

Response to Critics of *Hegel's Ontology of Power*

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Abstract

I am much indebted to Jacob McNulty, Allegra de Laurentiis and Tony Smith for their generous attention to my book and their insightful remarks. Since I could not possibly do justice to all their concerns, I have unfortunately had to be selective. The issues discussed in this response are organized thematically. In the first section, I discuss why Hegel's logic of essence has to be understood historically; which is to say that the logic of essence provides an ontology that is specific to capitalism. Then, in the second section, I discuss the nature of holism in the logic of essence, and correspondingly, the nature of social holism specific to capitalism. Finally, in the third section, I answer the question: if both Marx's critique of political economy and Hegel's own economic theory in the *Philosophy of Right* are based on the same logic of essence, why they are so divergent from, and indeed incompatible with, each other.

I. The historicity of the logic of essence

Farewell to the Forms: They are but ding-a-lings and even if they do exist, they are wholly irrelevant.—Aristotle¹

(I) The project of *Hegel's Ontology of Power* is to show how the categories of Hegel's logic of essence at the most general level give expression to the structure of social domination in capitalism. I reconstruct the logic of essence by focusing on three major categories: semblance or illusion (*Schein*), opposition, and totality. Correspondingly, the main claims of the book are the following. First, I argue that individuals seem to be independent from each other, but such independence is only a false semblance; in fact individuals are deeply interrelated. I further argue that the defining mode of relation in the logic of essence is the relation of domination. Second, I argue that in the logic of essence opposition is a more fundamental relation than diversity, and in fact grounds it. Third, I argue that in the logic of essence individuals are conceived as accidents of a totality, of a substance, which exerts power over them, and forces them to abide by its logic.

Using Marx's critique of political economy and Adorno's social theory, I show how the structure of social domination in capitalism is best captured by the logic of essence. First, I argue that in capitalism individuals seem to be independent from each other, and in their independence seem to be free and equal. But such freedom and equality is an illusion. Individuals are essentially constituted through the relations of domination that obtain between them. Second, I argue that the seeming diversity of labour arrangements in capitalism (some more humane, some less humane) are grounded on the deeper relation of opposition and domination between capital and labour. Third, I argue that the deepest level of domination is not that of capitalists over workers, but the domination of the totality of capital over both capitalists and workers. In Marx's sober words, the individual capitalist or the individual landowner is not 'responsible for relations whose creature he remains, socially speaking, however much he may subjectively raise himself above them' (C: 92/16).²

Through a detailed exploration of Hegel's logic of essence and Marx's critique of political economy, I take my main contribution to consist in (1) showing how Hegel's logic of essence, if read meticulously, gives us deep insights about the structure of capitalist social formation, and thus needs to be accorded a high rank in the tradition of critical social theory. (2) I further show how Marx's project is not an empiricist one. It is true that *Capital* is replete with empirical data: Marx makes abundant use of reports of factory inspectors in England, newspaper data about the health of the workers, reports about the super-exploitative working condition of the children, etc., but the structure of his critique contains an essential a priori ingredient (in a way to be specified later), an essential a priori ingredient which is best understood through Hegel's logic of essence.

While the main body of the book is devoted to showing the deep connection between the logic of essence and Marx's critique of political economy, in the Introduction I felt the need to give some explanation as to how it is possible at all that the logic of essence, which on the surface seems to be a treatise on purely a priori philosophy, gives expression to the structure of social domination in capitalism. I thought, and still think, that the best explanation for the parallelism between the logic of essence and the structure of social domination in capitalism is to posit that Hegel's logic of essence (if not the whole *Science of Logic*) is historical. This is the point that has proven to be unconvincing to McNulty (2022) and Smith (2022) and presumably for several others, and I need to defend it in some detail here.

Let me begin, first, by clarifying what it means that the logic of essence is historical. A good strategy is to contrast my conception of Hegel's logic with the opposite view. According to Stephen Houlgate, Hegel's logic is a treatise in 'presuppositionless thinking', but such presuppositionless thinking itself requires certain 'historical conditions' (Houlgate 2006: 67–71). The most obvious historical condition of the logic, according to Houlgate, is a degree of liberation from stark material

needs—a hunter-gatherer society, on pain of starvation, cannot engage in a priori philosophy. But the historical conditions of the logic also include a modern attitude towards free thinking that is independent of authorities, a modern attitude which is itself the historical result of the Reformation. As Houlgate is certainly right to point out, the mentioned historical conditions do not make the logic itself historical. Rather, in my wording, these are the *historical or sociological enabling conditions* of the logic and remain external to what the logic in fact is. I can supplement Houlgate's insight with a reference to Euclidean geometry. While the emergence of Euclidean geometry is dependent upon certain material conditions—for example, a society that is sufficiently rich and cultured to allow some of its members to engage in the discipline of geometry—presumably, the content of Euclidean geometry—the axioms, the postulates, the proofs—is not historical. The validity of Euclidean geometry seems to be independent of the question of its historical genesis.³

A similar position to Houlgate is taken by Robert Stern. According to Stern, history for Hegel is only the 'ratio cognoscendi, not the ratio essendi' of the logical or ontological truths (Stern 2017: 104). This implies that the logical truths are true independently of history; it is only the case that we moderns have finally arrived at a position to know and to adequately grasp these truths. In my wording, thus, in Stern's reading of Hegel, historical processes are regarded as *epistemic enabling conditions* of acknowledging these logical truths, but history does not affect the logical truths themselves.

Thus, both Houlgate and Stern posit that the logic is purely a priori, and that the historical preconditions remain only external to what the logic in fact is. In contrast, my claim in the book is that the logic of essence is historical in a much deeper sense: namely, that history (that is, modern history) affects the *content* of Hegel's logical categories or logical truths; such that to understand the enterprise of the logic itself, it is *necessary* to understand the historical situation the logic is about. In other words, my claim is that because the logic is not a mere category theory, and exhibits ontological commitments towards the historical condition of modernity, the logic must necessarily be historical.

To understand Hegel's take on the relation between the logic and history, one may look at the text of the logic itself; or one may look into the relation of the logic to the *Realphilosophie* in the context of the project of the *Encyclopaedia* as a whole. In the book, I focused on the text of the logic itself. Namely, through a detailed examination of the categories of Hegel's logic of essence, and the foundations of Marx's conception of capitalism, I reached the conclusion that the logic of essence is indeed historical, in the sense that the categories of the logic of essence are already attuned to describe the structure of society in capitalism. Now I would like to briefly elaborate on Hegel's own discussion of the relation of the logic to his *Realphilosophie* in the context of the *Encyclopaedia* project.

When one reads the Introduction to the *Encyclopaedia* (*EL*: §1 through §18), where Hegel reflects on the nature of philosophy and on the nature of the whole Encyclopaedic project, including the logic, one is surprised by the extent to which Hegel's philosophy is empirical. (Of course, by claiming that Hegel's philosophy is deeply attuned to empirical reality, I don't mean at any rate to suggest that he is an empiricist. Empiricism is a philosophical position according to which the *sole* foundation of knowledge is empirical data, and it is a position against which Hegel militated his whole life.) In section 6, Hegel writes that the content of philosophy in general (including the logic) is 'the living spirit', and emphasizes that 'since philosophy differs only in form from the other ways of becoming conscious of this content that is one and the same, its agreement with actuality and experience is a necessity' (*so ist ihre Übereinstimmung mit der Wirklichkeit und Erfahrung notwendig*). He then goes so far as to claim that those philosophies that are not attuned to grasping the historical living spirit are not only irrelevant and useless—recall Aristotle's charge against Plato's Forms cited in the epigraph—but are also not true, i.e. they are false.

Hegel's preferred method of grasping empirical reality in terms of thought is obviously not empiricist. He is not advocating a passive registering of empirical data, and then making inductive generalizations out of them. Rather, his preferred methodology is also borrowed from Aristotle: philosophy is the activity of 'thinking over' (*Nachdenken*) empirical phenomena, in order to find out rational principles that explain the phenomena (*EL*: §7). As in Aristotle's methodology of grasping empirical reality, the process of 'thinking over' for Hegel is a two-way reasoning: in one mode, one reasons from the empirical phenomena towards general, rational principles which ought to explain those phenomena. In a second mode, one begins with those general, rational principles and aims to reconstruct the empirical phenomena which ought to manifest them. As a result of this recurrent to-and-fro movement of thought (from phenomena towards thinking, and from thinking towards phenomena), the aim is to form a more or less harmonious body of thought that, on the whole, is explanatory of the phenomena in a non-reductive way.⁴

Thus for Hegel, there is no, and cannot be, any strict separation between philosophical (ultimately logical) thought and empirical sciences; each should inform the other:

As far as the first abstract universality of thinking is concerned, it makes very good and sound sense to say that philosophy owes its development to experience. On the one hand, the empirical sciences do not stand still with the perception of the details of the appearances; instead, by thinking, they have readied this material for philosophy by discovering its universal

determinations, genera, and laws. In this way, they prepare this particularized content so that it can be taken up into philosophy. On the other hand, they thus make it necessary for thinking to proceed to these concrete determinations by itself. The process of taking up this content, in which thinking sublates its mere givenness and the immediacy that still clings to it, is at the same time a process of thinking developing out of itself. (*EL*: §12)

The claim that philosophy owes its development to the empirical sciences must not be understood as suggesting that for Hegel the empirical sciences, à la Houlgate or Stern, are only *social or epistemic enabling conditions* of doing philosophy. Rather, as Hegel emphasizes, the empirical sciences, through a process of ‘thinking over’ nature or society, uncover the logic (i.e. the nomological explanation, the general determinations, whatever) of natural or social phenomena. Philosophy then comes to the fore to reflect on, to ‘think over’, the sciences, to extract *the logic of their logic*, and such second-order logic—the logic of the logic of empirical reality—in fact constitutes the enterprise of Hegel’s logic. The empirical—and, ultimately, historical—reality is not only an enabling condition of the logic, but enters into the very definition of its categories. This does not imply that philosophy for Hegel is a slave of the empirical sciences; it does not mean that the empirical sciences have ultimate authority in describing and explaining the world—‘thinking over’ is always two-way reasoning—but it does imply that philosophy or the logic cannot be wholly a priori, as Houlgate or Stern insist.

Indeed, Hegel denies any sharp distinction between the a priori and the a posteriori. In the *Science of Logic* he unambiguously claims that the objective logic considers determinations of thought ‘not according to the abstract form of the a priori as contrasted with the a posteriori, but of themselves according to their particular content’ (*SL*: 42/62).⁵ Hegel’s rejection of the *chorismos* between the a priori and the a posteriori, in my view, obtains by virtue of his re-defining the two concepts in a new way. The a priori for Hegel is not that which is completely independent of experience, but it is that which constitutes the deeper, intelligible structure of the phenomena. The deeper, intelligible structure is not exhausted by empirical data, and grasping it also requires a process of rational thought.⁶

Hegel again takes up the issue of the relation of the logic to *Realphilosophie*—more specifically, the relation between the three parts of his system: the logic, the philosophy of nature, and the philosophy of mind—at the end of the *Encyclopaedia* (*EG*: §574 through §577). Here he conceives of the relation between the logic, nature and mind in terms of three syllogisms, where each successively functions as the middle term (and thus the mediating element) between the other two. The point that Hegel wants to settle in these sections is the systematicity of the

body of philosophy, where there is a mutual attunement between logic, nature and mind. Now, since it is undeniable that the philosophy of nature is highly informed by the empirical, natural sciences of his day, and it is equally undeniable that the philosophy of spirit (especially of the objective spirit) is about the modern society, in my view the only way to account for the attunement of the logic towards the other two parts of the system is to posit that the logic itself (i.e. the content of the logical categories) is historical.⁷

(II) I would like at this stage to draw attention to a few issues which arise from Marx, since I think these can greatly clarify the nature of Hegel's logic, despite the fact that Marx himself believes that he is against Hegel. In the Introduction to the *Grundrisse* (which is one of Marx's few methodological writings), Marx claims that one may be able to speak of 'labour in general' (*Arbeit überhaupt*) as a historically invariant category (G: 103–4/38–39). One could say, for example, that labour is a teleological activity that transforms a natural object into a product, which is to serve a specific purpose (C: 284/193). But this category of 'labour in general' is woefully insufficient to explain the specific nature of labour in a specific social formation, say, in capitalism. 'Labour in general' applies to all historical periods equally, but for that very same reason, it is too empty and formal to explain the character of labour in capitalism.⁸

According to Marx, labour in capitalism has two specific features that distinguish it from labour in pre-capitalist societies: first, in capitalism 'indifference towards any specific kind of labour' (*Gleichgültigkeit gegen eine bestimmte Art der Arbeit*) reigns, which is to say that because in capitalism almost all products of labour are produced to be exchanged with money, the distinct qualities of different kinds of labour (shoemaking, taxi driving, computer engineering) are socially lost, because what really matters—the 'value' that different kinds of labour produce—is only or predominantly gauged by the money that the products of labour can be exchanged with. Second, in capitalism under the never-failing imperative of profit maximization, the process of labour becomes progressively more fragmented and 'mechanical', so as to make the labour-process more 'efficient.' According to Marx, these two specific determinations of labour under capitalism—its abstract and mechanical character—cannot be explained through a simple recourse to the rarified category of 'labour in general'.

The same holds true for the categories of the logic of essence. One may object: How can the modal categories of necessity and contingency ever be historical; how can the categories of essence and appearance ever be historical, when all historical periods (since Plato and Aristotle at least) have some notion of necessity and contingency, some notion of essence and appearance? To this objection, one may retort that Hegel's logic is infinitely richer than merely citing the logical categories in a definite order. When one reads the text closely, one realizes that Hegel does not talk

about 'necessity in general', or 'contingency in general' (to invoke Marx's phraseology), but talks of necessity and contingency in a specific way, i.e. he defines them in a way that is attuned to the empirical reality of the social (or the natural) world. 'Necessity in general' may be a historically invariant category, but it is explanatorily otiose. For Hegel, necessity must be understood dialectically in a specific interrelation to contingency, and the dialectical intertwinement of necessity and contingency is decidedly historically inflected; it is materialized in a society where the omnipresence of free market relations results in a necessity (of economic laws) evolving out of the contingency of individual economic transactions.

Thus, we can say that Hegel's logic of essence is historical in a sense much deeper than positing that history is only a sociological or epistemic enabling condition of the logic. The single most important meta-category of the logic of essence is 'relation' (or in Hegel's specific parlance: 'reflection'), and Hegel defines all other categories relationally: identity is only to be defined in relation to opposition; essence is only to be defined in relation to appearance, and accidents are only to be defined in relation to substance. I don't think that it is far off to claim that Hegel's ontology of absolute relationality in the logic of essence captures the specific social condition of capitalism. In contrast to pre-capitalist social formations where exchange of commodities was a socially marginal phenomenon, in capitalism the relations of exchange of commodities have become (almost) universal. This single fact (and its implications) deeply affects our reproduction of life and our very social being in capitalism, whether we may subjectively acknowledge it or not.⁹

Finally, I want to suggest that those who claim that Hegel's logic is not historical must face Marx's acute criticism of Hegel as he understood him. Marx criticizes 'his' Hegel on two points: first, the independence of logic makes other sciences effectively superfluous. In Marx's memorable phrase about Hegel's political philosophy, 'the whole of the philosophy of right is only a parenthesis within the logic. The parenthesis is, of course, only an hors-d'œuvre of the proper development' of logical categories (*MECW* 3: 18, *MEW* 1: 217). In Marx's view of Hegel, the deep structure of reality is already fixed a priori by Hegel in the logic, and the issue is only how and where to apply those logical categories in the explanation of empirical reality.

Second, one of the most potent forms of ideology for Marx consists in the eternalization of what is in fact historical. His criticism is mainly about social issues, such as about how those who take fierce competitiveness to be a brute fact about human nature actually observe what is empirically in front of them in the bourgeois society, and then make an absolute case for it. But Marx's point is also applicable to deeper areas of philosophy, indeed to the logic itself. Those who think of the logic as not being in any way affected by empirical reality or by historical situation risk their position becoming ideological. Concepts change; even the most fundamental concepts change, and to posit that concepts are once and for all imprinted in

Hegel's logic for all areas of thought is to foreclose from the beginning any genuine openness towards the social (or the natural) world, and even to posit what is in fact the result of a certain historical period as being eternal.¹⁰

(III) Let me finish by explicitly answering a few criticisms raised by McNulty and Smith. McNulty raises the issue of how it could be that Hegel, living a generation before Marx, could possibly have expounded the logical categories that I claim undergird Marx's theory. This is an interesting question, but I don't think it raises any significant *philosophical* issues. German philosophy since Kant (to Fichte, to Schelling, to Hegel, to Marx, to Husserl, to Frege, to Heidegger, with the important exception of Nietzsche) is in a deep sense against psychologism. Psychology is not explanatory about the logic, about the structure of subjectivity, about the social structure, about the dynamics of social change, about the empirical sciences, etc. Thought has an objectivity that transcends any individual thinker; which is to say that whether it is one or another person, with one or another type of psychology, who advances and completes a system of thought, is not *philosophically* salient, even if these data are salient for writing a biography about those very thinkers.

Second, *pace* Smith, the claim that the a priori ingredients of Marx's social theory are already articulated in Hegel's logic of essence does not in any way reduce the originality of Marx's thought. If one reads Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* closely, one finds the dialectical method already being deployed, but this does not reduce the originality of Hegel's dialectical thought. The process of development of thought in history is slow, and revolutionary thinkers, upon closer inspection, are found to be continuing a thread of thought that has already been developing, but has not been explicitly stated before. Marx's originality consists in a thoroughgoing critique of an entire field of political economy, in a way that has also potentially emancipatory social consequences. This is not a small achievement, especially because, as I will discuss later, Hegel's own economic thought in the *Philosophy of Right* does not follow the argument of the logic of essence to its conclusion.

Third, according to Smith, the claim that the logic of essence is only about capitalism is false, since all hitherto existing societies have some sort of essence; which is to say that in any given society in history, there is a social structure which is largely independent of the subjective attitudes of individuals, and which largely dictates the boundaries of possible action for individuals. Smith refers to Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* to settle the point, but in fact the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is also the articulation of different social essences being transformed alongside a definite order.¹¹ But recalling Marx's distinction between 'labour in general' and the labour specific to capitalism, what I claim in the book is not that pre-capitalist societies do not have any essences. Rather, my claim is that, *essence as specifically understood by Hegel in the logic of essence* is specific to

capitalism. Essence in the logic of essence has certain specific properties that distinguish it from previously held conceptions of essence in the history of philosophy. For Hegel, essence is based on the ontology of absolute relationality, according to which relations have priority over things, and so essence is relationally defined; essence incorporates the necessary element of the *Schein* (semblance) of independence of individuals; essence posits that opposition is a more fundamental category than mere diversity; and finally, the necessity of essence evolves out of the seeming chaos of individually contingent phenomena. Hegel's logic of essence does not describe 'essence in general', but it lays bare—I hope to have shown in the book with sufficient detail—the essence of capitalism.

Fourth, with reference to Smith's comments, I don't claim that the categories of the logic of essence *exhaust* the explanation of the deep structure of society in capitalism. In addition to the categories of essence, one could also use other categories from Hegel's *Science of Logic* to further explain capitalism: one could use the category of 'spurious infinity' in the logic of being to describe the never-satisfiable demand of capital for self-valorization (as Smith correctly suggests); or one could use the category of 'mechanism' in the logic of the Concept to describe the abstract imposition of monetary value over all other kinds of values in capitalism. However, this does not change the fact that the very structure of capitalism remains essence-logical.

To explain this point, we must note that, from a bird's eye point of view, there are three major paradigms in Hegel's *Science of Logic* that are largely incommensurable with each other. The paradigm of the logic of being is individualistic, and treats individuals as independent from each other. In other words, in the logic of being, the interaction of individuals does not converge into forming a definite structure (or essence). The paradigm of the logic of essence is both relational and structuralist: it treats individuals as accidents of a structure that largely precedes and outlasts the action of individuals. The structure (or the totality, or essence) exerts absolute power over individuals to ensure that the deep structure is being reproduced as it is. Finally, the paradigm of the logic of the Concept is developmental. Here social structure does not exert absolute power over individuals, but is reasonably responsive to the action of individuals; which is to say that, according to the logic of the Concept, the structure of society, even at the deepest level, may change and develop into another structure as a result of the practices of individuals.

My claim in the book entails that, while it may be helpful on occasion to import other categories from the rest of the *Science of Logic* to explain aspects of capitalism, the paradigm of capitalism still remains essence-logical. This is the paradigm of absolute power (of capital over all individuals), the paradigm of dispensability of individuals (with respect to capital), and the paradigm of the deep opposition and antagonism between individuals (that is posited by the nature of capital). Other logical categories may be helpful to describe aspects of

capitalism, but the fact remains that, as long as capitalism persists, the logic of essence prevails.

II. The holism of the logic of essence and the holism of capital

(I) In the book, I argued that Hegel's logic of essence offers a kind of holism that is to be distinguished from two other philosophical positions: (1) what I might now call 'rampant holism', according to which the whole or the totality is entirely independent of individuals. On this view, the whole has a totally autonomous logic, which 'emanates' itself in the behaviour of individuals. (Following Emil Lask's terminology, in the book I called this view 'emanatistic idealism'.) (2) The second view is 'individualism', according to which there is genuinely no such thing as the whole or the totality. Rather, what proposes itself as the totality is nothing but some aggregate patterns that are entirely explainable through (and thus reducible to) the actions of individuals.

Since the project of the book consisted in establishing the relevance of the logic of essence for understanding the structure of capitalism, I did not sufficiently engage with explaining how Hegel's middle position between the two extremes of rampant holism and individualism is not only textually but also philosophically defensible—hence McNulty's legitimate concerns. A satisfactory *philosophical* defence of Hegel's holism in the logic of essence is a research programme that needs to be carried out over several years. In this section, my aim is only to show why Hegel's 'moderate holism' (to use McNulty's term) is philosophically plausible (even for those who have not read Hegel), and establish why carrying out such a research project is worthwhile.

For the same reasons that McNulty cites, I don't think rampant holism is a philosophically plausible or even respectable position. (Above all, the problem with rampant holism is that it makes the relation between the individuals and totality in principle inscrutable, even mystical.) Leaving rampant holism aside, I focus here on individualism to argue why it is wrong, which paves the way for us to embrace a Hegelian middle position. In the book, I used Elster's definition of individualism (Abazari 2020: 112). Let me now use Popper's view of individualism:

All social phenomena, and especially the functioning of all social institutions, should always be understood as resulting from the decisions, actions, attitudes, etc., of human individuals, and that we should never be satisfied by an explanation in terms of so-called 'collectives'. (Popper 2002: 309)

As Anthony Giddens astutely observes, the main problem with the individualist view is that it takes the notion of individual to be self-evident, one which does not need any

explanation (Giddens 1979: 95). Now, from Hegel's point of view, we can say that the notion of individual, in and of itself, is so empty and formal that it cannot explain any specific social institution. Hegel's point of view can be expounded in two consecutive stages: first, I begin with the notion of individual human being considered only as a natural organism, and then consider the human being in its full conception as a minded living organism, i.e. as an agent proper.

Even at the level of biological organisms, the notion of individuality can properly be understood only as belonging to, and conceptually contrasting with, the notion of species. The behaviour of the individual wolf can only be understood or explained insofar as it manifests (even when it actually contravenes) the behaviour of the species *wolf*. The species *wolf* puts some pressure or (in Hegel's parlance) exerts 'absolute power' on the individual wolf, and defines the possible course of action for it. Nonetheless, it is of course wrong to posit that the species *wolf* wholly exists independently of, or wholly transcends, the very individuals of the species. (There is no Form of the species *Wolf* fixed in eternity in the supersensible realm.) Thus, we are pushed towards a Hegelian middle, dialectical, position, according to which, although the behaviour of individual wolves is constituted by the species *wolf*, the species is nothing but the result of the behaviour of individual wolves. In other words, the species *wolf* is the outcome of individual wolves; nonetheless, the species *wolf* is recursively present as the medium of operation of individual wolves.¹²

Importantly, a human being is not merely a biological organism. Rather, the human being is a minded animal, which is above all an agent. The individuality of an agent (much more strongly than the individuality of a biological organism) cannot be understood without recourse to the society in which she lives. In Marx's striking wording, 'The human being is in the most literal sense a *zoon politikon*, not merely a gregarious animal, but an animal which can individuate itself only in the midst of society' (*nicht nur ein geselliges Tier, sondern ein Tier, das nur in der Gesellschaft sich vereinzeln kann*) (G: 84/20, emphasis added). The individuality or agency of a female, undocumented, seasonal, Mexican strawberry-picker in California cannot possibly be understood (even for herself) without citing or referring to the social institutions (and the systematic interconnection between them, their 'totality') that engulf her, that is to say, without referring to the institutions of visa, border, nation-state, gender, race, capitalist economic relations, etc. In other words, the bare notion of individuality is so empty and formal that it cannot possibly bear the heavy weight of explaining any specific social institutions.¹³ In order to explain the individuality of individuals, there must be some explanation of social institutions that pre-date and largely outlast any particular individuals. Thus, again, we find ourselves being pushed towards embracing a Hegelian, middle, dialectical, position, according to which the social institutions (and their totality) are the precondition, or the medium, of the agency of individuals, while at the

same time the social institutions are nothing but the outcome of the action of individuals.

As McNulty correctly insists, this dialectical conception of holism requires us to admit some conception of contradiction. The contradiction obtains because the social institutions (and the social totality) are both and at the same time the outcome and the precondition of individuality. Faced with this contradiction, there are two positions one could take: one could, qua a good staunch Hegelian, announce from the beginning (and perhaps with some fanfare) that contradiction is at the heart of reality, and is the moving principle of the world. Or one could take a more modest position, claiming that explaining social reality requires us—gives us no other option than—to accept that at least on this issue, there is a true contradiction involved.¹⁴ Of course, one could dogmatically cling to Aristotle's principle of non-contradiction, but then one is forced to accept theories (in this case: individualism and rampant holism) that seem to be both deeply problematic and explanatorily inadequate with regards to the phenomena.

(II) But my claim in the book is not that the logic of essence is a bland social ontology regarding the relation between individuals and social institutions equally applicable to all periods of history. It is rather the claim that the logic of essence provides the social ontology specific to capitalism. In capitalism, although individuals constitute the totality of capital—and so the social ontology of capitalism still remains a middle position, and is not to be confused with rampant holism—they remain nonetheless under its overpowering spell: in capitalism, individuals become, in Adorno's word, the 'functionary' of the social slot that they occupy; which is to say that individuality in capitalism is degraded to the status of *Schein* (semblance), which helps the social totality to perpetuate itself. This is the view that McNulty rightly finds so 'eerie', and asks 'how something which owes its very existence to us [...] could come to rule us so effectively'.

The idea that in capitalism we are effectively ruled by our own creation is central to Marx's critical theory of capitalism since his youth, but he gives it a rather flamboyant expression in the famous section 'fetishism of commodities' in the first chapter of *Capital*. The imagery that Marx uses in this section is vivid, but I believe a sufficient *explanation* of the core idea is still lacking therein. This is no surprise, because this can only be offered on the basis of Marx's entire theory of capital.

In the *Grundrisse*, Marx emphasizes that his preferred methodology in social science does not operate with a nebulous 'chaotic representation of a whole'. Rather, the correct conception of totality is 'a rich totality of many determinations and relations' (*nicht als bei einer chaotischen Vorstellung eines Ganzen, sondern als einer reichen Totalität von vielen Bestimmungen und Beziehungen*) (G: 100/35). I believe that it is only through conceiving of the structure of capital as a *differentiated totality*

that the problem of persistence of capital can be solved; namely, the problem of how a total system of domination could possibly persist when we are in fact its creator.

In the book, I have detailed the various aspects of the totality of capital: the ideology of equality and freedom, the institution of wage-labour, the opposition between capital and labour, the self-moving process of valorization of value, the dialectical unity of production and circulation of capital, the industrial reserve army, and the reproduction of capital. Here I would like to re-describe how the totality of capital reproduces itself via a slightly different route, which I believe makes it clearer how the problem of persistence of capital can be explained.

According to Marx, wage-labour in capitalism has three specific features: material coercion, exploitation and domination. Firstly, wage-labour is characterized by coercion: although individuals are legally free to opt in or out from a specific contract, they cannot, on pain of starvation, wholly opt out from wage-relations in general. Secondly, wage-labour is characterized by domination, since the organization of the labour process in capitalism is taken to be the private affair of capitalists; which is to say that, apart from very general measures regarding safety and working-hours (when such measures in fact exist), the labour process is impervious to collective, democratic control from without. Thirdly, wage-labour is marked by exploitation, since the profits obtained from the labour process are for the most part systematically siphoned off to the capitalists.¹⁵

The three features of wage-labour cited above mutually support and reinforce each other. Despite the absence of legal sanctions in capitalism, material coercion guarantees that individuals, with their own legal consent, enter into a wage-relation that is both dominating and exploitative. Moreover, domination in the organization of the labour process guarantees that the rate of exploitation will remain high, which in turn reinforces the material coercion. Finally, the systematic exploitation guarantees that workers remain, in the end of each production cycle, without access to the means of production as before, thereby coercing them to renew their wage-contract (or to enter into a new wage-contract).

These can explain the persistence of the relation of power of capitalists over workers. But Marx's point runs deeper; for he argues that the capitalists, qua capitalists, are also under the 'coercive laws of competition' to expand their capital. In Marx's view, it is not the 'greed' of capitalists that drives them to expand their capital; it is rather the structural constraint on capitalists that forces them—leaves them no other option than—to expand their capital (if they don't, they have to face the stark reality that their capital gets devalued). In the *Theories of Surplus-Value*, while criticizing those socialists who hold that 'we need capital, but not the capitalist', Marx insists that 'the *capitalist*, as capitalist, is simply the personification of capital, that creation of labour endowed with its own will and personality which stands in opposition to labour' (*MECW* 32: 429).

To summarize, the total system of domination of capital does not persist primarily because of some rather vague notion of ‘fetishism of commodities’. The totality of capital persists because capital is a differentiated totality, consisting of various subsystems and relations, which mutually support and reinforce each other—hence Marx’s emphasis in the *Grundrisse* that the various aspects of capital ‘form the member of a totality, differences within a unity’. And he continues, ‘mutual interaction takes place between different moments. This is the case with every organic whole’ (G: 99–100/34).

(III) But is the logic of essence or capital really an ‘organic whole’, as McNulty also suggests? Of course, it all depends on how we understand the notion of the ‘organic whole’. If by the organic whole, we mean an internally differentiated, self-regulating, self-sustaining system, the answer is yes: capital is able to maintain itself through mutual interaction of its constituent moments. But if by the organic whole, we primarily mean a model of organicity that is best exemplified in biological organisms, the answer is definitely no: neither the logic of essence nor capital can be adequately grasped through invoking biological metaphors.

Hegel discusses the category of ‘life’ in the logic of the Concept. According to Hegel, although there might be some—for the lack of a better term—superficial tensions between the constituent moments of an organism, a healthy organism is able to maintain itself and its constitutive parts harmoniously. But in Hegel’s logic of essence, the relation of opposition runs deep and enters into the very definition of the totality. (Indeed, a major motivation for the transition from the logic of essence to the logic of the Concept for Hegel is the overcoming of opposition.) Similarly, for Marx, the totality of capital is non-accidentally—i.e. constitutively—defined in terms of the opposition between capital and labour: the interests of capital exclude the interests of labour, and vice versa. To model the capitalist society in terms of a biological organism is to significantly downplay the role of conflict, antagonism and opposition in the constitution of society. Capitalism is a social formation that sustains itself, not in spite of but through the deep tensions that it generates within the fabric of society.¹⁶ There is no such analogue of capitalism in the realm of biological organisms, unless the organism has some kind of, say, autoimmune disease, where a part of the body (the immune system) finds some other parts of the body to be its enemy. Of course, the biological organism afflicted with an autoimmune disease is not healthy (and so does not optimally exemplify the concept of a biological organism), but the ‘healthy’ or the normal reproduction of capital both requires and reinforces the deep tension between capital and labour. The social ontology of capitalism is the ontology that is laid bare in the logic of essence, and not the ontology offered by the logic of the Concept.¹⁷

III. The same logic of essence in Hegel and Marx, two incompatible economic theories?

Inspired by Allegra de Laurentiis's insightful comments (de Laurentiis 2022), in this section I aim to further clarify the relation of the logic of essence to Hegel's own economic theory in the *Philosophy of Right*, an issue which I managed only to discuss in a footnote in the Conclusion to the book (Abazari 2020: 197–98). More sharply put, we may ask: if the same logic of essence underwrites both Marx's critique of political economy and Hegel's own economic theory, why are the results so divergent, indeed incompatible?

As Lukács has persuasively shown, there is a deep ambivalence in Hegel's economic theory (Lukács 1975: 365–420). Lukács predominantly focuses on Hegel's Jena period, but the same ambivalence can be diagnosed in the *Philosophy of Right*, where two threads of thought come together in Hegel's conception of the 'bourgeois society'.¹⁸ The first thread of thought comes from Adam Smith. Following Smith, Hegel believes that in the bourgeois society, each individual by following her egoistic desires contributes to the welfare of the all. That is, in the bourgeois society, '*subjective selfishness* turns into a *contribution towards the satisfaction of the needs of everyone else* [...] each individual, in earning, producing, and enjoying for himself, thereby earns, and produces for the enjoyment of others' (PR: §199). Moreover, like Smith, Hegel believes that the sphere of the market is the sphere of social freedom, wherein the relation of mutual recognition reigns, which involves one's needs being recognized and satisfied by the labour of the others (PR: §192). Finally, Hegel believes that participating in the modern market economy provides a practical 'formative education' (*Bildung*) for individuals, because one must undertake labour in such a way as to satisfy the needs of *others*, thereby helping the individuals to experience 'liberation' (*Befreiung*) from their sheer self-centredness (PR: §187, §194).

But at the same time, because Hegel had a great 'realistic impulse' (Lukács's phrase) towards the modern world, he was forced to admit the many problems which result from the modern economy. Apart from the critique of the effects of excessive mechanization of labour on the personality of the worker—a fact that Smith, being a disciple of Hutcheson, was also cognizant of—Hegel saw two deep structural problems in the modern economy: First, Hegel realized that poverty and unemployment are non-accidental, essential features of the bourgeois society. With a portentous realism, Hegel asserts, 'despite the excess of wealth, the bourgeois society is not wealthy enough—i.e. its own resources are not sufficient—to prevent an excess of poverty and the formation of a rabble' (PR: §245). Second, Hegel realized—and was ruthlessly brave enough to draw the

conclusion—that the endogenous problems of the bourgeois society make commercial or state-orchestrated colonialism and imperialism a necessity:

This inner dialectic of society drives it—or in the first instance *this specific society* [i.e. England]—to go beyond its own confines and look for consumers, and hence the means it requires for subsistence, in other nations, which lack those means of which it has a surplus or which generally lag behind it in creativity, etc. (PR: §246; see also §248)

However, Hegel was not able to conceptually relate the two threads of thought—Smith’s optimistic speculations, and pessimism rooted in Hegel’s own realism—into a single coherent theory. In Marx’s memorable phrase (in another context), Hegel was thus forced into ‘this inevitable lapse from empirical fact into speculation and from speculation back to empirical fact’ (*dieses notwendige Umschlagen von Empirie in Spekulation und von Spekulation in Empirie*) (MECW 3: 39, MEW 1: 241). That is, the stark empirical reality of the bourgeois society did not sufficiently motivate Hegel to depart from Smith’s economic theory. And he contented himself by citing the problems empirically, without offering sufficient explanation for them.

To pre-empt misunderstanding, my claim is not that there is *no* explanation of the inherent problems afflicting the bourgeois society in the *Philosophy of Right*. My claim is rather that this explanation is not sufficient. In the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel does use the categories of the logic of essence to lay bare the deep structure of the bourgeois society. Namely, Hegel argues that the bourgeois society is ‘a system of all-round interdependence’ (*the ontology of absolute relationality*) (§183), where individuals entertain the *illusion* of independence from others (§189). He argues that the bourgeois society is ‘the field of conflict [*Kampfplatz*] in which the private interests of each individual come up against that of everyone else’ (*opposition*) (§289). He indicates that the *necessity* of economic laws and regularities in the bourgeois society evolves out of the *contingent* individual economic transactions (§189), which in turn implies that some people, out of *contingent* reasons, will plunge with *necessity* into poverty (§188, §231, §232 through §249).

These categories can explain the inevitable poverty of some people (after all, any statistical, ‘normal’ distribution bell curve shows how some people must eventually come off worse than others), but it cannot sufficiently explain *the structurally necessary, economically endogenous, polarization of the bourgeois society into the excess of wealth and the excess of poverty*, a fact that Hegel is content to cite empirically (§185). Hegel then uses the polarization of society to explain the necessity of colonialism—excessive poverty reduces the aggregate effective demand, resulting in overproduction crisis, subsequently mandating colonialization of

other countries to stave off the crisis (§245)—but the fact of polarization itself is not sufficiently explained.¹⁹

From a Marxian point of view, in order to explain the polarization of the bourgeois society, Hegel should have mobilized his category of ‘opposition’, as he himself sets out in the logic of essence. Now it is true that in the *Philosophy of Right* Hegel uses the category of opposition to explain the structure of bourgeois society, but his usage does not run deep enough. Namely, Hegel uses opposition only to describe the competition between individuals, but he conceives this opposition to be operating in a more or less even economic playing field, where there is almost no constitutive relation of power between competitors. Correspondingly, and this is a second point, in Hegel’s theory of the bourgeois society, the social field is stratified on the basis of culture into diverse ‘estates’—roughly into agricultural, commercial and administrative estates—where there is almost no constitutive relation of power between the three estates.

However, in contrast to his usage of opposition in the *Philosophy of Right*, in the logic of essence Hegel argues that in its fully developed form the relation of opposition is essentially a relation of domination. In the logic of essence, the relations of opposition are what Hegel calls ‘the positive’ and ‘the negative’, and he is careful to add that the two are not simply interchangeable. Rather, ‘the positive’ sets the general norms to which the ‘negative’ must necessarily conform (Abazari 2020: 60–64). In fact, had Hegel used the power-laden structure of opposition in the logic of essence to explain the structure of the bourgeois society, he would have arrived at the conclusion that the bourgeois society, rather than being merely stratified into different *estates*, is indeed polarized into two opposing *classes*. That is to say, he would have been forced to abandon Smith’s economic theory, according to which the invisible hand of the market benefits all, and would have instead adopted a proto-Marxian conception of the bourgeois society as being internally antagonistic.²⁰

The fact that Hegel did not realize that the power-laden category of opposition is at the heart of the social reality of capitalism had another important consequence for his conception of the modern society. Namely, Hegel did not realize that the antagonisms constitutive of the economic sphere in capitalism necessarily seep into the realm of the state; such that the state cannot simply stand *above* society to solve its inherent problems. That is to say, lacking the concept of class conflict, Hegel did not realize that in capitalism, the state in fact functions as the capitalist state, overwhelmingly representing the collective interest of the capitalists.²¹

Therefore, although Hegel empirically realized that there are some deep inherent problems in the bourgeois society, nonetheless, because he lacked a sufficient explanation of how those problems are engendered, he simply hoped that the modern state, if it is rational, can solve them to a significant degree. Thus, in

the *Philosophy of Right*, after setting out the structure of the bourgeois society, Hegel simply proceeds to develop a theory of the modern state, which is to embody the categories that he develops in the logic of the Concept. In contrast to the logic of domination characteristic of the logic of essence, the logic of the Concept outlines a society of genuine freedom and solidarity, where genuine freedom of individuals is achieved on the basis of their thorough inter-dependence.

This brings us to the last point regarding the difference between Hegel and Marx in their usage of the logic of essence. Christopher Yeomans (2019) has persuasively argued that Hegel's logic (and Hegel's philosophy in general) is constituted by two inter-relating elements: the objective content of the issue at hand, and the perspective that is taken on it. In this context, we may grasp that Hegel's theory of the bourgeois society is based on the logic of essence (with the caveat that it does not effectively mobilize the category of opposition), but *in Hegel's conception of the bourgeois society, the logic of essence is viewed from the perspective of the logic of the Concept*, as the problems of the bourgeois society are eventually tamed in the sphere of the state. In contrast, as I have argued in detail in the Conclusion to the book, because Marx correctly discerns that the modern state cannot possibly unfetter itself from the antagonisms inherent in the capitalist society, *Marx's theory of capitalism is based on the logic of essence, which is also viewed from the perspective of the logic of essence*. The objective content of the logic of essence, viewed again from the perspective of the logic of essence, remains, in Adorno's apt phrase, 'the ontology of the false condition' (*die Ontologie des falschen Zustandes*), although Adorno never attempted to fully explicate it.²²

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Notes

¹ *Posterior Analytics* 83a32–34, cited from Shields 2007: 9.

² Abbreviations used:

C = Marx, *Capital: Volume One*, trans. B. Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1976)/*MEW* volume 23.

EG = *Encyclopaedia Geist*, trans. W. Wallace and A. V. Miller, revisions M. J. Inwood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)/*HW* volume 10. Cited by § number.

EL = Hegel, *Encyclopaedia Logic*, trans. K. Brinkmann and D. Dahlstrom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)/*HW* volume 8. Cited by § number.

Response to Critics of *Hegel's Ontology of Power*

- G* = *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. M. Nicolaus (London: Penguin, 1973)/*MEW* volume 42.
- MECW* = Marx and Engels, *Marx–Engels Collected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1975ff). Cited by volume number: page.
- MEW* = Marx and Engels, *Marx–Engels Werke* (Berlin: Dietz, 1960ff). Cited by volume number: page.
- PR* = Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H. Nisbet, ed. A. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991)/*HW* volume 7. Cited by § number.
- SL* = Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. G. di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)/*HW* volumes 5–6.
- HW* = Hegel, *Werke in zwanzig Bände*, ed. E. Moldenhauer and K. Michel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970–71).
- I have occasionally modified the translations.

³ The example of Euclidean geometry is meant to convey that I do not aim here to defend a *general* thesis of historical materialism, namely, the view that *all* major ideas or theoretical constructs are constitutively dependent on the social context in which they arise. My claim in the book is more modest and specifically pertains to the logic of essence. It is the claim that the logic of essence portrays the structure of a historically specific social formation, namely, capitalism.

⁴ For an excellent discussion of Aristotle's general methodology, which I have replicated here, see Lear 1988: 43–54, especially 51.

⁵ See also Pinkard's discussion of this point in Pinkard 2012: 20.

⁶ While for Kant knowledge is either *a priori* or *a posteriori* (there is no third alternative), one may roughly talk of *degrees of apriority* for Hegel. The system of knowledge has a core that is most *a priori* (the logic), and the degree of apriority is progressively reduced, when we move towards *Realphilosophie*, and ultimately towards the outermost edges of the system manifested in direct empirical observational reports. The picture that is suggested here may be reminiscent of Quine's naturalism in some aspects, as Pinkard also suggests (Pinkard 2012: 19).

⁷ Those who claim that the logic is purely *a priori* have to face the challenge of explaining the relevance of the logic to the modern natural sciences and the modern society. This puts a great deal of interpretive pressure on them to decode Hegel's mysterious transition from the logic to the philosophy of nature (and ultimately to the philosophy of mind)—the so-called free discharge (*frei entlassen*) of the logic into nature (*SL*: 753/573). I believe the only way to demystify the *frei entlassen* issue is to posit that the logic is *already* historically infected. See Pinkard's brief but excellent discussion of the transition of the logic into nature (Pinkard 2012: 36). Citing Hegel, Pinkard maintains that the supposed transition from the logic to nature is no real transition at all, since it is not purported to resolve some previously obtained contradictions by moving to a new context. Rather the so-called transition must have already taken place. I take it that Pinkard would accept my interpretation of the logic as being historical.

In his recent work on Hegel's logic (Pippin 2019), Robert Pippin takes a position regarding the relation between the logic and history that I (cautiously) believe to be incoherent. Earlier in

the book, Pippin takes the logic to be an autonomous enterprise, and criticizes Brandom for conceiving of the logic as the rational reconstruction of historically formed conceptual content (ibid.: 68–69). But later, and in the context of the discussion about the relation of the logic to the *Realphilosophie* in the *Encyclopaedia*, Pippin posits that the logic has to be historical: ‘one possibility Hegel is definitely excluding is any sort of Platonic or Kantian notion of a purely rationally formulated ideal, which is then used as a permanently available standard with which to judge any historical actuality’ (ibid.: 314).

⁸ Marx makes the same point about the notion of ‘production in general’ (*Produktion im allgemeinen*): ‘There are characteristics which all stages of production have in common, and which are established as general ones by the mind; but the so-called *general preconditions* of all production are nothing more than these abstract moments with which no real historical stage of production can be grasped’ (G: 88/24).

⁹ I take this insight from Lukács’s undeservedly forgotten *Zur Ontologie des gesellschaftlichen Seins*, a large book in two volumes, only a small portion of which is translated into English. According to Lukács, the most important conceptual innovation of Hegel is the invention (or the discovery) of the ‘determinations of reflection’, i.e. determinations that obtain their identity only through relation with other determinations. And Lukács adds that Hegel’s second most important innovation, which is related to the first, is its specific emphasis on ‘processuality’, or ‘becoming’. These two features of Hegel’s ontology allow him to transcend the age-old ontology of the primacy of ‘things’ over relations, as it equally dissolves the notion of substance as an eternal, motionless substratum. Lukács holds that the two most salient historical conditions of Hegel’s ontology are the advancement of capitalism in England (of which Hegel was completely aware through in-depth reading of classical British political economy), and the dissolution of age-old and more-or-less fixed forms of political authority (kingship) through the French Revolution. According to Lukács, in his *Science of Logic*, Hegel makes the error of reifying the relational and processual categories he discovered into a historically invariant ontology. I don’t think Hegel makes this latter error, as he is conscious that his whole system (including the logic) is historical. (See Lukács 1984, volume 2: 515–58.) For a helpful introduction to Lukács’s appropriation of Hegel in his *Ontology of Social Being*, see Skomvoulis 2019.

¹⁰ I take McDowell’s position in *Mind and World* to be similar to the position that I advocate here. While McDowell insists that experience is thoroughly conceptual, he does not believe that the concepts constituting experience are fixed once and for all: ‘There is no guarantee that the world is completely within the reach of a system of concepts and conceptions as it stands at some particular moment in its historical development. Exactly not; *that is why the obligation to reflect is perpetual*’ (McDowell 1996: 40, emphasis added).

¹¹ The best rendition of this point with all its details is still Terry Pinkard’s now classic study of the *Phenomenology* (Pinkard 1994).

¹² In his excellent book on the logic (Kreines 2015), Kreines argues that for Hegel there is an intimate reciprocal process between the type and the tokens—between the concept and individuals—of an organism. Kreines argues that, in Hegel’s view, explaining the intimate relation between the type and the tokens of, say, wolf does not need to refer to any complete explainers

of the 'substratum'-*wolf* kind that is to serve as the foundation of being a wolf. Kreines's work is based on the logic of the Concept, and ultimately defends a version of conceptual realism or natural kind essentialism: the 'immanent concept' *wolf* is neither exhaustible in all instances of wolves existing in different spatiotemporal locations, nor wholly transcending them as an underlying inexplicable substratum. In the framework of the logic of essence, instead of immanent concepts, Hegel conceives of the 'absolute power' of species over individuals. I am non-committal about which conception (power or immanent concept) is philosophically superior, but I would like to mention that in both conceptions, the phenomenon of species change or extinction can easily be explained (in a way that Aristotle's own account cannot), since both conceptions are against rampant holism.

¹³ It is helpful to cite Adorno's lurid articulation of the point that the notion of individuality can only be understood in relation to the notion of totality: 'By individual here I do not mean the biological division into individual beings, i.e. the fact that human beings do not come into the world like coral colonies but as single beings or at best as twins, or less well as triplets or quadruplets with slighter chances of survival. What I mean is that individuality is a reflective concept, that is to say, we can only speak of individuality where individual subjects become conscious of their individuality and singularity, in contrast to the totality, and only define themselves as individuals, as particular beings in the consciousness of this opposition' (Adorno 2006: 70). Adorno here emphasizes that the notion of individuality is a 'reflective concept', namely, individuals come to the fore when they think of themselves as individuals. But the issue runs deeper, and must also be discussed at the level of social ontology, as I have done in the book.

¹⁴ I take the general motivation of Graham Priest's influential body of work on contradiction to be of the latter sort (see especially Priest 2006). According to Priest, there are some contradictions that we are better off to posit as being true. The true contradictions, which he calls 'dialetheia', can be contained in a properly developed para-consistent logic, and do not result in the explosion of the logical system, as Popper (1940) had feared.

¹⁵ See also Smith 2017: 132ff, and Abazari 2022, forthcoming.

¹⁶ See also Adorno: "The bourgeois society is an antagonistic totality. It survives only in and through its antagonisms and is not able to resolve them" (Adorno 1993: 28).

¹⁷ Even the most up-to-date, philosophically sophisticated defense of using biological metaphors in the realm of society, i.e. that of Neuhauser (2023 forthcoming), does eventually downplay the role of conflict in the constitution of capitalist societies, or so I believe. I find Giddens's approach superior to Neuhauser's, since Giddens explicitly posits that social sciences must primarily focus, as their guiding thread, on 'social contradictions', which he defines as 'an opposition or disjunction of structural principles of social systems, where those principles operate in terms of each other, but at the same time contravene one another' (Giddens 1979: 141). Strikingly, Giddens's conception of contradiction is similar to Hegel's in the logic of essence (see the second chapter of my book.)

¹⁸ In recent scholarship on Hegel, *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* is usually translated as 'civil society'. Since the historical sense of the term is inclusively important for Hegel, it is more apt, I believe, to translate it as 'bourgeois society' or 'bourgeois civil society' (although the latter is too long).

See Manfred Riedel's classic study, which emphasizes how Hegel's conception of the bourgeois society aims to capture 'the emergence of a depoliticized society through the centralism of politics in the princely or revolutionary state and the shift of society's focal point towards economics, a change which this society experienced simultaneously with the Industrial Revolution, and which found its expression in "political" or "national-economy"' (Riedel 1984: 148).

¹⁹ See Albert Hirschman's excellent essay on how Hegel explains the necessity of imperialism (Hirschman 1976). According to Hirschman, it is remarkable to observe 'Hegel's leap from the malady of generalized overproduction in a closed economy to the remedy in the form of mercantile and colonial expansion'. But Hegel's conclusions, Hirschman adds, remain 'particularly striking guesses based on the imaginative use of his dialectic method' (ibid.: 3). More recently, David Harvey also notes how Hegel's rudimentary dialectical construal of colonialism in the *Philosophy of Right* must be regarded as the forerunner of Rosa Luxemburg's theory of imperialism (Harvey 2003: 125ff).

²⁰ Hegel's failure to use the category of opposition to explain the polarization of society into classes can empirically be explained through the fact of Germany's socio-economic backwardness at his time. Although in Hegel's time, the class conflict was evident in England and France, forcing some English or French thinkers to accept it as an objective reality (although, they too, could not explain it theoretically), Hegel could by and large ignore it. (See Lukács 1975: 366.) For an excellent documentation of the genesis of class conflict in England in the period almost coeval with Hegel's life span, see E. P. Thompson's classic study *The Making of the English Working Class* (Thompson 1964).

²¹ For my reconstruction of Marx's critique of Hegel's conception of the modern state, see Abazari 2020: 199ff.

²² I am extremely grateful to Mahmoud Morvarid, Hamid Masoudi and Ebrahim Maghsoudi for discussions on the themes of this paper.

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