

Capitalism's Implants: A Hegelian Theory of Failed Revolutions

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Abstract: Going back to Hegel himself, there is a long-standing tendency to associate dialectics with dynamics. That is to say, Hegel's dialectical philosophy frequently is construed as an updated, sophisticated Heraclitean flux doctrine, a sort of process metaphysics constantly foregrounding becoming, change, fluidity, movement, transformation, and the like. Indeed, for Marx, Engels, and much of the Marxist tradition, dialectics-as-dynamics is the rational revolutionary kernel of Hegelian thinking. Yet, at least at the level of socio-political philosophizing, the past two-hundred years since the publication of Hegel's political *magnum opus*, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1821), has made evident the need to reconsider this deeply-engrained intellectual habit of equating the dialectical with the dynamic. If Hegelianism (as well as Marxism) is to remain capable of reckoning with history up through the twenty-first-century present, it must be able to account for why and how so much of the future historical progress Hegel and Marx, as children of the Enlightenment, optimistically anticipated failed to happen. One could say that real social history itself from the nineteenth century through today has exhibited much in the way of stasis, setbacks, and regressions unforeseen by the likes of Hegel and Marx themselves. The sorts of socio-historical progress envisioned by Hegelianism and Marxism has for a long time been, and still continues to be, stalled. This fact calls for conceptualizing a dialectics of non-dynamism, a sluggish or stuck dialectic, so to speak. Herein, I attempt to contribute to this (re) conceptualization of historical dialectics by developing a Hegelian theory of failed revolutions precisely through an immanent-critical engagement with the full span of Hegel's political writings from 1798 to 1831.

Keywords: G.W.F. Hegel, Karl Marx, Adam Smith, Scottish Enlightenment, History, Economics, Capitalism, Revolution

§1 The Compromising of Immanent Criticism: Timely and Untimely Children

G.W.F. Hegel is widely and appropriately credited with being one of the first major philosophers to grapple seriously with the significance and implications of the rise of modern industrial capitalist economies and these economies' representations in the thinking of the then-new field of "political economy" (eventually to become the discipline of economics). Hegel's socio-political writings display an in-depth knowledge of such British sources as James Steuart's *An Inquiry into the Principles of Political Economy* (1767), Adam Ferguson's *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767), and Adam Smith's *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776). What is more, not only do texts in the vein of Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* and Bernard Mandeville's early-

eighteenth-century *The Fable of the Bees* inform Hegel's directly socio-economic and political musings—the Mandevillian treatment of intended private vice as unintended public virtue¹ and the related Smithian notion of the “invisible hand” of the benevolent market animated by nothing more than bourgeois selfishness² serve as models for the movement of opposites of all sorts inverting into each other characteristic of Hegelian speculative dialectics in general (including in Hegel's non-political philosophy too).³ Indeed, Mandeville's talk of “cunning”⁴ (and related talk by Smith⁵) may have been a, if not the, inspiration for Hegel's “cunning of reason” (*die List der Vernunft*).⁶

Hegel's very first published work, *Commentary on the Bern Aristocracy*, is his 1798 anonymous translation and interpretation of a set of anti-aristocratic public letters written by a Swiss lawyer living in exile in Paris, Jean Jacques Cart, about injustice and oppression in Cart's native land (where Hegel himself resided from 1793 to 1796). Hegel's very last published work of 1831, entitled “On the English Reform Bill” and written shortly before his death, is an essay warning of the populist dangers of the then-impending reform of England's Parliamentary electoral system. Roughly in-between, there is the 1821 published version of Hegel's Berlin lectures on the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. 1821's *Philosophy of Right* justifiably is recognized, even by the bulk of its harshest critics, as one of the most important books in the entire history of Western political philosophy. Indeed, Hegel is seriously concerned throughout his philosophical career, from start to finish, with intertwined social, political, economic, and historical issues.

Particularly in the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel, as is common knowledge, emphasizes that the main challenge served up to humanity as a whole by modern social history is somehow or other reconciling the competing claims of the individual with his/her rights (i.e., Hegel's sphere of “morality” [*Moralität*]) and of the collective with its rights (i.e., Hegel's sphere of “ethical life” [*Sittlichkeit*]).⁷ Although foreshadowed in antiquity

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1 Mandeville 1989, pp. 53-55, 68, 76, 81, 88, 118-119, 130, 200)

2 Smith 1999, p. 32

3 Hegel 1979, pp. 154, 162, 167-168, 170, 242-244, 247-249; Hegel 1991a, §189 pg. 227-228; Hegel 1956, pp. 30-34; Lukács 1976, p. 352; Pelczynski 1971a, pp. 10, 12; Harris 1972, pp. 434-436; Harris 1983, pp. 126, 138; Bloch 1977, pp. 234-235; Pelczynski 1984, pg. 5; Plant 1983, pp. 229-231, 235; Walton 1984, pp. 246-247; Waszek 1988, pp. 8-9, 24-25, 149-150, 153; Smith 1989, p. 209; Wood 1990, pp. 228-230; MacGregor 1996, pp. 4, 48, 165, 290-291; Herzog 2013, pg. 25, 54; Skomvoulis 2015, p. 20-21; Mowad 2015, p. 79; Cesarale 2015, p. 98)

4 Mandeville 1989, p. 68, 350

5 Smith 1986, p. 515 Smith 1999, pp.30, 32

6 Hegel 1979, pp. 247-249; Hegel 1991a, §189 p. 227; Hegel 1984a, p. 325

7 Hegel 1991a, §33 pp. 62-64

by the figure of Socrates with his *daimōn* (especially as portrayed in the Platonic dialogues recounting his trial and death⁸), the figure of the sovereign individual with his/her inviolable mental interiority is a spiritual-ideological phenomenon specific, as socially pervasive or even hegemonic, to modernity.⁹ Hegel, especially in the *Philosophy of Right*, depicts the modern era, including his own present, as still struggling towards a yet-to-be-achieved proper balance between what is owed to the private good of the singular subject (“I”) of *Moralität* and what is owed to the public good of the group subject (“we”) of *Sittlichkeit*.¹⁰ How do these sides mutually restrict each other? How should their competing rights claims be adjudicated? Under what circumstances ought one side’s claims to override the other side’s claims?

Of course, the best-known portion of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right* is its (in)famous preface. One of its most familiar statements is the assertion according to which “each individual is... a *child of his time* (*ein Sohn seiner Zeit*); thus philosophy, too, is *its own time comprehended in thoughts* (*ihrer Zeit in Gedanken erfaßt*).”¹¹ Given how much ink has been spilled about this line, not to mention about Hegel’s 1821 preface, the *Philosophy of Right* in its entirety, the full sweep of Hegel’s complex and evolving socio-political thought, and Hegel’s philosophy as a whole, I must confine myself here to a few highly selective remarks about this line (as well as similarly constraining myself throughout the rest of this intervention).

Hegel’s acknowledgment that even the philosopher, presumably himself included, is never (completely) above the fray of his/her *Zeitgeist* entails at least a tacit registration of a possible risk. As Hegel would be the first to admit, his political philosophy, particularly as crystallized in the *Philosophy of Right* itself, is a “child of its time” insofar as its architecture and arguments mirror structures and dynamics operative in the social history culminating in Hegel’s early-nineteenth-century European context.¹² The Hegelian *Moralität-Sittlichkeit* distinction is meant to delineate a fault line of tension running through the objective reality of modernity and its familial, economic, and political organizations and institutions. As “*its own time comprehended in thoughts*,” Hegel’s philosophy deliberately reflects its socio-historical surroundings.

For this Hegel, neither the specific problem of spiraling wealth inequality under industrial capitalism (producing an immiserated

8 Hegel 1999, pp. 153-154; Hegel 1995a, §167, p. 311; Hegel 1955, pp. 425-448

9 Hegel 1999, p. 50; Hegel 1991a, §104 pp. 131-132, §106 pp. 135-136, §136 pp. 163-164, §138 pp. 166-167, §140 pg. 175

10 Hegel 1999, p. 230

11 Hegel 1970a, p. 26; Hegel 1991a, p. 21

12 Hegel 1995a, §86 pg. 158

“rabble” [*Pöbel*]¹³) nor the more general problem of squaring the circle between individualism and collectivism in the modern era point toward evident solutions on the foreseeable horizon of social history. Hegel’s refusal promptly to furnish improvised armchair resolutions of these difficulties testifies to his sincere intellectual honesty. Yet, regardless of however much awareness of and sensitivity to contemporaneous socio-economic challenges one attributes to Hegel as a “child of his time,” I would contend that Hegel’s thinking does not escape being contaminated and compromised by the same problems of modernity he keeps center stage in his socio-political philosophizing.

Indeed, Hegel himself might concede that this is inevitable for any and every philosopher or thinker of societies and their histories. From Hegel’s own perspective, reflection on social history is itself going to be shaped by the very social history upon which it reflects.¹⁴ Hence, such reflection (including that responsible for a text like the *Philosophy of Right*) will be ambivalently double-sided. It will be simultaneously a timely immanence and an untimely transcendence *vis-à-vis* its conditioning and enveloping social surroundings.

On the one hand, a *Zeitgeist* becomes self-conscious, transparent to itself, only via the “comprehension” (*Erfassung*) it achieves in and through the “thoughts” (*Gedanken*) about itself it helps to generate within at least a few of its participants. This would be a version of Hegel’s (unconscious collective) substance becoming (conscious individual) subject within the reflecting subjectivity of the socio-political philosopher/thinker. And, societies, in achieving degrees of consciousness about themselves in and through certain of their thinking members, also achieve ideational-deliberative self-distancing (i.e., an untimely transcendence, however minimal) such as to allow for reconsiderations of their arrangements and directions.¹⁵

In fact, as per Hegel’s idealism, social change is made possible precisely thanks to the intellectual grasping of social history up through a given *status quo* (a point which Karl Marx in particular goes on to problematize in several manners). This conviction about social change through social consciousness is conveyed in, for instance, an October 28, 1808 letter from Hegel to his personal friend and professional benefactor

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13 Hegel 2002, pg. 99;

Hegel 1979, pp. 170-171; Hegel 1995a, §118 pp. 208-211, §150 pp. 280; Hegel 1991a, §244-246 pp. 266-268], §248 pp. 269; Hegel 1999, pp. 255-256; Plekhanov 1974, pp. 471-472; Althusser 2006, pg. 276; Plant 1983, “pp. 231-232; Smith 1989, p. 143; Wood 1990, pp. 248-255; Hardimon, 1994, pp. 32, 236, 241-242, 244, 247-248, 258;

Kervégan 2007, pp. 68, 197-198, 232, 390; Ruda 2011, pp. 4-5, 13-14, 32-33, 36-39, 46-47, 58-68, 73-74, 116-117, 121, 146-148, 168, 179; Žižek, 2012, pp. 437-438; Žižek 2014, pp.23, 44; Johnston, 2018, pp. 78-79, 117-120, 124-125

14 Bourgeois 2000, pp. 106, 122

15 Hegel 1986, §11 pp. 12-13

Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer. A well-known line therein declares, “Once the realm of representation [*Vorstellung*] is revolutionized, actuality [*Wirklichkeit*] will not hold out.”¹⁶ Other texts also express Hegel’s belief that any truly significant social revolution must be prepared for and enabled by a preceding spiritual reformation.¹⁷

However, Hegel concedes that any such subjective reformation, in order to become objectively revolutionary, requires the backing of concrete physical force¹⁸ (a foreshadowing of Marx’s anti-idealist thesis about “the weapons of criticism” needing to translate themselves into “the criticism of weapons” in order to be actually efficacious in producing real social transformations¹⁹). Similarly, Hegel stipulates that it is not the thoughts of those exceptional subjects who alter the course of history (i.e., history’s proverbial “great men”) that makes them world-changing, as per an erroneous “psychological” approach to history, but their deeds really performed.²⁰ Considering that deeds as per Hegel’s theory of action are, as soon as they are performed, mediated by the intersubjective and trans-subjective social matrices within which the acting subject is embedded, Hegel rejects atomistic as well as psychologistic approaches to history, even to its so-called “great men” (with the idealism of Hegel’s “absolute idealism” emphasizing relational mediation and correspondingly being opposed to atomism, but not opposed to realism as is “subjective idealism”²¹). The gap between Hegel and Marx is not as wide here as it might seem at first glance—and this despite Marx’s anti-Hegelian “History does not march on its head.”²²

On the other hand, this same consciousness of society generated out of society itself is bound to reduplicate many of this society’s limitations and blind spots. Succinctly stated, socially conditioned reflection on the social is another instance of sublation in Hegel’s precise technical sense. That is to say, conscious apprehension of a society by some of this society’s members involves, as per the discrepant meanings of the German word “*Aufhebung*” invariably played upon by Hegel, both a partial surpassing of this society (through mental comprehension as a movement of the thinking subject taking distance from the object

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16 Hegel 1984a, p. 179

17 Hegel 1975, p. 152; Hegel 1999, pp. 1-2; Hegel 1971a, §552 pp. 287-288; Hegel 2002, pp. 305-206; Hegel 1956, pp. 420, 453;

18 Hegel 1999, p. 101; Hegel 2002, p. 252

19 Marx 1992, p. 25

20 Hegel 1964, p. 247

21 Hegel 1977a, pp. 115, 127, 165-167; Hegel 2002, p. 229; Hegel 1979, pp. 223-226; Hegel 1969a, p. 155; Hegel, 1991a, §95-96 pp. 152-153; Johnston 2018, pp. 51-52

22 Marx and Engels 1975, pp. 103, 118, 238-239; Marx and Engels 1998, pp. 33-36, 42-43

thought precisely in order to think the latter) as well as simultaneously a preservation of portions of this same society (including mental comprehension inheriting and echoing, however intentionally or not, this society's unresolved difficulties and inconsistencies). I believe that the latter aspect of Hegel's own reflections on his socio-historical context, in the *Philosophy of Right* and elsewhere, leave him still too indebted to and influenced by the capitalist, liberal, and bourgeois individualist elements he nonetheless also submits to penetrating, scathing criticism. I will specify and defend this belief throughout much of what follows.

For Hegel, a weakening of the cohesion of the *polis*, an unraveling of the binding threads of *Sittlichkeit*, tends to trigger a fleeing of social decay and dissolution by this community's better souls and brighter minds. Such singular subjects withdraw into themselves, retreating into the inner sanctum of their purely mental lives as refuges from the historical *Sturm und Drang* raging all around them.²³ Not coincidentally, Socrates, with his individualism of conscience, appears during the decline of Athens (with the Hegel of the *Philosophy of Right* even defining "conscience" [*das Gewissen*] proper as essentially involving withdrawal from the world's objective particularities into the empty fortress of universal free subjectivity²⁴). Similarly, in the spirit of this same Hegel, one might interpret today's self-help popularizations of tend-your-own-garden ancient stoicism as one of countless symptoms of the rottenness and dysfunction of a twenty-first-century capitalism convulsed by crisis, disease, poverty, war, and the looming threat of catastrophic environmental collapse.

But, however much slackening occurs of the ties that bind the "moral" individual subject to the "ethical" collective substance due to the latter's inner discord, instability, and/or enfeeblement, these ties tend not neatly and cleanly to snap *in toto*. At least a few loose threads of the times can be expected to cling to even the most radical and untimely of the *status quo*'s thinkers. This structural dynamic (partly) restraining or stifling the radicality of pure thinking arguably holds for Hegel himself too, as I now will set about demonstrating.

§2 *Glauben oder Wissen: Faith Plausible and Implausible*

From the very beginning of Hegel's intellectual itinerary and this beginning's initiations of his thereafter lifelong pondering of overlapping social, political, economic, and historical factors, he exhibits an Enlightenment-style faith in the inevitability and irresistibility of

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23 Hegel 1977b, pp. 119-122, 266-289; Hegel 1995a, §64 pp. 123, §69 pp. 129-130; Hegel 1991a, §138 pp. 166-167, §274 p. 313; Hegel 1995b, pp. 407-410, 412, 443-447; Hegel 1995c, p. 69

24 Hegel 1970a, §136 p. 254; Hegel 1991a, §136 pp. 163-164

progress. To be more exact, Hegel repeatedly voices his confidence that, regardless of whatever temporary setbacks and regressions social history displays, the larger trajectory of this history, the long haul of the grand arc formed by *Weltgeschichte* with the “inner pulse” of its *Wirklichkeit*,²⁵ reveals a steady and inexorable march in the direction of ever-greater ideational and institutional realizations of human liberty both individual and collective. History is teleological, and freedom is its *telos*.²⁶ The Enlightenment’s optimistic progress narratives, especially as (apparently) fulfilled by the French Revolution, are part of what Hegel inherits as a “child of his time,” through him being thrown by the accidents of birth into the educated Europe of the late-eighteenth century.

Admittedly, 1821’s *Philosophy of Right* in particular subtly sounds some more somber and pessimistic notes about the road ahead for modern social history. Of course, the famed image of the Owl of Minerva in this book’s preface conveys Hegel’s rejection of the notion that anyone, even the most insightful of philosophers, is able to predict the future.²⁷ However, according to this same Hegel, his ability philosophically to capture the social, political, and economic features of capitalist modernity means that the sun already is setting on this *status quo*, that it must be on its way out, breaking up and dying off so as to give way to something else yet to come. Moreover, there are Hegel’s earlier-mentioned registrations of the rapidly widening gap between rich and poor as posing grave, and potentially explosive, problems for which neither he nor industrial capitalism have feasible long-term solutions ready to hand. With his minimal reflective distance from the modern European *Zeitgeist* of which he is nevertheless the child—this also is despite his just-mentioned denial of predictive power as regards future social history—Hegel offers hints foreshadowing dramatic collective change soon to arrive. But, he still carefully refrains from thrusting forward specific predictions about the nitty-gritty details and features of any looming transformations yet to transpire. Hegel quietly tries to keep one step ahead, but one step only, of his own era.²⁸

Viewed with the benefit of a bit of Marxist hindsight, the Hegel of the *Philosophy of Right* could be said to leave open the question of whether future social progress will move within or beyond modern capitalism. As a wise old owl staying mum about the future out of principle, he deliberately avoids any overt proclamations about how much additional historical time remains for the industrial societies and nation-states of modernity.

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25 Hegel 1970a, pp. 24-28; Hegel 1991a, pp. 20-23

26 Ibid., §129 p. 157

27 Hegel 1991a, p. 23

28 Johnston 2018, p. 115-119

Nonetheless, there are indications about Hegel's views on all of this scattered throughout his *oeuvre*. I turn now to these indications.

Already in 1798, in both *Commentary on the Bern Aristocracy* and "The Magistrates Should be Elected by the People," the young Hegel, still freshly enthused by the French Revolution and its immediate implications, voices full-throated confidence that, with the powerful impetus of 1789 behind it, history cannot but continue to make further progress in the advancement of human freedoms. Any reactions against such progress rolling it back (for example, that of swathes of the German-speaking world to revolutionary France and Napoleon Bonaparte) are dismissed by Hegel as "ephemeral victories,"²⁹ as merely temporary setbacks doomed to be swept away sooner or later by the irresistible logic of history's larger teleological trajectory. Those who are "deaf," with ears not to hear the true beating heart of history, "will be harshly dealt with by their fate."³⁰ In particular, those trying to cling to the "good old order" of (the remnants of) feudalism, with a privileged landed aristocracy and everything that goes along with it, are living on very little borrowed time at most. Their ultimate defeat is depicted by this Hegel as a foregone conclusion (with this certainty of Hegel's youth appearing to be tempered and qualified in his maturity, as manifest in the uncertainty about the future detectable in the *Philosophy of Right*). The storming of the Bastille began sounding the death knell of this old order. There will be no permanently successful turning back the clock.

In "The Magistrates Should be Elected by the People," Hegel even blames the bloody excesses of the Jacobin Terror on the stubbornness of the *Ancien Régime* leading up to the French Revolution. Had the rulers of pre-revolutionary France capitulated to the need for serious reforms based on an acceptance that, prior to 1789, social changes originating in the sixteenth century (with the twin emergences of Protestantism and capitalism) eroded the feudal ground out from under them, a violent revolution might not have happened. But, the stubborn insistence, from within the conditions of the eighteenth century, on propping up by-then lifeless legal and institutional husks left over from feudalism rendered these feudal remainders brittle barriers provoking the revolutionaries to smash them to pieces. The vain efforts of the *Ancien Régime* to preserve these zombie feudal forms involved denials of the inevitable, namely, the unpreventable demise of feudalism at the hands of capitalism.³¹ This demise is dictated by the necessary movement of historical progress. As Hegel later warns during his brief Heidelberg stay, "The development of spirit unaccompanied by a corresponding development of institutions,

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29 Hegel 2002, pp. 125-126

30 Ibid., 126

31 Hegel 1999, p. 2

so that a contradiction arises between the two, is the source not only of discontent but also of revolutions”³² (promptly adding that, “we get disturbances of the peace owing to the fact that the self-conscious concept contains other institutions than actually exist; there is a revolution”³³). The foreshadowings of Marx’s theory of social revolutions as laid out in writings such as 1848’s *Communist Manifesto* and the preface to 1859’s *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* ought to be easily discernible to the reasonably informed eye.³⁴

A few years later, in the preface to 1807’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, a Hegel who had just seen Napoleon on horseback and Napoleon’s undoing of the Holy Roman Empire at the 1806 Battle of Jena remains confident of the irresistibility of continuing progress in social history. He declares that, “it is not difficult to see that ours is a birth-time (*eine Zeit der Geburt*) and a period of transition to a new era (*Übergangs zu einer neuen Periode*).”³⁵ A tone of deep optimism continues to pervade this side of Hegel’s thinking, one also sounded in an 1807 letter from Hegel to Christian Gotthold Zellman.³⁶

This same red thread of Enlightenment-type faith in further historical progress resurfaces in the pronouncements of the older Hegel of the Heidelberg and Berlin periods too. On the eve of Hegel’s move to Heidelberg, in a letter written in Nuremberg to Niethammer, he reaffirms:

I adhere to the view that the world spirit has given the age marching orders (*Ich halte mich daran, daß der Weltgeist der Zeit das Kommandowort zu avancieren gegeben*). These orders are being obeyed (*Solchem Kommando wird pariert*). The world spirit, this essential [power], proceeds irresistibly like a closely drawn armored phalanx advancing with imperceptible movement, much as the sun through thick and thin. Innumerable light troops flank it on all sides, throwing themselves into the balance for or against its progress, though most of them are entirely ignorant of what is at stake (*die meisten wissen gar von nichts, um was [es] sich handelt*) and merely take head blows as from an invisible hand (*einer unsichtbaren Hand*) [cf Adam Smith]. Yet no lingering lies or make-believe strokes in the air... can achieve anything against it (*Alles verweilerische Geflunkere und weisemacherische Luftstreicherei hilft nichts dagegen*). They can perhaps reach the shoelaces of this

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32 Hegel 1995a, §146 pg. 269

33 Ibid., §146 p. 270

34 Marx and Engels 1977, pp. 222-231; Marx 1970, pp. 20-22

35 Hegel 1970b, 1970, pg. 18; Hegel 1977b, p. 6

36 Hegel 1984a, pp. 122-123

colossus, and smear on a bit of boot wax or mud, but they cannot untie the laces. Much less can they remove these shoes of gods—which according to [Johann Heinrich] Voss's *Mythological Letters*, among other sources, have elastic soles or are even themselves seven-league boots—once the colossus pulls them on. Surely the safest thing to do both externally and internally is to keep one's gaze fixed on the advancing giant. To edify the entire bustling zealous assemblage, one can even lend a hand to the enterprise that is being taken so seriously.³⁷

With the Napoleonic Wars in view, he continues:

I have anticipated the Reaction of which we presently hear so much. It wishes to impose its right. '*La vérité en la repoussant, on l'embrasse,*' as a deep saying of Jacobi's goes. The Reaction (*Die Reaktion*) is still far removed from genuine resistance (*Widerstand*), for it already stands entirely within the sphere over against which resistance stands as something external. Even if it intends to do the opposite, the will of the Reaction is chiefly restricted to matters of vanity. It wishes to place its own stamp on the events it thinks it most vehemently hates, so as to read upon them: 'This we have done!' The essential content remains unaltered. The addition or subtraction of a few small ribbons or garlands changes matters as little as actual injury that is no sooner suffered than healed. For when such injury pretends to a more significant relation to the whole substance than it is capable of having, it proves ephemeral. Thus—if we largely ignore all the fuss and paltry paper successes of human ants, fleas, and bugs—has this most fearsome Reaction (*Die ungeheuerste Reaktion*) against Bonaparte in essence changed so much, whether for good or evil? We shall allow these ant, flea, and bug personalities to appear to us just as the good Creator has destined: that is, chiefly as a subject for jokes, sarcasm, and malicious pleasure (*Schadenfreude*). If need be, what we can do, in light of this provident design, is to help these poor vermin along to their destiny (*Was wir bei dieser gütigen Absicht tun können, ist, ihnen selbst im Notfalle zu ihrer Perfektion zu verhelfen*).³⁸

The second of these two quoted passages is one of those moments in Hegel's corpus when it becomes evident just how unfair and even false are commonplace accusations (ones going back to Rudolf Haym

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37 Hegel 1953, pp. 85-86; Hegel 1984a, 1816," p. 325

38 Hegel 1953, pp. 86-87; Hegel 1984a, p. 325

in the mid-nineteenth century³⁹) according to which the mature Hegel is a mouthpiece and apologist for German-speaking reactionary trends during and after the Napoleonic Wars. His scorn for the reactionaries, his disdainful characterization of them as vile and insignificant pests (“human ants, fleas, and bugs,” “these ant, flea, and bug personalities,” “these poor vermin”), is anything but muted or subtle here. For him, these pathetically impotent opponents of actual historical progress deserve nothing but derision and mockery (“a subject for jokes, sarcasm, and malicious pleasure”). As an employee of the conservative Prussian state, the Berlin-period Hegel is more careful and coded in his public teaching about his disregard for such phenomena as the Germanic Reaction following the defeat, exile, and death of Napoleon. But, the sentiments he feels freer to express in private correspondence with a trusted long-time friend and ally still underlie and shine through such texts unjustly lambasted as anti-progressive by the likes of Haym *et al* as 1821's *Philosophy of Right*.⁴⁰

That noted, the first of the two above-quoted passages reveals Hegel's direct linkage of Smith's invisible hand of the market with his own cunning of world-historical reason. What Smith sees as an unconscious structural dynamic operative specifically at the level of capitalist economies Hegel sees as holding sway over the vaster domain of social history writ large. *Die List der Vernunft* deployed by Hegelian *Weltgeschichte* is a hand promising to sweep aside all who would resist the forward march of the invincible “colossus” of this history, an “advancing giant” unstoppable in its size and speed (wearing its “seven-league boots”). This clever behemoth even is able to perform judo-like maneuvers through which it turns hostile intentions and aggressive actions directed against itself by its opponents into consequences harmless or even beneficial to it (consequences unintended by these same opponents). For this Hegel, the teleological trajectory of social history in the direction of further gains for individual and collective human freedoms enjoys an irresistible momentum destined to sweep aside all reactionary, anti-progressive holdouts against it.

Hegel's “Prefatory Lectures on the Philosophy of Law,” from the start of Hegel's time at the University of Berlin, echo the same sentiments expressed in such places as the just-discussed 1816 letter to Niethammer. In these lectures, he insists that, once the objective spirit as cultural consciousness of a society has outgrown the socio-historical context originally giving rise to it, this *Geist* inevitably must come into open conflict with the institutional, political, legal, etc. forms of this

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39 Haym 1975, pp. 365-394

40 Johnston 2018, pp. 81-82, 116-119

past-its-prime context.⁴¹ Marx's accounts of radical social changes often involve emphasizing that such historical upheavals and transformations result from tensions between infrastructures and superstructures and/or between means and relations of production. Hegel's identification of tensions between the spiritual and institutional dimensions of societies as responsible for these societies mutating in major fashions anticipates and likely inspires how Marx thinks about revolutions. This is so despite the undeniable differences between, on the one hand, Hegel's spirit-institution distinction and, on the other hand, Marx's infrastructure-superstructure and/or means-relations of production distinctions.

The same sort of notes are sounded in Hegel's roughly contemporaneous Berlin lectures on *The Philosophy of History*. In particular, its third and final section on "The Modern Time" (*Die neue Zeit*) reiterates a number of above-mentioned articles of Hegelian faith in the progressive thrust of actual human history. The French Revolution is rhapsodically celebrated as "a glorious mental dawn" (*ein herrlicher Sonnenaufgang*).⁴² This leap forward in gains for "*liberté, égalité, fraternité*" is portrayed as prepared for and enabled by Protestantism and its secular (primarily German-philosophical) offshoots⁴³—with (Protestant) religion and (Enlightenment) philosophy as jointly bringing about spiritual reformations making possible political revolutions such as the one in next-door France.⁴⁴

Moreover, Hegel speaks of the era initiated by 1789 as epitomizing and vindicating his view of history as the slow, steady, and inexorable advancing of humanity in the direction of ever-greater self-liberation.⁴⁵ At the very end of these popular Berlin lectures on the topic of *Weltgeschichte*, Hegel reaffirms once again that, "the History of the World is nothing but the development of the Idea of Freedom."⁴⁶ The last lines of these lectures proceed to declare that:

Philosophy concerns itself only with the glory of the Idea mirroring itself in the History of the World (*Die Philosophie hat es nur mit dem Glanze der Idee zu tun, die sich in der Weltgeschichte spiegelt*). Philosophy escapes from the weary strife of passions that agitate the surface of society into the calm region of contemplation; that which interests it is the recognition of the process of development

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41 Hegel 2002, "pp. 305-306

42 Hegel 1970c, p. 529; Hegel 1956, p. 447

43 Hegel 1956, pp. 415-417, 422-423, 435, 441-443, 446-447

44 Ibid., pp. 441-443, 446, 453

45 Ibid., pp. 9-11, 13, 15-19, 25, 65

46 Ibid., p. 456

which the Idea has passed through in realizing itself (*der sich verwirklichenden Idee*)—i.e. the Idea of Freedom, whose reality is the consciousness of Freedom (*Bewußtsein der Freiheit*) and nothing short of it.⁴⁷

The final paragraph of this text then concludes:

That the History of the World, with all the changing scenes (*wechselnden Schauspiele*) which its annals present, is this process of development and the realization of Spirit (*das wirkliche Werden des Geistes*)—this is the true *Theodicæa*, the justification of God in History. Only *this* insight can reconcile (*versöhnen*) Spirit with the History of the World—viz., that what has happened, and is happening every day, is not only not ‘without God,’ but is essentially His Work.⁴⁸

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Hegelian philosophy selectively focuses exclusively on what is “actual” (*wirklich*) in social history.⁴⁹ It pushes aside the superficial facade of anomalous happenings and outlier phenomena that are merely “there” (*Dasein*) or have only an insignificant “existence” (*Existenz*) in the social past and present; these would include “the weary strife of passions that agitate the surface of society” and “all the changing scenes.” By contrast, Hegelian “actuality” (*Wirklichkeit*) would consist of those elements in history’s movement that indicate and express this movement’s powerful underlying thrust in the future-oriented direction of, to use Hegel’s words quoted above, the conscious realization of the Idea of human freedom. And, as Norbert Waszek underlines in his study of Hegel’s debts to the thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment, Smith’s delineation of the supposed deep laws of economic life beneath the superficially chaotic hustle-and-bustle of the quotidian marketplace is a key inspiration for the Hegel who likewise discerns an underlying logic, a scientifically knowable structural dynamic (akin to an invisible hand), beneath the turbulent surface of shifting socio-historical events⁵⁰ (discernible by the dialectical-speculative philosopher inhabiting “the calm region of contemplation”).⁵¹

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47 Hegel 1970c, p. 540; Hegel 1956, p. 457

48 Hegel 1970c, p. 540; Hegel 1956, p. 457

49 Hegel 1984a, p. 114; Hegel 1970d, §6[pp. 47-49; Hegel 1991b, §9 p. 33, §6. p. 29-30; Hegel 1970a, pp. 24-28, §; pp. 29-30; Hegel 1991a, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, pp. 20-23, §1 pp. 25-26; Hegel 1956, pp. 17-19, 63-64, 446-447; Plekhanov 1974, p. 482; Lukács 1976, p. 461; Löwith 1991, p. 138; Weil 2002, p. 24-25; Bourgeois 1969, pp. 92-93; Wood 1990, pp. 10, 218; Hardimon 1994, pp. 26, 53; Jackson 1996, pp. 19-25; Neuhauser 2000, pp. 257-258; Beiser 2005, pp. 221-222; Kervégan 2007, pp. 17-32; Rosen 2014, p. 217; Johnston 2018, pp. 74-128

50 Hegel 1991a, §189 p. 227

51 Waszek 1988, p. 53

The religious chords struck in the quotations above from the *Philosophy of History*, with the talk of “the true *Theodicæa*, the justification of God in History,” resonate with a remark to be found in the third and final volume (devoted to *Geistesphilosophie*) of Hegel’s *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*. Both of these texts are roughly contemporaneous and both form the content of courses regularly taught by Hegel during his time at the University of Berlin. In the *Philosophy of Mind*, he avers apropos his historical theodicy that, “Such a doctrine—or in other words that Reason is in history (*Vernunft in der Geschichte sei*)—will be partly at least a plausible faith (*ein plausibler Glaube*), partly it is a cognition of philosophy (*Erkenntnis der Philosophie*).”⁵² A certain interpretation of this line, one I will lay out shortly, permits the resolution of an apparent tension between, on the one hand, the teleology-centered historical perspective of much of Hegel’s *oeuvre* and, on the other hand, the indications about history contained in another contemporaneous work of the Berlin period, namely, the *Philosophy of Right*. How so?

By implicit but sharp contrast with the teleological Reason-in-History Hegel briefly surveyed by me above, the Hegel of the *Philosophy of Right* specifically seems to take his distance from anything that could count as a historical theodicy. *Circa* 1821 at least, Hegel presents a different balance between the two parts of the “doctrine... that Reason is in history” (as these two parts are identified in the line I just quoted a moment ago from the *Geistesphilosophie* of the *Encyclopedia*). He appears to qualify and somewhat diminish the notion that further progress towards freedom in the future of human societies can be considered a “cognition of philosophy” (*Erkenntnis der Philosophie*) strictly speaking.

Later, in Hegel’s last publication before his death, the 1831 essay “On the English Reform Bill,” he even cautions about a possible socio-historical turn for the worse, at least in Britain. Therein, he depicts a rich rabble of English landowners as having dispossessed the subsistence-farming peasantry⁵³ (with the same historical process in England, the “great enclosure,” having provided Marx with the prime example of the “primitive accumulation” famously discussed in the eighth and final part of the 1867 first volume of *Das Kapital*⁵⁴). Then, while the “English Reform Bill” of the title of Hegel’s essay promises democratic gains through the widening of the franchise for British Parliamentary elections, the just-mentioned dispossession process creates a situation in which this “reform” makes it likely that a wealthy *Pöbel* will manipulate a gullible impoverished populace whose poverty leaves them vulnerable to demagoguery and the like. Thus, seeming progress towards greater

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52 Hegel 1970d, §549 p. 352; Hegel 1971a, §549 p. 281

53 Hegel 1999, p. 247

54 Marx 1976, pp. 873-940

democracy, through a bad cunning of reason, probably will lead to actual tyranny in the guise of mob rule by a mob itself ruled by the socially irresponsible rich. Hegel ends this essay predicting that this particular piece of English legislation will lead not to a desirable and peaceful reform, but to an undesirable and bloody revolution.⁵⁵ Hegel's outlook on the future in this late instance is anything but rosy.

Yet, as per the (in)famous preface to the *Philosophy of Right*, the best that anyone, philosophers included, can attain is the Owl of Minerva's child-of-its-time hindsight regarding the past as leading up to the present. Anything beyond that (i.e., the future) remains unforeseeable for philosophers as well as everyone else. Hence, for the *Philosophy of Right* at least, it not only is the case that the knowledge of scientific philosophy (*als Wissenschaft*) with respect to social history is limited such that any posited historical teleologies hold true only in retrospect, exclusively for the past through the present and no further. It also is the case that, for this Hegel especially, there really is no guarantee within social history itself that it will continue to make additional progress on the road ahead along the lines that it arguably already has made on the road traversed thus far.

At this juncture, the other side of Hegel's "doctrine... that Reason is in history," the one according to which this belief (*Glauben*) is "a plausible faith" (*ein plausibler Glaube*), becomes relevant. For the author of the *Philosophy of Right*, properly philosophical *Erkenntnis* can promise nothing about the inherently and insurmountably unpredictable future. This includes whether the future will continue to exhibit more of the same progress as eventuated in Hegel's early-nineteenth-century European era.

In the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel slyly insinuates that, although further socio-historical changes cannot be predicted by the philosopher or anyone else, it is reasonable to believe that such changes are likely in the times to come.⁵⁶ In the already-cited words of Hegel's contemporaneous *Philosophy of Mind*, these changes are the object of the prospective vision of "a plausible faith," but not of the retrospective vision of "a cognition of philosophy." This is a matter of *Glauben oder Wissen*, rather than, as per the title of an 1802 piece by Hegel, *Glauben und Wissen*.

Once again, the preface to the *Philosophy of Right* is crucial for an adequate appreciation of Hegel's position in this vein. As the oft-quoted penultimate paragraph of this 1821 preface states:

...philosophy... always comes too late... As the *thought* of the world, it appears only at a time when actuality has gone through its

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55 Hegel 1999, pp. 269-270

56 Johnston 2018, pp. 71, 78-79, 81-82, 111, 115-128

formative process and attained its completed state (*die Wirklichkeit ihren Bildungsprozeß vollendet und sich fertig gemacht hat*). This lesson of the concept is necessarily also apparent from history, namely that it is only when actuality has reached maturity that the ideal appears opposite the real and reconstructs this real world, which it has grasped in its substance, in the shape of an intellectual realm (*eines intellektuellen Reichs*). When philosophy paints its grey in grey, a shape of life (*eine Gestalt des Lebens*) has grown old, and it cannot be rejuvenated (*nicht verjüngen*), but only recognized (*sondern nur erkennen*), by the grey in grey of philosophy; the owl of Minerva begins its flight only with the onset of dusk (*der einbrechenden Dämmerung*).⁵⁷

Combining these remarks with Hegel's warnings in this same book about the dangers without evident remedy of fatal social self-destabilization through increasing wealth inequality and the production of rabble populations under modern capitalism, the implication is that the outlook for modernity's civil-society-centered nation-states is not good. The above quotation in particular clearly implies that Hegel-the-philosopher has "come too late" for modern capitalist societies in their "completed state," with these societies as a "shape of life... grown old" and incapable of "rejuvenation." Therefore, they presumably are doomed to die sooner rather than later.

By Hegel's own lights, he is warranted, as a matter of "*Glauben*," to believe or have faith that an even better socio-historical phoenix will rise from the impending ashes of modern social history. The *Philosophy of Right*, "painting its grey in grey" portrait of capitalist modernity, itself is a sign of the fact that the sun is setting on this modernity. Whatever else might or might not happen in the time to come, the modern *status quo* of early-nineteenth-century Europe will not perdure indefinitely—or even much longer, according to Hegel's indications.⁵⁸

The older Hegel of the Berlin period, particularly in the *Philosophy of Mind* and the *Philosophy of Right*, looks as though he considers belief in future historical advancement to ever-better-realized individual and collective human freedom to fall within the domain of faith (*Glauben*) rather than knowledge (*Wissen*). With Hegel's denial of him or anyone else enjoying predictive power as regards the socio-historical *à venir*, neither optimistic nor pessimistic determinism about the future is warranted. Freedom's progress through further stretches of history neither is guaranteed to occur nor guaranteed not to occur. It could go either way. Only time will tell.

.....
57 Hegel 1970a, p. 28; Hegel 1991a, p. 23

58 Johnston 2018, pp. 71, 78-79, 81-82, 111, 115-128

But, especially considering historical developments since Hegel's death in 1831, is his apparent belief in further future progress still "a plausible faith?" Does it still possess plausibility? Are the Enlightenment progress narratives shaping Hegel's (and Marx's) thinking about history still basically believable? I am far from alone in being heavily inclined to respond to such questions in the negative.

In particular, modern capitalism's stubborn refusal to implode or wither away in the roughly two centuries between the early nineteenth century and today raises serious questions about the mature Hegel's allegedly "*plausibler Glaube*" in the dawn of a new historical epoch following the twilight demise of modernity's liberal-bourgeois socio-economic systems. From the perspective of an early-twenty-first-century context dominated by a capitalism overseeing exponentially accelerating material inequality and staggering penury for the majority of humanity, Hegel's faith now looks to be implausible. Even if, following Hegel, a philosophical fatalism about the decades and centuries to come is ruled out as epistemologically invalid, there nevertheless is little to no reason nowadays to be optimistic about what lies ahead.

The electrifying inspiration of such events as the French Revolution that so thrilled Hegel himself obviously ran out long, long ago. A lengthy series of right-wing counterrevolutionary victories, with the earliest of these already transpiring during the latter half of Hegel's lifetime, have repeatedly dashed both reformist and revolutionary hopes alike. The years since 1831 look to have thoroughly buried any socio-historical theodicy, and with it the optimism, however qualified, it expresses, along the lines Hegel envisions during his lifetime. I doubt that, if Hegel were alive today, he would continue to stick to his Enlightenment-style talk about Reason-in-History as unerringly progressing towards greater freedom. Instead, he likely would accentuate the pessimistic tones that are audible in texts such as the *Philosophy of Right* and "On the English Reform Bill."

However, simply criticizing Hegel's Enlightenment confidence in the historical progress of humanity from a standpoint informed by the benefits of post-1831 hindsight would be a dull and unproductive exercise. Worse, it would be to kick down an open door. This is because Hegel himself, as seen, readily would concede that he necessarily is a "child of his time." As thus contextually situated, his Owl-of-Minerva retrospective reconstruction of history up to his present inevitably must, in ways he cannot foresee, be reworked or even replaced in light of subsequent times to come. Hence, an external critique of Hegel's early-nineteenth-century perspective on the basis of an early-twenty-first-century one would not even really be a critique of Hegel, insofar as he implicitly calls for such revisions in eras postdating his own.

A fundamental Hegelian conviction has it that the only truly interesting and productive critiques are immanent rather than external. Indeed, an immanent critique of the strands of Enlightenment optimism in

Hegel's reflections on social history, using Hegel himself to problematize this optimism, promises at a minimum to make for a more interesting engagement with Hegelian political philosophy as per the *Philosophy of Right* and similar works. What is more, one of my wagers in this intervention is that an account of post-Hegelian history's defiance of Hegel's sanguinity about historical progress will yield valuable insights into our present social, economic, and political predicament. I shift now to elaborating precisely such an immanent-critical account.

§3 There is no exit: From External to Extimate Mediation

As I will seek to demonstrate in this section, components of Hegel's own theory of social change can be made to help explain why the sorts of social changes Hegel anticipates unfolding beyond his lifetime did not, and still have not, come to pass. And, this explanation hopefully will shed light not only on Hegel's philosophy itself, but also on today's geo-political situation. This is a situation in which the world's societies and humanity as a whole are facing multiple acute crises (a global pandemic, environmental disasters, massive inequality, ballooning poverty, potentially devastating wars, etc.), yet seem unable to take the (admittedly radical or revolutionary) measures necessary to resolve these crises.

We know things are broken. We know what needs fixing. We even sometimes have ideas about how to fix them. But, nevertheless, we keep doing nothing either to mend damage already done or to prevent further easily foreseeable damage. This inaction, as people passively continuing to go along with a *status quo* that clearly is tearing itself apart and spiraling into destructive chaos, is the real mystery crying out for demystification.

As seen earlier, Hegel, throughout his socio-political writings in particular, emphasizes that, when a *Sittlichkeit* with its characteristic institutions and practices "has grown old" (i.e., entered its twilight decline), this shared "form of life" (*Gestalt des Lebens*) will be abandoned. Or, at least, it will be abandoned by the most advanced representatives of the actual (*als wirklich*) "inner pulse" of historical *Weltgeist*. But, what if those who would be such representatives do not show themselves as such by sooner or later fleeing a rotting social order? How would Hegel, contrary to the habits and inclinations of his own thinking, comprehend Spirit failing to fly from a diseased and dying *polis*? Although he might not have entertained such a possibility, his philosophy both allows for it and provides some precious tools for making sense of it.

Exploring the option of a theory of failed revolutions via an immanent critique of the social and political dimensions of Hegel's philosophy goes against a long-standing Hegelian penchant tracing back to Hegel himself. This would be the tendency to associate dialectics

with becoming, change, fluidity, transformation, and the like. Is Hegel not the preeminent canonical Western philosopher of restless historical processes and the ceaseless movement sublating the Old into the New? Starting especially with the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, is not Hegel's dialectic the all-pervading dynamism of such fluxes and flows, or, in the words of the *Phenomenology* itself, "the Bacchanalian revel in which no member is not drunk?"⁵⁹

This deeply-entrenched association of dialectics with dynamism is central to the appreciation of Hegel by a good number of his intellectual heirs. In multiple strands of Marxism, Hegel's foregrounding of historical change is precisely what is most prized about his philosophy. For Marx, dialectics-as-dynamics is an essential part of the "rational kernel," as separable from the "mystical shell," of Hegel's encyclopedic edifice.⁶⁰ For Friedrich Engels, the kinetic Hegelian dialectic is revolutionary, while the static Hegelian System is reactionary.⁶¹

But, with more traditional Marxism espousing its own version of an Enlightenment-style teleology of progressive historical rationality also espoused by Hegel (at least at times), it too needs a loosening of the linkage between dialectics and dynamics. This loosening must allow for a dialectical thinking of history capable of comprehending non-dynamism (as blockage, defeat, exhaustion, impasse, regression, stagnation, etc.) as thoroughly as it comprehends dynamism. Both Hegelianism and Marxism require the ability to explain not only examples of progress in social history, but also instances of the failure of social history to make any progress, instances of what could be dubbed socio-historical "stuck-ness." Only with this explanatory ability can either or both of these theoretical orientations serve as a contemporary Owl of Minerva sufficiently wise to grasp the course of actual events from Hegel's time to today, a course exhibiting at least as much, if not more, anti-progress than progress—as well as exhibiting hefty doses of jarring contingent occurrences defying any purported predictive power or description in terms of any theodicy, however secularized.

In order to articulate a Hegelian theory of non-revolution (i.e., socio-historical inertia or even reaction) through an immanent-critical engagement with Hegel's own reflections on history, I first have to reconstruct how Hegel himself accounts for social change. At least in Hegel's case, an adequate appreciation of his dynamic dialectic in history is a precondition for formulating a Hegelian concept of, so to speak, a lethargic dialectic as the stalling of historical processes and progress. In particular, capitalism's tenacious persistence up through the present,

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59 Hegel 1977b, p. 27

60 Marx 1976, p. 103

61 Engels 1959, pp. 37-39; Engels 1941, pp. 11-13

like the centuries'-wide ditch of the Middle Ages, reveals that real (*als wirklich*) history is as much about stasis as kinesis.

So, how does Hegel account for significant social changes? I suspect that a lengthy book unto itself would be necessary in order to do this question complete justice by fully answering it. Here, I must be selective (albeit without being inaccurate or distorting).

I would propose that the single clearest expression of Hegel's theory of revolutionary transformations from one social order (as a *polis* with its characteristic *Sittlichkeit*) to another is to be found in his early (1802-1803) extended essay on *Natural Law* from his pre-*Phenomenology* Jena period. At one point therein, Hegel brings up the topic of sickness (*Krankheit*).⁶² He reiterates on this occasion the notion, one he asserts elsewhere too, that illness is a matter of a part (as an organ, [sub-] system, etc.) asserting itself in rebellion against its enveloping whole (i.e., the total organism)—with the former thereby disrupting the organic unity of the latter.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in Book Three of *On the Social Contract*, compares the body politic to an organic body as a living entity. He claims that even the best designed body politic, with an optimally good constitution at its governing basis, still will be a mortal entity. All bodies, whether biological or political, eventually succumb to disease, decay, and death.⁶³

Perhaps with this very Rousseau implicitly in mind, Hegel also, in his text on *Natural Law*, draws comparisons between the body politic of *Geist* and the organic body of *Natur*. And, again echoing Rousseau (however intentionally or not), Hegel concludes that all bodies politic, like all organic bodies, are perishable and inevitably come to an end one way or another.⁶⁴ Furthermore, Hegel's 1802-1803 essay broadens the concept of *Krankheit* such as to permit speaking of a sick body politic in the same manner as a sick organic body: The former too can be deemed to be "ill" when its parts (as individuals, factions, etc.) revolt against it and attempt to subjugate it, as the surrounding universal whole, to their own special interests.⁶⁵ In a preceding (1798-1802) essay on "The German Constitution," Hegel even associates the contraction of parts away from the whole and into individuality or factionality with the extreme pathology of "madness" (*Wahnsinn*).⁶⁶

62 Hegel 1970e, pp. 516-520

63 Rousseau 1987, p. 70

64 Hegel 1999, p. 179

65 Ibid., pp. 169-172;

66 Hegel 1971a, pp. 580-581; Hegel 1999, p. 101

Additionally, Hegel's short treatise on *Natural Law* identifies those contracted-into-themselves parts, as both effects and exacerbating causes of socio-political *Krankheit* or *Wahnsinn* (i.e., the dissolution and derangement of the organic whole of the *polis* with its ethical forms of life), as heralds of an imminent new whole to come.⁶⁷ Hence, this sort of sickness or madness of the body politic is, unsurprisingly in a Hegelian context, not so much an outright negation of the social *status quo* as its sublation (*als Aufhebung*), namely, a negation that, in destroying an old order, simultaneously helps create a new order. That is to say, when one *Sittlichkeit* falls into the sort of illness or insanity Hegel has in mind, another *Sittlichkeit* is beginning to be born, having already gestated within the womb of its dying predecessor.

Moreover, this same Hegel adds that such a sublation awaits the new *Sittlichkeit* as well. It too, in its turn and given the fullness of time, will generate out of itself its own gravediggers, who will then go on to erect something else atop what they bury.⁶⁸ Incidentally, this detail contributes to debunking still-entrenched myths about Hegel as the thinker of “the end of history.”⁶⁹

For both Hegel and Marx, the French Revolution is at the utmost forefront of their minds in their theorizations of radical social change. To focus on Hegel's take on the French Revolution as indicative of revolutionary historical dynamics in general, he assigns philosophy a role in such dynamics. This comes out most clearly towards the close of his lectures on the *Philosophy of History*, just before his rapturous celebration of 1789 as “a glorious mental dawn.” Hegel states:

It has been said, that the *French Revolution* resulted from Philosophy, and it is not without reason that Philosophy has been called ‘Weltweisheit’ [World Wisdom;] for it is not only Truth in and for itself (*die Wahrheit an und für sich*), as the pure essence of things (*als reine Wesenheit*), but also Truth in its living form as exhibited in the affairs of the world (*die Wahrheit, insofern sie in der Weltlichkeit lebendig wird*). We should not, therefore, contradict the assertion that the Revolution received its first impulse from Philosophy. But this philosophy is in the first instance only abstract Thought, not the concrete comprehension (*konkretes Begreifen*) of absolute Truth—intellectual positions between which there is an immeasurable chasm.⁷⁰

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67 Hegel 1999, p. 178

68 Ibid., p. 179)

69 Grier 1996, pp. 183-198; Maurer 1996, pp. 199-222; Harris 1996, pp. 223-236;

70 Hegel 1970c, pp. 527-528; Hegel 1956, p. 446

The term “*Weltweisheit*” (worldly wisdom) is important here. As indicated by Hegel’s other uses of this term,⁷¹ there is a subtle but definite tie between this depiction of philosophy and the remark about being a “child of its time” from the 1821 preface to the contemporaneous Berlin lectures on the *Philosophy of Right*. As I indicated earlier, the child *vis-à-vis* its parents displays a mixture of, on the one hand, sameness, similarity, and continuity as well as, on the other hand, difference, dissimilarity, and discontinuity. In Hegel’s parlance, one fairly could render the child a sort of living sublation of the parents (something suggested in the well-known discussion of the family in the *Philosophy of Right*⁷² as well as elsewhere⁷³). As a “child of its time,” philosophy is both an immanent preservation of its time as well as a transcendent alteration of this same time.

Likewise, philosophy as *Weltweisheit* is, as “worldly,” a conditioned describer of its *status quo* and, as “wisdom,” a conditioning changer of this same *status quo*. Of course, Hegel also is emphasizing that true philosophy proper is not anything otherworldly, not a matter of some supposed “wisdom” about the ineffable, mystical, supernatural, transcendent, etc. (or, at its practical-prescriptive rather than theoretical-descriptive level, philosophy does not browbeat the “is” of reality with “oughts” haughtily issued from some unspecified ethico-moral Elsewhere). As “*Weltweisheit*,” philosophy is very much of this world. A philosophy that is too good for this world is, in fact, not good enough.

Setting aside for now whatever divergences and disagreements there might be between Hegelian and Marxian narratives about the part played by philosophy in world-historical events such as the French Revolution, a multifaceted question must be asked of the just-quoted Hegel of the *Philosophy of History*: When, why, and how does a world generate from within and out of itself the worldly wisdom that can, and sometimes indeed does, contribute towards extra-philosophical processes dramatically transforming this same world? Additional features of Hegel’s glosses on revolutionary France in particular contain the elements of how he would respond to this query.

In the Berlin *Philosophy of History*, Hegel situates the French Revolution as the late-eighteenth-century culmination of a modernity originating in the early-sixteenth century. For him, some of the most essential foundations of the modern era are laid down by Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation. Protestantism’s combination of individualism (in the guise of the primacy of the singular believer’s conscience and his/her direct relationship with God) and tendency towards translating its tenets into components of this-worldly profane

71 Hegel 1971b, p. 81; Hegel 1995b, pp. 60-61; Hegel 1969b, p. 241; Hegel 1984c, p. 456; Hegel 1999, p. 228

72 Hegel 1991a, §175 pp. 212-213, §177 p. 214

73 Hegel 1979, pp. 232-234

reality helps give rise to the secular Enlightenment thinking that eventually inspires some of the pivotal agents of revolutionary upheaval in America as well as in France. In Hegel's view, the modern era of world history could be said to have unfolded in a circular sequence starting with a German religious revolution, evolving to become a French political revolution (itself inspired by an Enlightenment which secularizes aspects of the Protestant Reformation), then returning to the German-speaking world in the guise of a philosophical revolution (beginning with Immanuel Kant's "Copernican revolution" as, in part, the groundbreaking initiation of a sustained German idealist reckoning with the multiple significant implications of 1789 and its consequences). Hegelian modernity is partly defined by its secularization of a Protestant conception of free subjectivity.⁷⁴

But, what gives rise to the figure of Luther in the first place? What generates the world-historical rupture of the Protestant Reformation? To cut a long story short, the Hegelian answer to these questions is, in a succinct phrase: institutional rot. As is common knowledge, and as Hegel reaffirms,⁷⁵ Luther's spiritual revolution grows out of the rank corruption and scandalous degeneracy of the Roman Catholic Church. This makes Luther one of the figures of a fundamental Hegelian structural dynamic I highlighted a while ago: an exceptional singular subject who responds to the crumbling or collapsing of a given form of life (in this instance, Catholicism) by detaching from this ailing *Gestalt des Lebens* and retreating into his/her inner mental life, the solipsistic sanctuary of the soul (a retreat interpretable as an instance of *reculer pour mieux sauter*). Catholicism's rot and, along with it, the disintegration of the entire feudal-agrarian order makes possible a revolutionary shift to the modern era, a shift indispensably mediated by the rebellion against a substantial whole (i.e., the Church and the medieval *Sittlichkeit* with which it is inextricably intertwined) by the agency of a subjective part (i.e., Luther's conscience and those it attracts to its cause). The Protestant Reformation is the sickness (*Krankheit*) and/or madness (*Wahnsinn*) of both feudalism and Catholicism. It also is the herald of a new order to come, namely, the *Sittlichkeit* of modernity.

Hegel's Luther is one in a series of figures exemplifying a characteristically Hegelian process in which a faltering or failing *Sittlichkeit* (as form[s] of life) precipitates, thanks to its inner negativities, the emergence of a (novel) *Moralität* challenging, and even reworking or replacing, this entrenched but waning ethical order (with its beliefs, customs, hierarchies, ideologies, institutions, mores, practices, rituals, and so on). Additionally, there are, for Hegel, numerous affinities between religion and philosophy, and especially between Protestantism

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74 Hegel 1956, pp. 415-417, 422-423, 435, 441-443, 449, 453

75 Ibid., pp. 412-413

and his own philosophy. Likewise, both religion and philosophy are expressions of “absolute spirit.” And, in 1831’s “The Relationship of Religion to the State,” a text in which Hegel again refers to “*Weltweisheit*,” he tightly enchains together politics, religion, and philosophy⁷⁶ (as he does on other occasions too⁷⁷). Therefore, it would not be a stretch to include religion *à la* Luther in a broadened Hegelian sense of philosophy as *Weltweisheit*. Indeed, the this-worldly philosophy in the narrower sense of “philosophy” that helps to spark the French Revolution (i.e., Enlightenment secular freethinking) is itself, as seen, portrayed by Hegel as a permutation of Luther’s Protestantism.

Going further in this same vein, I would maintain that Hegel’s own socio-historical and political philosophy is intended to be an early-nineteenth-century iteration of Luther’s early-sixteenth-century “worldly wisdom” (as situated on the threshold between an old world in the process of dying and a new world in the process of being born). According to Hegel, the Protestant Reformation was both, one, the swan song of medieval Catholicism and its feudal world as well as, two, the opening ballad of the modern era with its capitalist system. And, for Hegel himself as an Owl of Minerva, his 1821 *Philosophy of Right* in particular similarly is meant to be both an expression of the dusk of modernity’s (perhaps fatal) crises—on Hegel’s own account, these crises include such problems as wealth inequality, colonialism and imperialism, international rivalries and wars, socially corrosive hyper-individualism, demagogic and populist manipulations, etc.—as well as the initial outlining of the dawn of an admittedly unforeseeable new collective configuration yet fully and clearly to crystallize.

In fact, Hegel, going back to some of his earliest writings, consistently links the prominence and progress of philosophy itself (whether or not it is taken to include religion, theology, and the like) to the unsettling or undoing of established worldly arrangements. Socrates is symptomatic of the decline of Athens. The Stoicism of both Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius is symptomatic of the deathly uniformity and rottenness of the Roman Empire.⁷⁸ Luther is symptomatic of the degeneration of the Roman Catholic Church. And, Hegel, arguably for himself (and not just in himself), is a symptom of the coming apart, first, of the Holy Roman Empire and, second, of European capitalist modernity as a whole. These symptomatic figures are all worldly-wise children of their time in the specific Hegelian senses I have been exploring throughout the preceding.

In 1801’s *The Difference Between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Philosophy*, the younger Hegel writes of the “need of philosophy” (*Bedürfnis*

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76 Hegel 1999, pp. 226, 228

77 (Hegel 1995a, §170 pp. 314; Hegel 1956, p. 449

78 Hegel 1955, pp. 242-243

der Philosophie). He claims that this need arises if and when certain finer minds find themselves clasped within the suffocating embrace of troubled socio-historical conditions pervaded and agitated by divisions (*Entzweiungen*) and rifts (*Zerrissenheiten*). Philosophy manifests a human desire to overcome such painful dichotomies and fragmentation, to (re) establish a harmonious whole through philosophy's (spiritual) labors.⁷⁹

To take Hegel himself as an example, he is thrown by birth into a specific German-speaking context, namely, that of the tottering Holy Roman Empire (as neither Holy, nor Roman, nor an Empire à la Voltaire's celebrated quip) doomed to being smashed to pieces by Napoleon. This late-eighteenth-century Germanic context is marked by antagonisms between the not-really-unified members of a mere legal fiction of unified Empire ostensibly ruled by a paper figurehead of a feeble Emperor. And, not only are there rivalries and divergences amongst the constituents of the Holy Roman Empire's patchwork quilt of myriad different squabbling political entities—there are pronounced discrepancies and tensions between the German-, French-, and English-speaking worlds, especially during Hegel's time.

These intra-European discrepancies and tensions lead some in the German-speaking world, still largely mired in the backwardness of feudal-agrarian ways, to register with intense discomfort the gap between themselves and both an economically modernizing England as well as a politically modernizing France. This registration prompts young German intellectuals in particular to set about trying to modernize the Germanic ethos, if only at the cultural level (in the forms of philosophy, art, literature, poetry, etc.) in lieu of at the economic and political levels too. The German Romantics, the German Idealists in general, Hegel in particular, the Young/ Left Hegelians, and also later Marx all employ their voices in their own fashions simultaneously to lament Germanic underdevelopment, proclaim the dying off of Germanic and European disunity, and announce the imminent emergence of a new socio-spiritual unity on the horizon.

Even before Marx, history already as per Hegel advances by its "bad side."⁸⁰ Periods of international peace and human contentment (i.e., "happiness") are "blank pages"⁸¹ in a world history whose forward movement is driven by wars and other violent conflagrations. Hegel notoriously characterizes history as a blood-soaked "slaughter bench"⁸² and a "divine tragedy."⁸³

79 (G.W.F. Hegel, *Differenz des Fichteschen und Schellingschen Systems der Philosophie, Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, 2, pg. 20-22, 24); Hegel 1977a, pp. 89-91, 93

80 Marx 1956, p. 121

81 Hegel 1956, pp. 26-27, 29

82 Hegel 1999, §164 p[. 306-308; Hegel 1991a, §345 pp. 373-374; Hegel 1956, p. 21

83 Hegel 1999, §164 p. 306

Likewise, periods of harmony, unity, and the like eventuate in similar blank pages in the great Book-of-books that is the entire history of philosophy itself. Western philosophy arguably is born thanks to the setting of the sun on the Athenian Golden Age. The long stability of the Middle Ages produces the mentally deadening sterility of Medieval Scholastic theosophy, with philosophy becoming reinvigorated again (or even awakening from a slumber of many, many centuries) only once this feudal universe enters into its death spiral.

Hegel would say exactly the same things about his own both socio-historical and philosophical era. For him, the veritable explosion of intellectual activity represented by late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century German spiritual advances (particularly Kantian and post-Kantian idealisms) owes its striking, spectacular irruption into philosophical history to the political history with which it is complexly entangled. To be more precise, Hegel sees it as no coincidence that the splintering and collapse of the Holy Roman Empire, a demise hastened by the French Revolution and Napoleon's exporting of it at bayonet point, catalyzes a sudden upsurge of one of the most amazingly fruitful, inventive, and lively set of decades ever witnessed in the whole history of philosophy from antiquity onwards.

However, well after the 1801 *Differenzschrift*, Hegel hints that the turbulence of *Entzweiungen* and *Zerrissenheiten* perhaps can be a condition of impossibility as well as a condition of possibility for the genesis of philosophical *Weltweisheit*. In his October 22, 1818 "Inaugural Address" delivered at the University of Berlin, he begins, after thanking King Friedrich Wilhelm III of Prussia for his professorial appointment, with the following remarks:

As far as the *particular moment* is concerned, those circumstances appear to have arisen in which *philosophy* may once again expect to receive *attention* and *love*, and in which this science, which had almost fallen silent, may once more lift up its voice. For not long ago, the *urgency of the times* on the one hand conferred such great importance on the *petty* interests of everyday life, and on the other hand, the *high interests* of actuality, the interest and *conflicts* involved simply in restoring and salvaging the *political totality of national life and of the state*, placed such great demands on all [our] mental faculties and on the powers of all [social] classes [*Stände*]
—as well as on external resources—*that the inner life of the spirit* could not attain *peace* and leisure; and *the world spirit* was so bound up with actuality and *forced to turn outwards* that it was prevented from turning *inwards* upon itself and enjoying and indulging itself in its proper home.⁸⁴

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84 Hegel 1999, pp. 181-182

When Hegel speaks here of “not long ago,” he definitely is referring to the French Revolution and, especially, its aftermath in the guise of the Napoleonic Wars. As I already have shown, Hegel’s remarks about these world-shaking events identify them as conditions of possibility for the German idealist renewal of philosophy. Yet, in this just-quoted passage, he instead proposes that these same events were too pressing, tumultuous, violent, and all-consuming to permit persons the tranquility and sobriety of mental breathing room requisite for philosophizing of any sort (“*the inner life of the spirit could not attain peace and leisure*”).

Also in the above quotation, Hegel stresses that outwardly focused “interests,” both individual-quotidian (“petty”) and collective-geopolitical (“high”), are responsible for thwarting the philosophical worldly wisdom that might otherwise be enabled and inspired by socio-historical disharmony and turbulence. As outwardly focused, all such interests are shaped and sustained by external objects and states of affairs. Yet, for this Hegel, the “proper home” of *Weltgeist* is not, as one might assume, the world per se as the domain of such externalities. Rather, this home is nothing other than the interiority formed by singular subjects withdrawing from the world and contracting into themselves as loci of a disinterested rationality (*als Vernunft*), a reason whose trans-individual universality is effective only in and through such inward-turning particular individuals (“*the world spirit was so bound up with actuality and forced to turn outwards that it was prevented from turning inwards upon itself and enjoying and indulging itself in its proper home*”).

Incidentally, I strongly suspect that Hegel is echoing Kant’s distinction, from the 1784 essay “What Is Enlightenment?,” between the “private” and “public” uses of reason.⁸⁵ Outward-turning interests would be “private” (reflecting the particular concerns of certain families, factions in civil society, or specific nation-states) in Kant’s sense and inward-turning reasoning would be “public” (manifesting the universal *Vernunft* holding equally and indifferently for any and every subjectivity) in Kant’s sense. Reinforcing this suspicion of mine, Hegel, in 1831’s “The Relationship of Religion to the State,” points to a tension between universal free individuality (involving Kant’s public reasoning) and particular limited collectivity (involving Kant’s private reasoning).⁸⁶ And, all of this resonates with a number of passages in the *Philosophy of Right*, particularly in ones devoted to the topic of *Moralität* as distinct from both “abstract right” (*das abstrakte Recht*) below it and “ethical life” (*die Sittlichkeit*) above it.⁸⁷

85 Kant 1996, p. 17-22

86 Hegel 1999, p. 230

87 Hegel 1991a, §106 p. 135-136 §108 p. 137, §126-127 p. 154-155, §137-138 p. 164-167, §140 p. 175

Hegel, in his 1818 “Inaugural Address,” soon proceeds to introduce another facet to this assessment of the socio-historical prospects for true philosophy in his *status quo*. He declares:

What is opposed to philosophy is, on the one hand, the *spirit's immersion* in the *interest* of necessity [*Not*] and of everyday life, but on the other, the *vanity of opinions*; if the soul [*Gemüt*] is filled with the latter, it has no room left for reason—which does not, as such, pursue its own [interest].⁸⁸

Especially for the Hegel deeply indebted to the Scottish Enlightenment, “the *interest* of necessity [*Not*] and of everyday life” would be, under capitalism, bound up with and mediated by civil society’s “system of needs.”⁸⁹ In modern societies, the “interests” of quotidian requirements for living compel the vast majority of persons to enter into markets as both laborers and consumers exchanging goods and services as buyers and sellers. Through life’s mundane needs and the motivations they generate, individuals are compelled, within the confines of economically modernizing or modernized social orders, to accept their subjectivities being thoroughly permeated, influenced, and shaped by market mediation and everything it brings with it.

By Hegel’s own admission, this capitalist economic mediation threatens to leave no room within subjective interiority for disinterested reason and its operations. In light of what Hegel claims regarding the forward development of history, this must count as a grave danger indeed. The eclipsing or gagging of *Vernunft* by needs and their interests even jeopardizes the very possibility of further socio-historical changes and progress. Without reason-generated *Weltweisheit*, smothered in its cradle by the market’s hand, there can be, according to Hegel’s own theory of social transformations, no reliable mechanism for consistently guiding social history in the direction of the better.

Of course, in the above block quotation, Hegel also points to “the *vanity of opinions*” as likewise threatening to crowd out disinterested reason/rationality (itself responsible for, among other things, philosophy as worldly wisdom). Hegel’s phrase here, “the *vanity of opinions*,” subtly suggests a lamentable convergence of apparent opposites. In it, individuality, as the “vanity” of the “I” with its misplaced pride its its views simply because they are its own, and collectivity, as the anonymous “opinions” of a “we” (or the “they” of “They say that...”) circulating like well-worn coins amongst a given populace, coincide—and this to the detriment of individuality. Incidentally, the German word for “opinion,” *die*

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88 Hegel 1999, pp. 182-183

89 Hegel 1979, p. 103-107, 124, 154, 167-168; Hegel 1979, pp. 242-243, 247-249; Hegel 1995a, §92-93 pg. 166-167; Hegel 1991a, §189-208 p. 227-239

Meinung, conveys the first-person possession (*meine* [mine]) involved with it. The phrase “the *vanity of opinions*” is a pleonasm, if only for a German speaker.

What if the “I” of *Moralität* is captured and overwritten by the “we” of a sick and/or insane *Sittlichkeit*? Moreover, what if this social order is ill in such a way as to interfere with its own self-transformative processes by, through its surreptitious substitution of the spurious “I” of opinion (or *doxa*, ideology, etc.) for the genuine “I” of reason, thwarting the potential immanent emergence out of itself of a child-of-its-time *Weltweisheit* that could point the way toward exits from this order’s impasses and deadlocks? Especially as modern capitalist ideology, “opinions,” once they are misrecognized as the subject’s own personal convictions expressive of his/her supposed uniqueness and idiosyncrasy, create an illusory sense of selfhood, a specious impression of authentic ipseity. When, as per individualism as an ideology, everybody is a special individual, nobody really is.

Furthermore, capitalism, particularly in its consumerist phases, reduces both the things answering to “the *interest* of necessity [*Not*] and of everyday life” as well as “opinions” to all equally being commodities circulating through various marketplaces (including traditional mass media, newer social media, the internet, advertising, publicity, etc.). Particularly through its commodification of “opinions,” capitalism sneakily camouflages its impersonal interests as personal interests, tricking its subjects into identifying with it even when they try to disidentify from it. Trying to individuate oneself within capitalist society employing anything commodified (including “opinions”) as means is a fool’s errand (vaguely akin to the futility of “sense-certainty,” the initial shape of consciousness in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trying to reflect the particularity of its sensations in the universality of language’s words⁹⁰).

In the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel mentions a bit of ancient Greek wisdom he attributes to a disciple of Pythagoras—“When a father asked him for advice about the best way of educating his son in ethical matters (*sittlich zu erziehen*), a Pythagorean replied: ‘Make him the *citizen of a state with good laws* (*wenn du ihn zum Bürger eines Staats von guten Gesetzen machst*).’”⁹¹ Bearing in mind the broad sense of the German “*erziehen*,” as “raising” or “bringing up” in general (similar in scope and meaning to the “forming” [*bilden*] of “*Bildung*”) and not just “educating” in the narrower sense of academic training,⁹² what about those hurled by the accidents of birth into bad *poleis*?

90 Hegel 1977b, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, pp. 58-66

91 Hegel 1970a, §153 p. 303; Hegel 1991a, §153 p. 196

92 Hegel 1999, p. 162; Hegel 1995a, §22 p. 71

Furthermore, what if the putrescence of such political communities, rather than remaining at the level of external objective spirit in the guise of terrible written laws, awful governmental apparatuses, and so on, spreads into the realms of internal subjective spirit, overrunning the presumed haven of conscience, deliberation, and reflection? What if the subjective “I” is turned into a false escape from the objective “we” such that, when the subject “turns inward” (i.e., contracts into itself), all it finds within itself is more of same, namely, internalized or introjected fragments of the external mediation from which it imagines itself to be retreating or withdrawing? Even worse, what about the fact that such a subject, under the sway of the bourgeois-liberal ideology of modern individualism, will be prone to believe mistakenly that the opinions he/she adopts represent, even if only occasionally, a critical distance-taking from his/her *Zeitgeist*? To paraphrase the young Hegel’s vivid description of subjective interiority as “the night of the world” (*die Nacht der Welt*),⁹³ when one peers into the pupils of a contemporary capitalist subject, “here shoots a Twitter hashtag, —there another snarky internet meme, suddenly there before it, and just so disappears” (to be followed by an *ad nauseum* churn of *plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose*).

All of this would amount to the external mediation of the “we” of Hegel’s objective spirit becoming extimate (*à la* Jacques Lacan’s neologism “extimacy” [*extimité*] to designate an inner foreignness, an otherness at the heart of seeming selfhood⁹⁴) mediation in and through the “I” of ostensibly internal subjective spirit. To combine the extremely odd bedfellows of Jean-Paul Sartre and Margaret Thatcher, “there is no exit” within capitalism. Any apparent exits deceive one into remaining within capitalism’s confines while erroneously thinking oneself to have escaped from them. Hegel, with such earlier historical figures as Socrates and Luther in mind, portrays singular subjects asserting their singularity as threats to these subjects’ surrounding social orders.⁹⁵ What he underestimates as a child of his nineteenth-century time—in all fairness to Hegel, there is much in the history of capitalism he did not live to see—is how, and how thoroughly, capitalism has neutralized such threats. This neutralization is one of the keys to accounting for capitalism’s surprising longevity, including in the face of repeated predictions of its imminent implosion made by Hegel, Marx, and many others.

Maybe, *contra* Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right* in particular, the real problem of modernity (and, even more so, of “postmodernity” as later consumer capitalism) is not so much how to integrate with each other *Sittlichkeit* and *Moralität*, but the fact that the latter has been annexed by

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93 Hegel 1987, p. 172

94 Lacan 1992, p. 139; Lacan 1977, p. 268; Lacan 2006, pp. 224-225, 249

95 Hegel 1995a, §140 p. 256

the former and turned into a dangerous trap disguised as a safe refuge. The apparent shelter of spiritual interiority, the mind's inner life as its sanctuary away from the distractions and deceptions of the outer modern world's raucous rat race, is reduced to being yet another space colonized by capitalist business as usual. The din of the marketplace, particularly the noise of the media and on-line markets in "opinions," drowns out reason's silent soliloquy (or even tries to impersonate this *Vernunft*). To utilize some of Hegel's above-quoted words, what is progressive world spirit to do if and when it gets evicted from its proper home by occupying usurpers and pretenders? How, if at all, can it move forward under such inauspicious circumstances? What, if anything, becomes of it after being deposed into homelessness? In the preface to the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel, perhaps with considerations along the lines I have been exploring just now in mind, warns of the serious socio-political dangers of a "superficial philosophy" (i.e., *die Seichtigkeit* [shallowness] as a bundle of mere opinions [*Meinungen*]) which "corrupts the substantial source of all deeds (*die substantielle Quelle von den Taten*), namely universal principles (*die allgemeinen Grundsätze*)."⁹⁶

Hegel himself, as seen, repeatedly insists that there can be no successful socio-political revolutions without prior spiritual reformations paving the way for them. Apropos the prospects (or lack thereof) for any such revolutions under capitalism, my immediately preceding speculations suggest that a Hegelian theory of the non-occurrences as well as occurrences of revolutions in social history pinpoints capitalism's hijacking of the subjective interiority of *Moralität* as the initial obstacle to be removed if radical change is to be made possible once again. Creating an exit from capitalism, and ensuring that those who exit from capitalism will not promptly set about inadvertently recreating it once they have presumably left it, will require evicting implanted capitalist constructs both infrastructural (such as a C-M-C' logic of internalized consumerist desire dancing to the tune of M-C-M' as the logic of capital) and superstructural (such as the "opinions" of capitalist ideology pandering to individuals' vanity) from the "proper home" of *Weltgeist*, namely, the "inner space" of the "I" as rational subject.

Only if and when such evictions transpire will there be reason to hope for an improved social future, instead of yet more of capitalism's stagnating frenzy and/or abrupt environmental breakdown. This is a matter of whether and, if so, how capitalist societies might spawn avatars of a new communist conscience, just as the putrefaction of the Roman Catholic Church (along with the entire feudal-agrarian form of life with which it was inseparably entangled) eventually provoked the coming forward of Luther as a revolutionary figure (and, along with him, Thomas Müntzer too). At least for a Hegelian theory of social revolution,

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96 Hegel 1970a, p. 21-22; Hegel 1991a, p. 18

the self-destabilizing capitalist *Sittlichkeit* will need to give birth to its own secular socio-economic Luthers and Müntzers, new Protestants protesting capitalism itself, if capitalism is to advance beyond itself in the course of further history à *venir*.

Perhaps the first step to reclaiming our proper autonomy is recognizing just how heteronomous we really remain. We can resume striving for the true freedom of universal reason only after we cease being infatuated with the false freedom of particular opinions. The vanity of capitalist private reason must be driven out by the humility of communist public reason. Doing violence to ourselves in tearing out capitalism's implants within our subjectivities, including its M-C-M' and C-M-C' circuits as prosthetic drives extimately subsisting within our libidinal economies, is the first step towards reactivating our long-stifled revolutionary potentials. A combination of Marxism and psychoanalysis has a vital role to play in taking this step.

§4 The Tainted Love of Wisdom: Hegel's Incomplete Break with Bourgeois Individualism

Already in such early socio-political texts as the Jena-era *System of Ethical Life* and *First Philosophy of Spirit*, Hegel maintains that truly free-thinking subjectivity is itself pure *qua* detached from and indifferent to all surrounding contextual influences.⁹⁷ Put differently, the subject that truly thinks freely purifies itself of all investment in and tethering to its worldly milieu with this milieu's myriad determinations, the kaleidoscopic *Zeitgeist* of its time and place. All non-universal, particularistic determinations are eclipsed and dissolved within the self-relating abyss of its monochromatic purity (as "*die Nacht der Welt*" à la Hegel's contemporaneous picturing of subjectivity).

Hegel's later socio-political writings of the Berlin era continue to posit and foreground this same portrait of the free-thinking subject. In the *Philosophy of Right*, this "night of the world" is nothing other than the locus and basis of *Moralität*.⁹⁸ The *Philosophy of History*, echoing the just-mentioned Jena material, extols the unsullied and uncompromising purity of genuinely autonomous cognition and reflection, with thinking's turn inward establishing and reestablishing an interior zone of indifferent universality.⁹⁹ At this same moment, Hegel proclaims, "Man is not free, when he is not thinking."¹⁰⁰

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97 Hegel 1979, pp. 124-125; Hegel 1979, pp. 227-228

98 Hegel 1991a, §104 pp. 131-132; Hegel 1995a, §50 p. 107

99 Hegel 1956, pp. 438-439

100 Ibid., p. 439

Hegel's "Prefatory Lectures on the Philosophy of Law" contain identical assertions about the essential links between subjectivity, thinking, and freedom. Therein, he asserts that, "The ground of freedom is pure thought,"¹⁰¹ and that, "Thinking establishes the independence which makes men into human beings."¹⁰² His 1831 "The Relationship of Religion to the State" similarly identifies "*free spirit*" as "the highest truth."¹⁰³

For Hegel, the capacity to become untimely (while still being a "child of one's time") specifically through loosening one's ties to the times, thereby contracting into oneself and turning inward, is essential to being both actually free and properly human. Through such withdrawal from the world, one attains a purity distinctive of thinking subjectivity. All of this entails that, if and when this capacity for withdrawal and the purported purity of the inner space it creates through its act of withdrawing is impeded or compromised, our very freedom and even our humanity itself are in danger of being lost. The rottenness of certain sorts of particularly bad *Sittlichkeiten* might go so far as to infect and thwart our potential to be free-thinking subjects. In so doing, these corrupt social orders also forestall points of potentially revolutionary dissenting consciousness from arising within themselves, thereby staving off their well-deserved collapses, delaying any days of reckoning.

Perhaps ironically, when Hegel insists on the untimely status of free-thinking subjectivity, his own thinking is most timely *qua* conditioned and limited by his eighteenth- and nineteenth-century *Zeitgeist* (especially by the Scottish Enlightenment, with its liberal individualism). Hegel's own failure to take sufficient distance as a thinker from the bourgeois theories of human nature he inherits from certain of his early-modern intellectual inspirations leaves him neglectful of the possibility of the shared shapes of life of capitalist modernity capturing and obscuring the basis of the sovereign singularity of *Moralität*. This is so despite Hegel's otherwise severe criticisms of these same socially atomistic and mechanistic theories.

Indeed, at first glance, Hegel shows himself to be an especially harsh critic of the entire anthropology behind those philosophical and economic reflections on societies and states assuming human beings to be, first and foremost, islands unto themselves. Especially for early-modern British philosophy and economics, humans tend to be conceived of as originally pre/non-social atoms only secondarily made into social agents by being grouped together through entirely external and artificial contrivances brought to bear on their asocial natures. The popular, persistent myth of the "state of nature," in which *homo homini lupus*, and

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101 Hegel 2002, p. 306

102 Ibid., p. 309

103 Hegel 1999, p. 226

the eventual departure from this state via the “social contract” lie at the foundation of much of the British theoretical material Hegel integrates into his own socio-political thinking. Moreover, such English-language sources also relatedly tend to reduce human agents to being nothing more than utilitarian calculators of measurable self-interest at all levels of their existence, including the spheres of the family and the state as well as those of civil society and its marketplaces.

Throughout his socio-political writings, Hegel appears to reject thoroughly and repeatedly the entire narrative about the state of nature and its taming via the social contract. And, as I will substantiate in a moment, he also assaults the notion of modeling all social relations on contracts, namely, on primarily economic agreements between private persons as property owners with accompanying rights. These aspects of Hegel’s social theorizing seem to place him in diametrical opposition to such predecessors as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Smith too.

The young Hegel’s extended essay on *Natural Law* provides a thorough initial articulation of his case against state-of-nature and social-contract models. In this 1802-1803 piece, Hegel basically blames the application of the neither-dialectical-nor-speculative (i.e., sub-rational) understanding (*Verstand*), with its penchant for carving up reality into atomistic elements along the dualistic black-and-white lines of classical bivalent logic, to socio-political matters for producing these models.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, in *Natural Law*, he defensibly associates such socio-political thinking with “empiricism,” itself a primarily British epistemological orientation in the early-modern period (with the Continental Europe of early modernity, by contrast, as the geographical home of rationalism—well before the emergence of the antagonistic rift between Anglo-American Analytic and Franco-German Continental philosophical traditions during the first half of the twentieth century, the English Channel already serves as the demarcation of a gulf between incompatible philosophical sensibilities). Hobbesian, Lockean, and Smithian accounts regarding individuals *vis-à-vis* society and the state indeed are all vulnerable to Hegel’s criticisms of the state of nature and the social contract *circa* 1802-1803 (as well as after).

In *Natural Law*, Hegel dismisses empiricist socio-political philosophy, with its state of nature and social contract, as indefensibly one-sided. To be more precise, such philosophy lop-sidedly absolutizes modernity’s subject of *Moralität qua* sovereign isolated individual. Thereby, society as distinguishable from the individual is reduced to being nothing more than an aggregate of many individuals thrown together side-by-side in a kind of gigantic heap, a whole that is merely the sum of its parts.¹⁰⁵

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104 Hegel 1999, pp. 105-106, 172-174

105 Ibid., pp. 112-114

This pile of atoms (i.e., society as a simple sum) is then held together solely by the external imposition, ultimately backed by the threat of brute violent force, of formal frameworks in the guises of economic, political, etc. rules. Of course, Hegel's absolute idealist emphasis on the primacy of relations over relata, when brought to bear on societies and their histories, leads him to promote a picture of real *poleis*, of actual political communities, as organic wholes greater than the bare sums of their parts (with Hegelian reason [*Vernunft*] as able to conceptualize organic structures and dynamics, unlike the understanding [*Verstand*] as limited to mechanical-style cognition). This is in diametrical opposition to much of early-modern British socio-political theorizing, for which societies are mechanical wholes analytically reducible to the sums of their parts.¹⁰⁶

In fact, for Hegel, these parts (i.e., individuals as singular subjects) are what they are, including as units with political significance, not in isolation (as the fiction of the state of nature would have it), but only in networks of myriad interconnections with others. Normatively significant individuality does not precede, even in a mythical time before recorded history, this individuality's recognition by relevant social authorities. On the contrary: Such individuality is an effect constituted by this social recognition.¹⁰⁷

Anticipating already in 1802-1803 the later *Moralität-Sittlichkeit* distinction of the *Philosophy of Right*, the Hegel of *Natural Law* seeks to offset the one-sidedness of state-of-nature and social-contract theories by striking a dialectical-speculative balance between two equally extreme but mutually exclusive images of social reality. This Hegelian balancing act brings into play the long-standing ontological dispute between nominalists and metaphysical realists, with empiricists tending to favor nominalism and rationalists tending to favor metaphysical realism. For the empiricists with their nominalism, individuals as parts enjoy both metaphysical and political priority over societies as wholes. For an opposed but equally one-sided metaphysical realism of society, individuals as parts would be nothing more than epiphenomenal emanations of a society (especially its state) as a transcendent supersensible totality somehow existing independently of its many constituents.¹⁰⁸

The socio-political permutation of the long-running debate between nominalists and metaphysical realists thus appears, in Hegel's eyes, as pitting a falsely absolutized *Moralität* against a likewise falsely

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¹⁰⁶ Ibid., pp. 112-114; Hegel 1999, pp. 262-263, 265

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., pp. 112-114

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., pp. 115-117

absolutized *Sittlichkeit* respectively.¹⁰⁹ The framing of things along these lines in *Natural Law* sets up the subsequent handling of the tensions between individuality and collectivity in the Berlin period, particularly in the *Philosophy of Right*. For this older Hegel, the distinction between *Moralität* and *Sittlichkeit* is a distinction internal to *Sittlichkeit* itself (hence Hegel's repeated insistence on the primacy of *Sittlichkeit* over *Moralität*¹¹⁰). That is to say, although sovereign individuality has its place in the distinctively modern *polis*, this is a place internal to, embedded within, and even made possible by an overarching, trans-individual social order that nonetheless is a universality that would not exist were it not for its being embodied and realized in numerous particular individuals.¹¹¹ This social order involves not only a government with its criminal and civil laws, but also a thick texture of shared beliefs, customs, hierarchies, ideologies, institutions, mores, practices, rituals, etc.

Indeed, the very selves of such concern to the empiricist natural law theorists criticized in Hegel's essay on *Natural Law* are cut from this *sittlich* cloth, becoming who they are partly through (whether consciously or not) identifying with this fabric as their second natures.¹¹² *Pace* fantastical stories of the imagined state of nature, a tenable account of the individuals one actually encounters and is familiar with in really-existing social realities reveals these individuals to be anything but islands unto themselves. An empiricism that claims to be all about knowledge based on concrete experience ought to be committed to such an account, rather than to cling to confabulations about a nature red in tooth and claw in which "man is a wolf to man."

Subsequently, in the Nuremberg-era *Philosophical Propaedeutic*, Hegel warns against any romanticizations of the state of nature.¹¹³ *Contra* anything like Rousseau-inspired reveries about noble savages peacefully cohabitating in edenic settings free of civilization's woes, this Hegel stresses the barbarism, cruelty, and might-makes-right injustice of what a hypothetical natural-as-pre/non-social state would be (a stress to be found elsewhere too¹¹⁴). As Hegel puts this point on a later occasion, the romanticized "state of nature" amounts to "an imaginary paradise or a condition such as we represent in the idea of so-called innocent

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¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 115-117

¹¹⁰ Hegel 1986, §55 p. 47; Hegel 1995a, §8 p. 57; Hegel 1991a, §145 p. 190, §154 p. 197, §156 p. 197

¹¹¹ Hegel 1979, pp. 143-145, 157; Hegel 1979, pp. 209-210, 212-213, 241-242; Hegel 1991a, §154 p. 197, §156 p. 197

¹¹² Hegel 1999, p. 162; Hegel 1991a, §151 p. 195

¹¹³ Hegel 1984b, §25 p. 33

¹¹⁴ Hegel 1971a, §502 p. 248; Hegel 1956, p. 99; Hegel 1995c, p. 92-93

peoples.”¹¹⁵ Admittedly, this dismissal of Rousseauian-style romanticism involves a different criticism of the state of nature than the critical line Hegel takes in 1802-1803 against this notion as it features in British empiricism and liberalism.

The third volume of Hegel's *Encyclopedia*, his *Geistesphilosophie*, contains a development of the critique of natural law perspectives building on the arguments already made by Hegel in his earlier critical reflections on the notion of a state of nature. In the course of discussing objective spirit, he remarks:

The phrase ‘Law of Nature,’ or Natural Right (Naturrecht), in use for the philosophy of law involves the ambiguity that it may mean either right as something existing ready-formed in nature (*in unmittelbarer Naturweise vorhandenes*), or right as governed by the nature of things, i.e. by the notion. The former used to be the common meaning, accompanied with the fiction of a *state of nature*, in which the law of nature should hold sway; whereas the social and political state rather required and implied a restriction of liberty and a sacrifice of natural rights (*natürlicher Rechte*). The real fact is that the whole law and its every article are based on free personality (*die freie Persönlichkeit*) alone—on self-determination (*Selbstbestimmung*) or autonomy, which is the very contrary of determination by nature (*Naturbestimmung*). The law of nature (*Das Recht der Natur*)—strictly so called—is for that reason the predominance of the strong and the reign of force (*das Dasein der Stärke und das Geltendmachen der Gewalt*), and a state of nature a state of violence and wrong (*ein Naturzustand ein Zustand der Gewalttätigkeit und des Unrechts*), of which nothing truer can be said than that one ought to depart from it. The social state (*Die Gesellschaft*), on the other hand, is the condition in which alone right has its actuality (*seine Wirklichkeit*): what is to be restricted and sacrificed is just the willfulness and violence of the state of nature.¹¹⁶

As is common knowledge, the classic Hobbesian tale of the transition from the natural state (with its rule of strength [“the predominance of the strong and the reign of force,” “a state of violence”]) to the social state (with its rule of law) is one of the move from unlimited freedom coupled with great danger (i.e., the natural state) to limited freedom coupled with relative safety (i.e., the social state). This transition transpires via individuals entering into the society-creating terms of a social contract, in which all individuals transfer sovereignty to the political state, including

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115 Hegel 2002, p. 313

116 Hegel 1987, §502 pp. 311-312; Hegel 1971a, §502 p. 248

what becomes the state's legal monopoly on the use of violent force, in exchange for the protections afforded by this agreed-upon state.¹¹⁷

Admittedly, the Hobbesian state of nature is very different from this state as it features in Rousseauian fantasies about noble savages. Yet, there still is, for Hobbesianism and much of the tradition of modern British social philosophizing to which it belongs, a sense of loss also expressed by romanticizations of presumed pre-civilizational life. Both the Hobbesian and Rousseauian narratives point to the surrendering of a supposed unfettered subjective spontaneity in the state of nature (“the social and political state... required and implied a restriction of liberty and a sacrifice of natural rights”). Even if, as per a utilitarian aspect of Hobbes’s account, the trade-off proves to be worth it, with individuals gaining more through legal safety than they lose in giving up their dangerous natural independence, there still remains this impression that the laws providing for a secure existence nonetheless encroach on individuals’ (natural) rights and freedoms.

As the prior block quotation from the *Philosophy of Mind* reveals, Hegel considers this impression to be dead wrong. For him, one has nothing to lose but this erroneous sense of loss itself. The individual can and should become reconciled with the collective by coming to recognize several things. First, Hegel contends that the very phrase “natural rights” is oxymoronic. Rights as such exist only in and through the *Geist* of a social state, not the *Natur* of a pre/non-social condition. Hence, one loses no rights in exiting the state of nature, because there are no rights to begin with in that state. The “ought” of right comes into being only after the “is” of nature is left behind.¹¹⁸

Second, one should celebrate rather than lament the (hypothesized) exit from the state of nature. Not only does one not lose any rights that did not actually exist in purely natural circumstances—one thereby escapes from “the predominance of the strong and the reign of force,” from “a state of violence and wrong.” One should happily bid the state of nature “Good riddance!” without any hesitation, ambivalence, or regret (“nothing truer can be said than that one ought to depart from it”). There is nothing to bemoan about not being subjected to the tyranny of the arbitrary, capricious whims of whoever happens to be the physically strongest king of the jungle at any given moment (“what is to be restricted and sacrificed is just the willfulness and violence of the state of nature”). In addition to there being no rights in the state of nature, there is ample oppression, exploitation, and cruelty.¹¹⁹

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117 Hobbes 1985, pp. 189-191

118 Hegel 2002, pp. 306-307; Hegel 1995a, §2 pp. 52-53

119 Smith 1989, p. 115

Third, Hegel also mobilizes an implicit synthesis of Kant and Smith so as further to rebut natural law theories relying on ideas about the state of nature and the social contract. In Hegel's view, one of Kant's discoveries within the sphere of *Moralität*, a discovery integral to the Kantian "metaphysics of morals," is the reconceptualization of law as expressive of, rather than antithetical to, the freedom of the "I" as a rational self-determining agency with duties, obligations, responsibilities, and rights. What holds here for Kant's individual moral subject holds too for Hegel's collective ethical society: Hegel likewise characterizes the laws legislated by sovereign governing authorities and institutions as concrete social manifestations and realizations of the self-legislating autonomy of free-thinking rational spirit ("The real fact is that the whole law and its every article are based on free personality alone—on self-determination or autonomy, which is the very contrary of determination by nature"). A state of lawlessness (i.e., the state of nature) is one of unfreedom (just as, for Kant, failing to self-legislate according to the moral law is turning oneself over to the heteronomous status of being a puppet or plaything of one's phenomenal-pathological inclinations). By contrast, the (social) rule of law is a state of freedom, however partially and imperfectly actualized.¹²⁰ As Hegel sums up this line of thought, "freedom, or the spiritual, acquires existence through law rather than being restricted thereby."¹²¹

Already in 1798, Hegel, in his anonymous commentary to his translation of Cart's letters on Swiss politics, makes an observation about tax laws in particular relevant at the present juncture. Hegel, in this very first publication of his, warns that, "the excellence of the constitution of a country is not to be appraised according to the size of the tax which one pays in it."¹²² As an illustration of this mistake, he immediately points out that the citizens of Bern tend defensively to laud the low tax rates they pay whenever they are confronted with the rottenness of Bern's government.¹²³

By Hegel's estimation, the amount gained from not paying higher taxes is far from offsetting the loss of real freedoms resulting from living under the thumb of a bad state. For Hegel, taxation laws, like law in general, should be and be seen as further materializations of spiritual freedom.¹²⁴ This view, however intentionally or not, resonates with the Smith for whom taxes are signs of liberty, not slavery¹²⁵ (with H.S. Harris

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120 Hegel 2002, pp. 304, 306, 309-310, 312-313

121 Ibid., p. 310

122 Ibid., p. 127

123 Ibid., p. 127

124 Hegel 1991a, §302 p. 343

125 Smith 1999, pp. 450-451

surmising based on persuasive evidence that Hegel studied Smith's *Wealth of Nations* specifically while in Bern¹²⁶). Incidentally, there is much in the *Wealth of Nations*, including its numerous pointed criticisms of mercantilism, that apply even to today's capitalism in ways those assuming Smith to be in overall agreement with recent and contemporary neoliberalism would find surprising. One can see the Smithian assertion about taxation and liberty to be a social, political, and economic version of Kant's morality-level claim about law as creating rather than destroying freedom, a version Hegel appears to run with in the *Commentary on the Bern Aristocracy*.

In "Proceedings of the Estates Assembly in the Kingdom of Wurtemberg," Hegel accuses those who perceive laws as nothing but limits curbing freedom of being guilty of a mob mentality, so to speak. He states, "the view that what is done in the interest of government and state is *against* the interest of the people distinguishes the mob from the citizens."¹²⁷ Populist attacks against political, legal, and juridical systems, although usually conducted in the name of "freedom," are, in truth, attacks on fellow citizens' freedoms and rights by a bloody-minded rabble promoting nothing more than destructive anarchy. Behind the banner of "liberty for all" sometimes lurks the self-serving interests of a scheming few.¹²⁸

Also in "Proceedings of the Estates Assembly in the Kingdom of Wurtemberg" as well as in the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel cautions against another tendency manifesting itself in the political philosophy and political economics of Britain and the Scottish Enlightenment. This would be the tendency to overextend the frameworks of economic marketplaces to cover non-economic social relationships, such as those of domestic life in the family and political life in the state. In particular, the very phrase "social contract" implies a misconception according to which all spheres of *Sittlichkeit*, not just that of civil society with its markets, are thought of as based on the sorts of transactional arrangements characteristic of economic interactions between property owners with their abstract rights of possession.¹²⁹

The binding ties of family and state, as Hegel conceives them, are fundamentally different-in-kind from the economic and legal structures of civil society facilitating divisions of labor as well as the production, distribution, exchange, and consumption of goods and services. Relations between spouses as well as between parents and children cannot be done justice to if they are recast and reduced to secondary

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126 Harris 1983, p. 126

127 Hegel 1964, p. 259

128 Hegel 1956, p. 430

129 Hegel 1964, pp. 256-258, 262-263, 280-281; Hegel 1991a, §75 pp. 105-106, §281 p. 324

external interactions between self-interested parties interested in nothing but measurable personal material gain.¹³⁰ Of course, this by no means prevents the perversion of family relationships by the marketplace. In Hegel's and Marx's age, a heartbreaking instance of this is the commonplace phenomenon of members of working class families in industrial England having to regard each other in their shared desperation as nothing but rivulets of additional hourly wages to combat feebly the ceaseless tide of chronic hunger and deprivation. As an example of this today, spouses often are chosen like any ordinary commodity through monetized on-line dating and marriage-brokering services, pulled off the shelves of virtual meat markets. And, just as one casually tosses into the garbage any commodity that gets old or ceases to be pleasing, so too can one discard one's internet-selected significant other or spouse on a whim like yesterday's faded fashions.¹³¹ Hegel and Marx both realize, each in their different ways, that absolutely nothing whatsoever is sacred within capitalism.

On Hegel's assessment, the trespassing through overextension of civil society's economic abstract property rights beyond the boundaries of the marketplace is even more unfortunate and toxic when it affects the state itself. If the atomistic and mechanistic perspectives on collective human existence of early-modern British philosophy and economics have any validity, it is solely within the circumscribed region of the social totality Hegel associates with civil society. In this quintessentially modern region dominated by the economy, one indeed is dealing with a plurality of self-interested atoms (i.e., private persons as property owners engaged in buying and selling) jostling each other elbow-to-elbow in a vast numerical aggregate externally configured by the mechanics laid down by the rules and laws governing markets.

The inorganic nature of modernity's economy-centered civil societies is, according to Hegel, to be contrasted sharply with what he alleges to be the fundamentally organic nature of *Sittlichkeit*, with the state as the ultimate guarantor of the ethical order's greater-than-the-sum-of-its-parts unity.¹³² As he words this on one occasion, "the organization of a state rests... on a concrete wisdom totally different from a formalism derived from private rights."¹³³ In this same context, he subsequently adds, "A contract... is essentially distinct from a political bond which is a tie objective, necessary, and independent of choice or

130 Hegel 1979, pp. 127-128; Hegel 1995a, §79 pp. 146-147

131 Hegel 1991a, §176 pp. 213-214

132 Hegel 1995a, §123-124 pp. 221-224; Hegel 1991a, §267 pp. 288, §269 pp. 290, §271-274 pp. 304-313, §286 pp. 327-328

133 Hegel 1964, p. 256

whim.”¹³⁴ Yet, to follow Hobbes and company in broadening the economic concept of the contract to cover all social relationships of every sort, especially political ones, is to distort severely or even obscure completely the true status of what makes a community really a community. Interrelated senses, amongst both rulers and ruled, of non-transactional duties with respect to one’s *polis* as well as of values worth immeasurably more than utilitarian private self-interest are jeopardized by the idea of a social contract covering politics and government along with everything else under the sun in social reality.¹³⁵

Many of the ills Hegel diagnoses as afflicting his socio-political surroundings are, for him, symptoms of this modern process of civil society illegitimately recasting the state in the image of its own markets. These ills include: the inordinate influence or outright capture of sovereign state power by the fickle private interests of social factions within a class-divided economy¹³⁶; the conduct of foreign policy, including decisions about whether or not to enter into wars on the international stage, purely on the basis of transactional considerations of gains and losses; demagogic and populist rabble-rousing stoking masses’ resentments toward elected governments, with the latter misrepresented as bad-faith sellers of defective wares to individual voters¹³⁷; and, thanks to these other interrelated ills, the prospect of losing the very organic unity of *Sittlichkeit* itself through the disaster of society as a whole actually coming to amount to nothing more than a lifeless heap of isolated grains (whose isolation is only validated and reinforced by one-person, one-vote electoral systems).¹³⁸ It would be no exaggeration to say that, for Hegel, if the mechanical atomism of social contract theory were to succeed at thoroughly remaking the being of society *in toto* in the image of its (mis)thinking of society, this would be tantamount to destroying society itself. Any such remade “society” would remain one in name only, just as, for Aristotle, a jumble of limbs and organs is a “body” in name only. In it, the *bourgeois* would have killed off and entirely replaced the *citoyen* in the hearts and minds of each and every denizen of such a depressing *polis*.¹³⁹

Taking into consideration the multiple interconnected facets of Hegel’s sustained critique of the natural law tradition of social, political,

.....
134 *Ibid.*, p. 281

135 *Ibid.*, pp. 256-258, 262-263, 280-281; Hegel 1995a, §33 pp. 82-83, §37 p. 90, §134 p. 240; Hegel 1991a, §75 pp. 105-106

136 Hegel 1964, p. 3; Hegel 1964, pp. 257-258, 293; Hegel 1995a, §37 p. 90

137 Hegel 1964, pp. 262-264

138 *Ibid.*, pp. 264-265; Hegel 1991a, §258 pp. 277, §303 pp. 343-344; Hegel 1964, pp. 317-321

139 Rousseau 1987, pp. 24-25

and legal thinking, particularly as represented by early-modern British contributions in these veins, his *Rechtsphilosophie* appears to be squarely in favor of the venerable Aristotelean view of human beings as *zoon politikon* and against bourgeois modernity's (hyper-)individualistic view of human beings as, at root, Hobbesian lone wolves.¹⁴⁰ As the philosopher of mediation *par excellence*, Hegel, at the most fundamental and overarching of systematic metaphysical levels, adamantly rejects any absolutization of the atomic and the mechanical. This rejection applies to socio-political versions of such an absolutization of the atomistic and the mechanical (such as is exhibited in Scottish Enlightenment efforts to analyze societies under the inspiration of Newtonian physics as well as in the anthropological assumptions at the base of models of the state of nature and the social contract).

As Hegel emphasizes, ubiquitous trans-individual social mediation (bringing to bear the influences of the family, civil society, and the state as well as larger currents of world history, languages, cultures, etc.) thoroughly infiltrates and suffuses supposed individuals. In Hegel's *Lectures on Natural Right and Political Science*, he portrays singular subjects as "completely permeated" by the influences of objective and absolute *Geist*.¹⁴¹ This all-saturating trans-individual mediation is what the "*politikon*" in "*zoon politikon*" refers to for Hegel. What could be more opposed to the philosophical anthropology behind modern liberal-bourgeois individualism than this?

For all the ferocity and thoroughness of Hegel's defense of the political animal of antiquity against the pre/non/anti-social animal of modernity, Hegel, as he himself would be the first to admit, nonetheless remains a child of specifically modern times. As such, immersed in a socio-cultural ethos shot through with individualist ideology, he still partially succumbs to this ideology even while trying to combat and temper it. And, if Hegel's own philosophical conscience, in all its power and majesty, cannot fully escape from his *Zeitgeist* in attempting to pull away from its gravity so as to turn inward into purportedly pure thinking, then what hope is there for any other minds to establish themselves as irreducibly singular inner sanctums independent of the wider world's mediations? Are they not condemned to mistake ready-made contents imposed upon them by their socio-historical context, including the ubiquitous (as non-individual and non-idiosyncratic) ideology that is modern bourgeois-liberal individualism, as their ownmost intimate creations?

According to Hegel, at least certain of his historical predecessors, such as Socrates and Luther, really did succeed at becoming utterly

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140 Smith 1989, p. 62; Thompson 2015, p. 120

141 Hegel 1995a, §58 p. 116

untimely, thoroughly severing their links to their ethical forms of life so as to dwell within and critically reflect upon these forms from a thereby-purified moral conscience. Even if one concedes this point about some of Hegel's historical predecessors, figures like Socrates and Luther nevertheless presaged, but crucially did not live to see, the cultural-historical rise of individualistic *Moralität* as a socially hegemonic ideology. The *Sittlichkeit*-challenging individualities of these epoch-making figures, in their singularity, were not expressions of any already-established individualism. Only prior to the genesis of individualism as an ideology was it truly individualistic to assert one's individuality.

By contrast, capitalist modernity, ideologically codifying as part of its own workings things like Lutheran Protestantism's sovereign individual conscience, has made it such that the very assertiveness of the "I" of moral subjectivity no longer typically threatens, as it does in pre-modernity, the "we" of ethical life. The *faux* individualism of the subject of modern capitalism is different-in-kind from the idiosyncratic individuality of a Socrates or a Luther. Yet, in the *Philosophy of Right* and elsewhere, Hegel writes as though the purity of this pre-modern idiosyncratic individuality still were available and accessible to modern capitalist subjects (providing, among other things, the possibility of revolutionary changes beyond the horizon of capitalism).

Ironically, Hegel writes this way arguably under the influence of modern capitalist individualism as a trans-individual ideology baked into capitalism's peculiar *Sittlichkeit*. His Enlightenment-informed faith in the potential (re)emergence within capitalist modernity of genuinely free and pure thinkers drastically underestimates just how all-penetrating and pervasive the bourgeois individualism of liberalism (as a sort of cult of fake individuality in all its alluring speciousness) would prove to be. Hegel, as a self-confessed child of his time, falls prey to what I earlier identified as an especially insidious ruse of capitalist unreason, namely, the seizure of the "I" of singular subjective spirit and the substitution, in its place, of the *doppelgänger* of a false individuality. This false individuality is a Frankenstein-like stitch-up composed of and dominated by introjected or implanted fragments of capitalism's *Zeitgeist*. The trap created by this ruse leaves those subjects wishing to turn away from the objective spirit of capitalism by turning inward prone to being lulled into erroneously believing themselves to have achieved free-thinking independence from modern society when, in fact, their inner thoughts are not inner but extimate, not spontaneous original creations, but prefabricated products thoughtlessly echoing others (although mistaken for spontaneous original creations). When the voice of capitalism surreptitiously becomes the voice of conscience, disguising itself as each of our inner mental monologues, it makes conformist cowards of us all—and this whether we know it or not.

In *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*, Slavoj Žižek problematizes Hegel's treatment of human

sexuality, particularly as this treatment features in the discussion of the family contained in the *Philosophy of Right*. According to Žižek's justified criticism here, Hegel presumes human sexuality to be, in and of itself, a purely natural phenomenon. For the author of the *Philosophy of Right*, sexuality is sublationally transubstantiated from being natural to becoming social only in and through specific mediations being brought to bear upon it from the outside. These mediations would be the social institutions and practices of religious and legal rituals and laws of marriage, domestic divisions of labor, the family's relations with civil society and the state, and spousal and parenting roles as defined along cultural, religious, and legal lines. Such features of the family as a socially constituted unit are the social externalities which, when the *an sich* natural internality of the individual human organism's sexuality (including the pangs of romantic love as well as the pressures of carnal lust) is inserted into the familial framework, elevate this sexuality from *Natur* to *Geist*.¹⁴²

Žižek, basing himself primarily on psychoanalytic considerations with respect to sexuality, observes that Hegel leaves human sexuality in its purported natural purity open to being rendered denaturalized and impure exclusively via merely external mediations. Hegel thereby fails to take the additional step of exploring how this sexuality, particularly after a long-running phylogenetic history of being mediated by more-than-natural forces and factors, is already in and of itself denaturalized, inherently and internally traversed by denaturalizing mediations rendering it always-already non-natural (at least by comparison with non-human animals). With the likes of Sigmund Freud and Lacan palpably in the background, Žižek contrasts Hegel's natural-*qua*-in-itself sexuality with psychoanalysis's social-*qua*-for-another sexuality to the benefit of the latter.¹⁴³

Žižek's main point is that the sexuality of the libidinal economy is always-already suffused by and with the sociality of the political economy. According to this Žižekian point, Hegel mishandles human sexuality as externally, instead of extimately, mediated. My core critical thesis on the present occasion is that the objection Žižek makes to the mature Hegel as regards the entwined topics of sex and family also apply to Hegel's discussion of *Moralität*, conscience, and the inner "I" of subjective spirit. The latter's apparent unmediated in-itself-ness conceals subtle, sometimes even disguised, for-otherness mediations subsisting within the hearts and minds of modern individuals living under capitalism.

The unfreedom of such individuals is especially cunning in that it seduces them into believing that they are at their post-ideological freest

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142 Hegel 1995a, §73-88 pp. 138-161; Hegel, 1991a, §158-181 pp. 199-219

143 Žižek 2012, pp. 440-442, 449

when, in fact, they are at their most ideologically (as well as economically and politically) unfree. Disguising the chains of outer space as the keys to an inner space that itself has been reduced to a camouflaged extension of outer space is a cunning ruse indeed. By not recognizing this, Hegel, with his Enlightenment-inspired *Weltweisheit*, leaves himself tending quietly to overestimate the likelihood of near-term revolutionary transformations of capitalist modernity as brought about by the universal world spirit working through the particular subjective spirits of the exceptional consciences of “great men”—with these consciences as the “proper home” of Hegel’s rational *Weltgeist* purportedly guiding history. In so doing, Hegel underestimates capitalism’s socio-historical staying power, bolstered by its fashion of clipping the wings of potential “great men” with their socially destabilizing worldly wisdom, beyond what Hegel misperceives to be its dusk. Marx soon joins him in this underestimation.

Indeed, Marx shares with Hegel an Enlightenment-type optimism in imminent historical progress beyond nineteenth-century modern capitalism. But, in addition, Marx’s overestimation of the probability of radical social change of a progressive nature perhaps involves (at least to some extent) the same error plaguing Hegel’s anticipation of the decline and fall of capitalist empire. As seen a while ago here, the Hegelian theory of interlinked spiritual reformations and social revolutions, as the motors of actual socio-historical upheavals, relies upon the continued existence of truly pure and free inner spaces within thinking subjects to which they can retreat and from which they can plot courses of action aimed at altering their surrounding *status quos*.

The crucial step in the direction of a Hegel-inspired account of revolutions that fail to happen in the first place is to acknowledge that and how the autonomous bastion of the (self-)liberated “I” can be covertly taken over and misdirected by the heteronomous impositions of an oppressive, exploitative “we.” By implanting its own structures, dynamics, and contents within singular subjects’ souls, capitalism enables itself to weather the storms of countless crises that otherwise might precipitate it being toppled and swept away into the dustbin of history. Traces of the motivations animating something like Antonio Gramsci’s early-twentieth-century theory of hegemony as a supplement to Marxist historical materialism in light of the non-events of failing-to-materialize anti-capitalist revolutions in the West already are to be found within Hegel’s political writings themselves. However, based on a combination of Hegelian, Marxian, and psychoanalytic considerations, I would insist that persons’ hearts and minds are colonized not only by what is superstructurally hegemonic (with Gramsci and his fellow twentieth-century Western Marxists heavily favoring a focus on more-than-economic superstructures), but also by what is infrastructurally hegemonic (within the capitalist mode of production, such components of the economic base as M-C-M’ are internalized in the guises of prosthetic

drives and desires implanted directly into the libidinal economies of singular psyches by their market-mediated milieus).

Like Hegel, Marx repudiates modern liberal individualism in insisting that humans are, by nature, *zoon politikon*. Yet, also like Hegel, Marx sometimes seems inconsistently to concede, however inadvertently, a certain amount of ground to this dubious individualism. The primary indication of this concession is Marx's frequent depiction of the individual as a "bearer" (*Träger*) or "personification" (*Personifikation*) of economic categories.¹⁴⁴ This depiction suggests that such things as the logic of capital and the class roles it dictates are external masks which, as such, can be at least potentially removed one fine day as well as continually donned day after day in pre-revolutionary routines. If the individual is a bearer or personification of economic categories, then he/she still exists as distinct from these categories. He/she possesses, at a minimum, some potential inner distance from them.

Yet, what if capitalism achieves an annihilation, or even just a severe diminishment and hobbling, of this potential? What if the masks borne and personified cease to be masks precisely because they have merged with their wearers? What if the "rational kernel" of the free "I" gets crowded out by the "mystical shell" of an unfree "we?" Again, all of this might assist with explaining how and why capitalism has continued up through today to defy any and all predications of its impending implosion and overthrow.

§5 "A monstrous system": Hegel's Misgivings About Markets and Our Living Death

In Hegel's 1798 essay *The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate*, he observes in passing apropos modernity that, "The fate of property has become too powerful for us to tolerate reflections on it, to find its abolition thinkable" (*Das Schicksal des Eigentums ist uns zu mächtig geworden, als daß Reflexionen darüber erträglich, seine Trennung von uns uns denkbar wäre*).¹⁴⁵ He says this *vis-à-vis* early Christian (i.e., pre-modern) valorizations of poverty and corresponding denigrations of wealth. With secular socio-economic history having brought about the transition from ancient to medieval to modern modes of production, the transition to modernity specifically transformed the status and significance of private property.

Such property becomes bound up with a distinctively capitalist "system of needs," "civil society," and legal scaffolding of "abstract rights," to use some of the Scottish-Enlightenment-furnished phrases

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144 Marx 1962, pp. 147-148; Marx 1976, pp. 254-255; Marx 1963, pp. 270, 282, 389; Marx 1971, pp. 296

145 (G.W.F. Hegel, *Der Geist des Christentums und sein Schicksal, Werke in zwanzig Bänden, 1*, pg. 333); Hegel 1975, p. 221

Hegel himself subsequently (post-1798) employs for different components of modern European economies. In fact, private property becomes the load-bearing pillar of economic modernity such that modern subjects come to find its abolition unthinkable. Or, as Hegel puts it in the same context, the pre-modern Christian romanticization of poverty “is without truth for us” (*hat keine Wahrheit für uns*) modern subjects.¹⁴⁶ We have come to find the very notion of being separated (*getrennt*) from private property virtually inconceivable.

At the level of the history of the Christian religion, one can construe its development of Protestantism, with the latter co-emerging with Western capitalism in the early-sixteenth century, as allowing Christianity eventually to make its peace with the unprecedented primacy and seeming indispensability of private property within the new mode of production. To the Catholic cult of the impoverished saint or martyr, a cult rooted in pre-modernity and its pre-capitalist economic conditions, is opposed the Protestant ideal of “the man of the calling,” namely, the righteous businessperson vigorously pursuing a modern this-worldly economic vocation in the secular sphere while nonetheless remaining steadfastly devoted to otherworldly concerns about God and Heaven. Before both Marx and Max Weber, the young Hegel already gestures at a symbiotic relationship between the jointly rising pair of capitalism and Protestantism.

Furthermore, it sounds as if there is a slight mood of foreboding conveyed by Hegel when he acknowledges that, “The fate of property has become too powerful for us to tolerate reflections on it, to find its abolition thinkable.” It is almost as though he is cautioning that private property has perhaps “become too powerful” (*zu mächtig geworden*) in the sense of coming to be a dangerous excess, having too much of a grip on us. Indeed, by Hegel's own admission here, its hold on modernity's subjects has become so firm that these subjects no longer have the mental wiggle room properly to reflect on or think about it (a cognitive, and maybe also emotional-motivational, inhibition which, at least from a Marxist perspective, would strongly interfere with the surfacing of anything like anti-capitalist revolutionary class consciousness amongst such subjects). Could this amount to a moment when the early Hegel glimpses what has been central to my concerns throughout this intervention thus far, namely, the capitalist infiltration and commandeering of the intrasubjective realm of thinking and reflection? Is this a Hegelian registration, however fleeting, of the capitalist political economy, centered as it is on private property, bending both subjective and religious *Geist* to its purposes? Does this worry Hegel? If so, how much does it worry him?

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¹⁴⁶ Hegel, *Der Geist des Christentums und sein Schicksal*, pg. 333; Hegel 1975, p. 221

Soon after *The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate*, Hegel, in “The German Constitution” (1799-1802), appears to wax a bit less anxious about modern capitalism. Throughout his more youthful works (of the late 1790s and early 1800s), evidence abounds of his intellectual indebtedness to English-language political economics. Hegel, philosophically interested in manual as well as intellectual labor,¹⁴⁷ clearly adopts the labor theory of value à la Smith and David Ricardo¹⁴⁸ (although, as Georg Lukács remarks in his 1938 study *The Young Hegel: Studies in the Relations between Dialectics and Economics*, the underdevelopment of Hegel’s immediate German-speaking surroundings of the late-eighteenth century, by comparison particularly with the contemporaneous economic development of industrializing Britain, left him unable fully to draw out the revolutionary consequences of the Smithian-Ricardian labor theory of value in the ways later done by Marx in the latter’s radical “critique of political economy”¹⁴⁹). In “The German Constitution,” and based on this adoption of the Smithian-Ricardian labor theory of value, he seems at least resigned to, if not enthusiastically endorsing of, capitalism’s quantitative and qualitative inequalities of wealth and corresponding access to goods and services as reflective of the intrinsic and irreducible qualitative differences-in-kind between distinct types of labor in the internally differentiated division of labor of capitalist civil society’s system of needs.¹⁵⁰ For better or worse, unequal material conditions of life between the various classes (or Hegelian “estates” [*Stände*] and “corporations” [*Korporationen*]) and sub-classes, given the labor theory of value on Hegel’s reading of it, are to be accepted as structurally unavoidable under capitalism. As he bluntly states this in the *System of Ethical Life* (1802-1803), “inequality of wealth is absolutely necessary.”¹⁵¹

Yet, one does not have to wait until the mature Hegel of 1821’s *Philosophy of Right*, with his somber intimations about the potentially explosive consequences for modern societies of the swelling rabble populations being produced by capitalism and its inequalities of wealth, to see him seriously troubled by the issue of capitalist wealth inequality and its possible future effects. For instance, prior to “The German Constitution,” in the Bern-and-Frankfurt-period “Fragments of Historical Studies,” Hegel, after reiterating that private property (*Eigentum*) is at

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147 Riedel 1969, pg. 38; Bienenstock 1992, p. 23

148 Smith 1986, pp. 131-132, 138, 160-161, 291, 294, 334; Ricardo 2004, pp. 5-7, 14-15, 17-18, 23-24, 48, 189, 231, 260, 262.

149 Lukács 1976, pp. 176, 350, 366

150 Hegel 1964, pp. 18-19

151 Hegel 1979, p. 170

the core of “the *states of the modern world*” (Staaten der neueren Zeit),¹⁵² has the following to say as regards history’s lessons about wide gulfs between rich and poor:

How dangerous (*gefährlich*) the disproportionate wealth of certain citizens (*der unverhältnismäßige Reichtum einiger Bürger*) is to even the freest form of constitution and how it is capable of destroying liberty itself is shown by history in the example of a Pericles in Athens; of the patricians in Rome, the downfall of whom the menacing influence of the Gracchi and others in vain sought to retard through proposals of agrarian laws; of the Medicis in Florence. It would be an important topic of investigation to see how much of the strict right of property would have to be sacrificed for the sake of a durable form of republic (*wieviel von dem strengen Eigentumsrecht der dauerhaften Form einer Republik aufgeopfert werden müßte*). We have perhaps not done justice (*vielleicht Unrecht getan*) to the system of sansculottism in France in seeking the source of its demand for greater equality of property (*größeren Gleichheit des Eigentums*) solely in rapacity (*der Raubgier*).¹⁵³

This passage is enormously important and clarifying when read side-by-side with much of the rest of what I have foregrounded throughout the preceding from Hegel’s socio-political texts. To begin with, Hegel, at the start of this quotation, warns that the pulling away from the rest of society, thereby abandoned to immiseration, by a small elite of the super-rich is a lethal threat to “even the freest form of constitution.” That is to say, no matter how well-designed and initially robust and thriving are given political communities—these presumably would include, for Hegel, certain modern European constitutional nation-states—they will face mortal peril if they complacently let yawning chasms of wealth inequality open within their midst. As history teaches, these chasms easily can become abysses swallowing up whole societies in rabble-fueled destruction and even properly revolutionary upheaval.

After quickly running through a handful of specific historical examples, Hegel then wonders about “how much of the strict right of property would have to be sacrificed for the sake of a durable form of republic” (*wieviel von dem strengen Eigentumsrecht der dauerhaften Form einer Republik aufgeopfert werden müßte*). This comment should be viewed and appreciated alongside the line from 1798’s *The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate* with which I opened the present section of this intervention: “The

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152 (G.W.F. Hegel, “*Fragmente historischer und politischer Studien aus der Berner und Frankfurter Zeit* (ca. 1795-1798),” *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, 1, pg. 439); Hegel 2002, p. 99.

153 (Hegel, “*Fragmente historischer und politischer Studien aus der Berner und Frankfurter Zeit*,” pg. 439); Hegel 2002, p. 99

fate of property has become too powerful for us to tolerate reflections on it, to find its abolition thinkable” (*Das Schicksal des Eigentums ist uns zu mächtig geworden, als daß Reflexionen darüber erträglich, seine Trennung von uns uns denkbar wäre*). Combining this earlier-quoted line with the quotation immediately above from “Fragments of Historical Studies,” one would be justified in inferring that the Hegelian message here between the lines is that the modern capitalist “form of republic,” as a social order in which critically contemplating and altering (let alone “sacrificing” [*opfern*]) the status of private property is almost impossible, thereby should be considered anything but “durable.” The implication is that capitalist modernity’s *poleis*, due to their unwillingness or inability to check spiraling wealth inequality by “sacrificing” the “strict right of property” through various possible egalitarian reforms and regulations, will prove to be fragile and short-lived socio-historical configurations. Already during the mid-to-late 1790s, Hegel is expectant that, whether one likes it or not, inequality of private property will prove to bring about the self-wrought ruin of modern capitalist societies. They thereby will do fatal violence to themselves at their own (invisible) hands.

The only hope Hegel sees in “Fragments of Historical Studies” is to be found, unsurprisingly for him, in the then-still-underway socio-political experiments of revolutionary France. He faults himself for perhaps sometimes being unjust toward French radical efforts to combat wealth inequality through redistributive measures (“We have perhaps not done justice to the system of sansculottism in France in seeking the source of its demand for greater equality of property solely in rapacity”). France’s pro-Revolution poor (i.e., the *sans-culottes*) acting to better their rotten lot under the *Ancien Régime* should not dismissively be misunderstood as animated by nothing more than the vulgar desire to engage in predatory robbery (i.e., “rapacity” [*der Raubgier*]) of the rich for the sake of mere revenge. Instead, the Hegel of “Fragments of Historical Studies” sees fit approvingly to pin whatever slim hopes he has for the future evolution of modern societies on precisely such endeavors as the economically-redistributive side of the French Revolution (a side contrasting sharply with England’s contemporaneous nosedive into its Dickensian nightmare).

Alas, economic history has revealed, with its hindsight, that the likes of the *sans-culottes* failed to close the class gaps of the *Ancien Régime*. Many of the families who were wealthy in pre-revolutionary times in France remained wealthy in post-revolutionary times there too.¹⁵⁴ Hegel’s hopes did not end up being vindicated in this instance. And, French history ensuing soon after the fall of Napoleon glaringly displays the bitter consequences of this failure.

One final set of relevant observations by the young Hegel must be highlighted by me before I conclude. The observations in question occur

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154 Piketty 2014, pp. 342-343

in Hegel's 1803-1804 *First Philosophy of Spirit* from his pre-*Phenomenology* Jena period. At one point therein, he refers to Smith's famous example, with which the *Wealth of Nations* opens, of the modern pin factory.¹⁵⁵ Following this Smith (and anticipating a Marx inspired by both Smith and Hegel), the Hegel of the *First Philosophy of Spirit* ruminates about the deskilling, disempowering, impoverishing, and soul-destroying effects on workers of the relentless capitalist industrial mechanization of the means and relations of production.¹⁵⁶ What is more, these effects cannot but be detrimental to the health and flourishing of the body politic in general, with likely dire consequences for society as a whole. In this context, Hegel even foreshadows Marx's accounts of alienation/reification and commodity/money fetishism as inevitable, necessary outgrowths of industrial capitalism's means and relations of production.¹⁵⁷

Even Ricardo, as a liberal advocate of the capitalist economic system, admits that, "I am convinced that the substitution of machinery for human labour is often very injurious to the interests of the class of labourers."¹⁵⁸ In addition to the harms that Hegel, under Smith's shadow, attributes to techno-scientific mechanization,¹⁵⁹ Ricardo notes the obvious fact that mechanization benefits capitalists and landowners (at least in the short term) at the cost of rendering masses of workers redundant¹⁶⁰ (although Marx, unlike Ricardo, later will identify mechanization's redundancies as contributing to capitalism's self-destructive "law of the tendential fall in the rate of profit,"¹⁶¹ a tendency already noted by Smith too¹⁶²). But, with more of a calm resigned shrug than is exhibited by Hegel, Ricardo asserts that, despite whatever of its drawbacks, industrial mechanization is simply inevitable and must be acquiesced and adapted to by the inhabitants of capitalist countries.¹⁶³ As Thatcher would later express this Ricardian sentiment, "There is no alternative."

In the *First Philosophy of Spirit*, Hegel concludes his survey of the Smithian pin factory with a very dark and fearful description of capitalism in general. He states:

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155 Smith 1986, pp. 109-117

156 Hegel 1979, pp. 246-249

157 Ibid., p. 249

158 Ricardo 2004, p. 264

159 Ibid., pp. 267, 270

160 Ibid., pp. 264, 266

161 Marx 1981, pp. 317-338

162 Smith 1986, p. 453

163 Ricardo 2004, p. 271

Need and labor, elevated into this universality, then form on their own account a monstrous system of community and mutual interdependence in a great people; a life of the dead body, that moves itself within itself, one which ebbs and flows in its motion blindly, like the elements, and which requires continual strict dominance and taming like a wild beast.¹⁶⁴

He then compares the “activity of laboring and need” within capitalism’s system of needs (i.e., “this universality”) to “the movement of the living dead.”¹⁶⁵ Hegel employs strong, and strongly negative, words here: “a monstrous system,” “a life of the dead body,” “a wild beast” (indeed, the uncontested supreme power in the jungle-like “spiritual animal kingdom” [*das geistige Tierreich*]¹⁶⁶ of capitalist economies), and “the movement of the living dead.” These words, calling to mind horrifying imagery, are meant to voice and arouse fear and similar negative affects.

Moreover, Hegel, most likely with another famous stretch of the *Wealth of Nations* in mind, looks to be implying that Smith’s “invisible hand of the market” ought to be viewed as a terrifying undead appendage. This potent and unpredictable organ must be responded to with aggressive government control and oversight (“which requires continual strict dominance and taming like a wild beast”). Presumably, in the absence of such control and oversight, the market-monster will run amok and Hegel’s pessimistic predictions of capitalism’s near-future implosion will be made significantly more probable.

Much of the preceding demonstrates that Hegel indeed is no relaxed *laissez-faire* liberal. Yet, in a recent comparative study of Smith and Hegel, Lisa Herzog claims that, “Smith and Hegel did not yet seem very concerned about pressures from the market on the private sphere.”¹⁶⁷ Pace Herzog, I believe myself to have shown above that Hegel is anything but sanguine about the Smithian marketplace and its invisible hand. In fact, and as just seen, Hegel is quite acutely alarmed about the impacts of market pressures on the non-economic as well as the economic dimensions of modern societies. The mischaracterization of Hegel as fundamentally at ease with capitalism, this Right Hegelian or, in Herzog’s case, Smithian-liberal impression, deserves to be written off as, to have recourse to Lukács’s words, “a reactionary legend.”¹⁶⁸ Only if one ignores, among many other pieces of evidence, the very first place in which Hegel explicitly references the *Wealth of Nations* (i.e., in the *First Philosophy of Spirit*, with

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164 Hegel 1979, p. 249

165 Ibid., p. 249

166 Hegel 1970b, pp. 294-311; Hegel 1977b, pp. 237-252

167 Herzog 2013, p. 82

168 Lukács 1976, pp. 3-17

its consideration of Smith's example of the pin factory)¹⁶⁹ can one possibly find Herzog's claim about Smith and Hegel plausible.

By contrast with Herzog, Frederick Neuhouser contrasts Hegel's pessimism with Smith's optimism *vis-à-vis* capitalist markets.¹⁷⁰ I believe Neuhouser to be closer to the truth, at least apropos Hegel, than Herzog. However, both Neuhouser and Herzog concur that Smith himself, if not also Hegel, is relaxed and bullish about capitalism and its viable long-term future. Yet, if one notices and considers just how frequently and uncannily Smith's numerous sharp criticisms of protectionist state mercantilism (not to mention agrarian feudalism and its vestiges) in the *Wealth of Nations* obviously apply to ostensibly free-trading *laissez-faire* capitalism then and (perhaps more so) now, it becomes highly debatable whether even Smith himself is really so unconcerned and confident about modern political economies.¹⁷¹ Of the two principle founders of the British political economy taken up by Hegel, it is Ricardo, not so much Smith, who appears to display outright unworried insouciance about capitalist economic structures and dynamics.

The Hegel of the *First Philosophy of Spirit* and related texts deserves to be recognized as the true forefather of those nowadays who, like the Marxist Chris Harman and the neo-Keynesian economist John Quiggan, speak of "zombie capitalism" and "zombie economics" (as per the titles of Harman's 2009 and Quiggan's 2012 books respectively). Yet, burning questions remain for Hegel as well as for those who, like him, reach for the horrific imagery of the undead to characterize (post)modern capitalism: How, why, and when does a socio-economic apparatus, such as capitalism's zombified and zombifying system of needs in all its monstrosity, persist in undeath rather than just dying a death once the historical sun has set on it? What enables such a system to shamle on without dying, lurching through multiple crises that by various reckonings should each and all have killed it off many times over?

These are burning questions for Marx as well as Hegel. And, as I have hinted previously, I believe that both Hegelianism and Marxism, in order to answer them, need the assistance of psychoanalysis. This is so especially at the level of what Freudian and Lacanian metapsychologies offer by way of drive theories in which analytic drives (*Triebe*) take shape at the intersection of mind and world, with the latter including the social arrangements and operations dealt with both by Hegel's absolute idealist political philosophy as well as by Marx's historical materialist critique of political economy. I develop this elsewhere.¹⁷²

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169 Hegel 1979, p. 248

170 Neuhouser 2000, pp. 171-172

171 Smith 1986, pp. 120, 152-153, 168-170, 181, 185-186, 195, 198, 201, 232, 246, 357-359; Smith 1999, pp.. 25, 151, 298, 302-306, 308-309, 320, 369.

172 Johnston 2017, pp. 270-346; Johnston 2020, pp. 3-50; Johnston 2021, pp. 173-184; Johnston, 2022a, pg. 45-63 [forthcoming]; Johnston 2002b, [forthcoming]; Johnston, 2022c [forthcoming]

I now will conclude by returning to the later Hegel of the Heidelberg and Berlin periods. This older Hegel, in versions of his mature *Rechtsphilosophie*, brings up the concept of a “right of distress” or a “right of necessity” (*Notrecht*).¹⁷³ When the struggle to live collides with abstract property rights such that continuing to respect the latter jeopardizes the continuation of life itself, Hegel deems it rightful for abstract property rights to be set aside and justifiably violated. If stealing a loaf of bread will spare a poor person and his/her family from starving to death, then the theft of the loaf has right on its side, trumping the opposed property rights of the baker, thanks to the right of distress/necessity (*Notrecht*).

We face today, at the global collective level, an overwhelming plethora of sources of real necessity and distress: recession, depression, poverty, famine, pandemic, war, environmental disintegration, and the near unthinkable prospect of the end of all life on earth. A contemporary invocation of the Hegelian *Notrecht* should not be just about the right of desperately hungry isolated individuals to steal single loaves of bread simply in order to avoid death by starvation for another day in the capitalist concrete jungle. It ought to be about the right of the vast majority of humanity to expropriate all expropriators in the name of humanity’s most basic and essential needs (including the economically “ineffective” but nonetheless all-too-real demands of the bulk of the world’s population). Today’s urgent overriding right of distress is nothing other than the right to end capitalism for good.

We are well over two-hundred years past due on invoking this *Notrecht*. It is more than high time to pull the emergency brakes on the runaway zombie train that is modern capitalism. Yet, who, if anyone, will be the immanently-transcendent, half-in-half-out child of our times with the worldly-wise disposition (as involving a measure of tranquil inner distance from the world) as well as the practical ability and opportunity to reach for the brakes? If and when this happens, it definitely will be a matter of, as the cliché saying goes, better late than never.

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173 Hegel 1995a, §63 pp. 121-122; Hegel 1970a, §127 pp. 239-241; Hegel 1991a, §127 pp. 154-155

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