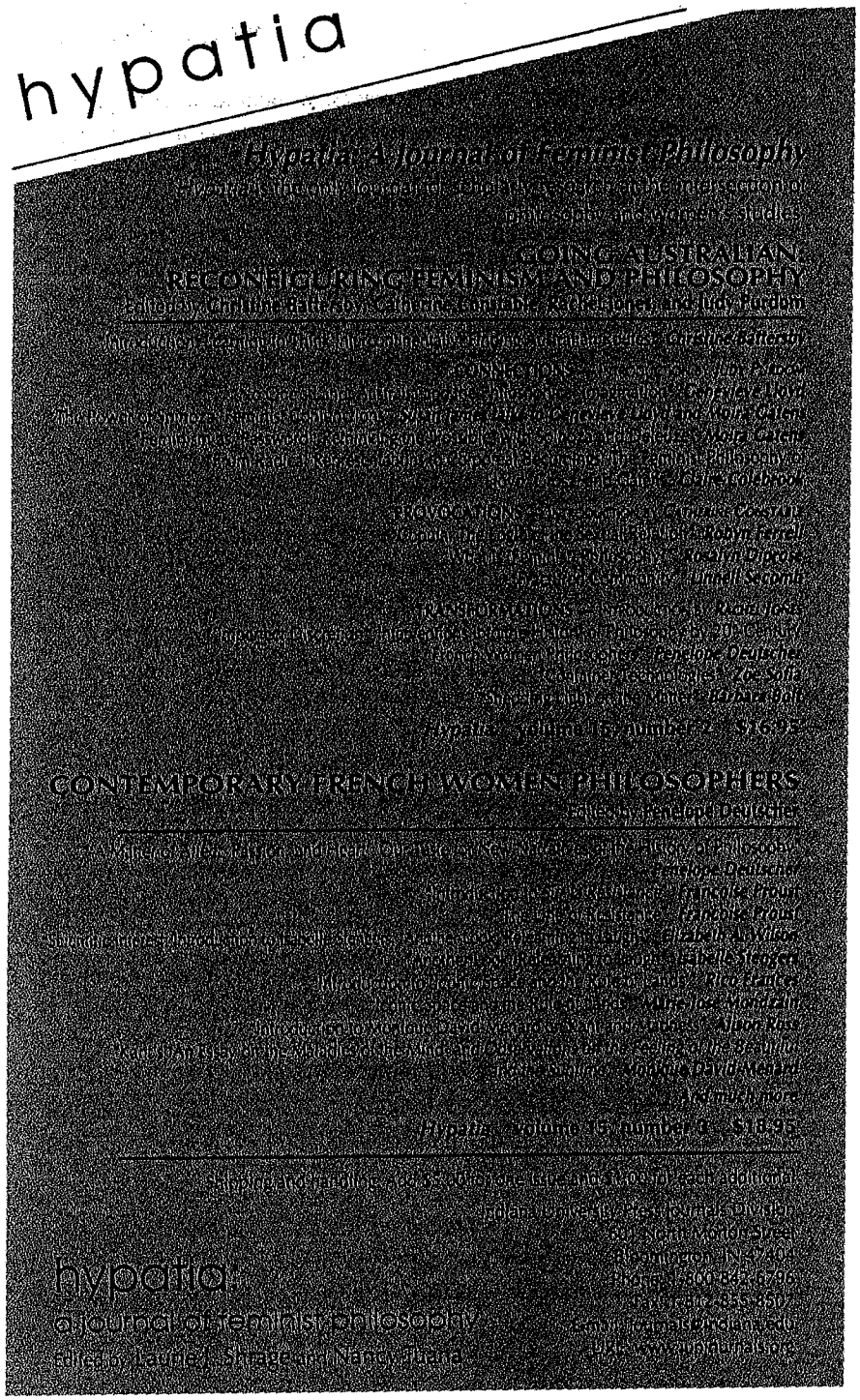

Yitzhak Y. Melamed

Leaving the Wound Visible

Hegel and Marx on the Rabble and the Problem of Poverty in Modern Society

1. Introduction[1]

The problem of poverty and the emergence of a rabble *(Pöbel)* in modern society has no reasonable solution in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* (henceforth PR).[2] Some scholars have stressed how unusual this is for Hegel, claiming that it would have been uncharacteristic for him to leave a major,

[1] I am greatly indebted to Matt Light, Ido Geiger, Oded Schechter, and Yaron Senderowicz for their helpful comments and critiques of earlier drafts of this paper. The ideas in this paper originated in a seminar on Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* by Allen Wood. I am very grateful to him for his intellectual generosity and encouragement. Finally, thanks are due to the anonymous referee of *Iyyun* for several important suggestions for improvement.

[2] Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations are from Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right* (PR), translated by H. B. Nisbet, edited by Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), cited by paragraph number; remarks are indicated by 'R'; Gans' additions by 'A'. The first drafts of PR were probably written during the years 1818–20 at the University of Berlin. Hegel revised these drafts due to the new political situation, namely, the conference of German states in Carlsbad, which imposed censorship on academic publications. The new preface to the book was completed on June 25, 1820, and the book was published in 1821. Between 1817 and 1831 Hegel gave seven series of lectures on the topics of PR: In 1817/1818 at Heidelberg (transcriptions of which, made by Peter Wannenmann, were published by both O. Pöggeler and K.H. Ilting in 1983). His 1818/19 lectures in Berlin, transcriptions of which were made by C.G. Homeyer, were published by Ilting in *Vorlesungen über Rechtsphilosophie* (Stuttgart: Frommann, 1974). An anonymous transcription of the third series of lectures, given in Berlin in 1819/1820, was published by Dieter Henrich, *Philosophie des Rechts: Die Vorlesungen von 1819/1820* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1983). The content of these lectures is of the utmost importance, since they had been given shortly before PR was completed. Of the fourth series of lectures, given in Berlin in 1821/1822, no transcriptions are extant. The

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acknowledged problem of his system unsolved: "On no other occasion does Hegel leave a problem at that."[3] The importance of this problem is not limited to the threat it poses to the sphere of ethical life *(Sittlichkeit)*. It also pertains to some central issues in Hegel's philosophy of history and the role he assigns to philosophy and philosophers in the making of history.

In the present paper, I have three objectives. First, I will point out some bold, radical claims in Hegel's discussion of poverty and examine the way he restrains them. Second, in contrast to the common view which holds that Marx ignores Hegel's discussion of poverty in the PR, I will point to one of Marx's early works which clearly refers to this discussion and in fact makes an intriguing use of Hegel's claims by uncovering their radical elements and setting them free. Finally, I will argue that the deep reason for Hegel's avoidance of social radicalism lies in his philosophy of history. The last point will also serve to explain Hegel's willingness to leave the problem of poverty unsolved.

I will begin however, with a short summary of Hegel's discussion of poverty.

2. *Modern Society, Poverty, and the Emergence of the Rabble*

1. Hegel's preoccupation with the problem of poverty persists throughout his literary life. From his early theological writings to his critique of the English Reform Bill (1831) — the last work published in his lifetime — he

transcription of the fifth (Berlin 1822/1823, by H.G. Hotho), the sixth (Berlin 1824/1825, by K.G. von Griesheim), and the seventh (Berlin 1831, by D.F. Strauss) series of lectures were published by Ilting in his, aforementioned, 1974 edition.

I shall refer henceforth to the transcription of the courses (VPR) according to the year in which they were delivered. Most of the translations of the transcriptions are my own, but, when indicated, I have also used the recent English translation of VPR$_{17/18}$ by J. Michael Stewart and Peter C. Hodgson, *Lectures on Natural Right and Political Science* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); and selections dealing with poverty in VPR$_{19/20}$ in Shlomo Avineri (tr.), "The Discovery of Hegel's Early Lectures on the Philosophy of Right," *The Owl of Minerva* 16 (1985): 199–208, and in the editorial notes to H.B. Nisbet's translation of PR.

[3] S. Avineri, *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), p. 154. Cf. A.W. Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 248–50, and Michael O. Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy: The Project of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 241.

returns to the topic time and again. One of Hegel's most concise treatments of the problem appears in the few paragraphs allotted to that topic in the PR.[4] Concise though it is, however, the discussion in the PR is much more than a mere sketch.

Hegel is concerned with poverty as a modern phenomenon. This is not to say that there were no poor in previous times, but that the modern phenomenon of poverty has certain characteristics which distinguish it from any previous types. Two main features of modern poverty are its necessary growth out of industrialized economy, and the absence of the extended family which could support the individual in times of hardship.

Hegel claims that an industrialized economy is based on mass production and marketing, and mass production rests on cheap, unskilled labor (PR, §243). People who earn their living as unskilled laborers are vulnerable to all kinds of contigencies which might reduce them to poverty. Although impoverishment can result from irresponsible personal extravagance (§240), this is not always the case. People may find themselves unemployed due to reasons which have nothing to do with their personal conduct (§241). Hegel illustrates such an occurrence in one of his early Jena lectures:

> Whole branches of industry which supported a large class of people suddenly fold up because of a change in fashion or because the value of the products fell due to new inventions in other countries. Whole masses are abandoned to poverty which cannot help itself.[5]

The internal dynamics of modern economy tend to concentrate wealth in the hands of a few. Since in modern civil society the population is expanding rapidly, the result is that considerable portions of society find themselves in a situation of "dependence and want" (§243). The poor cannot rely on the

[4] Avineri notes this point in his *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State*, and tries to explain the brevity of the discussion in the PR by claiming that "When writing the *Philosophy of Right* Hegel thought that he had already found an answer to his problem, and hence the criticism appeared as secondary, while the proposed solution came to occupy the center of the argument" (p. 98). It is hard to figure out which solution Avineri is referring to. This becomes even more difficult when we take into account Avineri's own claims about Hegel's deep pessimism in the PR regarding the solution of the problem, and Avineri's explicit assertion that "no solution is offered by Hegel himself [in the PR]" (p. 153).

[5] G.W.F. Hegel, *Jenaer Realphilosophie* II, ed. J. Hoffmeister (Hamburg: Meiner, 1967), p. 232, Eng. tr. Avineri, p. 97.

assistance of their extended families since "Civil society tears the individual away from family ties, alienates the members of the family from one another, and recognizes them as self-sufficient persons" (§238). In pre-modern times, the extended family served as the main source of economic support. It provided the skills one required to earn a living, and maintained individual family members in times of distress. By detaching the individual from reliance upon his family, civil society takes on the responsibility for the individual's welfare (§241). Thus the individual becomes a "son of civil society which has as many claims upon him as he has rights in relation to it" (§238).

Civil society, however, frequently fails to fulfil its obligations. It cannot secure the individual's right to make his living from his own work and thus the individual is doomed to all the ills of poverty and unemployment. The poor are deprived of most of the benefits of civil society. They receive very bad medical treatment, if any. They do not enjoy the protection of the law since the administration of justice is hardly accessible to them, and they are even deprived of the consolation of religion since they do not have suitable clothing for participation in Sunday worship. As a result they become bitter and envious. They feel cheated by the society which approves their status as free beings and at the same time abandons them to the mercies of the street (VPR19/20 194–95).

The reaction of the poor does not develop into any kind of self-conscious revolutionary activity; instead they internalize the feeling of worthlessness which society transmits to them, and lose any sense of self-dignity. At this stage, they become a rabble (§244). A man of the rabble is no longer interested in earning his own keep. He wants society to feed and support him without giving any service in return (§244). Since his own rights are being trampled on by society, he has no reason to recognize the rights of others. For him the laws of society are of no value; he might become a thief, a murderer, or a drug dealer. He does not rebel against the law, but simply ignores it. As Sartre puts it in the mouth of a 34 year-old convict: "The judge who sentences me is neither better nor worse; to judge a robber and to rob a judge comes to the same thing. It's all a rat race."[6]

[6] J.-P. Sartre, *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr*, trans. B. Frechtman (London: Heinemann, 1988), p. 609. This illustration of the rabble mentality is taken from the appendix to *Saint Genet*. In a psychological test, called 'The *tzedek* Test', the experimenters ask the subject to give his moral judgement on certain questions. The followings are some additional replies of the convict:

"Q: A serious offense has been committed in a government office. A certain person is vaguely suspected without sufficient proof. Nevertheless, he is seriously punished on the grounds that an example must be set. What do you think of that decision?
A: That's pretty much the way government agencies usually act. It's all right for them. I personally don't consider it right. [...]
Q: There is a food shortage... and rationing is introduced: very large rations for able-bodied persons who produce and work, starvation rations for old persons who are no longer able to work. What do you think of this?
A: They ought to be killed instead.
Q: A shopkeeper reserves his merchandise for his most powerful and richest customers, etc.
A: He's right. He knows on which side his bread is buttered. What he does is normal. It's also normal to steal."

2. The emergence of the rabble constitutes a major problem for the whole program of the PR. Hegel does not dispute the justness of the rabble's embitterment and anger, and he openly acknowledges that the poor are suffering a wrong. It is not difficult to see how this admission could undermine the moral foundations of his idea of civil society and the state in general, and the administration of justice in particular . Yet, in the PR Hegel does not set out to assign the responsibility for that evil to any particular agent, but instead attributes it simply to "nature."

> No one can assert a right against nature, but within the conditions of society hardship at once assumes the form of a wrong inflicted on this or that class. (§244A).

We may wonder how exactly nature is supposed to account for the wrongs inflicted on the poor. After all, in most cases poverty in modern society is not a result of what we call 'natural disaster'. Indeed, in his lectures on right, given a year before the publication of the PR, Hegel seems to assert exactly the opposite of what he wrote in the PR, namely, that the members of society, and not only nature, are responsible for the existence of poverty:

> In civil society it is not only natural distress against which the poor has to struggle. The poor man is opposed not only by nature, a mere being *[ein bloßes Sein]*, but also by my will. (VPR19/20, p. 195/ PR, p. 453)

Given that these two passages date from the same twelve-month period, it seems unlikely that Hegel simply changed his mind. What, then, does Hegel mean by 'nature', and how are these two passages to be reconciled?

3. It seems to me that what Hegel had in mind in these two passages was a view of modern civil society as having a twofold relation to its poor. The bourgeois, insofar as he is acting in civil society and its market economy as a homo economicus, looking merely after his own self-interest, is indeed in a state of nature. In such a state one cannot assert a right to receive a livelihood. This is the element of *particularity* of civil society. But civil society contains also a *universal* element. As we have already mentioned, by tearing the individual from his family, civil society takes responsibility for the individual's well-being and as such ought to treat him in a fatherly fashion (§238). For that reason, civil society has institutions whose aim is to support the individual in times of hardship and to prevent his descent into the rabble mentality.[7] But since civil society does not always succeed in supporting the needy, the responsibility for this failure is shared by all its members. As a member of civil society, it was "my will" which tore the individual away from his family ties, and it is "my will" which is thus responsible for any failure to provide a substitute support. Finally, as a competitor in the market economy who seeks to expand his fortune by all means, it was also "my will" which brought about the other's descent into poverty.

4. While Hegel examines three possible ways to deal with the problem of poverty, he accepts none of them as a satisfactory solution. (1) *The support of the poor through private charities:* Hegel thinks that that kind of individual morality is helpful when civil society cannot deal with the problem of poverty (§242R), but it certainly cannot serve as a complete or lasting solution because of the humiliating character of charity. Moreover, charity breaks with the principle of civil society that all are to earn their own livelihood by their own labor (§245). (2) *The redistribution of wealth through taxation:* This falls by the same argument, that it conflicts with the principle of civil society just mentioned (§245). (3) *The state provision of public works:* Since the source of the problem is overproduction and underconsumption, this would only aggravate the situation (§245). In addition, Hegel objects to public works as injurious to the freedom of commerce (§236R).

[7] In this context Hegel discusses the institutions of the Police (§§231–49) and the Corporations (§§250–56). The latter cannot be adequately addressed within the scope of this paper.

The conclusion to Hegel's discussion of the rabble in the PR is quite desperate:

> [In England] it has emerged that the most direct means of dealing with poverty, and particularly with the renunciation of shame and honor as the subjective bases of society and with the laziness and extravaganza which give rise to a rabble, is to leave the poor to their fate and direct them to beg from the public. (§245R)

3. Securing the Rights of the Rich

1. Comparing Hegel's political attitude with some of his contemporaries, Avineri accuses the British utilitarians of "making the horrors of modern life into a law of nature" (p. 240). Looking at Hegel's own claim that the poor cannot "assert a right against nature" (§245A), it seems that, at least to a certain extent, the same accusation could be directed against Hegel too. Hegel does not blame any specific element for the wrong inflicted upon the poor. It is neither the government, nor the poor themselves, nor even the financial greed of the rich that is to blame.[8]

This absence of responsibility plays a crucial role in Hegel's analysis of the creation of the rabble mentality. As long as there is someone whom the poor can blame for their ills, the loss of self-respect that would create the rabble mentality is much less likely to occur. It is precisely the natural character of poverty which drives the poor to the conclusion that if no one else is to blame for their miserable situation, they must be responsible for it.

2. One can also interpret this non-accusatory explanation of modern poverty as indicating a liberal world view. Indeed, this liberal side of Hegel's social philosophy is too prominent to be denied. Time and again we find Hegel defending the market from excessive control by the state. We have already encountered Hegel's rejection of public works, with his claim that this would be an offense to the freedom of commerce (§236R). His other justification for rejecting public works — that they would only exacerbate the problem, since the source of the problem is overproduction — was nothing but an iteration of a common liberal doctrine, held quite dogmatically till the great economic crisis of the 1930s.

[8] Though, as we shall see below (5.4), Hegel does consider wealth and poverty as two opposites, each entailing the other.

In VPR19/20, Hegel even sets out to secure the rights of the rich from any kind of redistributing taxation: "If the rich give direct support to the poor, they can spend less on their own needs, and thus another class suffers again through this" (p. 197). This is quite a shocking claim, considering Hegel's awareness of the nature of the hardness suffered by the poor.

Thus far, we have seen some of the radical and liberal aspects of Hegel's discussion of poverty. In the next section I would like to look more closely at the radical elements in this discussion and see how and why they are restrained.

4. Hegel's Latent Radicalism

1. Hegel has little sympathy for the rabble. He sees it as a destructive and dangerous force, yet he does not deny the justice of its "infinite judgement" against society (VPR19/20 196). He recognizes the rabble's criminal behavior to be nothing but a fitting reply to the wrongs it has suffered at the hands of society: "Self-consciousness appears driven to the point where it no longer has any rights, where freedom has no existence... Because the individual's freedom has no existence, the recognition of universal freedom disappears together with it."[9] Yet Hegel does not hold out any solution to this ethically unacceptable situation where both the criminal and the society suffer *just* offenses which each inflicts on the other.

2. In VPR19/20 Hegel compares the position of the wealthy over the poor with that of the master over the slave (p. 196). Taking this metaphor seriously one should realize that the freedom enjoyed by the poor is merely a sham. The inalienable rights of the poor over their own bodies, personalities, and consciences (PR, §66R) are annulled by their, so to speak, "inalienable" sicknesses and abasements and their lack of access to religious services, while their right to property persists only as a grim joke. Clearly, this farce is not what Hegel has in mind when he asserts that civil society should be a "universal family" *[allgemeine Familie]* toward which the individual "has rights and claims, just as he had in relation to his family" (§238A). Hegel does not try to disguise this state and prettify it, but boldly depicts it as one in which "freedom has no existence," yet he fails to condemn it the way he condemns brute slavery.

[9] VPR19/20 195/ PR, p. 453 (I have slightly altered Nisbet's translation).

3. Another potential source for radicalism is Hegel's account of the right of necessity *(Notrecht)*. Hegel claims that under extreme conditions of danger or distress the individual has the right to offend against someone else's property and thereby suspend the other's right to his own property (§127). Throughout the discussion Hegel understands this right as pertaining to economic distress. He illustrates the right of necessity not by a life-and-death example, such as one's right to break into a house in an attempt to escape pursuers bent on killing him, but by the debtor's right "to retain his tools, agricultural implements, clothes, and in general as much of his resources — i.e. of the property of his creditors — as is deemed necessary to support him, even in his accustomed station in society" (§127). Hegel's reliance on Roman law, which similarly limits the creditor's right, should not prevent us from appreciating the latitude of this interpretation of the right of necessity. In no place does Hegel justify this limitation of the creditor's right by utilitarian considerations in favor of the creditor, e.g., arguing that the tools of the debtor should not be taken since it will prevent him from earning the money needed to pay his due. Thus one may wonder about the difference between the right of necessity of such a debtor and that of a poor man who steals clothes or tools in order to maintain his body and welfare.

Hegel himself points to the right of necessity in his discussion of poverty:

> We have treated the right of necessity *[Notrecht]* earlier as something referring to momentary need. Here necessity *[Not]* no longer has simply this momentary character. In the emergence of poverty, the power of particularity [i.e., the market economy] comes into existence in opposition to the reality of freedom. (VPR19/20 196)

In his original discussion of the right of necessity, Hegel limits this right to a situation "whereby right as such and the capacity for rights of the injured party... continue to be recognized" (PR §127). Applying this limitation to the case of the poor thief, we may infer that as long as he acknowledges the rights of his victims to the clothes he has just stolen, he is acting in accordance with the right granted by Hegel. But since his need is not momentary this acknowledgment is completely abstract and void. We may imagine the poor man soundlessly begging the pardon of his victims before snatching the clothes off the clothesline. But Hegel, of course, did not intend to suggest this farce; he realized that in a situation of permanent need the poor would become a rabble that recognized no one's rights (VPR19/20 196). Does the right of necessity permit the rabble to steal a loaf or garment while

they *do not* recognize their victims' rights? But this is precisely the sort of question Hegel stops just short of answering.

Hegel was aware of the considerable latitude that he granted to the right of necessity, and in §127A he tries to qualify it:

> There are certainly many prerequisites for the preservation of life, and if we look to the future, we must concern ourselves with such details. But the only thing that is necessary is to live *now*; the future is not absolute, and it remains exposed to contingency. Consequently, only the necessity of the immediate present can justify a wrong action.

This attempt does not seem to me to be successful, since it was Hegel's paradigmatic case of the debtor's tools, where the right of necessity extended well beyond the immediate present.

4. Another instance of an attempt to sterilize latent radicalism can be found in §244A. Here Hegel depicts the disposition of the rabble as an "inward rebellion *[innere Empörung]* against the rich, against society, the government, etc." The parallel between the rich, the society, and the government is far from innocent. It seems to imply that, in the speaker's opinion, the society and the government are not his, but of the rich. Of course, one may justly argue that Hegel has only assumed the rabble's perspective, but the main question is whether Hegel has any cogent argument to persuade the rabble that the society and the government are theirs. Hegel would probably find this question of no value. He does not seem to credit the rabble with the reflective ability to grasp their moral and historical situation. But had one of these people overcome his ignorance and asked Hegel what he should do when society failed to provide him with employment and any honorable means of subsistence, Hegel would have had no good answer to give him.

5. To preempt such a challenge, Hegel appears to neutralize the text's potential radicalism by slipping in the adjective "inward" *(innere)* to describe the rabble's rebellion. The rabble is engaged not in any self-conscious social revolt, but acts out of an "inward rebellion" (§244A). What is the precise meaning of this "inward rebellion against the rich, against society, the government, etc."? Are the rich, society, and the government internal parts of the poor? Here, Hegel may be referring to the feeling of increasing indignation which the poor experience when they find their own view of themselves as free and valuable human beings negated by their economic predicament. This internal feeling of indignation leads to its external expression in crime, directed "against the rich, against society, the

government." Whatever the exact meaning of this phrase may be, the slight change produced by adding "inward" moves the discussion from questions of social justice toward the field of criminal psychology.

6. Hegel's account of poverty is thus seen to have the potential to inspire social thinking which could extract its radical elements and turn them into a demand for a fundamental change in the socioeconomic structure of modern society.

5. Marx's Reconstruction of Hegel's Discussion of the Rabble

1. The similarities between Hegel's account of the impoverishment of the working class and Marx's later description of the proletariat's predicament are well-known.[10] Yet it is commonly held that in no place does Marx refer to Hegel's discussion of poverty.[11] The lack of any references in Marx's 1843 manuscript *Critique of Hegel's "Philosophy of Right"* to Hegel's discussion of poverty in PR was even more remarkable and led to a detailed historical inquiry into the reasons for this surprising omission.[12]

I believe that this common assumption is not completely correct. At least on one occasion Marx does refer directly to Hegel's discussion of the rabble, and it might be instructive to see how he exposes and reconstructs the radical elements of Hegel's discussion. The following extract is taken from *The Holy Family*, the first joint work of Marx and Engels which was written a year after the *Critique of Hegel's "Philosophy of Right."*

2.

> Proletariat and wealth are opposites; as such they form a single whole. They are both forms of the world of private property. The question is what place each occupies in the antithesis. It is not sufficient to declare them two sides of a single whole [...]

[10] See, e.g., A. W. Wood, "Hegel and Marxism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, ed. F. C. Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 424–26.

[11] See O'Malley's introduction to Marx's *Critique of Hegel's "Philosophy of Right,"* ed. J. O'Malley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. liv, n. 1.

[12] O'Malley cites (ibid.) Lapine's explanation, that Marx intended to extend his critique of the PR to the sections on civil society, and accordingly avoided referring to Hegel's account of impoverishment "pending a detailed critical analysis of the paragraphs in question." However, this planned discussion was never undertaken. Cf. N. Lapine, "La première critique approfondie de la philosophie de Hegel par Marx," *Recherches Internationale à la lumière du marxisme* (Paris), cahier 19, p. 63.

> The proletariat [...] is compelled as proletariat to abolish itself and thereby its opposite, the condition for its existence, what makes it a proletariat, i.e., private property. That is the *negative* side of the contradiction, its restlessness within its very self, dissolved and self-dissolving private property.
> [...] The class of the proletariat feels annihilated in its self-annihilation; it sees in it its own powerlessness and the reality of an inhuman existence. *In the words of Hegel, the class of the proletariat is in its abasement is itself the indignation at that very abasement, an indignation to which it is necessarily driven by the contradiction between its human nature and its condition of life, which is the outright, decisive and comprehensive negation of that nature* [translation slightly revised; italics added].
> Within this antithesis the private owner is therefore the *conservative* side, the proletarian, the *destructive* side. From the former arises the action of preserving the antithesis, from the latter, that of annihilating it.[13]

The reference to Hegel's claims about the abasement of the proletariat and the necessity of this abasement as an outcome of bourgeois society seems to point quite clearly to Hegel's discussion of the rabble.[14] The assertions made here by Marx and Engels are far from moderate, yet it appears that most, if not all, of them, can be traced back to Hegel's discussion of poverty. I shall summarize those claims made by Marx and Engels which have clear Hegelian counterparts.

a. The proletariat and the rich are two opposite parts of a whole.
b. The proletariat's activity is essentially a destructive one.
c. The proletariat wants its own destruction.
d. The life conditions of the proletariat are degrading and inhuman.
e. The proletariat is necessarily driven into these conditions as a result of its nature (i.e., as proletariat in modern civil society).

I shall not dwell on points b, d, and e, since their importance in Hegel's discussion has already been noted earlier in this paper. Points a and c need a closer examination.

[13] *The Holy Family or Critique of Critical Critique*, tr. R. Dixon (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1956), p. 51.

[14] Another interesting point is that Marx and Engels seem to refer here to an internal struggle—"the contradiction between its human nature and its condition of life"—from which the poor suffer when they find society approving their status as free beings and at the same time leaving them to the mercies of poverty. However, this analysis of the rabble mentality is not to be found in the PR, but only in Hegel's lectures (see VPR19/20 194–96). Can it be that Marx and Engels came to know this analysis through the lectures of Eduard Gans or another of Hegel's successors?

3. The self-destructiveness of the rabble is asserted by Hegel not in the paragraphs dealing with the failure of civil society to prevent poverty, but in his discussion of the typical behavior of the rabble — crime. Here Hegel states that the justification for punishing crimes lies in the rational nature of the criminal and the universal implications of his deed. By offending against someone's property the criminal reveals his will, that the property of no one shall be secure, including his own (§100). Understood in this light, the criminal activity of the rabble is self-destructive.

If we take into consideration Hegel's claims in his subsequent discussion of poverty, his account of crime and punishment seems undermined. Hegel has no good answer to the poor man who consents wholeheartedly to the universal implication of his crime — that his own property should also be harmed — since the poor man has no property, and has nothing to lose but his humiliating condition. The destructive activity of the rabble thus turns out to be an attempt to destroy its humiliating situation, and to extinguish its own essence as something demeaned. That is exactly what Marx means. The self-destructiveness of the proletariat is nothing but a destruction of "what makes it a proletariat."

The view of poverty and wealth as two complementing and opposing parts of a whole was not peculiar to Marx and Engels at the time; they describe it as "a rather widespread admission" (*The Holy Family*, p. 50). This theme is also explicit in the writings of Eduard Gans — Hegel's follower and Marx's teacher at the University of Berlin — "poverty is the shadow of wealth. Extreme wealth will create extreme poverty."[15] The same perception can be found in Hegel's discussion of the "rich rabble" in VPR19/20.

4.

> Just as now, on the one hand, poverty lies at the heart of the rabble mentality — the non-acknowledgment of right — so there appears on the other hand the disposition of the rabble mentality in wealth. The rich person regards everything as something which can be bought by him, because he knows himself as the power of the particularity of self-consciousness. Wealth can thus lead to the same disrespect and shamelessness to which the poor rabble has recourse. The consciousness of the master towards the slave is the same as that of the slave [towards the master]. [...]

[15] *Philosophische Schriften*, ed. H. Schröder (Glashütten im Taunus, 1971), p. 120; quoted in N. Waszek, "Eduard Gans on Poverty: Between Hegel and Saint-Simon," *Owl of Minerva* 18 (spring 1987): 171.

> Those two sides, poverty and wealth, thus constitute the corruption *[Verderben]* of civil society. [...] [I]f the rich give direct support to the poor, they can spend less on their own needs, and thus another class suffers again through this. (VPR19/20 196–97, tr. [with modifications] S. Avineri, note 2 above, p. 207)

Hegel's discussion of the rich rabble in the context of his general discussion of poverty seems to be somewhat odd. Of course there is an interesting psychological insight in the observation that wealth can lead one to anti-social behavior, but this does not explain the location of this discussion right in middle of the discussion of poverty. One may claim that here again Hegel tries to mitigate society's guilt for the moral degradation of the poor by claiming that the wealthy too "suffer" from the same corruption. This would ascribe to Hegel the view that both poverty and wealth are natural unintentional corruptions of civil society, for which no one is to be held responsible. Yet, it seems likely that what underlies Hegel's concise discussion of the "rich rabble" is much more bold.

The clear symmetry which Hegel draws between the poor and the rich is striking. If the two sides of poverty and wealth "constitute the corruption of civil society," shouldn't we infer that *both* these element should be abolished? If the existence of slaves were extinguished would there be any place for masters? These barely hidden implications of Hegel's discussion are no less radical than the claims of Marx and Engels we have just met.

Almost as though Hegel is aware of these possible implications, he sets out to cover them up by opposing any attempt to help the poor through redistributive taxation, thus defending the right of the rich to their luxurious life.

6. The Owl

1. Hegel's refusal to develop the political and social consequences of his own analysis of modern poverty, as well as his willingness to leave this crucial issue unsolved, clearly requires an explanation. It is true that towards the end of his life, Hegel had an aversion to radical social changes. Hegel's disapproval of the 1830 July Revolution in France, which advanced moderate liberal reforms — similar to those advocated by Hegel in the PR — appears to indicate his deep anxiety about any political instability.[16]

[16] See *Hegel: The Letters*, tr. C. Butler & C. Seiler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), pp. 668–75.

Yet, it seems that this historical explanation is not satisfactory, insofar as Hegel does present the problem of poverty as significant and clearly acknowledges the injustices produced by capitalist economy. Hence, I believe the deeper answer to this question lies within Hegel's view of history and the role philosophers could and should play in it.

2. Hegel sees philosophy as a reflective activity which grasps the rationality of what has *already* come to be. It is neither the task of philosophy, nor it is possible for it, to predict the future. Philosophy is nothing but *"its own time comprehended in thoughts"* (PR, p. 21). Here we come to a beautiful and ironic paradox which stands at the center of Hegel's view of history. Hegel argues that the people who make history are always ignorant of the significance of their own deeds. They may conquer vast territories and rule tremendous empires, and yet they are not free since they are not conscious of the principles underlying their own activity. Actually, they are nothing but tools of world history.[17] The people who do understand the ends and principles of their society are the philosophers, but unfortunately, they gain this knowledge always too late to be able to act and change their society.

While the philosopher tries to grasp his own period, this kind of understanding is available only when the current form of life has grown old. Only in the ripeness of a specific culture can its internal principle be understood. Hegel formulates this conclusion in his well-known dictum: "The owl of Minerva begins its flight only with the onset of dusk" (PR, p. 23). Philosophy appears only at the decline of a historical period "when actuality has gone through its formative process and attained its complete state" (ibid.). Though the philosopher understands his own era, he cannot use this knowledge for any political or social activity since the world he has just grasped is already passing away.

It follows that those who are able to understand their era cannot act in it, while those who act in their era cannot understand it. Since Hegel clearly belonged to the former category he consequently could not (and should not) intervene in the course of history. Even if Hegel had wanted to issue

[17] There is an interesting similarity between these claims of Hegel and Kant's view of the aesthetic genius (*Critique of Judgement* §46; cf. *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* §56 [Ak. 7:225]). In both cases the great man is treated with some irony, claiming that he is not aware of the principles governing his own actions, and thus is not a free being but rather a tool of history (Hegel's historical "great man") or a tool of nature (Kant's aesthetic genius).

instructions on "how the world has to be," he could not have done so since "philosophy, at any rate, always comes too late to perform this function" (ibid.).

3. Though there is much charm in this ironic view of history, it is not easy to accept its quietistic implications. Indeed, two prominent interpreters of Hegel's social philosophy suggest a different reading of this issue. Allen Wood suggests that Hegel simply misunderstood his own philosophy of history. Wood claims that the main issue at stake is one's ability to act "self-transparently," i.e., as a free subject in the social and political realms while being "fully conscious of the meaning of what [he does], and do it in the light of that consciousness."[18] Wood suggests that Hegel's decisive denial of any possibility of self-transparent historical activity does not necessarily follow from Hegel's theory of history. Though it is true that we cannot comprehend the social order we are creating, it is not true that this comprehension is necessary for any radical social change. People can consciously act in history if the revolutionary character of their action is transparent to them and if they refrain from writing "recipes for the cookshops of the future," as Marx puts it.[19] Their understanding of the current social situation and its maladies can be enough to push them to agitate for radical change, leaving the exact nature of the unfolding social order undetermined.[20] Thus, Wood rejects Hegel's assumption that our inability to foresee the future prevents us from engaging in self-transparent political activity.

4. Another attempt to radicalize Hegel's theory of history is made by Shlomo Avineri who suggests that the mere comprehension of a period is a genuine act in history, one which is not less significant than overt political activity. This is exactly the kind of activity that philosophers can and should be engaged in.

> [A]ll philosophy, by summing up its ages, in some way announces the demise of this age [...]
> "The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk": in this seemingly quietistic sentence, full of resignation and apparent conservatism, there lies hidden a critical message about the role of philosophy. True, to borrow and invert a phrase from Marx, philosophy cannot change the world but only interpret it but by its very act of interpretation it changes it, it tells the world that its time is up. (*Hegel's Theory of the Modern State*, pp. 129–30)

[18] Wood (n. 3 above), p. 436; cf. Wood, "Marx against Morality," in *A Companion to Ethics*, ed. P. Singer (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p. 515.

[19] K. Marx, *Das Kapital*, vol. 1, 25/99, in *Marx–Engels Werke* (Berlin: Dietz, 1961–66).

[20] Wood (n. 3 above), p. 440.

Indeed, if the philosopher's action in history is the comprehension of the current form of life, we might begin now to understand Hegel's willingness to leave the problem of poverty as an open wound on the body of civil society. By comprehending the current period, philosophy uncovers the inner contradictions and social pathologies of the period, and thus advances the demand for a new form of life, one which would be free from these pathologies.

6. *Concluding Remarks*

In the present paper I have discussed Hegel's analysis of poverty in modern society and have indicated what I believe to be some radical elements in Hegel's discussion. The main contributions of this paper are its attempt to show where Hegel's radical views on poverty in modern society have influenced Marx and Engels, and its suggestion that the reason for Hegel's attempt to restrain the radical elements in his own social thinking lies within his own philosophy of history.

At this point we may finally turn to our original question. By admitting his inability to solve the problem of poverty in modern society, Hegel may well have been attempting to call attention to it. By pointing out the existence of the wound, but leaving it open, the physician does indeed admit his own impotency, but he also calls for assistance in treating the patient. If this is what stood behind Hegel's manifestations of despair, it would seem that his attempt was fully successful: many of the latent radical elements in Hegel's treatment of poverty were later adopted by Marx.

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