with much greater financial and cultural resources than others. And a system of formal rights does not acknowledge these different beginning points. For it sees all individuals as the same, from the perspective of an abstract choosing ego, and does



not take into account the concrete context from within which an individual must make her choices.

The awareness of our common vulnerability, and of the importance of the social context within which rights are exercised, expands the limited and one-sided fixation on formal rights. It acknowledges the wider reality that the capacity for free self-expression is located in a finite individual, who exists in a particular socioeconomic context. And the ethical consciousness that accompanies this awareness, that expresses an expanded sense of our unity with one another and our common humanity, is found in the individual commitment to a welfare state, to a social safety net for individuals who fall into distress, as well as to public health care, public education, affirmative action programs, and other social services that greatly reduce the inequality between rich and poor in a society dedicated to rights.

In seeing the limitations of a society based on formal individual rights, in understanding our common vulnerability, our different backgrounds, and the importance of a welfare state to address the limits of a system based purely on rights, individuals gain a higher spiritual self-consciousness. We go further towards recapturing the original experience of unity that we had in love. Rather than comprehending our unity merely as moral beings who respect one another's right to free expression, to hold property, we find a bond with each other also in terms of our particular qualities, our finitude, our qualities as social, embodied creatures. And in doing so, we no longer see ourselves as over against the natural world, exercising our freedom through possession, but as a part of that natural world, opening up the possibility of a different relationship thereto.

Thus the disjunction between our original experience of love, where we saw ourselves in unity with nature and world, and the alienation from nature and one another in the modern adult consciousness, grows smaller. In and through the expression of the modern individualistic will, the knowledge of love is gradually come back to, but in a way by which the unity can now be rationally comprehended. Love, the knowledge of our unity with one another, and of the finite and infinite aspects of the self, is objectified in the world, partly in the form of the welfare state. It is because of its objectification in and through the modern will that we can come back to it, that we can transcend the narrowly individualistic consciousness, while at the same time accommodating the claims of that consciousness.

We can see concrete examples of such experiences of transcendence in the history of the development of the welfare state in the west. The women philanthropists who formed the core of the first wave of the women's movement came together largely in and through their confrontation with cases of distress emerging from a period of *laissez-faire* capitalism. They had the most direct experience with the ills produced by a purely capitalist system, a system founded on formal individual rights. And their demand for the vote was very much a way of articulating a demand for an expanded state which could address more adequately the evils produced by such a system (Holton 1986). Similarly, the push to the left in Canadian politics at the end of World War II, the increasing support for the CCF socialist party and the emergence of a militant trade unionism, can be seen as a product of the trauma of the Great Depression, the worst experiences produced by a system based on formal individual rights, its exclusion of particularity and embodiedness (Horowitz 1997; Albo 1990). All of these individuals came, through experience, to a transcendence of a narrow rights-based consciousness, and felt the conflict between this higher consciousness and a world that did not reflect it. They came back in a more developed way to the original knowledge of love, and its conviction that the world around us can and should reflect this inner truth. This conviction expressed itself in political action towards transforming the world. Hence we can see how the immanent knowledge of love implicitly works its way out in and through the experiences of the modern individualistic consciousness, in the felt need to transcend itself and the existing world.

### *The Consciousness of Citizenship*

While commitment to a social safety net, and to a more substantive conception of equality as embodied in a welfare state, does expand our sense of ourselves and our relationship to one another, it still remains too limited a sense of our unity with one another, too limited a transcendence of the individualistic consciousness. It does not fully recapture the richness of the experience of unity we have in love. But in and of itself, the experience of coming to embrace the principles of a welfare state points us beyond, to a more expanded sense of ourselves as active and responsible *citizens*. In the idea that we come to recognize how formal rights and welfare must be balanced off against one another, that they are part of a mutually dependent whole, that both are essential aspects of our humanity and our dignity, we are implicitly acting

according to a conception of a common good, of what it is we stand for as a society, and how we are to go about realizing that. Further, however, and more significantly, since individuals *come* to this idea of the good *through their own experience*, they implicitly form a conviction of their own right to determine, or at least to recognize, what a society establishes as the good through its laws and institutions (Hegel 1962: 132). In other words, they implicitly form a sense of themselves as *political* actors, as constituents to whom the laws and institutions of the society, and the people who represent these, must be held accountable. Thus people gain a sense of themselves as members of a political community that is democratic in spirit, that finds its roots, to use the words of Rousseau, “in the hearts of the people.” The very educative movement towards awareness of the need to balance individual and social rights, towards the need for a welfare state alongside a state that guarantees formal rights to freedom, is a move towards the understanding of oneself as an engaged citizen.

In Hegel, we find the expression of this idea in the argument for a right of conscience (132). By the right of conscience he means not simply the right to one’s opinions and beliefs to be practiced largely in private, the corollary of the separation of church and state, not conscience in the domesticated sense in which it is usually understood in rights-based theories. Instead he means the right of the people to make a judgment, at the level of their own individual reasoning, about what is right and good for the community as a whole. He means the capacity of the individual to act as a *citizen*, as an autonomous person who does not follow unthinkingly the ideas of a leader or the customs of the community, but who makes a thinking decision about what is right and what is wrong. And while this cannot be an unlimited right, it articulates the *experience* of the individual in transcending an atomistic, rights-based consciousness, the experience of coming to oneself as a citizen with a sense of moral responsibility for the community as a whole. It is on this basis that a broader, more expansive concept of unity is formed, a concept of ourselves as genuinely engaged members of a self-determining political community. We have the experience of a community of conscience.

What again must be stressed here is the *method* by which we come to this self-understanding, so central to Hegel’s understanding of transcendence. It is not by *limiting* our self-interest, in the sense of separating this off from an altruistic or moral consciousness, that we

gain a higher perspective. Rather it is through our experience with a purely self-interested behaviour, the limits to this that we encounter, and the gradual resurfacing of the knowledge of love which happens through this encounter, that we make the movement forward. There is no *compartmentalization* of the self going on here — the self-interested, the altruistic, the political. Rather the experience of the one leads to an expanded self-concept that includes the other, and that recaptures the knowledge of love in a more rational form.

To refer once again to the example of the first wave of the women's movement, it is no accident that the encounter with cases of distress by women philanthropists became politically articulated in the demand for the vote. The *experience* of distress caused by a system based purely on formal, individual rights, led logically to a desire for greater *political* self-determination. Philanthropy led necessarily to active, democratic citizenship. These women *felt* their connection to individuals who suffered the brunt of nineteenth century capitalism, and comprehended the gap between this human connection and a world that refused to recognize it, that saw these individuals only as failures. They were driven to embody their felt connection in the political demand for the vote, through which they believed they could "feminize," or humanize, the public realm (Holton 1986). Thus the experience with cases of distress and the inequality produced by a narrowly liberal society leads not just to a commitment to a welfare state, but to an awareness of oneself as a citizen to whom the state is beholden, and who actively participates in the construction of a state that embodies the moral knowledge to which we have come.

### "Class" Consciousness

How a community of conscience, or democratic citizenship in an active sense, becomes articulated in a society, is not a matter of mere chance. While on the one hand there might be a fairly universal commitment to certain principles of law that bring people together in a widespread fashion, on the other hand individuals group themselves into moral and political communities depending on their backgrounds, their place in the society, their class, their cultural understandings, their religious or ethical views, their education, their experiences of injustice. And they tend to engage in citizenship in and through these particular communities. Our twentieth century experiences of the trade union

movement, the civil rights movement, the aboriginal movement, the women's movement, the environmental movement, the gay rights movement, western populism, as well as the class basis of traditional party politics, has clearly borne this out.

What this shows is that the experience of politicization, of coming to a sense of oneself as an engaged and responsible citizen, is an *organic* process. It embodies the Hegelian notion of self-development that I have been seeking to stress here throughout, the idea of an expanded sense of self, of connection to others, of meaning, achieved in and through one's daily activities and experiences in modern society, in and through one's finite needs and desires.

While for Hegel the ultimate defining feature of one's identity was socioeconomic class (Hegel 1962: 201-202), in our day, with our experience of the social movements of the twentieth and now the twenty-first century, we must comprehend this in a more fluid sense. Nevertheless, the concept of "class consciousness" remains significant. For what it expresses and seeks to acknowledge is the *experience* of individuals in coming to political self-consciousness, in and through their particular communities. It expresses the very movement of self-expansion, of developing meaning in the life of the individual, from an individualistic, self-interested, apparently finite self-consciousness, to a highly ethical and engaged one where a powerful meaning is found in one's unity with others. And it expresses how this happens naturally, organically, through the activities and self-pursuits of one's daily life. With experience, one comes to see how one's individual pursuits and experiences in life are implicitly connected to others, how they put one on a common ground with others. The very concept of "politicization," or the feminist slogan, "the personal is political," expresses just this kind of movement from the immediacy and apparent isolation of one's own existence and experience, to the awareness of its import and of how it connects one to others.

The idea embodied in "class" consciousness, or politicization, involves a sense of oneself and one's relationship to others much more expanded than that implied in the commitment to formal rights, to welfare, and to the rights of citizenship more abstractly. It is much more concrete, involving whole aspects of ourselves that would be left out in the more generic conceptions of welfare and rights (1962: 253). For it

implicates us not just in terms of what we share with *all* members of the society, but also in terms of where we come from more particularly — our family and cultural backgrounds, our education, our class, our race, our language, our particular talents and orientations, our gender, all of the things that determine us in our individuality. One experiences a universal principle at work within one's particular, natural, cultural, embodied self. These most particular aspects of ourselves become the medium for a deeper knowledge of our unity with others, such as we had with the working class movement, the civil rights movement, the women's movement, the aboriginal rights movement, and so on.

As a knowledge of unity that includes our most particular being, "class" consciousness is love come back to at a higher level. Like love, it involves us in our entire being, in all our embodied self and particularity. But unlike love, it incorporates those particular, individual desires and the questioning rationality that had been left out of the family. Indeed, one comes to the knowledge of one's unity with others in and through one's individuality, one's particularity. Hence class consciousness should in no way be confused with a tribalistic experience such as ethnic nationalism, an unthinking, purely emotional, identification with a blood bond. For class consciousness is a mediated unity, come to in and through the process of separation from the family and formation of ourselves as reflective individuals.

It is in this notion of "class" or of oneself as a member of a political community, that one finds a more meaningful and deeper sense of community than in the political community at large. "Class" consciousness and its political articulation are thus central to this understanding of the modern experience of immanence. Furthermore, in giving voice to an experience of self and unity with others that involves our particular experiences and backgrounds, our embodied selves, class consciousness provides individuals with a new understanding of and respect for that background. It provides a different way of relating to the nature within our own selves, than that found in the abstract, separated and possessive relationship characterizing the standpoint of individual rights. And while this is not explicit in Hegel's thought, we can see how such a different way of relating to our selves and to one another could provide the foundation for a different way of relating to the natural world without.

The idea that class consciousness is not based on an immediate identification with the blood bond does not mean that it cannot be parochial. Indeed, part of the limitation of class, for Hegel, is its partiality to its own concerns, and the need for these concerns themselves to be incorporated *and transcended* in the articulation of a larger public good. Without this transcendence, the original knowledge of love, which embodied an experience of the unity of self and world, cannot be fully recaptured in the consciousness of the modern individual, or fully objectified in the modern political community. For that original experience included the sense of a widespread unity of self and world. If this experience of unity is restricted now to the narrow realm of class, apart from the partial elevation entailed in commitments to rights and welfare, then love has not been fully recaptured; the world and the modern consciousness do not fully embody the original spiritual awareness of love.

The individualism that continues to plague class consciousness is particularly prevalent in what Hegel called the “business” class, which focuses on the activities of production and exchange (1962: 204). This remains true today. But we can see it also in new social movements, which tend to focus narrowly on their own individual agendas at the expense of a larger vision (Whitaker 1997). It is because of this group self-interest that Hegel advocates a “corporatist” system of representation, where individuals participate in policy-making not as citizens in the *abstract* but as *members* of particular communities that are relevant to them (1962: 301). Sweden’s institutionalization of labour and business representation in the formulation of social policy is one such example of corporate representation. A formalized system of public consultation with interest groups, and a system which provides funding to financially less powerful groups in order to even the balance of representation, is another one. Not only does a corporatist system recognize and encourage the natural articulations of citizens into groups, and thus foster active engagement and class consciousness, it is also meant, for Hegel, to provide a public forum for discussion *amongst* different classes or groups. Such discussion allows members of classes to see the limitations of their own interest in relation to other groups, so that there can be a movement beyond the parochialism of class, in an articulation of, and identification with, the larger good of the whole. It is this identification that is captured in Hegel’s concept of “patriotism.”

*"Patriotism"*

The most developed experience of unity with the good of the whole Hegel calls patriotism — "assured conviction with truth as its basis... and a volition which has become habitual" (1962: §268). Here, the individual acts consciously and yet spontaneously, on a day-to-day basis, according to the rational ideals and principles of her community. She does not feel this to be in conflict with her own particular interests; the relationship to the community is not experienced as a duty or an obligation. Rather, the individual adheres instinctively, from a unity of mind and body, just as we had with love before.

But whereas love is a knowledge of unity at the level of feeling and only with one's family, in patriotism, there is a knowledge of one's unity with the entire political community. Furthermore, this latter unity incorporates the principle of abstract rationality and the expression of individualistic desires that are left out of the family. It comes to harmonize these desires with the rational principles of the state. Hence every aspect of the individual's being is incorporated into the knowledge of unity.

Both love and patriotism represent a genuine knowledge of a divine principle in the life of the individual, a knowledge of the unity of reason and emotion, of self and other, of finite and infinite. But patriotism is a more developed and complete unity than that of love, even if it finds its source and root in the latter. One's particular, subjective personality, the passions and inclinations, which in love achieve a momentary, spontaneous harmony with the universal, in ethical life are disciplined and educated to achieve that harmony in a stable and predictable fashion.

Overall, in patriotism, we find the full transcendence of the individualistic consciousness, the full recapturing of the original knowledge of love, but in a way that incorporates the whole realm of reflective rationality and the individualism that accompanies it. And we have the completion of Hegel's idea of how the modern individual, so determined by the abstract thinking and individualistic ethics of the western order, can find a deeper truth and meaning in her day-to-day existence. In patriotism, in the daily willing of the principles of the community in an instinctive manner, as our second nature, so that there is no longer any experience of dramatic contrast between my own interests and those of the community, we can see that modern individuals have indeed fully "negotiated transcendence."



That the experience of participating in the social and political world of the modern west, and of having a developing commitment to its central political principles, is quite different from what an idea of religious transcendence ordinarily implies, seems clear. Nevertheless, as an approach to transcendence in modernity, it remains significant. For it conceptualizes individual elevation not as a momentary or singular event, after which we lapse back into our ordinary, mundane, existence, but as a process in which the harmonization with an infinite principle becomes thoroughly elaborated in the individual's life, so that the entirety of one's being is elevated to the good and the true. In this idea of transcendence, we have the experience of an absolute principle in our everyday lives. This conception of transcendence, furthermore, is significant not merely because of its more elaborated status, but also, as I have sought to emphasize here throughout, because it incorporates the challenge of reflective rationality and the individualistic ethics that accompanies reflective rationality, which appeared to be so antagonistic to spiritual experience. It comprehends how the individual is to come rationally, in and through the pursuit of her own self-interest, to a more expanded ethical consciousness, to a greater sense of meaning in her social and political role. The deepest truth of existence, the truth of our unity with one another, and with the world around us, can be realized partly in and through the abstract rationality that appears to alienate us from this truth. And because it incorporates this fundamental feature of the modern consciousness, this conception of transcendence shows how contemporary intellectual individuals, for whom the world appears to have become stripped of religion and meaning, can find an alternative spiritual existence.

### **Challenges to a Hegelian Conception of Transcendence**

One of the difficulties in the conception of transcendence offered above is that it involves such significant conditions of nurturance. For individuals to achieve the kind of expanded self-consciousness portrayed here requires extensive experience. It requires experience with the idea of individual freedom in one's own life, and one's interdependence with others, in order to see the necessity of individual rights, of a common idea of humanity, and of a system of justice that upholds this idea. It requires experience with the limitations of a purely rights-based system, and knowledge of the benefits of a welfare state, in order to comprehend the necessity of such a state. It requires the opportunity, the structures,

to gain a sense of one's connections to others, and to join forces with others in fighting for the interests and ideals of one's own communities. Of paramount importance, it requires the experience of being loved in the family, in order to have a sense of one's own individual worth, the conviction that one's choices, talents, skills, experiences, and ideas are relevant to the world around one, and the fortitude to demand recognition for these.

These principles of love and justice are best nurtured and reproduced amongst members of a society in cases where they are enshrined in just laws and institutions. Such institutions both reflect and recognize the developing experience and conscience of the members, and provide an environment within which the experience necessary to ethical development can be gained. Thus a strong justice system, a strong welfare state, a system of representative democracy, including recognized "mediating institutions" such as labour unions, vocational associations, interest groups, political parties, and an open and accessible media, as well as policies that support the family, including the promotion of equality for women, the promotion of socioeconomic equality, a shorter work week, adequate maternity and paternity leave and support, and state supported daycare, all contribute towards the realization of this modern vision of spirituality.

Aspects of our contemporary reality in many western liberal democracies do indeed seem to defy such a vision of political community, and to challenge our faith in this conception of transcendence. While there is a strong commitment to abstract rights in modern liberal democracies, the concern with a welfare state, with our common vulnerability and with a more substantive concept of equality, remains more limited and is currently subject to attack from forces on the right, particularly in North America and Britain.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, where individuals feel secure in the preservation of their abstract rights to pursue their own interests, there tends to be an excessive focus on the private and particular as the chief truth and reality of the individual, rather than on the interests of the community as a whole. Citizens remain stuck in an excessively individualistic consciousness. Various segments

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7. That this situation represents a clear moral *choice* being made by governments of these countries, that it is not an inevitable response to the pressures of global capitalism, is shown by the fact that many European countries remain committed to a social democratic approach (see Broadbent 2001).

of the society do become politicized and engaged, and movements that emerge from this, such as the trade union, civil rights, and women's movements, can have a profound impact. Nevertheless, great portions of the population are touched by these movements in only a passive way. Furthermore, when movements lose sight of, or become perverted from, their original ideals, or when they are simply stymied in their activities by an unresponsive system, they provoke disappointment, cynicism and disaffection among their own members. Compounding this is the widespread unresponsiveness of political systems that, in North America at any rate, seems to cater primarily to the narrow and shortsighted agenda of global corporations. And the family, the arena of love, too often fails to provide this foundational experience in the lives of individuals, becoming fragmented by the limited logic of an atomistic rationality.

In face of this, it may perhaps be understandable that many individuals would turn away from the kind of active political engagement described here, towards otherworldly religion, eroticism, drugs, or revolutionary politics. It is understandable, in other words, that they would seek a more immediate form of transcendence, or a radically transcendent conception. But does this mean that the idea of engagement in existing social and political life as the most promising arena of spiritual life for modern individuals is false, a blocked pathway towards transcendence? Does it mean that the split between finite and infinite, mundane and spiritual, cannot be healed in such a manner?

Given the degree to which individuals remain engaged in the actual political existence of modern societies, given the ongoing commitment to individual rights, to a welfare state, even if this latter is under attack, and to group politics, the vision of transcendence offered here remains a vital one. Yet clearly there is a problem. The separative, atomistic, technical thinking of reflective rationality *has* gained ascendance in the public realm so that, while such a thinking may be able to comprehend the most formal kind of unity and equality, and to enforce a rights-based community, it has not always gone over of its own accord to a more expanded concept of our relationship to one another. More significantly, for individuals subject to a system dominated by this limited rationality, the fostering of the knowledge of love, of a deeper knowledge of unity, one that includes our physical, embodied, emotional selves, and how this unites us with others, is not encouraged. What is encouraged, rather, is an individualistic ethics of comparison and

competition, of self-seeking and instrumentality. Beyond our formal respect of the other in her capacity and right to pursue her own self-interest, there is understood to be nothing intrinsic that bonds us to one another, or to nature.

What this reality shows is that there is an inherent tension in this conception of transcendence, in the idea of a larger meaning that is realized partly in and through an atomistic thinking and an individualistic ethics. For this narrower thinking is antagonistic towards deeper experiences of unity, more compassionate ways of being. What is ignored, denied, or eclipsed by this abstract reasoning, what it stymies and thwarts if left to itself, is the impulse towards a larger sense of unity, towards a larger truth of existence. A public discourse that limits itself to the individualistic language of abstract rights, and institutions that embody these assumptions, that are structured only according to the notion of the individual as an abstractly free unit, cannot nurture the felt sense of the individual that this is inadequate. It cannot validate experiences of love, empathy, community, and conscience. And so it encourages individuals to eclipse their own deepest interiority, the promptings of their own conscience, the inner stirrings of the memory of love. Or, alternatively, it pushes them towards a more radical vision, more opposed to the actual, existing world.

But this does not mean that abstract reasoning and individualism are *inherently* at odds with the principle of love, with the larger unity implicitly uniting us, and that we must turn away from a Hegelian approach. It does not mean that such a reasoning will *necessarily* get stuck in its antagonism with love, and that it cannot be surmounted. Love and conscience can indeed be reduced, and perhaps even eclipsed, by the dominant rationality, but they can never be destroyed. The truth of unity, the knowledge of it achieved through love, remains within us, and inevitably strives for expression. The reality of this is clearly shown in what has been described above: the powerful emotional commitment to rights in liberal societies; the ongoing experiences of loneliness, alienation, and injustice that are *felt testaments* to the inadequacies of a purely rights-based system; the ongoing fights to preserve and expand the welfare state in the face of current attacks upon it; the ongoing formation and re-formation of liberation and other social movements, the attempts of individuals and communities to find their own voices, create their own structures, and force their way onto the public agenda. Furthermore, while a narrow reflective rationality may have gained

ascendance in the public discourse of certain countries, the philosophical resources to criticize such a thinking and to promote a broader, more socially responsible, understanding, remain alive in our tradition.

Overall, the conception of transcendence offered here points in two directions, towards addressing the challenges it faces in our times. First, it points towards a continuing focus on individual *experience* — experiences of love, conscience and political community, as well as experiences of alienation, loneliness, of disjunction between self and world and the pain this involves. It is in this experience that individuals find their truest experiences of meaning and their most autonomous basis for diagnosing what is wrong. Yet the point of such a turn inwards should not be to retreat from the world, but to bring such experience to bear on the world in an active fashion — to respond to the call of conscience, to find a basis of commonality with others, to demand of the world that it deal with the reality of our experiences, while demanding of our experiences that they address the rational claims of the world. Ultimately, the truths we find within ourselves must be engaged with the world in an active fashion, and that means addressing the reality, and the rational claims and arguments of the world, rather than positing some radically utopian alternative. Ultimately what is called for is a *practice* of political engagement, rather than a practice of mere retreat or utopianism. It is through such engagement and practice that our experiences can have a genuinely transformative effect on the world, while we ourselves can test the limits of our own experience and perspectives and go beyond them to a higher understanding. Secondly, at the level of philosophy or theoretical discussion what is called for is a thinking that can do justice to our most important felt experiences, and nurture our commitment to them, rather than reducing or deriding them in the manner of a narrow abstract thinking. But here also there must be an *engagement* with enlightenment thinking and its rational claims, rather than a mere circumvention. We can see such a thinking in Kant, who sought to articulate *to* a narrower rationality its very limits, to halt its pretensions to explain what lay beyond its boundaries (see above footnote 1). And we see it here in Hegel's idea of the dialectic, where he seeks to take up the standpoint of a narrower kind of thinking in order to show it its own limits, so that it would go of its own accord beyond those limits to a larger perspective. And we see it in contemporary attempts in critical theory and postmodernism to show

reason its own other, upon which it is dependent and towards which it must have an attitude of respect.

In advocating both a practice of engagement rooted in our most important daily experiences and convictions, and a thinking that can do justice to those experiences in face of the claims of the world, Hegel's conception of transcendence remains a vital and challenging one today. His idea of love and practical engagement bear importantly upon the feminist call for a return to the everyday in our pursuit of the spiritual. Yet because of the idea of a transformative politics that emerges out of the knowledge of love, Hegel's conception overcomes the concerns about the potentially conservative implications of the feminist turn to immanence, the potential for reification of that which exists (Eller 1999; Gross 1999; Reuther 1999). In this respect it may have much in common with certain Christian conceptions of immanence that have a transformative orientation (Buckley 1978; Chapman 1994; Haight 1978; Trompf 1998). Furthermore, it is a transformative vision that is not involved in a dominating imposition of reason on nature and the world, as we had in an old leftism (Marx 1978: 66-125), because transformation emerges out of the activity of a will that is rooted in the knowledge of love, and that thus has a connection to nature and to a principle that unites us with nature. It does not seek a revolutionary transformation of the world, a wiping away of the ethics of individualism that alienate us from spiritual experience, but seeks to comprehend how modern individualism, through its self-expression, encounters its own limits, and goes beyond them. In all of these ways, Hegel is an important contributor to contemporary thinking on transcendent experience.

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