

**Reading the Philosophy of Right in light of the Logic:
Hegel on the Possibility of Multiple Modernities**

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1- Hegel's Middle Position on Modernity

Broadly speaking, two views of modernity are prevalent in contemporary debates. The first dates back to the nineteenth century, having been articulated by philosophers such as Hegel (according to popular interpretations of his work) and John Stuart Mill, and survives today in “modernization theory” and in the work of such thinkers as Francis Fukuyama. This view can be described in both economic and political terms: economically, modern society is organized on the basis of the institution of the free market, as well as a set of regulations that guarantees the free exchange of commodities; politically, it is organized on the basis of individual rights, the rule of law, a representative democracy based on an aggregation of individual interests, and formal contestation in the public sphere. According to this view, this is the *only* way of becoming modern; which is to say that modernity is tantamount to capitalist liberal democracy. The West has already achieved modernity, whereas most other areas of the world (the so-called East, Third World, Global South, etc.) have lagged behind. These other societies are, so to speak, still in the “waiting room” of history; their historical status is that of the “not-yet”; they must wait to grow sufficiently mature to “catch up” with the West, and eventually enter into history proper.¹

If we allow that there is only one unique way of becoming modern, that the West has already and fully achieved modernity, and that societies outside the West have no option but to become modern in that unique way, then a justification for colonialism does not seem far off. At the same time as hailing the principle of liberty as underpinning the modern society in the West, John Stuart Mill writes unabashedly that for “those backward states of society in which the race

¹ I borrow from Chakrabarty (2000: 20) the phrases “not-yet” and the “waiting room” of history for describing non-Western societies. As will very soon become clear, I am wholeheartedly against the postcolonial project; yet I am at one with its rejection of monolithic conceptions of modernity, conceptions which generally involve a justification of colonialism.

itself may be considered in its nonage”, liberty is of no use. Rather, “despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians, provided the end be their improvement.”² In the *Considerations on Representative Government* he goes so far as to claim that, since in those “barbarous” or “semi-barbarous” societies of India or Africa “a good despot is a rare and transitory accident”, it is necessary for colonizers to install and reinforce a despotic state. The colonial state is immune to “the precariousness of tenure attendant on barbarous despotisms”, and can help the barbarous nations to gradually mature into modernity; such, he concludes, “is the ideal rule of a free people over a barbarous or semi-barbarous one.”³ In other words, for Mill, the authoritarian colonial state is the handmaid of historical progress, and instigates or facilitates the transition into modernity.⁴

It was exactly in reaction to this monolithic, colonialist conception of modernity that postcolonial theory gradually emerged (in the 1980s), subsequently (since the 1990s) acquiring a respectable position worldwide via the influence of Western academia. According to postcolonial theory, there is genuinely no such thing as “modernity”. What the West erroneously calls “modernity” is nothing but a highly parochial way of thought, and of economic and political organization, that developed by accident first in the West and then by the exercise of military violence or economic power was subsequently “universalized.” Thus, there is no universal history, or universal philosophy, or universal social theory. There is only the parochial history of Europe, the parochial philosophy of Europe, the parochial social theory of Europe, which are being sold as universal history, as universal philosophy, as universal social theory. Some go so far as to claim that even the hard sciences, such as physics, are inflected by the place in which they arose and the social relations therein, and thus that universal validity cannot be claimed for their contents.

² Mill (1991: 14-15).

³ *On the Representative Government*, Chapter XVIII in Mill (1991: 454). See also the rest of Mill’s chapter.

⁴ One might think that this self-congratulatory way of thinking is nowadays a rarity, but of course it is not. “Modernization theory”, burgeoning after the Second World War and still so prominent today, is in its essentials a justification for the continuing colonializing attitude of the West. Colonialism today need not engage in direct warfare – although colonial war is not uncommon, as was the case in the recent US wars against Iraq and Afghanistan – but can be implemented through the imposition of a set of rigid economic policies designed by the World Bank and the IMF (see Harvey 2005).

The hallmark of postcolonial theory is the stress on the “difference” or “incommensurability” between the so-called East and the West. The social reality in the East is so *fundamentally* different than, hence incommensurate with, that of the West that to analyze the East one cannot use the categories of the social sciences developed in the West. Even the very structure of agency of people in the East is posited as fundamentally different than, and thus incommensurate with, that of the people in the West; while the former are motivated primarily through concerns for “religion” and “community”, the latter are primarily motivated by self-interest and the pursuit of monetary gain. Postcolonial theory thus emphasizes the role of culture in lieu of politics and economy, and even seeks to reinterpret politics and economy in cultural terms.

Postcolonial theory has secured some tenured jobs in certain respectable universities of the West, usually for people with ethnic roots in the East; and yet it is regressive. Postcolonial theory is exactly the mirror image of the 19th-century racism of such philosophers as Mill. While Mill thinks that democratic rule is only suitable for Western societies and leads to disaster if used by “barbarous” nations, postcolonial theory posits that the ideas of self-determination and autonomy, first historically developed in the West, remain *only* a Western construct, and are not suitable for the radically heterogenous societies of the East. By doing so, and especially because it has acquired an aura of respectability from Western academia, postcolonial theory actually feeds into the machinery of authoritarian states in non-Western societies: while self-determination and democratic collective determination may be good for the West, it is not suitable “for us”, since we have a different culture, religion, sensibility, etc., from “them”.⁵

Rejecting both modernization theory and postcolonial theory, I want to suggest in this chapter that there is a third way of understanding modernity, one that is also inspired by Hegel’s philosophy. Contrary to modernization theory, this third Hegelian way respects “difference” (in a way that will be specified later), while at the same time, contrary to postcolonial theory, does not engage in dividing the human species into *fundamentally* different or incommensurate groups.

⁵ For the most potent, indeed definitive, criticism of postcolonial theory in the field of social theory, see Chibber (2013). The idea that postcolonial theory at its core is racist is Chibber’s. For a notable contribution in the field of cultural studies, see Ahmad (1994).

This third way, that is, lauds modernity as the universal achievement of humankind, while at the same time does not offer a rigid, “eurocentric” definition of it.⁶

Of course, Hegel occasionally writes or talks in a way that suggests he believes in some version of modernization or even colonialist theory.⁷ But, I argue, if we read Hegel’s work on the basis of the reasoning that it offers, rather than on the basis of the occasional chauvinistic claims that he makes, we realize that Hegel indeed provides a third conception of modernity, one that is committed to the legitimacy of modernity, but nonetheless can conceive of modernity in multiple ways. In order to do this, I suggest that we need to turn to Hegel’s institutional account of modernity in the *Philosophy of Right* (hereafter, PR), but with an important proviso: namely, rather than reading the PR on its own, as is occasionally done in the literature on it, we must read the PR in light of the most general normative principles that ground Hegel’s justification of modern institutions, normative principles that are sufficiently expounded only in the logic of the Concept of the *Science of Logic* (hereafter, SL).

Thus, I argue that Hegel’s theory of modernity is to be found at the conjunction of the PR and the SL. Neglecting the logic of the Concept, while attending only to the PR, may and indeed will result in reifying Hegel’s institutional account of modernity into an inflexible blueprint, and collapses Hegel’s distinct theory of modernity into a version of modernization theory. Conversely, neglecting the PR, while attending only to fleshing out the normative principles of the logic of the

⁶ The term “eurocentric” is one of those ambiguous polemical terms that has become widespread exactly because of the confusion that it breeds. If by “eurocentrism” we mean a property of a set of theories that historically developed first in Europe, Hegel’s philosophy is of course eurocentric (he was after all from a location now called Germany). But if by “eurocentrism” we mean a set of theories that gains legitimacy simply *because* it has arisen in Europe, then Hegel’s philosophy is exactly not eurocentric. Indeed, one can criticize not only Eastern societies but also actually or historically existing European or Western societies on the basis of Hegel’s philosophy. In the Introduction to the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel emphatically criticizes the confusion between “true justification” and “justification by circumstances”. While the former is based on reason, the latter only cites historical, “external factors” as the ground of justification (PR §3, p. 30).

⁷ See especially his disturbingly chauvinistic claims regarding the African people in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*. See also the PR, §93 Remark, where Hegel maintains that “coercion against savagery and barbarism” (Zwang gegen Wildheit und Rohheit) does not count as real coercion at all. For Hegel, there are no relations of right in the state of “savagery” and “barbarism”, and coercion is meaningful only when (modern) relations of right are already established. Like Mill, Hegel compares the savages with children, both of whom must be forcefully “educated” into the state of freedom.

Concept, will deprive Hegel's theory of modernity of its empirical, historical underpinnings, and water it down to a predominantly normative social theory reminiscent of that of John Rawls, and hence susceptible to the same deficiencies. Moreover, I will argue that Hegel's PR helps us to conceive of modernity primarily in terms of the political and economic organization of society, leaving aside the cultural, religious, "traditional", and "communitarian" elements of society, which are not germane to, and usually obscure, a theory of modernity.

2- The Three Layers of Historical Explanation

The idea that the PR must be read in light of the SL is not an ad hoc suggestion; indeed, Hegel clearly and actively asserts it. In the Introduction to the PR, Hegel emphasizes that for understanding the method of the book "a familiarity with the nature of scientific procedure in philosophy as expounded in philosophical logic is here presupposed (*voraussetzen*)" (PR §2). He even goes so far as to claim that the organizing principle of his social and political philosophy "is presupposed (*vorausgesetzt*) from speculative logic" (PR §33). However, Hegel does not set out what it specifically means that the PR "presupposes" the logic, and the relation between the two is open to interpretation.

It is not my intention here to discuss the relation of the PR to the whole of the SL, and I leave aside how the former's methodology and organization presuppose the latter. My aim is more specific: I want to explain what role the third part of the SL, i.e., the logic of the Concept, plays in and for the PR, and I want to suggest that we can discern this role when we clearly distinguish the three orders of explanation that are present in the PR. In order to do this, let us first take a short detour through the work of the German historian Reinhart Koselleck on three layers of historical temporality, as this can clarify Hegel's account.

In his essay "Sediments of Time", Koselleck argues that three layers of historical temporality can be analytically distinguished: the first layer is that of "singular events" that can occasionally have irreversible consequences. Singular events can occur in any domain of history: from military victories or defeats, to the outbreak of economic crises, to technological innovations, to cultural or religious happenings. The singular events, however, do not obtain on their own, but are always nested in the "structures of repetition" which make those singular events possible. In order to elucidate this point, Koselleck gives the ordinary example of receiving a letter informing one of the death of a close relative. This singular event, which might be shocking for the receiver of the mail, occurs in the broader, ordinary, institutional network of a

carrier delivering mails on a daily basis. It is only within the structure of repetition of quotidian mail delivery that the said breaking news can transpire. To give another of Koselleck's examples, any utterance in language that is sufficiently complex is always in some sense novel and without precedent. Yet although the utterances and the meaning that they convey are new, that novelty is made possible by a pre-existing linguistic inventory that is relatively enduring and recurrent.⁸

These two layers, i.e., the layer of singular events and the structural layer of repetition, do not exhaust the realm of history. Koselleck insists that there is a yet deeper layer that reaches beyond any single generation, or beyond any two generations that can directly communicate with each other. This third layer – “transcendental”, as he calls it – undergirds multiple generations, and defines their general worldview. According to Koselleck, it is always important to pay due attention to this third layer in historical explanation, since “without it, there is no final explanation – however provisional it might be – and it would be impossible to translate experience into [real] knowledge”.⁹

Koselleck's scheme, which is influenced by the notion of temporality in Heidegger and Gadamer, can be adapted to clarify Hegel's thought. Thus, corresponding to Koselleck's account we can analytically divide modern social and political reality – and, accordingly, the PR, which is meant to capture modern social and political reality – into three layers: (1) the layer of the immediately empirical, (2) the layer of the institutional, and finally (3) the layer of the logical. The first layer refers to specific events that may occasionally have some irreversible consequences. An example of this from Hegel's own time is the murder of the ultra-reactionary playwright August von Kotzebue in Berlin on March 23, 1819, which the conservative forces then used as a pretext to crackdown on the reformist forces, resulting in what later was called the period of Prussian Restoration.¹⁰ The first layer of immediate events does not occur in a void, but always in an institutional framework, which constitutes the second layer of social and political reality.

While access to the first layer is secured by observational or empirical reports, the second layer consists of a framework that is not immediately available to observation; it is an invisible

⁸ Koselleck (2018: 4-5).

⁹ Koselleck (2018: 9). Koselleck's third layer of historical explanation roughly corresponds to Fernand Braudel's concept of “*longue durée*”, which Braudel distinguishes from the short-term history of events and the mid-term history of longer, secular (economic) trends. See Braudel (2009).

¹⁰ See Pinkard (2000: 435ff).

institutional structure that makes the occurrences in the first layer possible. To say that this second institutional layer is invisible does not mean that it has any supernatural quality: it means that institutions have some sort of objectivity that is not reducible to any particular action or event, and pre-dates and partially outlasts any specific individual or event. Correspondingly, the objectivity of institutions cannot be grasped perceptually; it can only be secured through inferential knowledge.

Hegel's project in the PR is primarily concerned with explaining the second, institutional, level of historical reality. Hegel's explication is not purely descriptive; rather, in accordance with the main project of the PR, namely the justification of the legitimacy of modernity, Hegel seeks to show how the central institutions of modernity are rational. The main legal, moral, social, and political institutions of modernity that undergird the immediately observable social and political phenomena are rational, Hegel believes, since they embody and give expression to freedom (PR §4).

Similar to Koselleck, who believes that the two levels of historical explanation are not sustainable by themselves and must be anchored in a yet deeper multi-generational historical layer, Hegel maintains that an explanation of the extant institutional framework of modernity cannot on its own be sufficient. Rather, such explanation must be buttressed by appeal to some general meta-norms that govern modern society as a whole. It is in the Logic, specifically in the logic of the Concept, that Hegel undertakes a systematic exposition and defense of the most general norms of modern societies. That is to say, the Logic is not a historically invariant and purely a priori metaphysics which Hegel then *applies* to the extant historical reality in order to justify it; rather, the logic of the Concept aims to explicate the already implicit norms that, across several generations, modern people in their lived experience have taken as the ultimate tribunal of justification. Thus, we have already a glimpse of what it means that the PR "presupposes" the logic: it means that the justification of modern institutions as explicated in the PR cannot be successful unless it is informed by the general normative principles of modernity, explication of which lies in the logic of the Concept.

Disentangling the various layers of Hegel's theory of modernity in the PR helps us to gain clarity regarding Hegel's project, and so enables us to remove two sets of confusions that occasionally surround the PR. The first is the confusion between the first and the second layer of historical explanation, i.e. between the immediate empirical level and the deeper institutional level. This confusion lies at the heart of those readings of Hegel that accuse him of being the

ideologue of the Prussian Restoration. To these accusations it must be retorted that the object of Hegel's rational justification is not the immediately observable social and political events, but the deeper institutional structure of modern societies in general. The distinction between the first and the second level also helps us to distinguish the merely empirical claims that Hegel happens to make from the more substantive reasoning that he offers for justification of the institutions. For example, while Hegel, the historical person, makes some empirical claims regarding the gendered division of labor (PR § 166) – empirical claims that in view of our current sensibility cannot but appear as outrageous – the reasoning that his philosophy offers concerning the justification of the institution of the nuclear family is of a different order of explanation, and must be evaluated accordingly.

The second set of confusions occurs when the meta-norms that are authoritative across several generations are collapsed into the institutions that Hegel actually advocates in the PR, such that those specific institutions are regarded as the only possible instantiation of those general norms. In the PR Hegel erroneously defends constitutional monarchy, but he does so because he thinks the sovereignty of the modern state (which, he thinks, is necessary for the realization of general norms underpinning modernity) must ultimately be exemplified in one single person (PR §280). One could reject Hegel's defense of constitutional monarchy and still accept the rational core of his argument: one might posit, for instance, that in order to count as being in harmony with general norms of modernity, sovereignty must rather be exemplified in, say, an elected president. A similar confusion between general norms and extant institutions reigns in the bowdlerized version of Hegel offered by Fukuyama, such as where the latter claims that the values of modernity can be embodied only in liberal, capitalist societies.

3- The Meta-Norms of Modernity

Thus, for Hegel modern institutions are legitimate because they embody, and give expression to, a set of meta-norms that form the ultimate horizon of justification for modern people across several generations. According to Hegel, the central meta-norm of modernity is freedom, and he devotes several sections of the Introduction to the PR (especially §5 through §7) to explaining what he means by this concept. However, from these sections alone, which are concerned more precisely with setting out the structure of the “free will”, it is not entirely clear (1) why Hegel thinks freedom must be considered as the central meta-norm of modernity, (2) why freedom must be understood in the specific way that Hegel propounds there, and (3) how the central norm

of freedom must be further determined, so as to provide more specific meta-norms that are to guide our evaluation of modern societies.

The answers to these questions are arguably to be found in the logic of the Concept of the SL. In the interests of space, I cannot engage in any detailed discussion of the logic of the Concept, and I content myself with some brief remarks. In Hegel's logic, the logic of the Concept develops out of the logic of essence, and aims to overcome the problems that the development of the categories of the logic of essence engenders. In the logic of essence, Hegel aims to give an exposition and analysis of central meta-concepts or meta-categories that are necessary for any (natural) scientific discourse. Any scientific discourse must be able to distinguish between "semblance" and "essence", i.e. between what only "seems" to be the case (that the sun moves around the earth) from what is "essentially" the case (that it is the earth that in fact moves around the sun). It must be able to specify what requires explanation (the "actuality") from what can be simply ignored ("contingency"). It must be able to specify the "causes" of events, or the invisible "forces" whose "expression" constitutes the observable phenomena in the way they are. Finally, it must be able to give a holistic picture of how different elements of the theory hang together and how the theory as a whole can explain the totality of the interrelated phenomena ("substance").

The meta-categories in the logic of essence are able to provide the logical framework of theories about natural or physical phenomena, but they are profoundly insufficient to explain specifically human, social or political phenomena, what Hegel calls the spiritual phenomena. According to Hegel, a merely scientific analysis of mental disorder in terms of disturbances at the level of neurotransmitters, or a merely behavioristic analysis of how people respond to certain advertisements, or a merely social analysis in terms of the tensions between forces of production and relations of production cannot be sufficiently explanatory; since these phenomena ignore the constitutive feature of humanity, i.e. its "freedom" or "agency".

Thus, Hegel takes his aim in the logic of the Concept as to set out the meta-categories that are necessary to understand "freedom". In contrast to the logic of essence, "in the *Concept*, the kingdom of *freedom* (das Reich der Freiheit) is opened" (SL: 513), he writes. With the categories of the logic of essence, we may be able to explain economic laws, or social forces, or psychological motives, but the logic of essence on its own can only explain in what ways individuals are *determined*; it cannot explain how individuals are *self-determining*. That is to say, a merely scientific discourse cannot explain the actual agency or freedom of individuals. In order to explain agency, we must give an account of norms that guide actions of individuals. In accord with the

generality of the project of the SL, the norms explicated in the logic of the Concept are not institutional norms of the type discussed in the PR. Rather, they are the most general norms, i.e. the meta-norms, that are to ground the institutional norms.

To speak in social and political terms, Hegel thinks the fundamental meta-norm of modernity is freedom, and not well-being, or security, or happiness, or control of nature. For Hegel, freedom is understood not in terms of “negative freedom”, i.e. freedom from interference; rather, for Hegel, the freedom that provides the ultimate horizon of intelligibility for modern people is autonomy, i.e. self-determination. For a modern individual, whether in her private life or in her social or political interaction, what counts as a successful life is to be able to control her life in a way that she regards as essential to her practical identity, a life in which she can define and carry out projects that make her life meaningful.

For the theories of negative freedom, the only thing that counts as freedom is freedom of individuals from interference. As long as the space of non-interference is not constrained, individuals are free, whether they live under a democratic rule or under a “liberal-minded despot”; whether they live in a republican Lucca or in a despotic Constantinople.¹¹ In contrast to these theories, for Hegel, individual freedom or autonomy can only obtain in a society where there are civil associations, which themselves are free, and more fundamentally in a polity which itself is free. Thus, for Hegel, freedom is not only a property applicable to individuals, but also applies to groups and civil associations, as well as to the polity as a whole.

Thus, according to Hegel, the three more specific yet still sufficiently general norms of modern societies are individual autonomy, group autonomy, and collective autonomy, and he believes that the first obtains only when the two others obtain. To use his own terminology, the three meta-norms of modern society are “individuality”, “particularity” and “universality”. The three must cohere in a systematic way, such that each is simultaneously constituted by, and constitutes, the two others. The overall logical structure for which individuality, particularity, and universality are moments, Hegel simply calls “the Concept” (der Begriff), and he maintains that the relation between moments must be understood through a series of inferences. In the *Encyclopedia Logic*, while elaborating on the inferential relations constituting the structure of the Concept, he explicitly uses the example of “state” to settle his point. This is further evidence that in developing his categories of the logic, Hegel already has social and political issues in mind:

¹¹ Isaiah Berlin (2002: 176); Hobbes (1996: 149).

“[T]he state, for instance, is, in the practical sphere, a system of three inferences. (1) The individual (the person) joins itself [schließt sich ... zusammen] through its particularity (physical and spiritual needs, what becomes the civil society, once they have been further developed for themselves) with the universal (the society, justice, law, government). (2) The will, the activity of individuals, is the mediating factor which satisfies the needs in relation to society, the law, and so forth, just as it fulfils and realizes the society, the law, and so forth. (3) But the universal (state, government, law) is the substantial middle [term] in which the individuals and their satisfaction have and acquire their fulfilled reality, mediation, and subsistence. Since the mediation joins each of the determinations with the other extreme, each joins itself precisely in this way together with itself; it produces itself and this production is its self-preservation. - It is only through the nature of this joining together, through this triad of syllogisms with the same terminis, that a whole is truly understood in its organization.”(EL §198)

Here Hegel explains that the modern society (what he calls the “state”)¹² is and should be governed by three meta-norms, i.e. individuality, particularity, and universality, which are interrelated through three inferences. According to the first relation or inference, the moment of particularity mediates between individuality and universality. This is to say that there are mediating links – in the form of professional organizations and civil associations – that connect individuals to the state. That is, individuals do not solitarily confront the state as an alien power standing over against them, but, through participating in civil associations, in fact contribute to the shaping of the state. In the second relation or inference, the moment of individuality lies at the center; which means that individuals are not mere cogs in the machinery of social institutions or the political state. Rather the two latter respond, and are reasonably transformed, by the action of individuals. Finally, and most important of all, the moment of universality mediates between individuality and particularity, which is to say that the institution of the state provides the necessary background conditions for individuals and particular groups to flourish. Hegel ends this fascinating paragraph by claiming that in a rational polity, since individuality, particularity, and

¹² Hegel uses the term “state” (der Staat) in a broader and in a narrower sense. In the broader sense, the state is the totality of a polity, inclusive of all its legal, moral, social, economic, and political institutions. In the narrower sense, the state is the institution of the political state. In the passage cited, first he uses the term “state” in the broader sense and then in the narrower sense.

universality are inter-defined, each, by contributing to the other, in fact contributes to its own constitution.¹³

For Hegel, there is no a priori guarantee that the three meta-norms of modernity, as well as the harmony between them, will be sufficiently realized in actually existing modern societies. Moreover, there is no a priori blueprint for how far or in what ways the collective determination of people in a given modern polity is to circumscribe individual or group self-determination; or for how far or in what ways individual or group self-determination should be translated into the process of collective determination. Obviously, new forms of economic interactions develop; new forms of social organization emerge; new technology is invented; the configuration of cities changes; and new pandemics break out. A society is truly modern if in response to new challenges or developments, it manages to maintain a good balance between the moments of individual self-determination, group self-determination, and collective self-determination.¹⁴

Thus, in the SL, Hegel uses the meta-category of “life” (Leben) to indicate that a truly modern society is not petrified or inert; the modern society is not antecedently fixed on the basis of a set of predefined rules or regulations, but has the capacity to change its internal organization while remaining modern all the same. Contrary to what may immediately come to mind, for Hegel the main instantiation of the logical category of “life” is not in organic life, but in social and political life, insofar as in the PR he defines the modern *Sittlichkeit* as “the living good” (das lebendige Gute) (PR §142).¹⁵ As modern societies are in this sense lively, their development cannot but be open-ended. The modern society is not primarily to be judged according to a set of fixed social or political institutions; rather it is judged by its capacity to realize the three meta-norms of

¹³ For helpful discussions of what it means that the structure of the state is a system of inferences, see Henrich (1982) and Vieweg (2017).

¹⁴ Pinkard also advocates a similar view. Reading Hegel in the light of Aristotle’s practical philosophy, Pinkard maintains that modern individuals should endeavor to “strike the balance, the mean, among the unavoidable tensions of modern life. Those tensions are ineradicable but necessary components of modern life. Something like practical wisdom, and not a final metaphysical solution, is the proper response” (Pinkard 2002: 181).

¹⁵ Recently, Hegel’s political philosophy has been reconstructed by paying central attention to the concept of “life”. For the best treatments, see Neuhouser (forthcoming) and Moyer (2021). While Neuhouser mainly focuses on the material reproduction of life in Hegel, Moyer elaborates the teleological character of modern social and political life, namely that it aims at the realization of the good. More broadly, Pinkard (2012) reinterprets various aspects of Hegel’s philosophy with reference to the concept of life.

individuality, particularity, and universality in a more or less sustainable way. Contrary to popularized versions of Hegel, Hegel himself was aware of the open-ended character of the project of modernity, and insisted that the issue of the actualization of freedom in modernity is still “the knot, the problem ... with which history is now occupied, and whose solution it has to yet work out in the future.”¹⁶

4- The Institutional Principles of Modernity

Thus, the general norms of modernity are set out in the logic of the Concept, and include individuality, particularity, and universality, as well as a systematic and dynamic union of them which is grasped through the concept of life. However, Hegel’s theory of modernity cannot be restricted to explicating the norms that are to define the horizon of intelligibility of modern individuals. Hegel is starkly opposed to purely normative social theories of a Kantian bent. Thus, it is important that in his theory of modernity, in addition to his normative account, his specifically historical and institutional account of modernity in the PR is also included.

In the PR, Hegel advocates an intricate institutional design for modernity. The institutions that he defends include, among others, private property, capital punishment, a bourgeois morality whose highest virtues are “rectitude” [Rechtschaffenheit] and “honor” (PR §150, and §207), the nuclear family, a regulated capitalist market, and constitutional monarchy. I have suggested that zeroing in on Hegel’s institutional design has the danger of reifying or fetishizing it as the *only* possible form of modernity. Now I suggest that, instead of staying too close to Hegel’s institutional design, we should extract a few essential principles that undergird it. This gives us more leeway to interpret Hegel’s account of modernity such that it can include multiple forms of modernity. The principles that can be regarded as essential to a Hegelian social and political account of modernity are (1) the central importance of politics and economics in the definition of modernity, and the irrelevance of culture, tradition, ethnic ethos, and religion; (2) the separation of the political from the economic; and (3) a post-Westphalian global order based on the sovereignty and self-determination of states.

Let us begin with the first point, namely that culture and religion are not pertinent to the definition of modernity. In the PR, Hegel is engaged with answering two central questions: First, how should the common life be organized, such that it allows both for individual self-

¹⁶ *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, p. 472.

determination and collective self-determination; this can be called the “political problématique” of modernity. Second, how the needs of individuals are to be satisfied, and, accordingly, how the relations of labor must be organized; this can be called the “economic problématique” of modernity.¹⁷

Hegel is occasionally regarded as a forefather of communitarianism. If by communitarianism we mean a kind of theory which advocates that modern society must be organized on the basis of cultural traditions, religious doctrines or practices, national ethos, family or clan loyalty, language, or ethnic or racial identity, Hegel is certainly not a communitarian. Communitarianism, in this definition, is a view held by Herder and the Romantics, particularly Schlegel and Novalis, and Hegel explicitly distances himself from them.¹⁸ According to Hegel, the modern society is ineradicably pluralistic, and in any given modern state there are various religions, traditions, and languages. If the principle of the modern state is based on any specific religion or on any specific culture, it inevitably leads to the exclusion of other religions or cultures from the political process. Specifically, following Hobbes, Hegel believes that in modernity, religion, rather than being a source of social cohesion, can function a source of conflict.¹⁹ Therefore, the principle of the modern state cannot be derived from religion (PR §270).²⁰ Moreover, the principle of the modern state is autonomy, and autonomy requires a

¹⁷ According to Peter Wagner (2008), the three main questions of modernity to which any modern society must provide some answer are the “political problématique”, the “economic problématique”, and the “epistemic problématique”; the last one refers to the rules governing what counts as valid knowledge. While it is not based on Hegel, Wagner’s account fits nicely with Hegel’s account of modernity. While the first two are discussed by Hegel in the PR, the third (in its most general form) is discussed in the logic of the Concept.

¹⁸ See Ross (2008). Ross gives a helpful account of how Hegel’s political philosophy is not based on the organic model of society that Herder and the Romantics advocate; however, he errs insofar as he thinks Hegel’s theory of the modern state is based on the notion of “absolute mechanism”. Hegel’s view of the modern state is still organic, yet in a different sense than the Romantics hold. Namely, while for Hegel the modern state is not based on cultural traditions, it must exhibit the property of “life” which denotes its capacity to respond to challenges in a rational way.

¹⁹ For an excellent, systematic discussion about the relation of Hegel’s political philosophy to Hobbes’s, see Bergés (2012).

²⁰ In this curious section of the PR, Hegel argues that while the *institution of the church* must be separated from the institution of the modern state, *religion* is united with the state qua the polity as a whole. However, by religion Hegel only means a Hegelian version of Protestantism, which is a religion that respects the autonomy of individuals and has almost no doctrinal content. Since for

degree of alienation from one's surrounding cultures and traditions. A thick conception of tradition and culture, as advocated by communitarians, leads to the naturalization of politics, which should count as a phenomenon belonging to the pre-modern world.²¹

This is not to say that culture does not play any important role for Hegel's conception of modernity. But the culture that Hegel counts as important is the political culture. In order for a modern state to be successful, its citizens must have a certain "political disposition" (*politische Gesinnung*) to "trust" (*Zutauen*) in the democratic, collective political process of which they are a part. This political disposition allows the citizens of the modern state to know that their own individual autonomy depends on, and presupposes, their collective autonomy. This, in turn, enables them to prefer the latter over their own immediate short-term interests, should a conflict obtain between the two. As if to pre-empt the later communitarian misreading, Hegel emphasizes that the modern political culture "is merely a consequence of the institutions within the state" and should not be confused with any specific culture antecedent to politics (PR §268).

Rather than ethnic traditions, culture, or religion, for Hegel the main *problématique* of modernity concerns the relation of the political process to the economic process, i.e. the relation of the state to the economy. Hegel believes that the sphere of the modern economy, as opposed to the ancient or medieval economy, has an existence of its own different from the political. This is to say that the modern economy follows its own relatively *sui generis* laws and regularities, and cannot be totally determined by ad hoc political fiat (PR §189). The separation of the economic from the political, however, does not imply that the economy should be completely left alone. Although Hegel is generally influenced by Adam Smith's economic theory – there was no Marx, when Hegel was writing – Hegel nonetheless sees the extreme problems that the free market engenders: "civil society affords a spectacle of extravagance and misery as well as of the physical and ethical corruptions common to both", he writes (PR §185). Hegel concedes that there is no complete solution to the problems that the modern economy creates, yet he argues that in order

Hegel (1) the modern society requires an autonomous political process, and (2) any doctrinally thick religion (including actually existing Protestantism) – if it becomes part of the state – obstructs the autonomous political process, religious organizations should strictly remain only as a part of civil society.

²¹ In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (§483ff) Hegel takes "alienation" as a necessary stage in the development of modernity, and thus as an essential moment of it. See Terry Pinkard's excellent discussion of how the project of "self-grounding" of modernity requires passing through the "groundlessness" that characterizes alienation (Pinkard: 1994, 150ff).

to reduce those problems to an acceptable degree, the state must actively regulate the general framework within which the economy can function according to its own laws. In addition to maintaining a healthy atmosphere for the economic activities, the state must always aim at the provision of basic welfare for all individuals, including and especially for the unemployed, the basic welfare of whom is not only the precondition of their individual autonomy, but also serves as the ground of collective, political, autonomy.

Although the measures the state must take to regulate the economy, or the extent of them, cannot be specified a priori or mathematically, Hegel believes that the state must not totally control the economy. The collapse of the economic sphere into the political sphere abolishes the moment of formal freedom, i.e. “the right of particularity”, that is embodied in the modern economy. It is worthwhile to note that, in contrast to the contemporary account of civil society, Hegel primarily defines civil society in terms of the sphere of economy, as well as the professional organizations and trade unions that are closely related to it. The swallowing-up of the economical into the political carries the danger of enervating the professional organizations and trade unions, and thus may pave the way for political authoritarianism or even totalitarianism. According to Hegel, in a well-functioning state, the relation of individuals to the state cannot be immediate. Since the power of the state is infinitely higher than that of isolated individuals, the concerns of individuals must be translated, and actively conveyed, by actually functioning professional organizations.²²

Finally, Hegel explicitly takes a stance against moralistic Kantian cosmopolitanism, as he would equally take a stance against Marxist social internationalism. He believes that although these two positions may be desired, nonetheless the actual arrangement of nation-states is such that cosmopolitanism or internationalism is practically impossible. Since there is no higher effective institutional order than the states that could guarantee the relation of states to one another (PR §333), the modern states must be content with a global order in which each state is recognized by other states as “a sovereign and independent entity in relation to others” (PR §331). The nation-state for Hegel is the historical horizon of modern political arrangements, and must be accepted as such.

²² Hegel’s view that the economic must not be reduced to the political is strikingly similar to that of Max Weber (1994). Weber argues that the total control of the economy by the state does not result in socialism; it results only in the rule of bureaucrats over society, which in turn paves the way to totalitarianism.

5- The Experience and Expectation of Modernity

I have argued elsewhere that, contrary to Hegel, the project of the PR, and the modern world whose conceptual articulation it is, fails.²³ The modern world has not yet realized – and in the current institutional order cannot possibly realize – the three norms of individual self-determination, group determination, and collective determination. This is so because Hegel significantly underestimates the challenge that the capitalist economy poses for the project of modernity. Contrary to Hegel, it must be conceded that in our time the distinction between the political and the economic, so important for Hegel’s conception of modernity, is almost obliterated. However, rather than politics determining the economy (what Hegel actually feared), it is now the economy that determines politics. Rather than collective autonomy, it is the interest of capital that de facto determines the political process. Concerning the global order, the self-determination of nation-states is effectively undermined by the rule of capital. The harsh imposition of EU austerity measures on Greece in 2015, despite the results of the referendum and the plentiful protests of Greek people against it, testifies to the hollowness of the rhetoric of the self-determination of nations today. The question now is: Given the historical, empirical refutation of the PR, is Hegel’s project of modernity now dead?

The answer is a cautious no. While the project of the PR, if read on its own, fails, I have tried to show that if the PR is read in the light of the logic (something which Hegel himself recommends) it *might* provide a defensible conception of modernity. To substantiate this claim, I would like to refer once again to Koselleck; this time, to his conceptions of “space of experience” (Erfahrungsraum) and “horizon of expectation” (Erwartungshorizont).²⁴

According to Koselleck, lived history is constituted by the two main metahistorical categories of “experience” and “expectation.” Experience is the “present past” (gegenwärtige Vergangenheit). That is, for Koselleck, the past is not simply past, but is experienced as present in our life. The past is present in our life as individual or collective memory, conscious narration of past events in the form of written or oral history, unconscious habitual continuation of past traditions, or as sedimentation of past practices in the institutions which guide our current life. In contrast, “expectation is the future made present” (vergegenwärtigte Zukunft); which is to say that the future is not simply that which comes after today, but is that which is expected as future

²³ Abazari (2020: 1-5; 193-204).

²⁴ Koselleck (2004: 255-275).

presently. Our hopes, fears, anxieties, desires, curiosities, imaginations, and rational planning, which are directed towards the future, are experienced in our present life, and constitute our “horizon of expectation”.²⁵

Experience and expectation, rather than being independent of each other, mutually influence each other. Our experience of the past forms our worldview, and thus partially determines our future expectations. Conversely, lived experience is not an inert container of past events ordered merely chronologically, but gets actively shaped in light of our future-oriented expectations. Koselleck further emphasizes that there is always some tension between experience and expectation, since expectation cannot simply, and without remainder, be deduced from experience; there are always unexpected events that transcend our prognosis based on past accumulated experience. Lived history, that is, occurs at the conjunction of experience and expectation, and neither is reducible to the other.

According to Koselleck, while in all periods of history there is some discontinuity between experience and expectation, in modernity the distance between them greatly expands: “Neuzeit is first understood as a neue Zeit from the time that expectations have distanced themselves evermore from all previous experience.”²⁶ In the pre-modern era, predominantly defined by the peasant economy or guild system, the social, or technological, or scientific changes were so slow that one could expect more or less the same things that occurred in the past to continue to occur in the future. The main change that was expected to transpire in the future was the religious Final Days in the Hereafter, which itself had been determined in past Biblical texts. In contrast, modernity – which was initiated by the Copernican revolution in science, the discovery of new lands, market-based economic relations that disrupted the guild system, rapid technological change, etc. – brought about a deep rift between experience of the past and expectations of the future. The defining event of political modernity, i.e. the French Revolution, which aspired to bring about a social and political structure that was *radically* different from the past, is inconceivable from a pre-modern standpoint.

Koselleck helps us, I suggest, to better understand what it means to read Hegel’s project of the PR in light of the logic. While the PR continues to lay bare the general structure of our “space of experience”, the logic of the Concept makes explicit the meta-norms operating in our “horizon of expectation.” These meta-norms – the quest for self-determination, for social group-

²⁵ Koselleck (2004: 259).

²⁶ Koselleck (2004: 263).

determination, for political collective determination – are continually translated into our fears, hopes, anxieties, aspirations, plans and prognoses about future. These norms are not some ad hoc invention of some philosophers or intellectuals; they are not the result of a mass mania of modern people. They are rather the very norms that are promised by past modern historical experience but never durably and sufficiently fulfilled. For Hegel, keeping the horizon of expectation of modernity in view is necessary, since otherwise we would lose the critical stance with respect to our current space of experience, our current predicament. For those who think Hegel's philosophy of history is purely retrospective, and does not allow for future-oriented expectations, one may retort that Hegel's famous metaphor in the Preface to the PR,

When philosophy paints its grey in grey, a form of life has grown old, and it cannot be rejuvenated, but only recognized, by the grey in grey of philosophy; the owl of Minerva begins its flight only with the onset of dusk. (PR, p. 23)

can be read as being *both* past-oriented *and* future-oriented. Philosophical knowledge of a form of life can only obtain when that form of life has been sufficiently consolidated. But at the same time, philosophical knowledge can discern the petrification of that form of life (which follows its consolidation), thereby contributing to opening up the horizon of expectations for a new form of life. The experience of the sinking into darkness at dusk is inconceivable without the expectation of the rise into light at dawn. Although, because of our epistemic constraints, we never know how the future concretely turns out to be, the expectations that we have of the future continue to inflect our present experience.

To conclude, let us consider how Hegel's theory of modernity, as is laid bare in this chapter, fares with regard to modernization theory on the one hand, and postcolonial theory on the other. Hegel would reject the view, posited by modernization theory, that modernity has already been achieved in the West, and that non-Western societies can only aim to "catch up" with the specific institutional order that is currently realized in the West. From the Hegelian standpoint advocated here, the norms of the logic of the Concept are not yet sufficiently realized in the institutional order of Western societies, and, not least because of the failure of the West, the field of experimentation for new forms of modernity is open to all, Western and non-Western societies alike.

Hegel's theory of modernity is also opposed to postcolonial theory, since the latter posits that the norms expressed in the logic of the Concept – individual self-determination; group, social, self-determination; collective, political self-determination – constitute only the horizon of

expectations of Western people, while non-Western societies have incommensurate aspirations and expectations. Contrary to postcolonial theory, all areas in the contemporary world are co-eval; they experience the same historical period – modernity. There is no “traditional” society today; there are only better or worse forms of modernity. Further, Hegel’s theory of modernity implies a critique of postcolonial theory for being fixated on the role of so-called cultural and ethnic traditions in the organization of society, as if cultural and ethnic traditions were self-enclosed containers, encapsulated unto themselves, separate from the rest of the world. Given the plurality of cultures and ethnicities in any society today, the main problématique of modernity – I emphasize, in any society, whether Eastern or Western – must center on affairs that are the concern of anybody in that society, irrespective of culture or ethnicity: and that problématique is the economy and politics and the relation between the two.²⁷

²⁷ I am thankful to Dean Moyar, Hamid Masoudi, and Benedict Young for helpful comments on the earlier drafts of this chapter. I presented an earlier version of this chapter at Johns Hopkins University, Institute for Research in Fundamental Sciences (IPM), and Tarbiat Modarres University, and I am thankful to the audience for their helpful feedback.

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Note: I've occasionally modified the translations.

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