

HEGEL'S ANTI-CAPITALIST STATE

EL ESTADO ANTICAPITALISTA DE HEGEL

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RESUMEN ABSTRACT

Sostengo que el concepto del Estado moderno de Hegel está formulado de tal manera como para ser anti-capitalista. Hegel concibe el Estado moderno como el avance de la voluntad universal de la comunidad política; yo argumento que la naturaleza y la estructura de las relaciones sociales capitalistas son un anatema para este proyecto. Aunque Hegel proporciona una defensa de las sociedades de mercado modernas, él pone en tela de juicio sus efectos corrosivos sobre la sociedad en su conjunto. Al ver el capitalismo como algo más que una organización de la sociedad simplemente basada en el mercado, sostengo que el concepto de Estado de Hegel está en contradicción con la lógica del capital como una institución social. Puesto que la lógica del capital obliga a otras esferas de la sociedad a convertirse en dependientes de ella, así como a integrar a los agentes sociales en formas de la vida social que no sirven a fines universales, esto constituye una contradicción con la propia finalidad del estado racional tal como Hegel lo concibe.

I argue that Hegel's concept of the modern state is formulated in such a way as to be anti-capitalist. Hegel conceives of the modern state as advancing the universal will of the political community, I argue that the nature and structure of capitalist social relations are anathema to this project. Although Hegel provides a defense of modern market societies, he calls into question their corrosive effects on society as a whole. By seeing capitalism as more than simply a market-based organization of society, I argue that Hegel's concept of the state is in contradiction with the logic of capital as a social institution. Since the logic of capital forces other spheres of society to become dependent upon it as well as integrate social agents into forms of social life that do not serve universal ends, it constitutes a contradiction with the very purpose of the rational state as Hegel conceives it.

PALABRAS CLAVE KEY WORDS

capitalismo, libertad, Hegel, obligación, economía política.

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The resurgence of interest in Hegel's political and moral philosophy over the past two decades has curiously left out a comprehensive treatment of his theory of the state. Although it stands at the apex of his political theory, Hegel's concept of the state is now generally viewed as an anachronism, a view echoed by Axel Honneth who has recently written, "I do not believe that Hegel's concept of the state or his ontological concept of spirit can in any way be rehabilitated today." (5) In this paper, I do not seek a comprehensive treatment of his theory of the state, but I would like to assert its importance with respect to the problems that have arisen with the evolution of capitalism and economic modernity. In the process, I believe that many of the attributes of the modern state that Hegel sees as having normative validity can be glimpsed. In addition, I want to suggest that an application of Hegel's theory of the state to problems associated with modern economic life can help chart a path toward rethinking the state's role with respect to the economy.

Indeed, the liberal structure of thought that pervades the lion's share of our political self-understanding sees redistributive measures, to a greater or lesser extent, as the primary mechanism for ameliorating inequalities generated by market institutions. Part of the reason for the hegemony of this view has been the ascendance throughout the twentieth century of the liberal value of "justice as fairness," where states can play a minimal role in interfering with the ends and purposes of economic actors. The justification for further state action in shaping and organizing economic life requires more justification than liberal theory can provide. To this end, I would like to suggest that examining Hegel's theory of the state and drawing out its implications for modern socio-economic problems yields a broader and more compelling conception of state action than the more limited approach of liberal theory. Hegel's theory of the rational state, I contend, provides us with an alternative way of thinking through these problems and justifying an expanded sphere of state action into economic affairs and, even more, into the deeper moral and political purpose of the modern state in relation to the expansion of capitalist market economies.

I

The thesis I seek to defend in this paper is that Hegel's concept of the modern, rational state is anti-capitalist in its very essence or with respect to the inner principles that make it normatively valuable in Hegel's own view. Hegel's theory of the state is anti-capitalist because he conceives

the purpose of the rational state as preserving the universal in the face of the particular in all affairs of social life. Put another way, although he allows for the existence of market institutions, Hegel reworks Rousseau's thesis of the general will in such a way that the state can be seen as opposing the ability of capitalist interests to dominate and permeate social life as a whole. Contemporary capitalism is largely defined, as Martin Sklar has argued, by "a system of social relations expressed in characteristic class structures, modes of consciousness, patterns of authority, and relations of power," and which "involves a system of authority inextricably interwoven with the legal and political order as well as with the broader system of legitimacy, the prevailing norms of emulative morality and behavior, and the hierarchy of power." (Sklar 6-7) For Hegel, a state is only properly a state, or "actually" a modern state, when it is able to stand against the excesses of civil society that have the power to turn political life away from universal concerns toward particular interests and ends. If we conceive capitalism, as it should be in our own time, as a coordinated system based on private interests and aims that is predicated on shaping the common powers and interests of the community to enhance those private interests, then we must see Hegel's rational state as opposed to such a system. I will also argue that he does not deem capitalist institutions as worthy of our moral and political commitments – we are not obligated to recognize them as rational, in his sense, to the extent that they are not subordinated to the universal, common interest of society as a whole.

The central reason for this is that capitalism needs to be distinguished from the kind of market society that Hegel had analyzed during his own time. Although he saw the normative value of self-interest, of private property, of exchange, and of a certain degree of wealth accumulation, he sees these as subordinate to a larger political and cultural project. Hegel's disparaging remarks about the economic society of England during his own time, of the nature of mechanized factory production, and his insistence that modern economic institutions serve the general interest of the society, all speak to the interpretation of Hegel as anti-capitalist. Hegel was not against markets, or the idea of a market economy. Rather, he was critical of the tendency for the sphere of market social relations colonizing the higher, political and moral purposes of the state and its ability to orient the political community toward universal ends. If we expand on this reading, we find that Hegel's concept of the rational state – if it is to realize and secure the universal interests of the community – needs to resist and to break down the model of social

and economic life that we today know as capitalism. In my reading, modern capitalism presents us with a contradiction within the rational state in that its imperatives, institutions, interests, and so on do not realize universal ends. As a result, we have no duties or obligations to such institutions or the practices engendered by them. Indeed, I want to also suggest that such a reading also means that we even have a duty to resist and to alter such institutions, to make them serve universal, generalizable ends and interests. Indeed, far from accommodating capitalist institutions and socio-economic formations, Hegel's theory of the state is, I contend, explicitly anti-capitalist and should be reassessed for its power to reorient contemporary political and economic life toward more common, universal social ends.

Initial reaction to this thesis will be no surprise. Was Hegel not a great champion of private property and of markets? Is his theory of "civil society" (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*) not an outright justification for bourgeois, "capitalist" forms of exchange and accumulation? I am not convinced that Hegel justifies what we understand as modern capitalist society. Certainly he was deeply critical of the excesses of civil society, of what he called the "system of needs," in particular when economic self-interest was not properly contained but allowed to enter into the sphere of the state. He saw a normative value in market society for moderns, but he is explicit that the state repels its pathological effects and tendencies. Hegel's overriding concern with the universal and with the kind of rational freedom that modernity must seek to achieve is opposed to the kind of individuality and freedom that the logic of market society is able to provide. Rather, Hegel's understanding of the role of the modern rational state is to function so as to preserve a universal will in a society that must also accommodate the existence of individual self-interest in civil society. Therefore, capitalism becomes distinct from a society that simply possesses markets once its imperatives begin to transform and pervert the universal will and common goods of the political community and instead seeks to place its own interests as the interests of society as a whole. When the logic of economics overrides the moral purpose and ends of politics and social policy, then capitalism becomes a distinct social formation and way of life, and it is something Hegel's political theory distinctly opposes.

To make the claim that Hegel's conception of the state is inherently anti-capitalist immediately brings to mind the Marxian argument that the state as conceived by Hegel is an expression of capitalist class interests.

In his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Marx takes Hegel to task for his inability to see that the relationship between civil society and the state – a crucial element of Hegel's political philosophy – creates the preconditions for the state becoming subordinate to bourgeois class interests. This position creates a deep skepticism of the state's capacity to mitigate the excesses of economic life and to re-orient private interests toward common, universal ends. For Marx, Hegel's theory of the modern state is mistaken because it sees the state as the expression of the Idea rather than as an expression of "the mass of men existing as members of families and of civil society." (9) According to Marx, this means that the state cannot be posited over and against the real world of human beings: "Family and civil society are the presuppositions of the state; they are the really active things; but in speculative philosophy it is reversed." (Ibid. 8) The upshot of this thesis is that the empirical conditions of existing social relations are affirmed in the illusory rationality of the state: "Thus empirical actuality is admitted just as it is and is also said to be rational." (Ibid. 9) The state therefore is shaped by the actual nature of civil society; it cannot be independent of it, and then act back upon the actual processes of modern economic life. The state therefore remains, in Marxist theory, allied with bourgeois class interests and is a crucial part of modern capitalist society.¹ This view assumes that what Hegel perceived as a modern, bourgeois market economy is synonymous with modern capitalism and, more crucially, that his theory of the "rational state" is in fact the defender of capitalist social relations.²

In contrast to this, Hegel argues that the very essence of rational, modern culture is one in which its universality is embodied or objectified in the institutions of the rational state. The very idea of rationality is crucial here since he means by this that there are universal ends that are secured toward which the other, subordinate spheres of society (the family and civil society) are to be oriented: toward the universal, common interests of the political community. For its part, the universal can be seen as having a two-fold character. In the first place, it means that any concept, idea, practice, institution, and so on, achieves rationality

¹ Although some theorists have sought to show the deficiencies of this approach in Marxist thought, it remains a stubborn aspect of anti-capitalist discourse on the left. See Ralph Miliband; and more recently Mike MacNair.

² Robert Fatton Jr., for instance, argues that "the Hegelian state cannot pretend to universality, because it denies the working class both political participation and the means to sustain a livelihood," (580) and that "[t]his rational state . . . corresponds to the advent of capitalist civilization, which according to Hegel marks the end of the historical process." "Hegel and the Riddle of Poverty: The Limits of Bourgeois Political Economy." (583).

because it is generalizable. In the second instance, universal means that it is to apply to the political community as a whole, not only to its parts. The basic principle is that modern consciousness grasps the ontological reality that human beings are part of an interdependence that shapes its individual members. To distort or degrade the relations that constitute that interdependence constitutes an erosion of the common interest. The universal is therefore the insight into the contradictions of previous historical forms of social and political life. But perhaps most importantly, he believes that the normative power of modernity lies in its ability to bring to rational fulfillment the kind of universality that will be also be able to secure the development of a complete, rational individuality as well. Modern political and social institutions need to be able to guarantee a kind of social integration that is not based on the arbitrary customs of any given community, but the universal, common interest of society itself. Rational individuals recognize in these institutions the universal ends they seek to accomplish; only in this way can they be free. In this sense, the inability for the state to maintain, secure, and guarantee social institutions, processes, customs, and practices that preserve the structure of society that is necessary to allow each individual to see his own interests as needing to achieve a higher set of aims than particular, subjective interests.

The connection of this argument to the critique of capitalism can be accepted only if it can be demonstrated that capitalist institutions are able to distort and deform the common social processes responsible for the constitution of modern individuality. Put another way, if it can be shown that capitalist social relations do in fact constitute individuals away from achieving the concrete universal – by which Hegel means that identification of the particular with the universal – then these kinds of social relations detract from the rationality of the state; they in fact mean that the state ceases to be modern in Hegel's distinct sense. In this way, I contend that Hegel's philosophy of the rational state must not simply mitigate the deleterious effects of capitalist social relations, it must strive to guide the direction of civil society away from capitalist forms of accumulation, exchange, wage labor, and so on that set up the preconditions for the de-rationalization of the modern Hegelian state and which, in the process, erode the preconditions for modern freedom.

II

The first question therefore becomes the extent to which Hegel's theory of civil society (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*) is able to accommodate the empirical realities of modern capitalism as a system of social production and social organization. Although Hegel sees the incorporation of market relationships and the pursuit of self-interest in economic life as a crucial dimension of modern civic life, this ought not to be applied to the realities of capitalist social formations. Hegel is clear in numerous places about the defects of modern civil society including the creation of poverty as well as the debasement of human being and labor as the result of mechanization and organized factory production (“Jenaer” 331-335) (*Lectures on §§101 104 117 121*) (*Die Philosophie* §198)). Market relations, the pursuit of private interests, and so on, are elements of the universal because they make individuals aware of a set of needs that are not only unique to themselves, but are shared by others as well. The development of economic modernity is crucial for Hegel because it shows individuals that despite their individual needs, interests and desires, they are not independent in fulfilling them (Cf. Greer).

Modern individuals require civil society because they need both to give expression to their particularity and also to see their social interdependence on others.³ In this way they are able to come to grasp that the pursuit of self-interest needs to recognize the self-interests of others. Lacking this, civic freedom deteriorates into a sphere of competitive atomism (Cf. *Dien* 227ff). On Hegel's view, civil society and the system of needs require the existence of the state to prevent this kind of social pathology. Modern capitalist societies are characterized by this pathology: economic activity organized by owners of the productive powers of society becomes the dominant logic of social relations influencing other spheres of social and individual life without any external steering mechanism.⁴ It therefore turns society into its means for realizing the interests of one segment of the community.

³ Although many highlight the relation between Adam Smith and Hegel with respect to the normative validity of market society, Hegel is clearly distinct in the way that he conceives of the purpose and role of the market. As James P. Henderson and John B. Davis have argued, “[s]ubjecting Smith's thoughts to dialectical analysis led Hegel to conclude that modern man is less independent, less self-sufficient than his primitive ancestors. Though man is now less dependent on nature, he has become more dependent on his fellow men.” (191)

⁴ I take this characterization from Maxime Rodinson and his theory of “capitalist socio-economic formations.” See his application of this theory in *Islam et capitalisme*. Rodinson derives this from François Perroux.

This creates a problem for Hegel's understanding of the value of modern economic life. The existence of an exaggerated economic sphere is irrational on Hegel's view because it reverses the logical priority of the universal preceding the particular. The constant, critical thread that runs through Hegel's account of civil society is precisely this: that the concatenations of market relations are unable to realize and secure a higher sense of universality that is more rational than atomized civic life alone:

The system of needs continues to be strongly marked by contingency, which must be counteracted by means of something universal; the sphere of right too is marked by this contingency, and to sublate this must be the aim of the public authority. (Hegel, *Lectures on* §117)

Hegel sees that the problem of the "social question" lies at the center of the sphere of needs, where individuals are driven by their own needs and interests at the expense of the broader interests of society as a whole. These are intrinsic to civil society; the law of necessity (*Notrecht*) is seen as a potentially destructive force when it lacks the ability of the state to reign in its excesses as well as inculcate individuals to seek the universal in their own private spheres of action (Cf. Losurdo).

Therefore, it becomes clear that the extent to which we can equate what Hegel sees as the positive elements of civil society with the structure of modern capitalism as a mode of social organization and production is highly questionable. One primary reason for this is that modern capitalism – as opposed from the largely pre-industrial, market-based form that was emerging Hegel's time – has been overcome by a more comprehensive organization of social relations and institutions. Modern capitalism is therefore characterized not simply by exchange and by the pursuit of private interests (as classical liberals posit) but by a small subset of private interests that seeks out the supportive power of state institutions, law, and social policy to be organized in its own interests at the expense of the universal interests of society. To the extent that capitalists are able to capture the institutions of the state, they are able to influence and steer policy and other political institutions toward their own interests. But even in a less direct way, economic necessity permeates other aspects of social life, displacing the broader concerns of the common interest and need, whether expressed as of wages, jobs, and the environmental impact of industry, tax revenues, and the extent

of regulations on business, and so on. Hegel would see this as the expression not of a *rational* state, but rather as a state that is not fully developed, a *de-rationalized state* that has succumbed to the particularist powers of civil society, to the market, to atomistic individualism, and to the power of the particular over that of the universal interest.

This is an important conceptual distinction between mere modern market society and a more fully developed capitalist society: the former is marked by competition, inequality, market exchange, and so on; the latter by large scale reorientations of social institutions, the adaptation of social and cultural institutions to the needs of capital as well as the reduction of many forms of life to instrumentalized economic relations as a means to the realization of capital. Hegel did not have this in mind when he theorized civil society, nor would he have seen it as normatively valid. Economic modernity is seen as a space for individual self-interest and competition, not a situation of permanent “unsocial sociability” since it needs to be sublated into the higher purposes of the state, of the overall project of rational freedom: the realization of the general interest. Economic modernity, civil society, is a phase along the path of the realization of a more complex state of human freedom, it is not an end in itself, a self-contained form of social life, and should therefore not be at the center of modern life. Economic growth for its own sake was not a concern for Hegel, somehow separate from the broader concerns of social life; what matters most is that the needs of the community are to be given priority.⁵ Instead, his conception of the purpose of the state as protecting and promoting a universal ethical order mitigates against the kind of economic and social realities that characterize modern capitalist societies. Indeed, for Hegel the ideas of an unfettered market, or one where market relations dominate society, are seen as anathema to the very purpose of politics which is to reconcile the divisions created by the sphere of needs and economics by reconciling particular interests with the whole (*Cf. Ver Eecke*). It is a society that lives without a rational grasp of the true purpose of modernity, a *Verstandesstaat*, limited in its capacity to conceive let alone actualize modern freedom.⁶

⁵ In this sense, Hegel's conception of economic life is very different from Adam Smith who was concerned with national wealth and economic growth as opposed to Hegel's view that modern economic life was a means to satisfy human needs. When it fails to do so, there is a duty for the state to step in and provide when the market cannot. See the analysis by Birger P. Priddat.

⁶ See the discussion by Adriaan T. Peperzak.

The difference between Hegel's conception of private property and markets and the nature of capitalism is actually made more concretely by Marx in his discussion of private property. The young Marx may have been too quick in his dismissal of Hegel's theory of the state, but he was correct in seeing a conceptual distinction between private property and capital. Where Hegel sees private property as the core concept in the development of the modern personality, Marx argues that capital is not property *per se*, nor is it private, but rather a systemic process that depends on the absorption of as many spheres of social life to its own logic as necessary to maximize and secure accumulation.⁷ Hegel's thesis is that persons individuate themselves in the modern world by objectifying their wills in property; it is the receptacle of the individual's will providing him with the appropriate means to interact as a concrete individual with others (*Cf.* Ritter). But for Hegel, this is the limit of the concept of property. He does not take pains to distinguish capital from property, no doubt due to the fact that capitalist social relations had yet to fully articulate themselves in early nineteenth-century German society as a distinct social formation.⁸ However, where he does pay attention to the excesses of capital – such as in his discussions of England – he is emphatic on the need of the state to correct the pathologies of these excesses. Seen another way, Hegel's rational state must repel these tendencies in modern economic life.

III

For Hegel, the role of the state is to incorporate subordinate forms of social life – the family and civil society – into a higher totality where rational agents will be able to identify self-consciously with the universal and thereby achieve rational freedom. This is an important and often misunderstood thesis, for it does not mean that individuals are to modify their desires, projects, wills according to whatever the state or society as a whole represents or to the social order that one finds oneself in. Rather, they are to place the rational, universal ends of society as whole at the heart of their projects and these needs to be what the state seeks to embody as well. These can only be universal if they are rational, if they embody the “universal,” by which Hegel means the *concept* of

⁷ Marx is consistent in emphasizing that capital is not to be seen as a concrete “thing” but as a system, a process that achieves its completion by organizing social formations of production. “But capital is not a thing. It is a definite interrelation in social production belonging to a definite historical formation of society.” (947-48). Also cf. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Capital*, vol. 1, 247-269, 711-870; *Capital*, vol. 2, 571-591; *Capital*, vol. 3, 92-124, 314-379.

⁸ This thesis is explored vigorously by Georg Lukács.

the general will.⁹ This is because Hegel believes that the institutions of modern society make available to its members the idea that they are, in an ontological sense, part of a broader set of interdependencies and that their sense of individuality is also shaped by the nature of those interdependencies as well. The basic problem that Hegel sees with irrational forms of social and political life and institutions is that they allow the state to be characterized by the lower spheres of abstract right, personal interests, or, as in the case of the Greek *poleis*, with the family. Hegel is clear on this point when he argues that

if the state is confused with civil society, and if its specific end is laid down as the security and protection of property and personal freedom, then the interests of the individuals as such becomes the ultimate end of their association, and it follows that membership of the state is something optional. (Hegel, *Philosophy of* §258)

What does it mean for the state to be rational and for it to possess a “universal element”? The modern state is, on Hegel’s view, a higher structure of association wherein individuals come to see, through the process of reason, that they possess membership in a higher order of social relations and dependencies that are distinctly social in nature (Cf. Ilting). The modern state is a rational ethical community; it is a higher sphere not only of association, but of rationality in that individuals come to see their own interests as part of a larger, more coherent and cohesive whole. In the realms of the family and civil society, individuals are unable to recognize and rationally grasp the objective nature of their freedom as social beings or that they indeed require the relations that constitute them, the goods, the products, and so on that make their lives what they are. The rational character of the modern state for Hegel therefore consists most importantly in the fact that the true essence of modern freedom is the objective reality that one’s individuality is dependent

⁹ Hegel sees the power in Rousseau’s concept of the “general will,” but he believes that he was unable to articulate it as a concept that would be able to be actualized into the Idea of freedom. In discussing Rousseau in his *Logik*, Hegel argues that “the general will is the concept (*Begriff*) of the will: and the laws are the special clauses of this will and based upon the concept of it.” (*Enzyklopädie* §163) What is crucial here is that the general will as concept is that it is universal: i.e., all individuals come to see, through the exercise of reason, that they possess a universal status as members of a comprehensive social totality rather than simply their own particularity, as they do in the sphere of civil society. As a result, it is grasped by reason rather than simply felt (as in the family or in traditional customs). This is Hegel’s critical move to correct what he sees as Rousseau’s error in not making the general will a reflection of reason, of the *concept* of the will.

upon his relations to the social whole.¹⁰ To deny this would be irrational since it would mean that one is sent back into the imperfect, incomplete spheres of association and consciousness that precede the state: to either the family or civil society. Therefore, the state is the objectification of the universal in the realm of ethical life. Once individuals become self-conscious of themselves as moments within a greater totality, they will see that their relations to themselves are objective in nature in that they lay outside of their mere subjectivity, they will realize their freedom concretely.¹¹ The foundation of the state therefore derives its coherence from this universal, rational, and inherently *social* ontology.

The state therefore needs to prevent the particular from remaining so in the face of the universal. In Hegel's view, "particularity" (*Besonderheit*) is opposed to the universal in that it is unable to see itself as a moment of the whole; only when the particular realizes its membership in the whole does it achieve "individuality" (*Einzelheit*) (Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der* §§163, 164, 165; *Wissenschaft der* 280-301). Therefore, those social structures, institutions, practices, customs, and so on that are unable to orient their activities toward universal, common ends fail to meet the criterion of rationality – they remain in their own particularity, not able to conceive of the whole of which they are a part. In this sense, Hegel argues that "the universal element in the state does not allow the particular purposes to ossify as such, but ensures that they keep on dissolving in the universal." (*Lectures on* §122) According to Hegel's argument, there is an essential, rational structure to modern social institutions that can be grasped by its members. On this view, we come to see what is universal through the recognition of the fact that others also share with me a set of common needs and desires. The state is the objective manifestation of this essential rationality that pervades modern human relationships. The state is the prism through which we are able to see each other as needed in the societal processes that shape, produce, and reproduce our lives. We come to see that our individuality is in fact connected to a set of social processes, institutions, and practices that constitute our

¹⁰ As Shlomo Avineri observes: "Hence the purely individualistic concept of freedom, which maintains no limits on one's arbitrary choice, has to be superseded by the ethical order which makes my freedom dependent on that of the other. The state is 'freedom universal and objective.'" (179)

¹¹ Frederick Neuhouser argues that "this part of the theory of *Sittlichkeit* is meant to ensure that social members' endorsement of their institutions is capable of surviving reflection on these institutions undertaken from a universal perspective – in Hegel's terms, the 'abstractly universal' perspective – that is definitive of moral subjectivity." (116)

lives – as individuals and as a society.¹² Hegel's contention is that we live in a society that is *processual*, where the processes that shape our lives and the institutions that embody them are not able to realize rational, universal ends, are they pathological.

The universal will that is contained in the state is therefore dependent on the individual to give it actuality, just as the individual requires the state to make freedom actual itself. This means that the particular ends that an agent wills will be rational to the extent that it is able to become resonant with the universal ends that society requires. But at the same time, this cannot be imposed by the state; the condition of rationality is that the individual wills this because he comes to grasp that rationality is itself contained in universality. Hegel's remark that individuals "do not live as private persons for their own ends alone, but in the very act of willing these they will the universal in the light of the universal, and their activity is consciously aimed at none but the universal end" (*Philosophy of* §260) embodies the thesis that for them to be free, for them to belong to a society in which their own interests are taken care of as a whole, they need to have in mind the principle that they are constituted by the social processes and relations that are present in their world. We come to grasp that we are social beings, that we are parts of a cohesive whole, that our individual world – our personalities, our drives, our sense of duty, and so on – all achieve their concreteness in the world once we realize our relation to others and the social institutions that mediate our relations as well as educate us. To believe – as does the structure of classical liberalism – that individuals are not only atomistic, but also that they achieve what they do in this world on their own, *qua* individuals, is itself an abstraction that Hegel seeks to counter. His conception of the universal in his political philosophy is therefore not a metaphysical category, but an ontological one: we achieve what we do not as individuals alone, but as a part of a web of relations, actions, and practices that we employ in our world. To lose sight of this means to fall into abstraction, to lose grasp of the actuality of modern freedom.

The ends of the modern rational state are universal; the role and function of state institutions are to steer social life toward common ends when society as a whole tends to become dominated by particular ends. The disintegration of modern life is the result of the splintering of common

¹² As Klaus Hartmann has argued, for Hegel "there must be a higher categorial structure, a structure with a more affirmative relationship of the many to one another than obtains in the antagonisms typical of [civil] society." (120)

universal interests by the plethora of individual or private goals that are not oriented toward an overarching, rational universal.

The essence of the modern state is that the universal be bound up with complete freedom of its particular members and with private well-being. . . . Thus the universal must be furthered, but subjectivity on the other hand must attain its full and living development. It is only when both these moments subsist in their strength that the state can be regarded as articulated and genuinely organized. (*Philosophy of §260*)

Hegel's concerns are derived from the republican sentiment – both classical and modern – that the common good is to be given primacy over contingent, private interests. What makes his view distinctly modern is that he sees that this also incorporates the subjective willing of individuals as well as the circumstances within which they find themselves. Hegel is clear that there is no way for a society that allows the anarchy of private interests to prevail to be worthy of the allegiance of modern, rational subjects. Instead, he is clear that the universal has to become the central aim for all individual and institutional action. The universal will is, in this sense, “the formal character of the purposive action that is directed not merely toward my personal and private ends but also and simultaneously toward commonly shared ends and interests.” (Baum 141)

Although Hegel sees normative value in modern economic relations, he also sees that the pursuit of self-interest in market relations will require control from those agencies and institutions that look after public interests.¹³ There is no sense of a *laissez faire* approach to economic life for Hegel. Indeed, markets are an important dimension to modernity, but it cannot stand as the central organizing principle of modern societies, that role must go to the state. Markets are seen to be able to operate within defined limits defined as the extent to which they are able to

¹³ It is important to note that, for Hegel, this is because civil society is the realm of the “particular” which means that its members are lost in abstract right and unable to comprehend, let alone realize, their rational will (i.e., freedom). “In civil society, the Idea is lost in particularity and has fallen asunder with the separation of inward and outward. In the administration of justice, however, civil society returns to its concept, to the unity of the implicit universal with the subjective particular, although here the latter is only that present in single cases and the universality in question is that of *abstract right*.” (Hegel, *Philosophy of §229*) Hegel's treatment of ethical life in the *Philosophy of Right* is grounded in his logical concepts. For a discussion of the foundations of Hegel's political concepts in his logical concepts, see David MacGregor (275ff).

operate and still realize universal aims. The problem with the self-interest inherent in market society is that it has a tendency to become exaggerated and, when that happens, it must be brought under control by the public authority. "This interest," Hegel writes,

invokes freedom of trade and commerce against control from above; but the more blindly it sinks into self-seeking aims, the more it requires such control to bring it back to the universal. Control is also necessary to diminish the danger of upheavals arising from clashing interests and to abbreviate the period in which their tension should be eased through the working of a necessity of which they themselves know nothing. (*Philosophy of §236*)

Self-interest therefore cannot serve as the basis of modern, free individuality or as the grounding for legitimate law and authority because it is a kind of subjectivity that lacks the capacity to grasp the self-consciousness of the will's own freedom. Hegel consistently invokes the power of the state and other public authorities to "control" and orient the marketplace toward common concerns.¹⁴

This constitutes a powerful thesis; one that I believe necessitates an opposition between the rational state and the processes and institutions of capitalism as a socio-economic formation. To move to the sociological dimension of this argument, Hegel's theory has true weight given the development of modern societies, it should come to apply to the concrete processes and institutions that shape and form individuals within society as a whole. Returning to the salient feature of Hegel's argument, the rational state is a uniquely modern sphere of human life not because it stands outside and against society – as the state is conceived in classical liberal theory – but rather as a product of the united wills of individuals who come to see that the universal is something that they come to will rationally, as free individuals and that the ends that they will are both common and individual ends. The key here for Hegel is to point to the ways in which the individual and general interests of society are one because I am part of the broader fabric of social relations and dependencies that secure my needs, that nourish my ethical sensibilities, that allow me to progress out of mere *Natürlichkeit* and

¹⁴ Hegel writes also on this note that "[t]he differing interests of producers and consumers may come into collision with each other; and although a fair balance between them on the whole may be brought automatically, still their adjustment also requires a control which stands above both and is consciously undertaken." (*Philosophy of §236*)

into a broader space of reasons as well as a more comprehensive fund of social goods (*Vermögen*) that can allow my personal self-development and comprehensive education (*Bildung*). “The life and subsistence of individuals are accordingly a universal concern. This universal should itself be its own conscious end.” (*Lectures on* §118)

If this argument is accepted thus far, the problem that capitalism poses to modern ethical life is that it is able to *de-rationalize* the state; it is able, in other words, to remake social relations and institutions to serve particular rather than universal, common ends. Even more, this means that the very purpose of modern ethical life – which is conceived as providing a rational, reciprocal order for individual and social freedom – is displaced and we are left with an irrational social order, one that provides a false universal for social institutions and individual development.¹⁵ Hegel is clear on this when he warns against the propensities of civil society, of the “external state,” to steer the interests and priorities of the rational state:

The state must not allow the purposes of the state based on need to take root within it, but must constantly draw them back within its substance; its attitude to them is merely negative. (*Ibid.* §128)

This brings us back to the problem of the universal. For Hegel, the dynamics of market relations that make up the essence of civil society are constituted by egoistic considerations. The external state, or state of needs is a fragmenting force in modern societies, but that is because it is based on these egoistic forms of self-interest.¹⁶ Although Hegel assumes that this is sufficient to explain the essence of the modern marketplace and its role in shaping modernity, it is also possible to argue that capitalism is not reducible to Hegel’s concept of civil society. Rather, capitalism ought to be construed as the positing of a *false universal*; as a social system wherein the general will of the political community (the “state,” as opposed to the “political state” in Hegel’s parlance) is displaced by a false conception of the whole, by a deformed idea (*Vorstellung*) about what the essence of modern social institutions and social relations are supposed to achieve.

¹⁵ Hegel writes that “[t]he right of individuals to be subjectively destined to freedom is fulfilled when they belong to an actual ethical order, because their conviction of their freedom finds its truth in such an objective order, and it is in an ethical order that they are actually in possession of their own essence or their own inner universality.” (*Philosophy of* §153)

¹⁶ Hegel derives these ideas from his study of English and Scottish political economy. See Norbert Waszek; Laurence Dickey; Paul Chamley (*Economie politique*) and his (“Les origins”).

In this sense, a society dominated by capitalist forms of economic and social relations come to colonize the non-economic institutions. This is, I believe, directly counter to what Hegel believes the normative purpose of both civil society and the political state are supposed to accomplish. The purpose of the state is to bring about the universal over and against the fragmentary nature of civil society – its function is to stand against this tendency and to correct it when necessary:

As an external necessity the state stands opposed to private individuals and to the system of needs and particularity in general, to the extent that this system's purpose and that of the state conflict. (*Lectures on* §128)

Hegel goes on to insist that the role of the political state is coercive when the interests of the system of needs begin to bleed out of its particular sphere: “the power of the state appears as coercive power and its right over against such purpose as a right of coercion.” (*Ibid.* §128) In order to uphold the rational universal, to maintain the coherence of universal aims for which the totality of human social relationships are to be organized and oriented, the state preserves the right to coerce, but only to the extent that it is seeking to enhance the freedom and power of its citizens (*Cf.* Marcuse). In a move resonant with passages from Machiavelli, Hegel also claims that “The good is not a random disposition, not a disposition of the conscience; it is external, actual existence, and in order for it to be, the state can employ coercion” (*Lectures on* §123); and again that “the state's right of coercion enters into play when the state departs in any respect from what is ideal (*ideell*).” (*Ibid.* §128) The political state cannot allow the interests of the state of needs to permeate the logic of the universal; if this were to happen, we would not be dealing with a rational state since it would be unable to realize and embody the universal in its acts and in its self-consciousness. The political fabric of such a society would begin to break down as the erosion of duty, patriotism, self-consciousness of freedom, and so on, all disintegrate. We are left with a distended form of atomism that masquerades as the general will of the political community as a whole.¹⁷

Basic to my thesis is that Hegel was unable to conceptualize the historical realities of modern capitalism and as such, many commentators have

¹⁷ Gillian Rose makes an interesting comment in this direction when she argues that “Hegel is precisely drawing attention to the illusions (relations, difference) of bourgeois society. He is warning against an approach which would see illusion as rational, which makes illusion the absolute principle of the whole.” (81)

been forced to see modern capitalism through the lens of the concept of civil society. But this obfuscates the matter. By organizing itself as a process of production, distribution, labor, property, and all on a massive scale, capital becomes more than property, more than money. Marx's characterization was correct at least insofar as it suggests that capital is a social institution not reducible to money or to property. It sets itself up as an organizer of social relations; it has the ability to reorient the functional logics of all institutions – economic and non-economic. Whereas Hegel was aware that the market relations that make up civil society would result in the fragmentation of society, capital is able to overcome this by positing a false universal: the pursuit of profit, a culture of consumption, and so on are all logics that come to permeate all of the functional logics of modern society. In this sense, Weber's insight that modern institutional logics must follow "legitimate domination" can be fused to the understanding of Marx where capital becomes the center of gravity of more and more of the institutional logics that form modern society. I think this is something that Hegel thought was possible *if and only if* the modern, rational state were unable to perform its proper function and defend the universal against the corrosive implications of the external state. Hegel's state is intrinsically anti-capitalist because capitalism is itself the dominance of contingent, particular interests – in the form of profit maximization, production decisions, and so on – over universal, common interests. To make the claim that capital is simply an expression of civil society fails to capture the essential nature of capitalism as a system of social and economic life. In Hegelian terms, capital vies with the state for the power to control universal interests – in the former case, it is a false universal, in the latter, and it is the actual universal.

IV

The state, however, is not an abstract entity; it is made of people, of individuals with ethical conscience and will. Given the argument I have presented thus far, I think we are forced to consider the extent to which rational individuals have any form of obligation to the kind of de-rationalized modernity to which capitalism as a social formation gives rise. At the core of Hegel's political theory is the thesis that the universal is rational in an absolute sense only to the extent that there is a self-conscious awareness of the universal interests of society as a whole by the individual: "The absolute right of the state is to be actualized by means of the individual self-consciousness." (*Lectures on* §124) Not unlike Rousseau, Hegel was concerned with the republican spirit of

seeking to preserve and enhance the common good of the community.¹⁸ In modernity, this can only come about when individuals are able to identify rationally with the universal ends of society as a whole.

But this scheme is deeply distorted as capitalist social relations come to predominate society and its institutions as well as, in time, the priorities of the modern political state. In this sense, the question of obligation comes squarely into play. The central reason for this is that the rational character of the political state, under the predominance of capitalist social relations, introduces contradictions into the fabric of political life. Central to what Hegel means by the universal that the rational state is to preserve is that it enables us to live in a society that is self-determining. By this Hegel means that the concept of freedom can only be real in the world not when I am free from necessity, but rather when I am able to see the kernel of freedom within the structure of necessity. Self-determination is a crucial feature of modern freedom because it is the full articulation of what Hegel seems to be the normative power of the modern world. I need to see that self-determination is not possible in the family, and it is only one-sided (i.e., atomistic) in civil society; only in the state can I come to grasp that true self-determination requires social coordination, that my individuality is a function of the social processes and relations that pervade my world.¹⁹

This takes on a higher order of importance once we recognize that capitalism is a system not restricted to the sphere of market relations, but begins to steer the broader political and social institutions toward its own interests. Since capitalism is more than an economic configuration, it also comes to have hegemonic influence in other, non-economic areas of social and cultural life to the extent that those other spheres of life cease to be able to direct the interests of private elites toward public aims and interests. In terms of more concrete forms of political power, it seeks legislation that is beneficial to its systemic interests rather than to the community as a whole; it makes production, investment, and employment decisions based on the narrow criterion of expanding accumulation; it seeks social policies that increase its ability to act without restraint, and so on. As a result, capitalism as a fully developed

¹⁸ "The concept of the state which Hegel develops in §114 of his natural law lectures of 1818-19 accords so patently with these and similar remarks in his Frankfurt and Jena writings that there can be no doubt as to its republican character." (Iltis 95).

¹⁹ As Michael O. Hardimon argues, "Hegel maintains that one of the most important ways in which the modern political state promotes the common good is by providing the institutional framework within which the community can determine its common destiny." (210)

system is able to dislodge the capacity of self-determination at the level of the universal.²⁰ Self-determination, for Hegel, is not to be interpreted merely as self-interest. What distinguishes his conception of self-determination from liberal theories is that it also must be *self-conscious*; it must also embody the universal itself (Cf. Schacht). When an individual acts in a free way, he acts so that the common ends of the community are taken into account. When the laws and institutions of society become adapted to institutions that are not for the benefit of society as whole, we begin to see a *contradiction* in fabric of social relations and institutions. This is an important point since, for Hegel, contradiction is a standard indication of irrationality; and the modern state – the actual embodiment of rationality – must therefore overcome this contradiction (Cf. Wolff).²¹

The basic question therefore becomes: to what extent do political and social institutions that govern my life obligate me when they in fact do not genuinely serve universal, common ends? Since Hegel's basic argument is that for modern individuality to be complete, one's subjectivity, one's will, must absorb the objective needs of ethical life and of the substantive reality that one is in fact enmeshed within the relational structure of interdependence with others.²² Hence, the laws, practices, and norms of my political and social institutions need to embody this fact; they need to achieve universality or "generality" (*Allgemeinheit*). If I come to grasp contradictions in modern ethical life, are those institutions and practices worthy of my allegiance? Can I be at home in such a world? My thesis is that capitalism constitutes such a

²⁰ Emphasis on the primacy of self-determination is not meant to take away from Hegel's emphasis on the role and goal of the state to be develop the powers of individuals and their personalities as well: "the final end and aim of the state is that all human capacities and all individual powers be developed and given expression in every way and in every direction." (*Vorlesungen über* 48)

²¹ Pelczynski also argues that "In the process of becoming conscious of the concepts, rules or principles of their ethical community, men also become aware of contradictions, incongruities and ambiguities within the structure, and since reason abhors contradiction and obscurity they strive to remove them, to refine or formulate ideas, and to give unity and clarity to the whole." (20) "The Hegelian Conception of the State." (20)

²² As Fred Dallmayr points out, the state "is the actuality of freedom where particular self-consciousness is elevated to, and permeated by, *Sittlichkeit* as the common good." (1343) "Rethinking the Hegelian State." (1343). This points to Hegel's enduring concern with the republican ideas that exploded with the French Revolution, and his attempt to renovate and calibrate the concept of the common interest with modern individuality. The importance of the idea that the institutions and practices of one's society are "generalizable" means that first that my own interests and desires, my particularity, needs to be conditioned by the demands and needs of others, and second that the institutions that exist in my society need to live up to the same criterion. Lacking this, my own interests would have no bounds and there would be no mediation between my own subjectivity and social objectivity; but also, the institutions in my society will simply serve particular ends, not universal ends and cease to be able to realize my freedom.

system and that an ethical life permeated by capitalist social relations is in fact not worthy of rational obligations. I am forced either to reject the project of Hegel's political philosophy or to seek to equip the modern state with rational reasons for resisting the projects of capital. This may seem to be a heavy-handed reading of Hegel's basic argument, but I actually believe the opposite: a genuine reading of the texts seems to necessitate the resistance by rational actors and institutions against the momentum of capital and its ability to transform social relations and institutions – that in their truly rational sense are to serve universal ends – into means for the ends of capital. We are left with the important question of a Hegelian theory of dissent as opposed to the often mistaken view of Hegel's accommodationist social philosophy. According to Hegel, “duty is primarily a relation to something which from my point of view is substantive, absolutely universal.” (*Philosophy of* §261) The move into the realm of ethical life requires that I perceive the universal and have duty toward it. This means seeing the universal not as an abstraction but, rather, as a specific kinds of matrix of relations with others that is able to realize my freedom.

Rational individuals see that the realization of their own free personhood, of their substantive personality is dependent on a society where all individuals are able to achieve those ends. They see that the social relations in whom they are embedded are constitutive of their individuality; allowing irrational, deformative kinds of social relations therefore will deform my capacity to achieve free individuality.²³ The universal is therefore in dialectical relation to the rational will, and this is why Hegel claims that the rational state has its basis in the individual's rational will. And since “the particular subject is related to the good as to the essence of the will, and hence his will's obligation arises directly in this relation,” (*Ibid.* §133) the good of the social whole means the individual's obligation only to those institutions that maintain and underwrite my freedom conceived as self-determination. Without this, there is no connection between my will and the good that should normatively govern my actions. Capitalist economic relations privilege the particular interest over that of the common interest and, to the extent that this is the case, it fails to qualify as capable of realizing the universal or rational freedom. Capitalism as a total system organizing the entirety

²³ Anselm Min observes on this point that “precisely because property, profit, and wealth are products of social labor under conditions of interdependence, the consequences of their abuse – intended or unintended – are not confined to the individuals directly involved; they are necessarily socialized, affecting in some way the whole chain of interdependence.” (50)

of social and political life is, on Hegel's view, opposed to the common interest and a rational state will be in opposition to it.

This good is not abstract, but becomes concrete when we see, from the standpoint of social relations, that the good of society as a whole consists in its serving the development of the capacities and powers of individuals; it consists in the maintenance of freedom as the defining, inner, organizing principle of modern ethical life. The universal is a crucial component for me as an individual to reach out of my narrow, abstract individuality and into the realm of ethical life. The state holds this fact self-consciously; its members see that absolute freedom lies in the actual relation between the particular and the universal. The individual's role in all of this is complex, because it requires that each of us is self-conscious of the need to uphold the universal in our particular projects. This, in turn, gives actuality to the state, rather than the other way around. As with Hobbes, we make the state, we make the institutions that govern and constitute our lives. But the crucial difference is that, unlike Hobbes, Hegel sees (as did Rousseau) that it is the rational will, the will that knows it seeks its freedom, that is the basis of the state, not a will that is concerned with its personal security.²⁴ Our freedom lies not only in the knowledge of this, but it comes with an obligation to maintain it.

The state is actual, and its actuality consists in this, that the interest of the whole is realized in and through particular ends. Actuality is always the unity of universal and particular. (*Philosophy of §270*)

For me to be free in Hegel's sense means that I have self-determination over the forms of life that govern me and that those institutions, as well as my conscience, are oriented to what is good, toward the universal, toward rational freedom. When the state is unable to secure that capacity for self-determination, absolute freedom begins to vaporize and we are left with the lesser, more abstract and narrow forms of freedom laid out in the beginning of the *Philosophy of Right*, of abstract right and *Moralität*. In such a situation, there is no way for modernity to maintain its normative content – it would cease to be worthy of my duties, of

²⁴ Paul Franco elaborates on Hegel's thesis that the rational will is the foundation of freedom: "Unlike the individual will, the rational will does not derive its content from something other than itself – from our inclinations, fancies, or desires. Rather, the rational will derives its content from the concept of the will, freedom, itself. The rational will is simply the will that wills freedom – in the form of the objective rights and institutions developed over the course of the *Philosophy of Right* – and hence wills itself." (289)

my rational obligation.²⁵ As a result, if it can be shown that capitalist institutions impede or distort that universal, then it follows that I have no duties toward them. Rather, if we extend Hegel's argument then I, as well as the state, have an obligation to resist these institutions or to in some way subordinate them to universal ends.

For Hegel, the limits of civil society can be felt once it begins to displace the universal in favor of the particular. In this sense, the ability of capital as an institution, as a process, to be able to control the decisions and imperatives of other spheres of social life is a symptom of that reality. The power not only of a section of the political community – economic elites that control capital – but also the process of valorization, credit, and so on all fall outside of the state's ability to steer it toward universal ends. If we accept the idea that our social institutions are to be seen as processes, then for individuals to identify with their world rationally, they must be able to see that the processes that make up their social world serve universal ends (Cf. Kolb). In Hegel's view, individuals are "realized" by their social world and its institutions in the sense that they bring one's particularity with higher forms of consciousness, of the universal itself.²⁶ Otherwise, they would not command rational obligation. This is a basic condition for self-determination: if I am simply a plaything of the social institutions that create me and I am alienated from the greater purposes of those processes, then the system does not embody rationality, but contradictions. I not only have no obligations to them, Hegel believes that institutions that are corrupt, in that they do not realize the modern idea of freedom, need to be transformed:

we can see that the right way to pursue improvement is not by the moral route of using ideas, admonitions, associations of isolated individuals, in order to counteract the system of corruption and avoid being indebted to it, but by the alteration of institutions. ("The English" 297)

²⁵ I believe this is why Max Weber knew it was important to put forth a theory of legitimate domination. For Weber, this theory of modernity meant that the logics of institutions would begin to have cohesion only once they were able to articulate their own rational rules that individuals would inculcate, fusing them to the logics of different social institutions. This inculcation is not through rational evaluation – as Hegel suggests – but through the process of "routinization" (*Veralltäglicung*). As a result, individual selves are caught in an iron cage of rational rules for different kinds of authority that they tend to accept because they are the prevailing norms within their culture. Weber saw this as problematic, since this meant the loss of what he saw the potential for a truly "authentic modernity."

²⁶ Axel Honneth goes so far as to claim that the rational structure of objective spirit that Hegel puts forth constitutes "the nucleus of a theory of justice, which aims at assuring the intersubjective conditions of individual self-realization to all." (7)

In modern capitalist social formations, individuals are socialized to accept the values of market relations, of economic consumption, of the forms of life and norms that are requisite for the labor market, and so on. Such individuals are unable to grasp a concrete universal in these norms and practices because such values uphold a system based on accumulation by a specific class. This constitutes pathology of socialization because these agents accept a false universal, a concept of the whole that is in fact premised on the interests of a specific class. One reason for this is that Hegel views the political community, society itself as an organism, which means that he sees human social life as functionalist in nature. The rational whole, the universal end to which the state and its members need to be oriented is therefore toward the maintenance of the very institutions and processes that produce the collective life of its citizens.

The state is an organism . . . The nature of an organism is such that unless each of its parts is brought into identity with the others, unless each of them is prevented from achieving autonomy, the whole must perish. (*Philosophy of §269*)

This passage is meant to show not that each individual has no place but to contribute to the whole, as in Plato's *Republic*; it is meant to show that the social whole acts processually, that once we lose sight of the rational whole – i.e., that we as individuals are part of broader set of social relations that realize who I am and can, if they are properly ordered, realize my freedom – then the very means of our subsistence and existence begins to collapse.

The implications of this are clear: individuals suffer to the extent that the social whole to which they belong is unable to provide them with the proper forms of social integration that give them consciousness of their mutual sociality, the extent to which they are part of reciprocal relations that are embedded in society itself. They recognize these pathologies because they can root out the contradictions between what the concrete institutions of their world are achieving and what they ought to achieve based on their understanding of the inner principle of what it means to live in a state: that of realizing our individual and social freedom. This occurs due to the process of coming to recognize these relations through forms of social interaction that bring the concept of the universal into focus (Cf. Williams). To this end, we can see that capitalist forms of social

relations are able to distort the processes of social integration, producing pathologies of individuality and social institutions as well (Cf. Honneth).

V

If this interpretation is correct, then we must consider the extent to which Hegel's political philosophy provides us with an imminently anti-capitalist structure of political institutions as well as a distinctly anti-capitalist understanding of the modern, rational state. It is not my contention that Hegel was hostile to the existence of markets, or to economic modernity as a whole, nor that he felt there needed to be some utopian form of social equality, or any other non-modern model of economic life. Rather, I am committed to the thesis that sees Hegel as providing us with a theory of a modern republic, one that is in distinct contrast to liberal theory. We are, then, provided with a framework for normative social action, the direct opposite of what critics of Hegel as "totalitarian" or as "accommodationist" to the prevailing social powers would have us believe. Hegel allows – nay, insists upon – the coercive power of the state to protect universal ends; he also seems to urge individuals to come to see that such a commitment is central to the reality of their own self-determination. The actuality of modern freedom becomes all the more fragile when considering the ways that it is able to get out of the groove of the machinations of capital.

Although Hegel is not explicit on this point, I believe we can construe an activist conception of the political state against the exaggerated imperatives of capitalist market relations and the need for capital to, in effect, reprogram the organism of the state as a whole – by which I mean the sum total of social institutions responsible for social integration – to serve not rational, universal ends, but a false universal where the interests of private capital succeed in orienting these institutions toward their own interests. Hegel's thesis that the state can utilize coercion to achieve and protect universal ends ought not to be seen as license to eradicate difference and force upon individuals an abstract sense of the common good. Rather, it is meant to show that the state needs to be able to shape the institutional forms and logics in society that work against common ends. As an objective idealist, he sees the emphasis on institutional arrangements as central rather than – as with Machiavelli or Rousseau – the emphasis on the individual. It seems to me that Hegel has a very concrete sense of what a common good means in the context of modernity: that our socialized interdependence be preserved and

protected from the distortions and perversions of private or particular interests and forces. That our common interest is in seeing that the institutions that produce and reproduce our lives, our culture, our sensibilities, our “ethical life,” as well as our personalities be free from these particularist forces as well.

I think Hegel’s philosophy of the state compels us to consider the proposition that in order to realize a more robust, more substantive conception of freedom; a rational state needs to be able to act outside of the restrictions placed upon it by contemporary liberal theory. Hegel’s republican argument is that only a rational state, one that is able to embody the universal will, the common interest of the political community as a whole, is worthy of our obligations. But it also seems to suggest that the nature of contemporary economic arrangements and the increased power and influence that economic elites and imperatives have in modern society are anathema to the very purpose and aims of such a rational state. By displacing universal interests with particular interests, liberal capitalist societies find themselves in a condition of contradiction. Reconsidering the primacy of political and collective interests over economic and particular interests is one way we can begin to rethink the state, to rethink the purposes of the state, and rethink the relation between state action and economic institutions. Hegel’s progressivism lies in his ability to ground the argument that the essential purpose of social and political institutions is to aid in the realization and protection of common goods that human agents require in order to realize themselves as modern, free human individuals. They cannot do this alone, without the aid of the state. Rather, they require the state to help in that process, to secure the process of realizing individual freedom.

Since Hegel sees a rational social order as based upon the individual’s recognition that he is part of a wider set of social relations, that he and those he lives with and depends upon are shaped and formed by the institutions that give social life its coherence, then we need to see that the power of the state can and should be used over and against the lesser interests grounded in economic life and those particular self-interests that come to colonize the state and social relations as a whole, especially when these are able to interfere and reorient the processes of socialization. If we see capitalism as exemplifying a social formation that has these characteristics, then Hegel’s rational state is opposed to its development and proliferation just as modern rational individuals should view them as anathema to their own freedom. But it seems to

me this can be given more weight if we consider the extent to which Hegel offers us a justification for more affirmative social relations to repel the development of capitalist social formations and interests as well as guiding new forms of economic life that can satisfy the demands of a truly rational social order.

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