

A Hegelian Theory of Reification

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Abstract

György Lukács introduces the concept of “reification” in *History and Class Consciousness*, describing it as the social phenomenon whereby “a relation between people takes on the character of a thing” under capitalism. Its existence, he argues, is implicit in Marx’s analysis of the fetish character of commodities. Despite offering a compelling description of the subjective and objective aspects of reification, Lukács – following his political convictions – dismisses the possibility of either being the result of a more general problem with object and conceptual relations, not just capitalism per se. However, following a detailed reading of the works of Marx’s dialectical predecessor, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, it is evident that the latter not only had an intuitive awareness of the phenomenon before Marx or Lukács, but also offers a more detailed and convincing exposition of how and why it takes place. Rather than being a social pathology that emerges from the central structure of capitalism, Hegel – on my reading – conceptualises reification as a historical occurrence that begins as a form of conceptual misidentification before the misappropriated object or idea assumes an autonomous and causal presence in society and the lives of human beings. My ambition in this thesis is to identify and unpack the historical development of Hegel’s understanding of the concept with the view to present a more convincing alternative to the models presented so far.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author.

This work has not previously been presented for a degree or other qualification at this University or elsewhere. All sources are acknowledged as references.

Abbreviations

CPR: *Critique of Pure Reason*. I. Kant.

CPRa: *Critique of Practical Reason*. I. Kant.

DFZ: *Differenzschrift*. G.W.F. Hegel.

DOE: *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. T.W. Adorno & M. Horkheimer.

FNR: *Foundations of Natural Right*. J.G. Fichte.

HCC: *History and Class Consciousness*. G. Lukács.

LPH: *Lectures of the Philosophy of History*. G.W.F. Hegel.

MOM: *Metaphysics of Morals*. I. Kant.

ND: *Negative Dialectics*. T.W. Adorno.

PCR: *The Positivity of the Christian Religion*. G.W. F. Hegel.

POR: *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. G.W.F. Hegel.

POS: *Phenomenology of Spirit*. G.W.F. Hegel.

SNL: *Scientific Ways of Treating Natural Law*. G.W.F. Hegel.

SOC: *The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate*. G.W.F. Hegel.

TCA1: *Theory of Communicative Action. Volume 1*. J. Habermas.

TCA2: *Theory of Communicative Action. Volume 2*. J. Habermas.

TYH: *The Young Hegel*. G. Lukács.

Introduction

Opening statement

Very few people have even heard of the term “reification” and those who have are unlikely to know what it means. This is for good reason, however, because intellectuals (mostly philosophers) to this day cannot seem to agree on a basis from which to address the question, let alone offer a solid definition for the term itself. That said, reification (Lukács, 2017) is an undeniable social fact about human existence. At some point, every person in human history has witnessed it, been a victim of it, and – arguably the most unsettling of all – involuntarily participated in the process of something definitively abstract attaining a causal presence in reality.

In the majority of cases, “reification” assumes a somewhat trivial form. For those who have been introduced to the concept before, the observable process of an employee being visibly transformed by the social characteristics of their workplace may qualify as an example of the phenomenon in motion. However, the process of a human being developing “thing-like” characteristics, as they may working in the military, clearly cannot be interpreted as a pathological development on its own. The reason for this is obvious: succeeding in such a role – as with so many others – depends not only on the person being technically competent at a particular form of work, but also on being able to renew and transmit the social facts of the profession itself. This is because labour, in a sense, is another form of common language: if an employee were unable to either carry out the practical task, or transmit these social facts in order to communicate with their colleagues and whoever else they serve, they wouldn’t be able to do their job to an adequate level. Indeed, should these social facts about their vocation be permanently imprinted on the person themselves, they would find themselves, “reified”. But this isn’t an intrinsically bad thing unless it can be confirmed that it interfered with that person’s life in a disproportionately negative way, or that the transmission of these social facts had unwanted effects elsewhere; quite how one would objectively judge either to be the case is, of course, a whole other matter.

However, such versions of reification are not those which produced the urgency (at least not at first) for the establishment of the *Institut für Sozialforschung*, viz the *Institute for Social Research*, in Frankfurt, 1923. Whilst the *Institut’s* founding purpose was to reexamine the foundations of Marxist theory in the hope that it could draw out

a path for revolution in the future (Jay, 1996 p. 3), it would find itself fixated on what was originally a secondary concern: the subversion of the Weimar Republic at the hands of communism's ideological competitor (aside from the abstraction of capitalism). This was none other than the Nazi regime which – for the thinkers now accepted under the umbrella term “the Frankfurt School” – knowingly exploited the phenomenon of reification to advance a particular political end while simultaneously existing as potentially the most concentrated expression of the social pathology itself. Despite the *Institut's* original interest in reification emerging from Lukács's observation in *History and Class Consciousness (HCC)*, viz that the development of “contemplative” attitudes and colonisation of the natural world is inscribed in the logic of capitalism, Adorno and Horkheimer (1997) identified more value in challenging the base and thus questioning whether reification may, in fact, be an ideological problem of which capitalism is merely downstream. In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment (DOE)*, originally published in 1944, they show the pervasiveness of antisemitism in Germany and Europe to give an instructive answer to this question about the true roots of reification – which would work to the benefit of Marxist praxis itself – as well as of the place of reification in the human condition generally. What their dialectical and psychoanalytical investigations into antisemitism and authoritarianism allowed them to observe was both the extent to which abstractions shape human behaviour, and the intrinsic social need that humans have to establish those abstractions as a social reality in some scenarios.

Thus, given the pervasiveness of the phenomenon today, it is surprising that interest in the “phenomenon of reification” appears to have declined considerably in the last few decades. Even more surprising, however, is that despite the obvious connection between Hegel and Marx's philosophy – the latter being where “reification” traditionally belongs – no one has investigated whether the former may have a more historically and conceptually substantive theory than the one originally presented by György Lukács. As such, because there is a shortage of literature on the subject, and an alternative model could provide the tools for a more robust model of social critique, I have set myself to the task of developing a Hegelian theory of reification in the firm belief that his exposition of the modern problem is indicative of a more sophisticated understanding of the social phenomenon.

Methodology

To ensure that I can do justice to the richness of Hegel's theory of reification, not least because of the extent to which its evolution corresponds to the changing historical conditions of his time, I have structured this thesis into four chapters, each focusing on different elements of his philosophy. Chapter I covers the striking and in my view, uncoincidental similarity between what Hegel calls "positivity" and the "phenomenon of reification" that Lukács exposit as an endemic feature of life under capitalism. Chapter II unpacks the potential theological reasons behind Hegel's change of attitude on the place of positivity in modern society and how this intellectual shift provides the metaphysical groundwork for his mature system ("absolute idealism"). In Chapter III, I demonstrate the *purposive* role that reification has in Hegel's philosophy of history and thus the development of human rationality. Finally, in Chapter IV, I address reification on the terms that the concept was originally introduced: as the social and political problem that, in Lukács's view, justifies communism as capitalism's successor-in-waiting. After unpacking what could be perceived as Hegel's prophetic assessment of what the ultimate cause of this specifically "modern" form of reification is, I will lay the groundwork for a potential solution that could be shaped into a new model of social criticism.

As is well known, Hegel's writing is often dense, convoluted and in some cases intentionally creative for the purpose of capturing an idea that he believed could not be adequately expressed through the German language as it was. My dependence on translated versions of these texts makes this an even more complicated predicament. As such, I have tried to mitigate this problem by being as clear as possible when I am using Hegel's concepts and making claims of a more general kind. When I am referring to a specifically Hegelian concept such as *Sittlichkeit*, I will either cite their full form in German or write their translated forms in capitals, e.g. "Ethical Life" and "Spirit" respectively. I will do the same for words that existed within the tradition of German Idealism before Hegel, but which have developed more specific meanings in Hegel's system. This is especially important for "Reason" and "Understanding", which refer to the originally Kantian concepts of *Vernunft* and *Verstand* as opposed to the generic versions of "reason" and "understanding". There will also be occasions, however, when I capitalise words for reasons that don't necessarily refer to Hegel's system or its use in German Idealism. For example, "Reason" will sometimes refer specifically to Rousseau's conception and at other times, the general Enlightenment or scientific

conception, but in such cases, the historical context in which the term is used will be stated. Last of all: given the inconvenience of citing the full titles of Hegel's works, I will make it a custom to use the full title once before using abbreviations for the remainder. For example: after introducing the *Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate*, I will refer to it thereafter as the SOC.

Preliminary Chapter:
The Literature on Reification

As stated in the introduction, everyone is aware of reification on some level, no matter how naive or theoretically underdeveloped their conception of it may be. My attempts to explain what reification is and why it should be recognised as a social pathology have so far involved describing it as follows:

...the phenomenon whereby something definitively abstract or unreal mysteriously assumes the appearance of being concrete or real, with the ultimate result being that – in virtue of the belief that the thing is real on a psychological, phenomenological or sociological level – the abstract thing actually acquires the quality of ‘thing-hood’ or ‘thingness’.

Despite this being a somewhat familiar description of reification for those acclimatised to the intellectual tradition of the Frankfurt School, it is unreasonable to suggest that mere reference to a phenomenological quality that makes something real constitutes a theory of reification. If a descriptive reference to reification as a social phenomenon does not constitute a theory of reification, then it cannot serve as the base from which a critical theory of society can be developed.

When the term reification is used by Lukács, Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse – whether they intend this to be the case or not – it refers to a derivation from a ‘purer’ or less hostile state of being that the contents of the reified ‘thing’ (or set of ‘things’) encroach upon in some way. If anything, it is this derivation that poses the greatest challenge to those who insist on recognising the importance of reification to critical social theory¹ today. But what is the form of freedom that we are trying to protect from these developments? Moreover, why should we be attributing these developments to reification at all? Are there not some instances where reification takes place in service of human freedom? Under what conditions might this be possible? As I will argue later on, Hegel offers a compelling and historically substantive answer to all of these

¹ In this chapter, I make use of both terms “critical theory” and “critical social theory”. Critical theory refers to either the first generation of the *Institute for Social Research* – generally recognised as “the Frankfurt School” (e.g. Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse) – or present philosophers evaluating the concepts of critical theory from within the philosophy of history tradition (as can be observed in the works of Jay, Gessell, Kellner and Finlayson). Critical social theory, on the other hand, refers to intellectual traditions which use the concepts of critical theory to challenge social injustices of various kinds (as can be observed with “women’s studies”, “black studies”, “gender studies” and “critical race theory”).

questions, albeit with controversial implications for what results a critical theory of society would produce.

Hegel and reification

It is my task in this thesis to exposit Hegel's theory of reification. However, the credit for identifying it should actually go to one of my supervisors, James Clarke, having done so in his essay *Hegel's Critique of Fichte in the 1802/3 Essay on Natural Right* (Clarke, 2011), albeit without referencing the concept directly. As the title suggests, Clarke's aim is to clarify and break down the grounds of Hegel's concerns over Fichte's conception of natural right (or 'natural law'), and the political system based on it. Hegel's critique, in keeping with the systemic nature of his philosophy, is highly complex. As such, I have left that task to Chapter IV and limit my aims here to using Clarke's analysis to identify the theoretical description of Hegel's critique.

Ultimately, the basis of Hegel's criticism can be reduced to the assumption on Fichte's part that rational individuals are self-interested beings/agents who necessarily act from within a "sphere of freedom", and that this very fact about freedom requires the establishment of a state that has the authority to coerce individuals into acting within this rational capacity. It is a security measure designed to produce the guarantee that one individual will not encroach on the freedom of another. The major flaw that Hegel identifies in this is both social and ontological, namely that "self-interested agents will [only] conform to a law that promotes the interests of others [if] failing to do so would prejudice their self interest" (Clarke, 2011, p. 211). This is an entirely *negative* idea of freedom that posits individuals not only as intrinsically cut off from one another (and which seems to make any basis of trust and goodwill impossible) but as abstracted from the natural state of things broadly speaking. The term Hegel makes ample use of in his critiques of Fichte here and going forwards is "atomistic". This is, the most appropriate term that Hegel could possibly have used if, indeed, the extent of his interest in Fichte's philosophy in particular is owed to its existence as the intellectual incarnation of the 'modernity problem': it alludes to the growth of a world and mode of being governed by abstract, rational and scientific principles that seem to require the colonisation of any entities that threaten that abstract world's seemingly endless expansion. What Hegel is describing is the *pure* logic of the Enlightenment: whilst being rational insofar as intellectual and economic freedom provides the intellectual

and economic conditions for civil society to exist, the Enlightenment appears to be destined to develop an autonomous and infinitely destructive machine unless these paradigms of rationality remain situated in the higher ethical principles on which a substantively rational and moral society is based². As Clarke (2011) observes, Hegel use terms related to industrial themes in this essay to make his point about the existential threat that the emergent sphere of science, economics and technology, referred to as the “*System of Reality*”, poses to the “*System of Ethical Life*”, viz the sphere of virtue, belonging, and life itself. However, it is in his confrontation of the problem of wealth inequality and poverty in the *System of Ethical Life* essay – written around one year later, where Hegel is most explicit about what he sees as the seismic social costs involved in “Ethical Life’s” colonisation:

Great wealth, which is similarly bound up with the deepest poverty (for in the separation [between rich and poor] labour on both sides is universal and objective), produces on the one side in ideal universality, on the other side in real universality, mechanically. This purely quantitative element, the inorganic aspect of labour, which is parcelled out even in its concept, is the unmitigated extreme of barbarism. The original character of the business class, namely, its being capable of an organic absolute intuition and respect for something divine, even though posited outside it, disappears, and the bestiality of contempt for all higher things enters. The mass of wealth, the pure universal, the absence of wisdom, is the heart of the matter (*das Ansich*). The absolute bond of the people, namely ethical principle, has vanished, and the people is dissolved (Hegel, 1977, pp. 170-1).

From a close reading, it is clear that the above quote amounts to far more than shallow proto-Marxist critique of the ‘*nouveau riches*’, the looming threat of wealth accumulation becoming an end-in-itself, and the emergence of cultural value spheres based on greed. Hegel is, I believe, attempting to articulate what he sees as the endemic modern conundrum. On the one hand, individuals require economic freedom, otherwise they are unable to access the exclusively *private* aspects of life (to provide

² As has been observed in the literature, it would be a mistake to abstract Hegel’s analysis from the social and political situation of Germany. While Hegel was, for the most part, enthusiastic about the modernisation of Germany, he was by no means a radical liberal (which revealed itself as the main driving force of the 1848 Revolution). He saw it as desirable to make political concessions to the bourgeoisie, including more rights to state participation, but continued to believe that the Prussian aristocracy – composed of military men – were best suited to rule Germany. Hegel’s reasoning is as follows: as soldiers, they have confronted death to preserve the character of their nation and so demonstrated that they place the interests of their political community above their political interests as individuals. The “bourgeois”, on the other hand, has not only not made such a sacrifice, but has thrived by wedding himself to his inward, materialistic existence (Clarke, 2011, p. 220).

for their families and so on), and Hegel notes that such access does require the state's objectification and enforcement of these conditions. But on the other, the establishment of these very conditions is a *de facto* passport for the objective subversion and spiritual concealing of the higher principles that give rational justification to the *System of Reality's* existence. In the case that these higher, "divine" principles *are* concealed, whether by the class-based resentment that Hegel describes or by the scientific and technological progress (which he alludes to in the *Scientific Ways of Treating Natural Law (SNL)*), civil society itself has dissolved because the conditions for its objective possibility have been subverted. Theologically speaking, this is equivalent to *logos*, the Holy Spirit and the "heart" of the moral law being veiled by the social, scientific and technological progress reducing otherwise free men into subordination to an endlessly advancing machine that exists to actualise these rational principles. If this reading is accurate, then it both implies the presence of reification (given that it describes the *System of Reality* acquiring a "real" quality that it *ought* not to have) and offers a more accurate portrayal than Lukács of the human values that critical theorists (including the first generation) and critical social theorists see reification to threaten. That said, while the description is compelling, no theory of how and why the phenomenon takes place is included.

However, a conceptual explanation *can* be identified in what Clarke (2011, pp. 217-8) understands to be Hegel's "second argument" against Fichte in the *SNL*. As Clarke states, this argument is a further insight into the problem of making "universal egoism" the basis of his political system. On the understanding that Fichte's conception of freedom is strictly "empirical", Hegel argues that agents are reduced to acting in accordance with "fixed determinacies": "the agent can choose either +A or -A but not both. Empirical freedom, Hegel claims, 'consists in selecting either +A or -A and is absolutely bound to this *either-or*' (Clarke, 2011, p. 217). The intrinsic connection of +A to its opposite seems to imply the existence of an "alien power" that determines the agent's behaviour, involving not only the willing agent (though this is the ideal scenario for Fichte), but the state's proactivity to safeguard these parameters through coercion if necessary. As there is nothing intrinsically attributed to *either/or* due to its status as a formal principle within a broader system, the forms which +A and -A assume are potentially *infinite*. As such, the forms to which they *do* proceed to assume are those which are merely posited as the attributes of freedom that the state has a

rational obligation to protect. Put alternatively: while Fichte's system is designed to guarantee the freedom and security of all, the practical reality is that what freedom and security amount to is ultimately decided by the party that successfully asserts the most force (whether that force be physical, political, or both). In Clarke's view, Hegel's failure to "state explicitly what +A and -A are renders his account obscure" (Clarke, 2011, p. 218), thus weakening his overall critique. However, I would like to offer a different interpretation of Hegel's decision to abstain from explaining what +A and -A are. Rather than being a "failure", I interpret it as consistent with the practical reality that "empirical freedom" can literally amount to anything. +A and -A thus denote the infinite possibilities that Fichte's state could be legally compelled to defend because of what the absolutely negative principle – viz the "sphere of freedom" – is, and perhaps also the infinite lengths that the state will be compelled to go to uphold it should the empirical contents be impossible to facilitate. As such, what Hegel seems to be describing with these references to an "alien power" is a like-for-like description of what Lukács coins "the phenomenon of reification", viz where the presence of a *phantom objectivity* assumes an autonomous form in social relations to the extent that human beings and the fabric of society itself are fundamentally re-sculpted in the image of its ideological character.

Critical theorists and philosophers of history generally acknowledge the debt that Lukács owes to Marx's early humanistic period, despite the description of its conceptual characteristics being intentionally based on Marx's (2008) theory of "commodity fetishism". However, surprisingly little attention has been paid to the extent that Lukács's (2017) critique of modern "rationalistic" philosophies, in the chapter titled "The Antinomies of Bourgeois Thought", borrows heavily from Hegel's critique of Fichte in the *SNL* and the earlier *Differenzschrift* (*DFZ*). Curiously, Lukács references Hegel quite regularly in *HCC*, but never brings him into the discussion of reification. Instead, Lukács appears to trace the theoretical contours of Hegel's critique of Fichte's subjective idealism and apply it as a critique of modern, subjectivist philosophies as a whole. Lukács's conclusion is consistent with the base of dialectical materialism³,

³ In Marx's dialectical materialism, the cultural superstructure – of which academic practices assume a core part – is interpreted as a product of the economic substructure. In the *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber argues that the opposite is the case.

namely that modern, subjectivist philosophies are none other than ideological manifestations of capitalism (and thus products of capitalist reification):

[The more conscious this Kantian tendency becomes the less avoidable is the dilemma. For, the ideal of knowledge represented by the purely distilled formal conception of the object of knowledge, the mathematical organisation and the ideal of necessary natural laws all transform knowledge more and more into the systemic and *conscious* (italics added) contemplation of those purely formal connections, those 'laws' which function in-objective-reality without the intervention of the subject. But the attempt to eliminate every element of content and of the irrational affects not only the object but also the subject. The critical elucidation of contemplation puts more and more energy into its efforts to weep out ruthlessly from its own outlook every subjective and irrational element and every anthropomorphic tendency; it strives with ever increasing vigour to drive a wedge between the subject of knowledge and 'man', and to transform the knower into a pure and purely formal subject (Lukács, 2017, pp. 103-4).

Lukács is describing what he sees as the autonomous quality of capitalism, which assumes the aforementioned intellectual forms for the purpose of suppressing the consciousness of the proletariat. Indeed, one could feasibly subject dialectical materialism to the same accusation, *viz* of being another pathologically rationalistic science, but Lukács abstains from doing so and fails to explain why it qualifies as an exception. Instead, he reaffirms Marx's implicit assumption that reification is, and has always been, a problem that begins and ends with capitalism, hence why communism is presented as the only practical solution. As such, Lukács's failure to mention Hegel's contribution to the discourse of reification makes perfect sense: if he did, Lukács would have to concede that reification denotes a far more complex problem with *modernity*, not capitalism per se. For Hegel, reification in some contexts has a historical purpose in the development of the modern world, and as such, isn't a problem that a proletarian revolution would resolve. This is because Hegel interprets the phenomenon as simultaneously the cause, result and effect of modern consciousness's failure to substantially ground itself in the world where it belongs, *viz* within the recognitional structures of *Sittlichkeit* (Ethical Life). The referenced analysis in the *SNL* is certainly intended as a critique of Fichte's subjective idealism, not of *modernity* as an idea, not least because what modernity amounts to persists as a subject of intense debate. However, it does, in my view, offer an irrefutable description of the fundamental problem with basing human freedom entirely around the abstract principle of self-legislation (which remains the dominant conception today). It produces a society based on willing agents taking infinitely preventative measures to not 'step on the toes'

of their fellow citizens (in accordance with the empirical terms which they posit). Consequently, the state inherits the obligation to preserve conditions which are ultimately ineffable, and so produces a never-ending mechanical process of trapping citizens into a purely solipsistic vocation.

It is for this reason that “atomism” is such an appropriate term for Hegel to use in describing Fichte’s idealism and resultant political philosophy. Citizens are compelled not only to keep to their own “spheres”: the state inherits the prerogative of functioning like a particle accelerator that endlessly facilitates conditions for practical activity at the cost of having any interest in the results it produces. Naturally, this extends to the very ethical basis that gave credence to the recognition of self-legislation as a rational principle in the objective form of “abstract right” (Hegel, 1991).

Reification understood as “rationalisation”

In *The Young Hegel*, Lukács is fairly transparent about the debt that he owes to Hegel. This is clear from the fundamental premise of the book, which is to argue that Hegel was a like-minded radical (albeit of an idealistic kind) before his Frankfurt period, where a change in his socioeconomic circumstances caused him and ultimately his philosophy to succumb to the prevailing backwardness of German thought (Lukács, 1975, pp). Lukács presents the *Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate* (SOC) as the first product of this paradigm shift. However, whilst he is keen to demonstrate the theory of reification implicit in Marx’s *Capital*, he fails to explicitly identify that Hegel’s critique of “positive religion” contains the same conceptual ingredients:

Positive religion, so depicted, is in Hegel’s view the determining moment of the whole of life in the Middle Ages and modern times. Obviously its ramifications are felt even in the realms of knowledge, the understanding and reason. According to Hegel the loss of moral freedom necessarily entails the loss of the independent use of one’s reason. The alien, lifeless given and yet dominant object of positive religion destroys the harmonious and coherent life which man had earlier enjoyed in the age of freedom; it transforms the crucial issues of life into transcendental, knowable problems inaccessible to reason (Lukács, 1975, p. 23).

Thus, instead of looking closer at the many instances where Hegel demonstrates an advanced awareness of capitalism’s subversive and destructive potential even in texts such as the *Realphilosophie* (RPH) lectures and the *SNL*, where he presents such developments as pathological expressions of the Understanding (*Verstand*), Lukács takes aim at the sociologies of Georg Simmel and Max Weber in *The Philosophy of*

Money and *The Protestant Ethic* respectively. He interprets both models as byproducts of modern critical philosophy's "reified structure of consciousness" (Lukács's, 2017, p.88) as shown by their purposive collapsing of the "qualitative" aspects of life into the logic of capitalism. Lukács develops his theory of reification particularly from Weber's concept of "rationalisation", referring to the objective restructuring of society in the image of economic and scientific principles (Weber, 2002, p.104), and from Simmel's view that the emptying of these qualitative elements is necessary for the capitalist mode of production to expand (which is itself based on the assumption that capitalism and human freedom are symbiotic).

Lukács's loose conflation of reification with rationalisation has already been criticised by Habermas (1981) and Honneth (2008). Honneth's main criticism is that Lukács is unable to explain what reification amounts to outside of the behaviours and mental states that arise specifically from "economically calculable factors" (Honneth, 2008, p. 24). Habermas's (1981) argument in the first volume of *The Theory of Communicative Action (TCA)*, made out of respect for Weber's intended use of the term, is that rationalisation, applying to the "contemplative stance" that Lukács sees as a psychological effect of reification, sometimes paradoxically produces improved conditions for democratic participation and common understanding. If so, it doesn't seem appropriate to label such developments as reification:

The rationalisation of the lifeworld makes possible a kind of systemic integration that enters into competition with the integrating principle of reaching understanding and, under certain conditions, has a disintegrative effect on the lifeworld (Habermas, 1981, pp. 342-3).

Treating reification and rationalisation as synonymous also doesn't capture the complex nuances that critical social theorists are often interested in when they discuss reification as a phenomenon; something which, in my view, has been confirmed by the fact that the literature has consistently referred to reification pejoratively and in relation to particularly recognised systemic problems such as poverty, social estrangement, alienation and the excessive viewing of oneself in a professional or formal vocation. It seems that the same cannot be said of rationalisation, which – following Weber and Habermas – has been generally accepted as a morally neutral term for rational improvement that sometimes, but not always, entails reification. To offer some examples: the introduction of more complex legal instruments and bureaucratic processes to improve communicative infrastructure meets the conditions for

rationalisation, but not necessarily reification because of the degree to which the process preserves and improves the conditions for individual autonomy and rational agency. The same could be said of the ongoing expansion of the public sphere in the internet age, which has been widely identified as having ‘reifying effects’, but doesn’t necessarily qualify as reification because of the advances made towards the democratisation of information. According to Timo Jütten (2011), a functionalist theory of reification can be found in the second volume of *TCA* which could be used to discern, in Habermas’s view, when rationalisation *should* be interpreted as reification. It is alleged to occur when a human lifeworld or lifeworld institution, viz the sphere of lived experience or an institution established to protect the interests of certain social groups, is colonised and restructured by systems that serve the interests of market, money and power. Jütten refers to this theory of reification as “the colonisation thesis”. In the second part of Chapter IV, I will unpack the limitations of this theory of reification, which is not limited to the fact that it seems highly subjective whether a seemingly autonomous process qualifies as reification, rationalisation or both. For now, it seems clear enough that interpreting reification and rationalisation as synonymous and mutually exclusive doesn’t help to explain what reification itself denotes.

Reification understood as “objectification”

The same conclusion, I believe, can be drawn from the use of “objectification”. This is not only because, similarly to rationalisation, critical social theorists have not seriously entertained the idea that reification and objectification refer to the same phenomenon, but also because a clear distinction can be found in the same section of *Capital* (Marx, 2008, pp. 42-57) that Lukács’s theory of reification relies on. Marx explicitly says that it is neither the process of making a commodity that produces the “mystical character” of commodities, nor the use value, but the exchange value when the resultant object is placed into a relation with other commodities of the same type. Thus, while the act of labouring itself only meets the conditions for objectification, the product of that labour becomes subject to reification under capitalism. Whereas the “phantom objectivity” incorporated in commodity fetishism is the natural result of the capitalist mode of production, objectification itself doesn’t contain any such phantom-like quality at all:

So far as it is a value in use, there is nothing mysterious about it... [i]t is clear by noon-day, that man, by his industry, changes the forms of the materials furnished by Nature, in such a way as to make them useful to him. The form of wood, for instance, is altered, by making a table out of it. Yet, for all that, the table continues to be that common, every-day thing, wood. But so soon as it steps forth as a commodity, it is changed into something transcendent. It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than 'table turning' ever was (Marx, 2008, p.42).

Marx's position on the reification-objectification distinction can therefore be summarised as follows: the process of objects being brought into the world through the combination of manual labour and natural resources isn't an intrinsic feature of capitalism, but one of man's natural vocation as a producer which would be unfettered under communism. As Pitkin (1987) appears to suggest in her essay, *Rethinking Reification*: if we were to understand reification in the most etymological and literal sense possible, viz to "make [something] *res*" or *real*, then the concept could be understood as synonymous with objectification. However, there is clearly no benefit to doing so for two reasons: *first*, as we have seen, Marx evidently sees what Lukács describes as reification to be something different from mere objectification, which isn't limited to capitalism; and *second*, because academics in philosophy, sociology, cultural studies *et cetera* see reification to consist of much more than simply 'making something real', hence the extensive efforts being made to trace its hegemonic structure of power. The most decisive argument for the essential difference between reification and objectification within the present discourse could be the hypothetical case of the revolutionary proletariat's success in seizing the means of production, which would administer a fundamental change in the social character of the objects/commodities produced.

As with rationalisation, there are examples of objectification that could be recognised as reification, but these are of a slightly different (though not conceptually unrelated) character. This is the kind of objectification presented by Walter Benjamin in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (2008), referring to when a person's image (or the image of their art) is abstracted and duplicated for display within a physical or virtual space. Feminist scholars, for example, frequently make use of this conception of objectification to explain how visually depicting women in certain ways amounts to an unjust encroachment on their freedom. Excluding the ethics of the

subject for our purposes here, objectification of this kind creates such problems because the digital or physical reproduction of one's image involves something more socially complex than those images' mere duplication and distribution⁴. The abstraction or 'thing' that is being reified, or 'made *res*' is not just the image, but also the historical attitudes, biological facts, expectations and values baked into the image. Thus, the 'making *res*' of certain images is understood to proliferate certain historical facts that in some cases can disproportionately affect the welfare of some more than others. The impact that the female *supermodel* has had on the expectations of both men and women, something which has arguably intensified with the input of social media applications, is a well-recognised case of what critical theorists describe as reification because of the permanent mysteriousness of what is actually being 'made *res*' (Richardson & Shaw, 1998).

Reification understood as “positivity”

The matter gets more complicated with “positivity”. Positivity is used repeatedly by Hegel as an epistemological reference to something like reification in two of his early theology works, namely *PCR* and *SOC*, which we will cover in Chapters I and II respectively. However, the original Frankfurt School, particularly Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse, use the same conception to supplement their broader discussions about the complexity and pervasiveness of reification and the implications for praxis. As we will see, Hegel uses the term in a way that is consistent with Fichte's concept of “positing”, which sets him up to explain why the latter's reworking of Kant's transcendental idealism presents an incomplete and metaphysically empty understanding of human knowledge and freedom by extension. Fichte's conception can be found in the first theorem of the *Foundations of Natural Right (FNR)*, where the I's recognition as an efficacious agent requires that it practically “posit” itself as such among other efficacious agents:

A finite rational being cannot posit itself without ascribing a free efficacy to itself (Fichte, 2000, p.18).

⁴ This notion of objectification is implicit in the Abrahamic conception of “idolatry”. It provided the basis for Judaism's rejection of Jesus as God incarnate, Islam's forbidding of the Prophet Mohammad's depiction, and the Byzantine Iconoclasm where Christian works of art were destroyed in the belief that they obscured Christ's spiritual presence.

Thus to “posit” in this context means to assert something, not through reason, but through *force*. In principle, it can apply to *physical* force (e.g., literally by taking up space in the material world) *ideological* force (contemporarily known as “gaslighting”) and most importantly in Fichte’s case perhaps, *legal* force: an objective expression of will that requires both an ideological basis of some kind and a physical means through which the laws themselves can be applied. “Positivity” itself is, therefore, an epistemological term referring to something abstract or immaterial (such as an idea) *becoming* concrete or being ‘made res’ through the intentional assertion of force or coercion. The general recognition within the philosophy of law of *legal positivism* as the system of law that acquires its legitimacy from the will (with *natural law* being interpreted as entirely separate) suggests that philosophers and legal theorists have accepted this definition of positivity. Hegel’s definition appears to be fundamentally the same except for his strong pejorative references towards it: through “positive Christianity”, for example, he is taking aim at the objective structures of Christianity that he saw to be constraining humanity’s ability to properly self-legislate (albeit before radically changing his position on Kant in the SOC). The basis of his criticism of Fichte’s political system in the *FNR* involving the “executive”, the “ephorate” and the “interdict”, emerges from a concern over “mob rule” from political legitimacy being absolutely derived from the application of force rather than through mediation (Hegel, 1991). Even clearer, however, is Hegel’s use of the epistemological version of the term through his allusions to the “positive sciences” in the *SNL*, where he criticises the empiricist and formalist approaches to understanding law on the basis of transcendent presuppositions proceeding to stand above the “essence of the relation” between thought and the natural world, and that between science and philosophy (Hegel, 1999, p.101). As we will explore further in Chapter IV: this, for Hegel, has the effect of placing Spirit ontologically at odds with its own metaphysical foundations, and invokes practical consequences of the most serious kind (that history has witnessed on multiple occasions in the modern period).

We see this same conception of positivity feature in Horkheimer and Adorno’s respective critiques of logical positivism. In the *Latest Attack on Metaphysics* (1982a), the former makes a conceptual observation about empiricism that is identical to Hegel’s (1991): rather than presenting the findings of the observed phenomena within

the higher historical context, thus giving full expression to the full contents of the relations, the phenomena under the paradigm of empiricism find themselves concealed due to the science's need to remain oblivious to its own epistemological limitations:

Empiricism, it is true, untiringly avows its willingness to set aside any conviction if new evidence should prove it false. "No rule of the physical language is definitive" and "the test applies, at bottom, not to a single hypothesis but to the whole system of physics as a system of hypotheses . . .". Nevertheless, empiricism limits this test to neutral, objective, nonnormative viewpoints, that is to say, to viewpoints that are, after all, isolated. One can either change physical laws that come into conflict with new observations or refuse to acknowledge the new evidence. There is no element of necessity in this, however; the consideration of expediency, which makes the decision, escapes theoretical determination (Horkheimer, 1982a, p. 144).

The same criticism applies to critical philosophy and formalism: if any of the original elements are allowed to survive, they persist in a disfigured form to provide theoretical justification for the method itself, which necessarily includes concealing the positive elements inscribed within the methodology. This, to be sure, is also the same point that Lukács makes about modern critical philosophy: that it assumes the theoretical form of the historical power structure from which it arises. Adorno's notorious objection to the critical rationalism of the Vienna Circle (of which Karl Popper was a recognised member), articulated at length in *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, is in the same vein and arguably in virtue of the same ethical principle: that, in the words of Gillian Rose (2014, p. 122), it is a "mode of cognition which grants theoretical priority to 'what is at hand, what is fact'". Habermas was, of course, also involved in this dispute and thus makes use of the same conception of positivity, hence his featuring in the book. Last but by no means least in terms of significance is Herbert Marcuse's description of positivity in *One Dimensional Man*, which he historically attributes to Henri De Saint-Simon. Marcuse can be seen alluding to it in the same epistemological (and borderline moral) sense as Hegel, Adorno and Horkheimer, albeit in a way that – in my view – most concisely represents the nature of the Frankfurt School's investment in the subject of reification:

The universe of discourse and behaviour which begins to speak in Saint-Simon's positivism is that of technological reality. In it, the object-world is being transformed into an instrumentality. Much of that which is still outside the instrumental world – unconquered, blind nature – now appears within the reaches of scientific and technical progress. The metaphysical dimension,

formerly a genuine field of rational thought, becomes irrational and unscientific. On the ground of its own realisations, Reason repels transcendence (Marcuse, 2002, p. 177).

This description of positivity appears to be identical to Lukács's description of reification, and as we will see in Chapter I, there are good reasons to believe that Hegel is describing reification in some way with every reference to positivity in his early theology essays. Moreover, in the case of Marcuse, it would not be inaccurate to regard positivity and reification as synonymous because, like Lukács, he observes the subordination of the human condition to instrumental reason to be inscribed in the logic of positivity, which is inseparable from the interests of capitalism.

The defining thesis of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* could be used to argue that Adorno and Horkheimer have the same view as Marcuse puts forward in *One Dimension Man*. If the rational development of Enlightenment is indeed methodologically premised on the infinite subordination of the natural world and human thought to ahistorical and abstract concepts and notions, then one could subscribe to the totalising view that any entity that commits to the labour of 'positing' qualifies as a passive and operational participant in what Lukács, Adorno, Horkheimer *et cetera* attribute to reification. The limitation of this view, however, is that it rests on a presupposition of its own: capitalism's existence as the parent contradiction of the modern world, thus seemingly revealing the presence of positivity within critical theory's own conception of reification. This seems to suggest not only that critical theory's attempt at understanding it is itself reified, but that positivity and reification are implicitly accepted as different concepts despite their strong descriptive similarities.

Lukács aside, the closest we have to an explicit declaration from the school of Western Marxism that 'to posit' does not necessarily mean 'to reify' comes from Marcuse's (1969, p. 87) allusion to the necessity for "true positive", viz "that which must be surmounted" in *Repressive Tolerance*. In this context, Marcuse appears to be identifying "true positivity" with "dereification" (the subversion of reification) and "existing positivity" with reification itself. As such, it seems unhelpful to limit our definition of *reification* to the mere 'making res of something by force'. While it may be an adequate definition of *positivity*, those operating within the parameters of critical social theory today – acting in the spirit of Adorno — generally reserve the term reification for expressions of 'becoming res' that have more socially complex, totalising and hostile implications that, coincidentally or not, all give credence to pre-established

theories of social hegemony. In the case where this is non-coincidental, critical social theory itself would amount to none other than a prolonged exercise of *post hoc ergo propter hoc*.

Reification and the praxis question

In this cynical spirit, it has been contemplated whether there is anything substantial that can be attributed to reification and if there is any value to its inclusion in critical social theory and the philosophy of history. In her essay *Rethinking Reification*, Pitkin (1987) argues firmly that the answer is 'no'. Her reasons, based on the attempts that had been made up to the point that the essay was published, are well formulated. In her view, there are as many as five different conceptions of reification contained within Lukács's *HCC* which, despite remaining true to Marx's view that capitalism is the cause, makes his conceptual analysis of the phenomenon ambiguous and confusing (Pitkin, 1987, p. 267). After dismissing Lukács's conception, Pitkin turns her attention to the model of reification expounded by Peter. L Berger and Thomas Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality* – this conception of reification is the one standardly applied in sociology circles. However, according to Pitkin, it shows itself to be even more ambiguous than the one presented by Lukács: instead of interpreting reification as having emerged from a historically fettered economic base, Berger and Luckmann – like Honneth (2008) later on – see more value in the “ghostly objectivity” being an intrinsically ontological problem rather than one of capitalism per se:

[F]or Berger and Luckmann, reification is not particularly a modern phenomenon, nor tied to any particular mode of production. It is a universal human tendency, a feature of social psychology in general: 'as soon as an objective social world is established, the possibility of reification is never far away' (Pitkin, 1987, p. 273).

At first, Berger and Luckmann's move seems appealing: the scenario whereby something abstract acquires a seemingly autonomous form to the detriment of a human agent's ability to act freely and rationally applies as much (if not more) to humanity's relationship with all forms of technology (including production) than just those Lukács believes to be shaped by the logic of capitalism. Social institutions, for example, serve a rational and necessary function in all types of society, meaning that the risk of a natural right or intrinsic social good being replaced by a fixed or constrained form (of that natural right or social good) will exist irrespective of whether capitalism persists as the parent totality. As such, assuming that Pitkin's reading is

accurate, Berger and Luckmann view the phenomenon of reification not as one that has a permanent historical relation with modernity or Enlightenment, but as a permanent feature of human psychology that requires mediation and, in some cases, strong intervention.

For Pitkin, however, this sociological conception is lacking, as evidenced by the relativistic implications that emerge from the absence of a historical base. Whilst Berger and Luckmann separate reification from objectification more convincingly than Lukács – arguing that whereas the latter serves a genuine social function, the former refers to a pathological digression from that function – how these conditions are met appears to be infinitely subjective. Berger and Luckmann’s conception gives credence to the idea of reification amounting to a form of social “forgetting” (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997, p. 191), such as when the institutionalisation of moral principles renders the moral conscience itself functionally superfluous. However, they could be perceived as undermining themselves by not tracing these principles to a historical base. Indeed, they avoid the charge of *post hoc ergo propter hoc* that one could direct at Lukács, but at the cost of leaving the essential nature of the social injury involved to be arbitrarily defined. This doesn’t suggest that no social injury or injustice occurs, but rather that there is little use in referring to such cases of forgetting as “reification”, not least because understanding it as such involves entertaining the unsatisfying prospect that no one is morally accountable for the outcome.

Dare it be said, Pitkin’s use of “Kafka’s mouse” to capture the phenomenological nature of a reified experience could also be used as an effective metaphor for the academic literature on reification: namely that it was perhaps predestined to become a reifying trap of its own making by virtue of it being impossible to escape reification from the very beginning. Thus, there could not only be little point in finding a concrete definition for reification: there could also be a moral reason to *not* do so at all on the grounds that it risks misappropriating the social harm that reification inflicts, and perhaps even intensifying the reification itself. There is also the unavoidable praxis paradox within critical theory itself: namely that it is only able to sustain an interest in reification for as long as capitalism permits it. For those of a Marxist persuasion, this fact could be interpreted to give just cause for dismissing everything that has been written on the subject. However, there is nothing to gain from adopting this approach given that reification will persist regardless of critical theory’s condition.

Reification as “identity thinking”

Pitkin’s argument for the conceptual impotence of reification is persuasive. The lack of a consistent conception of reification in the philosophy of history and critical social theory has – as appears to be the suggestion – led to it being used pejoratively to refer to forms of objectification, rationalisation, commodification and positivity by critics who, before conducting a critical analysis at all, may have already decided that certain developments are socially undesirable, inhospitable and irrational for their own reasons. Pitkin’s claim could thus be expanded upon and used as a basis for the superfluousness of critical theory itself on the grounds of it being objectively impossible for Lukács or any member of the Frankfurt School to have confronted the subject of reification from a position of true negativity. If these presuppositionless conditions exist only in the abstract, then Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse couldn’t have conducted the *critical* analyses of society that Adorno and Horkheimer claimed could serve the ends of Marxism. As such, their critical theories are, in fact, as *transcendent* and thus ideological in essence as the positive ones that supposedly emerge from bourgeois antinomies. On the other hand, however, those like Berger and Luckmann who advocate for a more relaxed conception seem unable to refute the charge that reification doesn’t contribute anything to the end of disambiguating complex structural and systemic problems. There is, therefore, some credence to Pitkin’s view as showcased metaphorically through “Kafka’s Mouse”, namely that it may be a waste of time and even counterproductive to develop a theory of reification at all.

That said, I believe it would be a mistake to give up on the concept of reification entirely. At the very least, the attempt to identify cases of reification expresses a will to recognise some sociological developments as issues that civil society has a moral obligation to address. Unfortunately, I do not have the scope in this thesis to draw on Berger and Luckmann’s theory of reification beyond Pitkin’s interest in it. However, I will argue that there are compelling reasons for viewing reification as a more pervasive phenomenon in the era of modernity than in previous epochs of history, contrary to Berger and Luckmann’s claim that primitive forms of social organisation were more ‘reifying’ still (which seems to give credence to Lukács’s attempt to situate the phenomenon in a holistic historical context). This fact about the intrinsic connection between reification and modernity is key to understanding what I believe to be the main problem with the literature at present: that despite the historical picture tied to

academia's common understanding of reification being demonstrably inadequate, it appears to have internalised the positivistic tendencies that Adorno and Horkheimer vehemently criticised. If this assessment of academia is correct, then it may be worth exploring whether "identity thinking" is active in the discourse of reification.

As Gillian Rose (2014) argues in *The Melancholy Science*: within Adorno's philosophy of experience, reification and identity thinking are inextricably linked if not synonymous. Whilst identity thinking is alluded to as the unrealised conceptual form of reification, reification itself is its historical manifestation. In the following excerpt, Adorno leans on his broader claims about the historical character of Enlightenment to describe the process of how an identity becomes *res*, or acquires the quality of 'realness', in experience. Adorno and Horkheimer's argument is that what Occidental civilisation has evolved to recognise as knowledge entails the labour of *first*, assigning a pre-established (ideological) concept to irreducibly particular objects, and *second*, *reflectively* crediting itself as having fully apprehended and represented the qualities of that object when it has, in fact, given rise to a disfigured, fetishised version that permanently conceals these irreducible particularities. Thus, reification in its most totalising historical condition, for Adorno, assumes the form of systemic solipsism:

Identity is the primal form of ideology. We relish it as adequacy to the thing it suppresses; adequacy has always been subjection to dominant purposes and, in that sense, its own contradiction. After the unspeakable effort it must have cost our species to produce the primacy of identity even against itself, man rejoices and basks in his conquest by turning it into the definition of the conquered thing: what has happened to it must be presented, by the thing, as its "in itself" (Adorno, 2005, p.148).

Like Lukács, Adorno interprets reification to be downstream of the historical form(s) that capitalism has assumed. However, in *Negative Dialectics (ND)* (the source of the above quote), it appears that he sees reification to be the result of a much more complex historical picture than Lukács's which seems to metaphysically deny the possibility of overcoming reification⁵. In the above quote, Adorno's description of reification is much the same as Lukács's in *HCC*: where the equivalence principle (referring to the labour theory of value) becomes *res* due to a "ghostly objectivity" which mysteriously posits the intrinsic value of labour and exchange value as identical,

⁵ This was the main source of disagreement between Adorno and Marcuse (1999) over the German Student Movement.

culminating in the cancellation or “forgetting” of labour’s qualitative elements. Put concisely, it appears that the “identification” that Adorno is primarily concerned with is not something that emerges from capitalism *per se*, but from a conceptual category mistake that leads to an object of irreducible particularity being misappropriated and thus losing the quality of being *res* to the misappropriated version. Adorno makes this same observation with the German Idealists (Hegel included) who, albeit in different ways, naively identify *thought* with *freedom* itself:

Before all social control, before all adjustment to conditions of dominion, the mere form of thoughts, the form of logical stringency, can be convicted of unfreedom. It can be shown that there is coercion both of what is being thought and of the thinker, who must extract the thought from himself by concentration. Whatever does not fit a judgement will be choked off; from the outset, thinking exerts that power which philosophy reflected in the concept of necessity. By way of identification, philosophy and society are interrelated in philosophy’s inmost core (Adorno, 2005, p. 233).

Identity thinking as praxis: “identity politics”

While rarely described as “reification” or even “identity thinking”, the idea of conceptual identification producing forms of social and historical disfiguration that, despite not being easily discernible, clearly infringe on the freedom of a person or community has arguably been the most extensively covered subject in the humanities for decades. This can be observed with the prevailing literature in white studies, black studies, sociology, postcolonial theory, women’s studies, disability studies, and gender studies, all of which compose what is generally recognised as “critical social theory” today. Some academics thinking within the field of “critical discourse analysis”, such as Robin DiAngelo, have even brought the existence of identity thinking to the non-academic public’s attention. In the following quote from *Beyond the Face of Race* – an essay DiAngelo co-authored with Cheryl. E. Matias - there is a clear allusion to the same concept of identity thinking as Adorno as part of an attempt to substantiate the theory that “white neurosis” is a purposively self-renewing social phenomenon in the West:

White neurosis and the need for Peoples of Colour to placate white neurosis due to real fears of white supremacy is the interplay of racial cray-cray, a problem that plays out in the racial dynamics of urban classrooms. Under the power of Whiteness, the racial cray-cray becomes a socially-sanctioned process of engaging in the lies of white neurosis that everyone is forced to perform (Matias & DiAngelo, 2013, p. 12).

Despite relying on the concepts of identity thinking, hegemony and reification to substantiate these claims about white supremacy, there appears to be a reluctance among philosophers of history to either acknowledge these subjects and their findings as part of the critical theory canon or to explain why they shouldn't. However, this is not to say that themes related to Hegel and the 'modern question' have not been explored from within the academic circle. Habermas offers a theory of reification in the *Theory of Communicative Action*, albeit a problematic one for reasons I will unpack in Chapter IV. Frederick Neuhouser has conducted a review of Honneth's theory of reification and engaged with the question of what social pathologies and 'healthy' societies essentially are (Trevino, 2023). Neuhouser has, indeed, also investigated the "Origins of Radical Social Theory", the foundations of Hegel's social theory and the role of conscience in Hegel's concept of "Ethical Life" (Neuhouser, 1998). However, all have been conducted from within the confines of a theoretical-historical framework rather than a praxial one and exhibit no further interest in the concept of reification. The same point applies to Robert Pippin's (2001) investigations into Hegel's understanding of institutional rationality: therein lies an interest in the related themes of reification, but very little in the matter of how these insights into Hegel's practical philosophy can be instructive for the persisting social problems of today as well as the matter of how modern freedom can be situated on an ethical footing.

Some interesting research in social philosophy has been taking place at the University of Essex on the subject of reification. However, there has been little engagement with the explicitly political emanations of critical social theory that claim to be serving the Frankfurt School's praxial legacy. Fabian Freyenhagen has undertaken research into the intellectual history of the Frankfurt School and the ideas of Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse and Habermas. This includes a piece on Adorno and Adorno and Marcuse's disagreement over the German Student Movement in the 1960s (Freyenhagen, 2014). Bearing in mind that transpired events involving *Antifa*, Brett Weinstein and Jordan Peterson have arguably given credence to the concerns Adorno raised to Marcuse about the left developing fascist tendencies of its own on university campuses, it is surprising that the themes of the debate have not been re-evaluated by critical theorists in the present context. Timo Jütten (2001; 2013; 2017) has also written on reification. While his exposition of the theory of reification in Habermas's *TCA* is a significant contribution to the discussion, his argument for the extension of Honneth's

theoretical-recognitional view of “respect” to include “esteem”, in my view, paves the way for a re-evaluation of how the institutional changes made in response to reification could itself have significant adverse effects. Implementing such principles involves making radical changes to the prevailing social infrastructure which could arguably lead to other sectors of society becoming fragmented and disenfranchised to the point that respect and esteem become harder social goods to attain. Honneth (1995; 2008) in particular has gone to considerable lengths and taken great care to justify why a denial of recognition amounts to such a serious social and moral harm, and why modern states have ethical obligations to mitigate it. But this begs the question of why the prospect of the policies having negative effects elsewhere has been left relatively unattended by him and disciples of his recognition-theoretical view.

There are, of course, philosophers within the philosophy of history and critical theory circles that qualify as exceptions. Slavoj Žižek has, arguably, continued the work of the Frankfurt School by publicly analysing events of world history through the lens of cultural hegemony and psychoanalysis and subsequently raised concerns about the current trajectory of academic institutions and student activism (to the extent of finding common ground with Jordan Peterson). Frederic Jameson has offered an alternative view of the logic of *postmodernism*, viz that it exists as the most intellectually advanced and antinomical emanation of capitalist reification (Jameson, 1991) (a point elaborated on by Mark Fisher in *Capitalist Realism*), but this critique is essentially a historical extension of Lukács’s theory. It also doesn’t involve unpacking the role of reification in the spread of social pathologies and systemic problems despite Jameson’s analysis of late capitalism being potentially instructive to this end. In fact, one of the only established philosophers operating in this academic circle to have engaged with the systemic and institutional problems regularly reported in contemporary politics is Michael Hardimon, as evidenced by his essay in response to the conditions of George Floyd’s death in 2020 (Hardimon, 2023). Whilst the concepts of reification, positivity and identity thinking are all implicit in his analysis, they are never officially introduced. It is, of course, not essential that they are. Given the complex and holistic nature of critical theory (not to mention the esoteric language that critical theorists often use), it is perhaps a much simpler task to confront the ethics of social injustices without alluding to reification, positivity and identity thinking at all. However, I believe this would be a mistake, not only because of the causal power that reification has been

documented to have, but because there may be a historical and purposive reason for this absence in the literature.

Has “critical theory” been reified”?

One explanation for this abstinence is that critical theory has been reified and thus reconfigured to “contain” revolutionary praxis (Marcuse, 2002, pp.21-58). In *Symbolic Exchange and Death* and later in *Simulacra and Simulation*, Jean Baudrillard (1993) could be credited with providing an answer by presenting a complete theory of reification, with the most advanced form involving the perpetual reduction of objects to autonomous sign values of capital. While Baudrillard will not feature in the thesis that follows, the sequence could be perceived as revealing the extent of critical theory’s own reification, which also falls into line with his thesis about the “end of Marxism”. For our purposes, the “Three Orders of Simulacra” or “Precession of Simulacra” – the latter of which features in *Simulacra and Simulation* – could be understood to be presenting the three distinctive stages on which commodity fetishism and thus reification occurs, the stages of which are characterised by alterations in the relationship between the original *object* and the *image* (alternatively known as a ‘representation’ or ‘abstraction’) that is socially assigned to that object. In the *first* order, the object or “profound reality” finds its intrinsic contents disfigured or masked by the presence of its synthetic image. In the *second* order, the object or profound reality is totally concealed or eclipsed by the image to the degree that the contents of the original fall by the wayside. This stage is arguably the closest to Marx’s description of the fetish character of commodities, where the exchange value stamped on an object overwrites the labour value from which the social contents of the production process reside. Lastly, in the *third* order, referred to by Baudrillard as simulacra in its *operational* stage, the image acquires the power to fully determine the contents of the real to the degree that “profound reality” as it was previously understood no longer exists. At this stage, the nature of reality is metaphysically sourced from relations between social signifiers, or hyper-commodities, which are also products of other relations of the same kind. This is what Baudrillard presents as the essence of postmodernism, thus creating the conditions for the image of Marxism to determine the contents of Marxism itself in ways that challenge the logic of capitalism without actually subverting it. It is in this way that critical social theory’s present condition as an intellectual discipline could be diagnosed as one that has not only become ahistorical under the influence of market

forces, but exists as capitalism's most advanced attempt at annexing the dialectic, viz the development of human rationality. Whilst this is a highly controversial assertion, the dominant strands of critical social theory do seem to meet the conditions for reification, as shown by their dependence on identity thinking to justify their historical claims about social injustice.

Despite receiving surprisingly little attention from academics operating within the philosophy of history tradition, there are many examples of identity thinking and reification being utilised for praxial purposes from particularly influential philosophers in the public sphere. Judith Butler, one of the pioneers of what is recognised today as "Queer Theory", makes use of it in *Gender Trouble* (1990) (and even uses the term "reifications") to argue that traditional conceptions of gender are historically realised "social fictions" that ontologically marginalise those who possess alternative qualities:

Although linguistic categories shape reality in a "violent" way, creating social fictions in the name of the real, there appears to be a truer reality, an ontological field of unity against which these social fictions are measured... concepts are formed and circulated within the materiality of language and that that language works in a material way to construct the social world. On the other hand, these "constructions" are understood as distortions and reifications to be judged against a prior ontological field of radical unity and plenitude. Constructs are thus "real" to the extent that they are fictive phenomena that gain power within discourse (Butler, 1990, pp. 151-2).

Within the philosophy of race, Charles Mills appears to use the same conception of reification and identity thinking throughout *The Racial Contract* (1997) to argue that the identities of "white" and "black" are the intentional result of white supremacy, which to this day systemically reproduces a civil order at the social expense of non-white/non-European citizens:

White supremacy is the unnamed political system that has made the modern world what it is today. You will not find this term in introductory, or even advanced, texts in political theory. A standard undergraduate philosophy course will start off with Plato and Aristotle, perhaps say something about Augustine, Aquinas, and Machiavelli, move on to Hobbes, Locke, Mill, and Marx, and then wind up with Rawls and Nozick. It will introduce you to notions of aristocracy, democracy, absolutism, liberalism, representative government, socialism, welfare capitalism, and libertarianism. But though it covers more than two thousand years of Western political thought and runs the ostensible gamut of political systems, there will be no mention of the basic political system that has shaped the world for the past several hundred years. And this omission is not accidental. Rather, it reflects the fact that standard textbooks and courses have for the

most part been written and designed by whites, who take their racial privilege so much for granted that they do not even see it as political, as a form of domination (Mills, 1997, p.1).

Mills's argument, however, is a transparent theoretical expansion of Carole Pateman's analysis in *The Sexual Contract* (2014), which seeks to exposit the forms of added labour that women endure under the social contract's jurisdiction (referring mainly to the version generally associated with John Locke's classical liberalism). John Walker (1995) describes this as "the problem of adaptive preferences" which, according to Pateman, emerge from the standardised "patriarchal" expectations of gender inscribed in the social contract that purposively constrain the choices women are able to make:

All too easily, the impression can be given that the sexual contract and the social contract are two separate, albeit related contracts and that the sexual contract concerns the private sphere. Patriarchy then appears to have no relevance to the public world. On the contrary, patriarchal right extends throughout civil society. The employment contract and [the] prostitution contract, both of which are entered into the public, capitalist market, uphold men's right as firmly as the marriage contract. The two spheres of civil society are at once separate and inseparable. The public realm cannot be fully understood in the absence of the private sphere, and similarly, the meaning of the original contract is misinterpreted without both, mutually dependent, halves of the story. Civil freedom depends on patriarchal right (Pateman, 2014, p. 4).

Perhaps the most historically significant thinker of all to critical social theory's treatment of reification, however – excluding those who confront the subject directly – is Kimberlé Crenshaw, whose model of "intersectionality" is prefaced on the presupposition that the social categories of race, gender, ethnicity, class, religion *et cetera* are so structurally entrenched (and thus reified) within the West's cultural value spheres that positively identifying through them on the terms that they are understood to "intersect" is the only way that a substantive (*viz* politically organised) response to the systemic marginalisation can be achieved. It is on these grounds that in *Mapping the Margins*, Crenshaw (1991) advocates in favour of an "identity politics" that involves certain social constructs being *posited* as essential whilst recognising that they are not:

One version of antiessentialism, embodying what might be called the vulgarized social construction thesis, is that since all categories are socially constructed, there is no such thing as, say, Blacks or women, and thus it makes no sense to continue reproducing those categories by organizing around them... [b]ut to say that a category such as race or gender is socially constructed is not to say that that category has no significance in our world. On the contrary, a

large and continuing project for subordinated people - and indeed, one of the projects for which postmodern theories have been very helpful - is thinking about the way power has clustered around certain categories and is exercised against others. This project attempts to unveil the processes of subordination and the various ways those processes are experienced by people who are subordinated and people who are privileged by them. It is, then, a project that presumes that categories have meaning and consequences. And this project's most pressing problem, in many if not most cases, is not the existence of the categories, but rather the particular values attached to them and the way those values foster and create social hierarchies (Crenshaw, 1991, pp. 1296-7).

Surprisingly, despite Butler, Mills, Pateman and Crenshaw leaning heavily on Adorno's conception of identity thinking, a conceptual distinction between identity thinking and "identity politics" is yet to be drawn by academics thinking within the philosophy of history tradition of which critical theory is itself a part. There are, I believe, two core reasons for this literary gap. The *first* is that none of the philosophers (e.g. Crenshaw, Pateman, Mills, Butler and DiAngelo) who argue in favour of identity politics are working in philosophical fields outside of critical theory and the philosophy of history. As such, it could be argued that there is no need to give their ideas coverage. The *second* reason, which I believe to be the more likely reason for their abstinence, is that the extent to which the arguments made by critical theorists have been misappropriated in the public sphere (which Marcuse falls victim to the most frequently) would make it unethical to do so. The *first* reason is wrong for the following reason: assuming it were true that Butler, Mills, Pateman and Crenshaw were not "critical theorists" by vocation, it would be a *non sequitur* and an ironic case of identity thinking itself to suggest that their status of "not being critical theorists" annuls their contribution to the discipline. Making such a rigid and narrow judgement would also be deeply out of place with the interdisciplinary research culture that critical theory celebrated upon its intellectual foundation. The *second* reason is also wrong because, as I have attempted to show, the epistemic and moral justification for an organised political response relies on Adorno's thesis about identity thinking and reification. To give another example: the concept of "white supremacy" on which the analyses of Mills and Crenshaw are based is itself predicated on the notion that "whiteness" possesses a phantasmagorical quality in history. This is demonstrated by Mills's core thesis in *The Racial Contract*, namely that the inequalities that disproportionately impact non-white citizens are not always the direct result of intentionality (even though this does

still occur, of course), but of the self-renewing and continuously shifting cultural attitudes that pervade from the parent social structure:

[T]he Racial Contract evolves not merely by altering the relations between whites and nonwhites but by shifting the criteria for who counts as white and nonwhite. (So it is not merely that relations between the respective populations change but that the population boundaries themselves change also.) Thus - at least in my preferred account of the Racial Contract (again, other accounts are possible) - race is de-biologized, making explicit its political foundation. In a sense, the Racial Contract constructs its signatories as much as they construct it (Mills, 2022, p. 78)

Following this, the ultimate consequence of this for black citizens, in Mills' view, is that they experience an ongoing form of historical erasure or "forgetting" that allows white citizens to receive the benefit of the West's economic prosperity without engaging with the social conditions from which that wealth was created. Assuming that this understanding of Mills's (2022) analysis is correct, the historical erasure he describes possesses the same characteristics as the "forgetting" that Adorno and Horkheimer see as synonymous with reification. Pateman, in *The Sexual Contract*, applies the same conceptual analysis (albeit at an earlier time) to explain the added labour that women endure under the self-renewing culture of "possessive individualism" pervading from the social contract; this, again, is an allusion to identity thinking. Butler (1990), more or less transparently, uses Adorno's philosophy of experience to supplement her essentialist theory of gender, where traditionally sex-based notions are presented as reified identities that renew themselves directly from the subversion of non-normative gender identities and/or sexual orientations. Crenshaw (1991) then proceeds to incorporate all of the above into her model of "*intersectionality*", which consequently posits the *identities* of "cisgendered", "white", "heterosexual" and "male" as the social constructs which historically stand above the interests of women, ethnic minorities and the LGBTQ community. It is thus a specific historiographical reading of identity thinking providing the precedent for what is now contemporarily recognised as identity politics and the policies derived from it, which include state-sponsored positive discrimination in favour of these marginalised groups in the West today.

Indeed, Adorno does not discuss identity thinking and reification (as well as his philosophy of experience in general) in these contexts, and those who do rarely acknowledge the developments as emanations of identity thinking or reification. However, considering that *nonidentity* is Adorno's (2005) antidote to reification, it is

feasible that he could view a methodological framework based on the sacrosanctity of fixed social identities as a product of capitalist reification itself, especially given that it draws attention away from the contradictions within the economic base. Whether this is the case or not, it seems clear that interest in identity thinking and reification has existed in philosophy for some time: there has just been surprisingly little interest in connecting these social analyses to a theory of reification.

Conclusion

What is lacking in philosophy at present is a conceptual analysis of the relationship between reification and identity thinking, including whether they are indeed synonymous. Butler engages with the concept in her review of Honneth included in the edited republication of the *Reification* essay. But this doesn't alter the fact that Mills, Butler, Crenshaw and the offshoot intellectual traditions, for want of a better phrase, seem to wish to 'have their cake and eat it'. On the one hand, their analyses – following Adorno – depend on the notion of identity thinking being intrinsically oppressive to substantiate the view that some social groups, for historical reasons, are more systematically marginalised than others. But on the other, Mills, Butler and Crenshaw appear reluctant to explain why the lived experiences of these marginalised groups have natural immunity to identity thinking and reification by extension; their social analyses seem to rely on the *transcendent/ahistorical* claim that the experiences of persons that fall under the social categories of 'woman', 'black', 'queer' *et cetera* are more authentic or 'purer' than those who do not. Given that Western institutions have made major structural changes to their practices in the belief that recognising these lived experiences under the umbrella of "diversity" produces a net social gain, it is surprising that those working in either critical theory or critical social theory continue to show little interest in unpacking the remarkable similarities between these ongoing allusions to "lived experience" and Adorno's scathing criticism of Heidegger, as can be observed in the *Jargon of Authenticity* (1973)⁶. As such, it seems that there would be much to gain from conducting a historical and conceptual review of identity

⁶ Adorno's charge is as follows: in presupposing that individual experiences arise from a nonconceptual relationship that an individual has with the world in which they are situated, Heidegger engenders the ideal conditions for the contents of a reified experience to be taken as 'pure'. For Adorno, this has the potential to cause an aggressive relapse into subjectivity, culminating in an authoritarian dynamic manifesting within social groups that results in previously autonomous individuals evolving into agents for reified notions (Adorno saw the Holocaust as the most significant historical example).

thinking's application in the literature and what praxial implications this could have for reification. Doing so is beyond the scope of this thesis, as is the essential task of subjecting these arguably transcendent theories to immanent critique. But as we will see, the theory of reification implicit in Hegel's philosophy of history offers *first*, a compelling explanation for when identity thinking and reification could be interpreted as the same, and *second*, an ontological and arguably functionalist framework capable of disambiguating when reification amounts to being a purposive historical event and when it is correct to interpret it as pathological.

Indeed, one could argue that conceiving of identity thinking and reification as synonymous gives credence to the sociological model advocated by Berger and Luckmann: where reification is described as the overwriting and ultimate displacement of something possessing intrinsic sociological value with a fetishised version of that same thing, which assumes an autonomous form to the extent that it erases the contents of the original. Whilst identity thinking conceptually matches this description (and the argument that all forms of sociological forgetting are equally unjust is not without credence), I believe it should be resisted. For a start, the relativistic presuppositions translate into praxial impotence: if a sociological 'forgetting' itself is to be recognised as the source of a certain historical injustice, then the basis of reification's resistance can only ever be *reactionary*, thus leaving no room for dialectical development (where elements of the old assume improved forms in the new). More importantly, however, the idea that reification amounts to a smaller problem in the modern day than under more archaic structures of social organisation is both too simplistic and intuitively unappealing, which appears to have been confirmed by the extensive and ongoing efforts to trace reification to a "totality" or a monolithic structure of power. The problem with these attempts, which I have covered only briefly, is not that their findings are wholly false or without value. The experiences they attempt to express are rational insofar as they allude to flaws within the present social infrastructure. It is rather that, in many cases, these disciplines have a tendency to posit some historical readings grounded in "lived experience" as more epistemically rooted than others without providing reasons for why this is the case, beyond the presuppositions of hegemonic power already inscribed in their theories. This is something that Adorno and Horkheimer traditionally accused their "positivist" opponents of (Rose, 2014).

For the above reasons, perhaps, the considerable lengths taken to protect the interests of groups conceptualised as oppressed minorities under the intersectionality model has created social problems that didn't previously exist and which could also qualify as reification. Persons who fall under the categories of 'white', 'heterosexual' or 'male' are structurally compelled to endure forms of added labour in being compelled to *first*, view themselves as compliant in the marginalisation of these minorities, *second*, accept the subversion of their culture and communities as part of the ethical solution, and *third*, adopt the view that there are no rational or moral grounds for political organisation or solidarity for their respective identity group(s) under the prevailing conditions. Without a convincing explanation for how members of the parent culture retain access to the same rights and social goods whilst their own identities are sacrificed to advance the interests of groups identified as marginalised, it appears that the former are being subject to a double standard that would make resisting the changes an act of self-respect or moral indignation, *not* a 'reified' one (this is an observation that also seems to be consistent with the recognition-theoretical view advocated by Honneth (2008) and Jütten (2017)). In spite of this contradiction, however, those working within critical theory and critical social theory appear to have either accepted intersectionality as an infallible social framework (and thus view the structural enforcement of this double standard to be morally justified) or have decided to abstain from challenging it for other reasons.

I acknowledge that my coverage of the literature on reification in this preliminary chapter is not exhaustive. I have, in particular, given little attention to Honneth's (2008) theory of reification, but only because unpacking the details to an appropriate standard requires an essay in its own right. I should also be explicit that my intention from the beginning was not to situate my discussion on reification within the current academic fences, but to reopen them to what I see as their own neglected pastures. My interest in the phenomenon of reification has always been in the spirit of Adorno's (2005, pp.211-99) new "categorical imperative", viz to confront the emergence of social pathologies and injustices not in virtue of the formal principles which they violate, but in direct response to the various forms of suffering they inflict. However, while critical theory and critical social theory have done this extensively for women, ethnic minorities and people with alternative conceptions of gender and sexuality, there continues to be very little, if any, interest in covering the problems that have been

reported as among the adverse effects of *Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)*-related policies, particularly on esteem and the process of gaining employment. The entire conversation about whether *DEI* provides a net social gain or not has for the most part been left to contemporary news outlets and new media organisations (e.g. internet podcasts). While one can observe academics in social philosophy to not be hesitant at signifying their disapproval at the institutions hosting the discussions and/or the manner in which the subject is being addressed, which is not always unjustified, the response rarely involves resituating the discussion in an academic context. There appears to be either a tacit acceptance of the view that such discussions are not worth having (which would contradict any commitments to ensuring that the social goods of respect and esteem remain accessible to all persons), or that these questions have already been adequately answered. If, indeed, any critical theorist or critical social theorist has raised concerns about how intersectionality's systemic marginalisation of persons subjugated to the "*reifications*" of "cisgendered", "heterosexual", "white" and "male" could deny access to the standards of dignity and esteem being preserved for the recognised minorities, I am yet to be introduced to them. Regrettably, this seems to suggest that Adorno and Horkheimer's (1997) project of raising Enlightenment to the level of self-awareness (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997, p. xv) has been thwarted by critical theory assuming a hegemonic form of its own, causing it to "forget" its own praxial foundations and accept another *transcendent* framework (Horkheimer, 1982b) as a solution, where a new "embodiment of the negative principle" (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1997, p. 168) is implicit. The reluctance of academics to engage with these developments despite the potential consequences of not doing so (which we are already witnessing) is especially strange given the *Institute for Social Research's* historical commitment to ensuring that industrialised genocides like those that happened at *Auschwitz* never reoccur (Jay, 1996).

It is from these observations that my motivation to exposit a Hegelian theory of reification arose. Within his absolute idealism and philosophy of history is not only a more detailed account of the social (and in some cases physical) harm that reification inflicts, but a convincing theory for why reification may be necessarily insurmountable for human freedom to be possible. As is well known, the main problem with Adorno's social philosophy is its endemic negativity and the seemingly blanket view that all forms of identity thinking are bad except for those which fall under the category of

“rational identity” (when concept and object align). Hegel, however, – due in part to his teleological philosophy of history – offers a richer explanation for when identity thinking is rational and when it assumes a pathological form that could be described as “bad infinity” or reification. In particular, his theory of reification lays the groundwork for an improved version of Habermas’s model in both volumes of the *TCA*, where reification involves not only the structural and phenomenological colonisation of the lifeworld by the interests of money and power (Jütten, 2011) (as Habermas insists), but also the colonisation of rational and communicative systems at the hands of *reified* lifeworlds (e.g. those based on the Heideggerian fallacy of “authenticity”) or lifeworld institutions. If so, then understanding reification in the way that Hegel seems to propose could create the opportunity to situate modernisation on the rational and logically consistent footing that it currently lacks.

Chapter I:
**On the Inextricable Link between ‘Positivity’ and
‘Reification’**

An opening statement on ‘reification’

The question of what ‘reification’ amounts to is yet to be sufficiently answered by those who have attempted to do so. Although the concept was introduced by Georg Lukács (2017, pp.65-88) in *History and Class Consciousness (HCC)* to develop a theory only made implicitly by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels - namely that crises under capitalism are caused by a mysterious, independent quality that it appears to have above human agency – the theory makes little sense when abstracted from the post-Kantian epistemology that makes such crises intelligible. I am, of course, referring to the phenomenon of how an intrinsically unstable economic system introduced as a means for human interest can first, decouple itself from this interest and second, establish itself as an *end in-itself* to the eventual detriment of capitalist society itself when its intrinsic instability finds sufficient expression.

The epistemology behind this phenomenon was originally investigated not by Marx and Engels’s respective critiques of capitalist society – as important as these works will be for our purposes - but by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel in his emphatic departure from what he perceived as the subject-centred, “soul sacked” epistemology of Immanuel Kant⁷. Instead of accepting Kant’s presuppositions for the possibility of experience, namely that it is comprised of objects processed in accordance with the subject’s *a priori* concepts - the “pure concepts of the understanding” as the cognitive faculties within the “transcendental unity of apperception” (Kant, 1929, pp. 120-197) - Hegel extended the enquiry to how these *a priori* concepts can be justified. His conclusion, in short, was that they cannot, because whilst concepts must exist *a priori* for experience to be possible in the first place, it is dogmatic of Kant to assume that these particular concepts persist through time when experience itself does not persist outside of time. Having made this observation, Hegel deduces these concepts to be historically contingent, *viz* products of historical variables within time, arguing therefore that the concepts producing experience are determined – or at least considerably influenced – by social conditions.

⁷ Whilst Hegel’s name is most commonly associated with post-Kantianism in the literature today, it was actually Johann Gottlieb Fichte who made the first steps of transgressing Kant’s subjectivism in claiming that transcendental idealism requires intersubjective acknowledgement of rational agency, which can only be achieved through acknowledging “right” to have independence from “morality” (Neuhouser, 1996, pp. 158-177).

While this may appear to be only a minor amendment to the cornerstones of German thought which Kant had laid down, the theoretical implications it has on what experience and knowledge ultimately amount to are seismic. To be sure, Kant's attempt in the *Critique of Pure Reason (CPR)*—where he introduces the “pure concepts of the understanding” - was to solve the problem of scepticism, but he did so without addressing what precipitated sceptical thought in the first place: the postulated independence of mind and body, subject and object, and the existence of both internal and external relations. Instead of doing this, he sought to speculate – in the spirit of the Copernican Revolution – how these independent entities may relate so as to produce objective knowledge for the subject, and in concluding that *appearances* of the external world are all we can know of that world, he only succeeds in finding another way to present experience as an illusion. By introducing the idea that this very presupposition – the independence of mind and matter, subject and object and the existence of both internal and external relations – may itself be historically contingent, Hegel showed it as intelligible to believe that there may be no such independence at all, viz that knowledge and all contents of experience, may be produced entirely of internal relations. This holistic metaphysical basis, whereby subjects are understood as interconnected products and agents of purposive historical forces (ideas in Hegel's case) - which itself can be seen to have been considerably influenced by the scholastic metaphysics of Benedict de Spinoza (1955, pp. 45-81), who conceptualised all things existing in time and space exist to be extensions of a single, primordial substance - is precisely the doctrine of internal relations which Marx ‘turned on its head’ to form *dialectical materialism*: the science developed from the presupposition that historical conflicts are precipitated by material necessity. Dialectical materialism then, based on the material needs of the impoverished class - the *proletariat* - existing as the catalyst of social conflict, is the paradigm which Lukács (2017) worked within to make sense of “the phenomenon of reification”; to explain how the narrow, bourgeois world view establishes itself as a given fact about reality to that impoverished class.

In this chapter, I am going to argue for something quite surprising: that it is not Lukács, but Hegel who develops the first theory of reification⁸. Even more surprisingly,

⁸ Habermas argues that Fichte could be read as presenting an even earlier theory of reification in the first Jena *Wissenschaftshlere*. Having presented Kant to confine philosophical enquiry to either “idealism” or “dogmatism”, Fichte concludes that “[idealism explains] everything that dogmatism explains, while making no assumptions beyond the reach of observation” (Scruton, 2002, p.164).

however, I will do so through adopting Lukács's own later approach to the philosophy of history demonstrated in *The Young Hegel (TYH)* (1975), to argue that he inadvertently reveals Hegel to have identified reification as an epistemic and social pathology of which capitalism is a mere extension. What we will see is that Hegel's focus on the theological elements underwriting the emergence of "bourgeois society" before "positivity" comes into effect bears strong similarities with the fatalistic view espoused by Oswald Spengler in *The Decline of the West*, within which lies the claim that the colonisation of the Christian moral universe by objective and seemingly autonomous expressions of instrumental rationality is merely an expression of Christianity reaching its most logically developed form. As we will see, Lukács makes ample use of this idea, viz of reification being linked to Christianity's prospective metaphysical fatalism, to justify why the supersession of both capitalism and Christianity is rational, necessary, and for the good of humankind as a whole. In order to understand reification properly, however, the theoretical difference between what constitutes a "true" and "reified" experience needs to be unpacked in more clarity.

'Reification' as the triumph of fixed identification

Ever since Lukács introduced the term, accounts of reification as both a concept and a phenomenon have been described predominantly in an expressive manner. Theodor Adorno's epistemological insight into experience, however, is arguably the closest thing critical theorists have to an analytic definition of it, as I will proceed to illustrate with a considerable debt to Brian O'Conner (2013, pp. 54-85). In his 1966 work *Negative Dialectics (ND)*, Adorno affirms – in purposely adhering to Kantian and post-Kantian traditions – that the content of experience emerges out of a productive relationship between subject and object. Pure experience and a true relationship with the world requires subject and object having a proactive and transformative effect on the other, but for this to be achievable, the relationship between them must be based on mediation, whereby fixed identities are perpetually resisted and annulled. In contrast, reified experience – an intrinsically false relationship with the world – is the result of fixed identities constraining the transformative potential of the subject-object relation which, in turn, confines experience to the conditions of those fixed identities.

While this indicates that Fichte had an awareness of the rising prevalence of unscientific epistemic practices, there is nothing to suggest that he perceived it be symptomatic of a broader social pathology.

From this description, we can conceptualise reification as the phenomenon whereby fixed identification somehow takes precedence over this transformative relationship. Neither these transformative relationships or reification as a process are possible in Kant's epistemology because subjects cannot cognise objects in any way contrary to the formal capacities of the Understanding (*Verstand*).

The conception of reification just presented is, of course, too general to accept. What does it mean for a fixed identity to take precedence? How does an object acquire a fixed identity and how does it, from here, become antecedent so as to determine the conditions of the subject's experience? This can be clarified by taking a closer look at how subject and object mediate one another in Adorno's system. But in order to do this sufficiently, we first need to take a closer look into something we have already touched upon at the beginning of this chapter: the subject-object epistemology in Kant's *CPR*. In this text, Kant argues that knowledge is born out of a synthesis between concepts and experience (Scruton, 2002, pp.142-8). We can take this to mean that experience itself is born out of a synthesis between internal concepts and external stimuli: the concepts are *a priori* to the subject and experience is comprised of the subject's *a posteriori* interaction with the world of objects. Knowledge *must* begin with the subject because without the conscious unity of self - the "transcendental unity of apperception" - it is impossible for any information about the world of objects to be brought to consciousness. As information about the world of objects can only be known through these concepts, the subject's experience is comprised of those object's 'appearances' (*phenomena*). The objects in-themselves, "things-in-themselves" (*noumena*), cannot be known because the subject's capacity for knowledge is limited to what these fixed concepts can produce, which means in turn that knowledge and experience must themselves be products of cognitive faculties that are detached from the noumenal world. Needless to say, Kant's efforts to refute scepticism led him to develop a philosophy of *solipsism*: a philosophy that is quintessentially reified as Adorno (2001, p.114) stresses later, being that knowledge and experience emerge from fixed identification itself.

Hegel relieves Kant's epistemology of its solipsism by first, rejecting these fixed, absolute concepts which isolate the subject from the world of objects (Beiser, 2005, p.201) and second, rejecting the notion of "things-in-themselves" entirely. He rejects the former with a sensitivity to the fact that if these concepts are absolute, then the

subject, in theory, already has total self-knowledge irrespective of experience – thus confirming Kant's failure to put away the threat of scepticism – and rejects the latter on the simpler basis that it is unintelligible to assume the existence of things that experience has not yet revealed. Both of these criticisms set the foundations for Hegel's mature epistemology in the *Phenomenology of Spirit (POS)* (1977b), which is that rather than accepting Kant's presupposition that appearances of reality are all we can know, we can improve our knowledge of objective reality by proactively adapting our concepts to the conditions of which that objective reality reveals itself (Houlgate, 1991, pp.48-58). Hegel therefore transforms Kant's epistemology from a static, reified one, where all objects collapse into the fixed identities of the subject, to the dynamic, transformative one that Adorno later adopts. Contra Hegel, however, Adorno reintroduces the concept of things-in-themselves on the basis that without there being some definitive, essential difference between subject and object, it is not possible for there to be a process of mediation as he claims (O'Connor, 2013, pp.66-70).

Adorno's own system then, is reducible to three postulates. The first is that subject and object are definitively different: as already said, if this were not the case, then mediation could not be possible. The second is that objects are irreducibly particular: if this were not the case, then the subject-object distinction would at some point stall in virtue of the object's qualities being identical with the subject's concepts. The third is that because of the object's irreducible particularity, it must function as a stimulus to the subject's experience (O'Connor, 2013, p.72). This prioritisation of the object in Adorno's system - confirming it as a form of revised materialism - means that subjects exercise their freedom through responding to the particularity of objects, transforming the objects in the process of conceptualisation and then returning to the object so that its particularity can be reaffirmed. Without this, the transformative cycle cannot be renewed as the subject would have no new content in experience to respond to. Subject-object reconciliation is the desired end, but the irreducible particularity of the objective world means that this is a perpetually ongoing process and an ideal that will never be fully realised.

The reciprocal relationship of subject and object in the construction of experience means that fixed identities can take precedence in two ways. Either the subject sets out to purposely annul the object's particularity in order to collapse its qualities into these identities, or the object commits this same act of aggression by annulling the

autonomy of the subject after somehow acquiring a purely autonomous form – that is, after gaining full independence from the subject. The former can be categorised as egoism. The latter, however, is a far more complicated matter, as it is not immediately clear how it is possible for an object to become autonomous so as to confine the subject's agency to the object's fixed identity.

To understand this, we need to examine the subject's role in the object's autonomous character. In Adorno's system, for an object to become autonomous, the subject's input is required from the offset. Without the subject being ever-present, experience itself cannot be possible: it would be a contradiction for an autonomous object to be present in experience, but not present in the subject. The object's independence must, therefore, ultimately have its sanctuary within the paradigm of subjectivity and with this being so, that object's autonomous quality can only be instantiated upon the subject's failure to grasp the object's particularity as it is presented in experience. It is this failure that leads to the object taking up a fixed rather than transformative form to the subject and from this point that this natural, dynamic way of relating to the world of objects is eclipsed by modes of fixed identification, whereby the subject becomes accustomed to accepting misapprehended (fixed) objects as apprehended (transformative). It is at this point of misapprehension that the subject inadvertently grants the object this autonomous quality and, in Adorno's view, when experience becomes fundamentally reified.

Let us consider an example: imagine a relation between a subject and a large die. Because the object has priority as the stimulus of experience, it is the subject's response – after the object has had its initial transformative effect on it – that is first demanded. The transformative potential of the relation, however, has already been disrupted because prior to the subject's response, the object was presented as having a specific function through being predicated as a 'die': a cube with different numbers or symbols on each face that is used, more often than not, for recreational purposes. The inclusion of the adjective 'large', furthermore, implies a presupposed standard of size that, if unfulfilled, can prevent the object from delivering its ascribed function. Had the dice had anything other than six sides, this would have compromised its use value further. The qualities of 'large' and of being comprised of anything other than six sides – where it would then cease to be a cube – both fall outside of the fixed identification of 'die', but the object is still constrained by the identity nonetheless which, in turn,

constrains the subject's perception of it. To Adorno, this contrived relation with the world of objects is symptomatic of experience born out of the modern world's intrinsically reified character, whereby fixed identification seems to looms over all aspects of social activity. It is both a detriment to the object as a thing-in-itself - and thus the objective world in its entirety, due to its particularity going unrealised - and to the subject who is denied a much richer experience (O'Connor, 2013, pp.83-5) with the world that is being concealed by this mysterious, autonomous process.

Out of the two aforementioned ways that fixed identities can take precedence in experience, it is clearly the latter – the subject's inadvertent misapprehension of the object, followed by the mysterious autonomisation of this misapprehension – that Adorno has in mind when he attempts to explain the phenomenon of reification. Whilst Adorno is in no explicitly constrains his explanation of reification to this formal proposition, the proposition does sufficiently express the basic outline of both his holistic approach to critique and his scathing diagnosis of modern society as a pathological outgrowth born out of the contradictions that history has been (and is now completely) unable to resolve. I will cover Hegel's specific engagement with "the modern dilemma" (Taylor, 1979, pp.108-15) in Chapter IV. But for our present purposes, it is more important to turn our attention to the historical period that arguably precipitated Hegel's awareness of the phenomenon of reification: the French Revolution of 1789 and the events leading up to Napoleon's coup d'état in 1799.

Hegel's interest in the French Revolution

The subjects of intellectual interest that Hegel would pursue throughout his academic life, including the nature of individual autonomy, knowledge, the ideal structure of the modern state and the rational purpose of religion all began with his general interest in the French Revolution, which he perceived as an ideological conflict between republicanism and feudalism. Lukács's (1975) reading of Hegel in his "republican phase" is as follows. The feudal counter-revolutionaries – comprised primarily of the nobles, the Catholic clergy and the peasants (who had no interest in revolution due to their undeveloped intellectual capabilities) – sought to uphold the authority of the *Ancien Régime*, viz a ruling monarchy with absolute political power. The revolutionary republicans on the other hand - guided by the *Jacobins*, and in the defining phases by Maximilien Robespierre – represented the interests of States-Générale's third estate,

composed mainly of the emergent bourgeoisie and urban sans-culottes. Inspired in considerable part by Jean-Jacques Rousseau's vision in *The Social Contract*, the Jacobins – acting in virtue of social equality and in opposition to the notion of a 'divine right to rule' – aspired to replace the absolute monarchy with a secular democracy which acquired its legitimacy from the "general will". Unlike the social contract theory that could be found in the English natural law tradition, within which the general will amounts to the aggregate sum of individual, private wills, Rousseau conceived the general will as a "transcendent incarnation" of collective interest (Bertram, 2004, pp. 96-122). Rousseau is explicit in his view that even after individuals attain equality *de jure* in their legal status as "citizens", they are not free *de facto* until the general will transgresses the value they ascribe to their private interests. Those who do otherwise, or openly refuse to obey the general will, will find themselves *coerced* into freedom by the state (Rousseau, 1920).

The growing support for republicanism positively correlated with the growing sense of national contempt for the French monarchy. Then under the rule of Louis XVI, this contempt came from two separate but interrelated factors. The first was the failed attempt by Charles-Alexandre de Calonne - the controller general of the royal finances – to rationalise the organisation of the French state so as to avoid a looming economic crisis (Doyle, 1988, pp.43-52). These reforms were necessitated by the monarchy being on the verge of bankruptcy having borrowed excessively to finance the *Seven Years' War* under Louis XV which, following the defeat to Great Britain, left France, economically, geopolitically and thus spiritually weaker. With policies continuing to be made at the expense of the third estate's members - due to the estate being consistently outvoted by the nobility and clergy in the Estates-General despite representing 95% of France's population - public opinion was becoming increasingly aware that the system of government structurally worked against the interests of the overwhelming majority (Doyle, 1988, p.168-77). This sense of anguish boiled over on 6th October 1789 when a mob of starving Parisians stormed the Palace of the Versailles after the Finance Minister, Jacques Necker, in what was perceived as an unnecessary free market experiment, relaxed controls over the grain trade only to subject the country to a bread shortage⁹ at a time of bad harvest and prolonged wage

⁹ The price of bread rose to consume 88% of the average Parisian's wage as a result of the policy (Doyle, 1988, p.162).

stagnation. The second factor underwriting this contempt for the monarchy was the influence of an elite class of intellectuals who composed a subsection of the non-commercial bourgeoisie in Paris: the “men of letters”. While not a politically organised movement per se, many of these men were well educated in social contract theory, enthusiastic about progressive thinkers such as Rousseau and Voltaire, upheld a position of principled solidarity with the third estate on the grounds that the bore the ultimate brunt of undemocratic governance, and found themselves on the receiving end of censorship for challenging the Régime’s legitimacy. As such, the private spaces which that could use to congregate, viz coffee shops, salons and Masonic lodges (Doyle, 1988, pp.126-7), evolved into recognised venues for revolutionary discussion. Whilst the urban sans-culottes, the increasingly prosperous mercantile class and the men of letters themselves had separate interests in the private domain, they found common ground in the assessment that the Ancien Régime was decadent, corrupt, and most importantly, that its claim of inheriting a divine right to rule was illegitimate. These developments are contemporarily understood to be the political origins of the French Enlightenment.

‘Positive Christianity’

These material and ideological factors provided the cornerstones for Hegel’s early political and theological writings. During this phase, Hegel concerned himself primarily with the historical origins of Christianity and the relation between the individual and the state. In 1795 – one year after Robespierre was executed for treason – he completed *The Positivity of the Christian Religion (PCR)*: an essay which, according to Lukács, sets out to expose Christianity as a religion of dogmatism. The fact that his criticism of “positivity” appears to be concentrated on the structural orthodoxies of the Roman Catholic church – namely the relation of man to God being established through priests and of worship being fulfilled through participation in sacraments organised by the church – suggests that the Ancien Régime was likely to be his intended target. Lukács (1975, pp.58-72), however, argues instead that Hegel was in fact expressing a broader view that the greed and self-centred character of the modern world is underwritten not only by the specific form that Christianity came to assume under the Ancien Régime, but by the historical fact that Christianity inherited the political, economic and legal structure of the Roman Empire, which in his view, collapsed due to a combination of its “atomistic” social foundations, the absence of a “higher” ethical substance, and the

state's dependence on justifying its legitimacy by force. The Catholic church, for Hegel, thus filled the *spiritual* vacuum that was arguably responsible for the prolonged social and moral decadence, and the *political* vacuum which necessitated the preservation of the pre-existing civil law tradition. In sum, the moral, "ascetic" disposition celebrated in Christianity and the pre-existing political and economic commitments to upholding property rights meet to create the modern, subject-centred society embodied by the social structure of the Ancien Régime, which he perceives as a regression from more ancient forms of freedom.

Hegel simplifies the ideological differences between modern freedom and classic freedom through a juxtaposition created out of the different ways that Christ and Socrates engaged with their interlocutors. Whereas Christ persuaded his interlocutors to locate their moral rationality privately through faith in accepting him as the son of God, Socrates did so through inviting his interlocutors to the symposium and refuting their scrutiny through what has come to be known as the 'Socratic', or 'dialectical method'. While Hegel acknowledges that Socrates's social approach does not extend to his actual moral system, he sees the approach itself to embody the notion that moral rationality is fostered not in some internal, private realm outside of society, but *through* society itself, viz through the social, collective participation in public life (Lukács, 1975). The juxtaposition between classic freedom (republican) and modern freedom (Christian), and of their intrinsically public and private natures, is made more explicit through the attention Hegel draws to the dialectical method itself. The method, in short, is entirely *non-positive*, in that it entails the assessing of a claim's validity against the very terms on which the claim is made. A claim is valid insofar as it remains non-positive, that is, when it is revealed as intelligible on its own terms. In turn, a claim is invalid, and *positive*, when the content is revealed to be in contradiction with the conditions that give rise to it. Positive claims then, are those which justify themselves effectively by force, or rather, without giving any respect to the conditions which allow them to emerge as claims. This, Lukács (1975) believes Hegel to argue, is precisely the manner in which Christ makes claim to the moral good and why the resultant despotism in his name – expressed by the Ancien Régime - should still be attributed to him.

In an earlier chapter, Lukács (1975, p. 18-29) hones in on Hegel's discussion about non-positive ("subjective") religion in *On the Prospects for a Folk Religion*. Here, Hegel

draws an emphatic distinction between subjective and “objective” religion, arguing that “the inherent and true worth of religion” lies in the former: where the practice of faith is interwoven in the spirit of the wider community. He refers to objective religion, in turn, as something of a dead rituality, where the practice of faith has a decaying effect on the subject and the spiritual health of that community, viz “[where] understanding and memory are the powers that do the work” rather than the active presence of the heart (Hegel, 1981, p.3). As such criticism can only apply to Christianity as the established religion of Europe, Lukács (1975, pp.3-88) seems to assume Hegel’s distinction to have been primarily influenced by cynicism towards the institutions that were functioning in the image of Christianity. Rousseau’s ideas, at the time, were on the front line of this discussion. In *Dedication to the Republic of Geneva*, Rousseau writes extremely favourably of the prospect of a state “proportionate to the limits of the human faculties” developing from all citizens being permanently subject to the whole community’s judgement:

[N]either the secret mechanisations of vice, nor the modesty of virtue, should be able to escape the notice and judgement of the public; and in which the pleasant custom of seeing and knowing one another should make the love of the country rather than a love of the citizens and its soil (Rousseau, 1920, pp. 116-117).

This can be interpreted as a declaration of hostility towards private interest itself. Rousseau’s chapter on “civil religion”, however, is most likely to have brought Hegel’s attention to what the former saw as Christianity’s individualistic and withdrawn essence:

Christianity [is] occupied solely with heavenly things; the country of the Christian is not of this world. He does his duty, indeed, but does it with profound indifference to the good or ill success of his cares. Provided he has nothing to reproach himself with, it matters little to him whether things go well or ill here on earth (Rousseau, 1920, p.77).

Rousseau’s anthropology is laid out in these two excerpts. In their unsullied condition, men are active citizens of their community and agents of its common cause before they are individuals with private interests; the socially transformative potential of mankind is realised when it has the freedom to posit itself as its own object, viz through the general will. However, with the modern world’s historical roots in the subject-centred legal structure of Rome, which Christianity now provides the moral justification for, it proliferates positive elements that resist, nullify and disfigure humankind’s true

social and rational potential, as well as confining it to a withdrawn, atomised existence (Lukács, 1975, pp.66-70). As such, what seems to attract Rousseau, and in turn the young Hegel, to the classic republics of antiquity was their potential to curtail the excesses of modern individualism by uniting their subjects under the authority of a higher moral and rational goal. For Rousseau, this higher moral goal is the general will. While Hegel has many reservations about Rousseau's idea of human freedom, which he would only make explicit in the Napoleonic era, he shares Rousseau's enthusiasm for the idea of self-determining, rational subjects positively identifying themselves with the rational structure of the state, whilst also exhibiting a much more intuitively convincing account of what a rational state amounts to.

As we will see, Christianity assumes a part of the rational state in the end. But at this point, Hegel's criticism of "positive Christianity" is strong enough to suggest, at times, that he was somewhat influenced by atheistic sentiments. The graphic imagery that Hegel uses in *PFR* to describe "objective religion", of which Catholicism is likely the target – namely that "[it] is the cabinet of the naturalist, full of insects he has killed, plants that are desiccated, animals stuffed or preserved in alcohol" (Hegel, 1984, pp.30-58)– also supports Lukács's (1975) suggestion that his disdain for the pervasive culture of self-interest was likely in response to the extent of the Ancien Régime economic and political mismanagement which he saw to be downstream of the "positive Christianity" of Roman Catholicism that needed to be overcome, *not* reconciled.

'Positivity' as Christ's method of communication

We must now turn our attention to what Hegel sees as the source of Christianity's intrinsic positivity. One could argue that if Christ had the absolute assurance of his immutable rationality through his status as God incarnate, then he could have avoided making any positive claims at all by using the Socratic method to address the contradictions within the dominant understanding of the Old Covenant. However, Hegel argues that this was not an option for Jesus because of the attitudes of the Jews towards him:

Jesus was compelled for his own purposes to speak a great deal about himself, about his own personality. He was induced to do this because there was only one way in which his people were accessible. They were most heartily convinced that they had received from God himself their entire polity and all their religious, political, and civil laws. This was their pride; this faith

cut short all speculations of their own; it was restricted solely to the study of the sacred sources, and it confined virtue to a blind obedience to these authoritarian commands. A teacher who intended to effect more for his people than the transmission of a new commentary on these commands and who wished to convince them of the inadequacy of a statutory ecclesiastical faith must of necessity have based his assertions on a like authority. To propose to appeal to reason alone would have meant the same thing as preaching to fish, because the Jews had no means of apprehending a challenge of that kind. To be sure, in recommending a moral disposition, he had the aid of the inextinguishable voice of the moral command in man and the voice of conscience; and this voice itself may have the effect of making an ecclesiastical faith less preponderant. But if the moral sense has entirely taken the direction of the ecclesiastical faith and is completely amalgamated with it, if this faith has got sole and complete mastery of the heart, and if all virtue is based on it alone so that a false virtue has been produced, then the teacher has no alternative save to oppose to it an equal authority, a divine one (Hegel, 1996, pp.75-76).

Hegel's explanation can be summarised as follows. Christ abstained from persevering with the Socratic method because it would not have worked: it is impossible to justify such an idea of the moral life to those who accept no divine authority except the word of God as it is transcribed in the Torah. As such, in the eyes of the Jews, reason is subordinate to the authority of faith, which means that if Christ was to succeed in objectifying his moral precepts, he could only do so through appealing to that same authority. It was for this reason, Hegel believes, that Christ *posited* himself as God incarnate: as a mere preacher he had no authority, but in introducing himself as the "King of the Jews" and as living evidence for God's mercy in the fallen world, he was able to make the case that accepting him as God incarnate was taking the same leap of faith that they had already taken as worshippers of Yahweh. In recommending a form that the moral sense should take, namely how individuals should conduct themselves in private life which they rightly prioritise, Christ was historically forced into giving the moral sense an abstract, objective form and established a new sect committed to the institutionalisation of this objective form in the religion of *Christianity*. Hegel then, is not accusing Christ of conspiring to give his moral precepts this autonomous, imperial character. His claim is rather that in order to be "acceptable and meaningful to the masses", Christ had to retain some of the positive elements from the previous tradition. It is these which give Christianity its intrinsically positive character. Shlomo Avineri offers a list of these elements in the following:

[M]iracles, the use of the dramatic elements in the Crucifixion; the divinity of Jesus' person; the Messianic Judaic tradition; the institutionalisation of the apostolic college; the command to propagate the faith even through pandering to popular superstition... and the hypostasis of the Last Supper into a 'substitute for the Judaic and Roman sacrificial feasts' (Avineri, 1972, p. 27).

Thus, Christianity's incapacity to retain itself in its pure, unfettered form, to Hegel, emerged from a combination of "Imperial Rome [putting] an end to the free republican spirit of classical antiquity" (Avineri, 1972, p.25), and two politically implicit principles which Christ posited in response to the conditions he had to work with. The first of these principles is the supposedly objective nature of his moral sense, which was used to justify the Roman legal system's retention based on prioritising the interests of the private person. Property ownership and the accumulation of wealth are both compatible extensions of this principle. The second lies in Christ's method of communication in affirming his moral precepts, their private residence and his existence as God incarnate as absolute truths. That is, the way in which he demanded of his followers to nurture their moral sense through his teachings in order to adhere to a moral system that supposedly stands over and above history itself. In describing the positive character of Christianity, Hegel is referring to the abstract metaphysics that Jesus posited as an absolute truth becoming autonomous and structurally purposive. Lukács summarises Hegel's theory on how this autonomous quality is acquired in the following:

[Christianity has become positive through] the process by which moral precepts intended only for the individual and envisaging only his perfection were extended in the course of time to entire societies. [There are] three phases in this development. There is, firstly, the teaching of Jesus and his relation to his immediate disciples. Secondly, we find the Christian sect that grew up after his execution and in which the seeds of the 'positivity' already implanted began to germinate, turning what was intended as the moral union of the first community of Christians into a religious sect with pronounced 'positive' elements. Finally, we see these doctrines spreading throughout society, Christianity as a dominant church in which the force of 'positivity' so alien and inimical to life acquire that fateful importance that will determine the entire history of the Middle Ages and modern times (Lukács, 1975, p.63).

Bearing in mind the internal problems in Germany at the time, most of which emerged from the absence of a unifying political entity (which produced the propensity for the bourgeois intelligentsia to view the developments in France as a blueprint for Germany's own unification), I believe that Lukács's interpretation of Hegel's convictions are plausible, as is his interpretation of the historical connection that Hegel

draws between the legal structure of Imperial Rome, the resultant positive characteristics of Christianity, and the Ancien Régime's status as the historical incarnation of the objective, moral sense that – in virtue of its “private” and withdrawn spiritual essence – was predestined to develop into a more pervasive societal problem (Lukács, 1975, pp. 3-16). Lukács's observations also allow us to see the form of Hegel's early concept-driven dialectic which, while beginning with a radical reconceptualisation of human freedom and of what moral action amounts to, reaches its logical conclusion in the subordination of the higher forms of life to the institution of self-interest

Potential complications with Lukács's account

As Lukács has done with Hegel, however, we must be wary not to withdraw historical interpretations from their appropriate contexts. With this in mind, it is necessary to attend to something that Lukács has not included in his review: the nature of Hegel's *personal* relationship with Christianity. Whilst he does not declare it explicitly, one could interpret Lukács to be presenting Hegel in this period as an *atheist* who had a change of heart in conjunction with his reluctant acceptance of Germany's future likely belonging to the Prussian monarchy. I cannot prove that Hegel was *not* an atheist in this phase and I cannot prove that Lukács is subtly trying to transmit this impression either. But given the strong Lutheran leanings that he expresses elsewhere, especially in the *Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate* (SOC), I believe it is equally plausible that he may have been engaging in a conscious act of political and intellectual pragmatism in the form of him diverting criticism away from Protestant denominations and towards the despotic behaviour of the Catholic institutions. This is because doing so would have allowed him to attain the approval of the Enlightened intelligentsia without explicitly betraying his Lutheran convictions. Another area of Lukács's review to tread cautiously with is the lack of attention he seems to give to something that Hegel himself addresses comprehensively in the *PCR*: the actual theological origins of the private, moral sense which Christ instantiated. Whilst Christ posited this moral sense as an *autonomous object* through establishing with proactive, ahistorical precepts, the contents of the moral law that is being ‘sensed’ has its origins in Judaism through the Mosaic law, which has “positive” roots of its own (as we will see in Chapter II).

But these reservations aside, we can use Lukács's overview to observe that much of the value Hegel saw in religion during this phase can be attributed to its potential to foster a "national character" (*Volkgeist*) through appeal to a certain notion of collective "spirit", with Christianity itself being little more than the *de facto* means by which the Ancien Régime would first, justify its legitimate right to rule, and second, justify flawed economic policies that benefited themselves but which led to property ownership and individual sustenance were freedoms that the overwhelming majority of the French population could not enjoy. Moreover, it is conceivable that Calonne's failure to avoid the economic crisis in 1789 had all but confirmed, for Hegel, that the feudal Ancient Régime to be unreformable to the third estate (Doyle, 1988). Furthermore, whilst the Enlightened intelligentsia in Paris were mostly protected from the effects of the Régime's despotism due to their general positions of affluence, like Hegel, they continued to see the "inward" trajectory as a social regression from the classic republics of antiquity that they believed Christianity had broken up. As already established, these classic republics, frequently assumed to be synonymous with the Greek polis, were societies based on individual-state identity: inconsistencies between individual freedom and collective freedom were not seen to exist (Constant, 1988). Far from being a romantic longing for a return to such archaic social structures, however, Rousseau and the Jacobins saw in these classic republics a progressive vision for France's future as a democratic, secular republic with liberty, equality and fraternity as the transcendent incarnations of the general will (Bertram, 2004). In such a society, individuals would not coexist in the pursuit of private interest, but positively thrive alongside one through active participation in the state's affairs. Excluding the secular aspects of the Jacobin movement, the early Hegel seemed to see rational potential in its commitment towards the *Volkgeist*, thus providing him with ideas with regards to Germany's prospective unification and modernisation.

The inextricable link between 'positivity' and 'reification'

We must now return to the central topic of the thesis: the phenomenon of reification, on the grounds that there is something significant that Lukács demonstrates only in passing: that Hegel's description of "positivity", and his own description of "reification" in *HCC*, seem to be inextricably linked. To understand the strength of this link, however, we need to be familiar with the two different but interrelated aspects of reification in Lukács's description. Rather appropriately, these aspects can be referred

to as “subjective” and “objective” reification (Jütten, 2010, p. 236). Lukács’s (2017, p. 83) renowned description of reification, viz “where a relation between two people takes on the character of a thing”, intends to refer to a subject’s psychological and epistemic withdrawal from the object of their labour and the social contents of their labour in the production process. Lukács refers to this as the adoption of a “contemplative stance” and understands it to be the result of the division of labour inherent in the capitalist mode of production. As the labourer is made to serve a constrained function under the control of a broader production process, which demands certain levels of output and efficiency for the company issuing his wage contract to be competitive, the nature of the labour is harsh. This ‘harshness’ has a numbing effect on the labourer’s experience as he is forced to adapt so as to not lose his wage contract. Through time, this harshness becomes ‘second nature’ to the labourer: he becomes more *machine-like* as the conditions he endures in the work environment become more *thing-like*. In turn, the labourer starts to see himself and his counterparts as cogs in the production machine and thus understands his own value on purely economic terms. By this point, the labourer’s experience adheres predominantly to the “phantom objectivity” which underwrites the rational nature of the production process under modern capitalism. This, in short, is the effect of *subjective* reification: ‘when a man’s activity becomes estranged from himself’ (Lukács, 2017, p.87)¹⁰.

Objective reification, in contrast, refers to this phantom objectivity’s presence at a societal and structural level. That is, rather than being transmitted from one person to another, this ghostly objectivity – otherwise described as an “invisible [force] that generate[s] [its] own power” (Lukács, 2017, p.87) – coerces these established institutions into alignment with this objectivity and then proceeds through them to exercise its power onto others, institutions and people alike. Lukács develops this aspect of reification directly from Weber’s concept of “rationalisation”, which refers to the disintegration of previous social structures and traditions in pursuit of restructuring society on the basis of strictly rational, calculated principles. These principles are, of course, those of modern capitalism, where private property, capital accumulation, the division of labour and the production of surplus value are sacrosanct. What Lukács (2017) has in mind here, historically speaking, are likely to be the considerable

¹⁰ Whilst Lukács bases the ‘contemplative stance’ on the effects of capitalist production on the subject’s experience, it can, of course, apply to any object or process they relate to.

changes similar to those seen in France when, since the dissolving of the Ancien Régime, the state underwent a radical structural transformation in accordance with the bourgeoisie's establishment as the ruling class following Napoleon Bonaparte's 1799 coup 'état. Whilst, with Hegel, he sees the bourgeoisie's revolt to be a necessary and purposive moment in the realisation of human freedom as a whole, Lukács does not go on to illustrate that this mysterious autonomy which he cites as 'reification' - whereby bourgeois rationale is decoupled so as to act *above* the agency of the bourgeoisie themselves - seems to be the same phenomenon as the "positivity" which Hegel traces to the inherent nature of Christianity¹¹.

The transition from the establishment of Christ's private sect to the kleptocracies that feudal institutions would become, and the later transition from the bourgeois state's establishment to capital's mysterious acquisition of a power to operate beyond the bourgeoisie's agency, follow the same historical pattern that Hegel has already described in the *PCR*. This pattern can be understood to occur in three stages:

1. A 'dead objectivity' is present, which produces the social desire for a visionary figure or group to emerge. These conditions, in the case of Christ's emergence, corresponded to the positive elements of Judaism, of which the longing for a Messianic figure was a part (Avineri, 1972, p. 14). In the following case, the bourgeoisie emerged as the revolutionary class through the combination of the Parisian urban workers' impoverishment and the Enlightened intelligentsia - the "men of letters" - who brought the Ancien Régime's kleptocratic nature and unjustified right to rule to the nation's attention¹².
2. The visionary figure or group does away with the dead objectivity by establishing itself as the *new object* of the state. In the case of Christianity, this happened in 754 A.D. when a deal between the Frankish Empire and the Church of Rome – known as *The Deal of Saint-Denis* – placed Roman Catholicism at the heart of continental Europe's resurrection from *The Dark Ages* (Hawes, 2018, pp. 28-32). In the latter case, as recently mentioned, Napoleon's coup d'état, put an end to the plebeian directorship of the Revolution. Five years later, in 1804, now emperor of France, Napoleon

¹¹ As a matter of fact, 'reification' is not mentioned in *TYH* once.

¹² The nobility's tax exemptions were subsidised by the profits produced by the mercantile class at the time which the latter judged to be unfair (Doyle, 1988, pp. 116-127).

reorganised property, contract and tort law around the abstraction of the *bourgeois individual* (Halperin, 1992) to effectively establish the bourgeoisie as the *de facto* ruling class.

3. The *new object* of the state, having been actualised in the constitution and been a part of a mutually transformative relationship with the *subject*, viz the visionary figure or group which provided the basis of the object's character, decouples itself from the subject's agency and proceeds to acquire an autonomous, ghostly objectivity. Put another way, the new object develops into a new dead objectivity, which gives rise to new forms of despotism. The expression of this stage with Christianity was the Ancien Régime's outdated notion of private law on the grounds of faith, which served to uphold the existing political structure. With the bourgeoisie, the forces of production combined with the sacrosanctity of the private person, viz the perpetual generation of surplus value, productive expansion, efficiency and wealth accumulation, have mysteriously risen to metaphysical dominance as self-sustaining ends-in-themselves. In both cases, the new object has transitioned into a new dead objectivity.

At stage 3, the latter case is what Lukács describes as the objective aspect of reification, viz when previous social structures and traditions are disintegrated by autonomous forces acting in virtue of rational, but now alien principles. As we can see from the three stages, however, Hegel and Lukács's historical descriptions of Christian positivity and reification respectively, seem to be referring to the same process: where institutions, having once undergone necessary structural change, become fettered again over time, but under different historical conditions. To be sure, Lukács acknowledges Hegel's seeming awareness of the institutional fettering's inevitability, but he never includes it in his discussion of reification. This, he reserves for the productive and economic forces of capitalism, but as we shall observe more closely in the following chapter, Hegel anticipates this development before Marx. All that we need to know for now, is that in order for Hegel to have anticipated this in the first place, there must be a theory of reification implicit in his philosophy of history, of which Christian positivity is a part. To identify this, we only need to take the historical context which we have just considered back to where we began in this chapter, when we observed what compelled Hegel to depart from Kant's epistemology in the first place:

his positing of experience as produced through abstract, ahistorical concepts which he could not justify.

Despite having lived many centuries apart, it is not difficult to observe that, in Hegel's view here, Christ and Kant are guilty of committing the same social and epistemological offence, viz of positing abstractions as absolute truths or, at the very best, positing historical truths as ahistorical truths. With Christ, it was his positing of himself as God incarnate along with the objective moral sense, which alienated the moral sense from itself. With Kant, it was his positing of the "transcendental unity of apperception" – comprised of concepts that stand above time – as the eternal condition for the possibility of experience and human progress. The essence of this social and epistemological offence, in short, is the instantiation of a fixed identity that proactively constrains the true potential of both of these things, and perhaps even destroys them. There can be no better example of this destructive character of fixed identification than when a fixed identity becomes institutionalised so as to become autonomous with actual force, as in the case of the private person under the Ancien Régime and the bourgeois individual under modern capitalism, both of which justified the damage they inflicted through appealing to their own forms of rationality. Of course, neither Christ nor Kant, as mere figures, deserve to be held morally responsible for either of these outcomes. But it is not controversial to say that they both inadvertently endorse belief systems that justify the negation or even outright destruction of particularity not in virtue of relieving the human spirit and the state of their fettered aspects (dead objectivity) in pursuit of freedom, but in virtue of an abstract universal which, like dead objectivity itself, is nothing other than a fixed identity or a process of fixed identification acting as a *totality*. This, in short, is what Hegel later refers to as the act of "striving": a purposive and aggressive form of practical conceptualism which understands the world only through the identities (the posited concepts) that it has presupposed.

This conceptualistic process, to Hegel, represents the objectification of Kant's faculty of the Understanding (*Verstand*) the form of rigid social structures and limited frameworks of knowledge. Rather than acquiring knowledge of the world dialectically, involving the "knower" seeing itself in the world it desires to know qua Reason (*Vernunft*), the Understanding imposes fixed identities onto the world so as to confine knowledge of the world to what it has already presupposed through fixed identification.

Objective knowledge of the world, on the terms of this epistemology, arises from the world being brought into line with knowledge that has already been *posited*. This contradiction, which Hegel (1977, pp. 297-363) later acknowledges that Enlightenment must overcome, consists of humankind being unable to be free of the domination it imposes on itself¹³. Although it would be uncharacteristic of Hegel to regard Christ himself as liable for the way in which the modern world has proceeded to develop, it is clear that he also acknowledges that the modern world's unrelenting strive towards the abstract universalism of individualism begins with Christ's introduction of the moral sense and acceptance of the pre-existing structure of Roman law. It is this which Hegel sees to find full expression in the in Kant's solipsist "soul sacked" subject, of which is both "a slave against a tyrant [and] a tyrant against slaves" (Lukács, 1975, p.156), in being bound to carry out duties that are estranged from the heart of the moral law. In any case, the concerns Hegel exhibits over the positive aspects of Christianity, in my view, clearly demonstrate an awareness of the subjective and objective aspects of reification, which would mean that he introduced the concept before either Lukács or Marx, albeit implicitly.

Thus, even though Hegel never referred to reification directly, I believe that his republican phase reveals him to have been aware of its presence from very early on. In the *PCR*, he seems to hint at the presence of reification in the Ancien Régime in presenting Christianity as something of a fixed identity that, in exercising its autonomous quality through the Catholic church, proactively suppresses the emergence of particularities so as to prevent modern society from progressing to its next historical phase. It is also clear at this point, through the social value he attributes to subjective religion and the essential role he grants to the state in the historical realisation of this social value, that he saw in the French republican movement - inspired by Rousseau's enthusiasm for the democratic structure of the classic state - potential for the supersession of Christianity's fettered components. What he perceives to have given the modern world its fettered character, or rather, its positive elements, is the original Christian sect's insistence on withdrawing the individual from public life and thus giving societal inequality a secondary importance, which resulted in Christianity developing into a "positive" sect. As touched upon earlier, Hegel's claim

¹³ It is this which Adorno and Horkheimer (1997) later diagnose as the Enlightenment's irresolvable contradiction.

it not that Christianity has never served a genuine historical purpose. In fact, he argues separately that Christianity's original institutionalisation following the decline of Roman life was historically necessary because its private source of morality had already disintegrated the republican freedom and virtue offered by the folk religions that preceded it (Lukács, 1975). His claim at the time of writing (1795), rather appears to be that this purpose has been served and, in effect, that its continuation can only be the result of reification.

With all this considered, we appear to have arrived at a controversial realisation: that in the young Hegel's implicit theory of reification, Jesus Christ is the figure with whom the phenomenon of reification in the dialectic of modernity begins. His assignment was to introduce the New Covenant by unveiling the true way that one should enact the Mosaic law. However, in Hegel's view, he was unable to do this because of the "positive" interpretation of the law that the Jews did not wish to renounce. Jesus was therefore compelled by practical reason to work within the confines of faith rather than reason to complete his assignment, hence why he presented himself as the Messiah that the Jews were anticipating. While it is overwhelmingly likely, in my view, that Hegel was a devout Christian himself, in the *PCR*, he appears to believe— at this point at least – that Christ's decision to affirm his moral sense in such a manner was what originally bound the Christian moral worldview to the institution of self-interest, thus giving it the reifying character that Lukács (2017) attributes to capitalism.

The French Revolution for Hegel in hindsight

In this opening chapter, I have attempted to show that a theory of reification can be identified in Hegel's early work on "positivity" and that when observed sufficiently, positivity and what Lukács conceptualises as reification are concerned with the same historical phenomenon. This is the phenomenon consisting of objectivity decoupling itself from its social origins so as to become 'dead', and then for this dead objectivity to transition into an autonomous totality, or system. I began by presenting the Hegelian paradigm from which Lukács worked to develop his theory of reification and then proceeded to present an analytic theory of reification based on Adorno's amendment of Hegel's epistemology. This amendment conceptualises reification as the process whereby knowledge and experience become confined to the fixed identity of an object, once that object has mysteriously gained independence from the subject of which

brought it into existence. Having revealed Kant's epistemology in the *CPR* to have its roots entirely in fixed identification, with the "transcendental unity of apperception" being comprised of ahistorical concepts which Kant cannot justify, which we know through Hegel's early criticism of his "soul sacked" moral system, we arrived at the following realisation: that the solipsism that Kant fails to escape from establishes his philosophy as the epistemic embodiment of the inherent presence of reification in the modern world's development.

In the following section, we turned to the historical events that profoundly influenced Hegel's turn against the Kantian epistemology. Our focus, helped by the insights of Lukács (1975), was confined to the *PCR* and parts of the *PFR*, both of which were written with a demonstrable awareness of the French Revolution's ongoing events and, to a lesser extent, the backward conditions in Germany. Having considered the specific socioeconomic conditions which Parisians endured under the Ancien Régime, the influence of the Enlightened intelligentsia, the political role which Christianity had in the Régime's establishment and Hegel's assessment of the fettered aspects from which its despotic character arose, we observed that what Hegel describes as "positivity" has a profound resemblance with the characteristics that Lukács attributes to the objective aspect of "reification". On a closer investigation, we observed them to be the same historical phenomenon occurring at different temporal stages in the modern world's development. We then closed through the bold claim that the "phantom objectivity" which positivity and reification have in common – a commonality which, extraordinarily, Lukács never makes – has its roots in Christ himself, whose proactivity in adapting to the historical conditions so as to instantiate his moral sense, gave Christian positivity an autonomous quality. Thus, despite the fact that this positivity, to Hegel, expressed itself most purely in the Roman Catholic church, he appears to reluctantly admit that the affirming of positivity is intrinsic to Christianity itself. Being that we have identified positivity and reification to be referring to the same historical phenomenon, we can interpret this as an implicit admission from Hegel that reification is an intrinsic feature of Christianity and thus the modern world itself as it develops in its image.

Whether or not a theory of reification as comprehensive as Lukács's can be extracted from Hegel's early theological writings alone is beyond the scope of this thesis. But in any case, through a careful reading of his *System der Sittlichkeit* introduced in *The*

Scientific Ways of Treating Natural Law (SNL), three years after Napoleon's coup d'état, it can be observed that a more sophisticated theory of reification starts to emerge. This a development that corresponds to the general evolution of Hegel in his Jena period (1801-06), when his enthusiasm for Napoleon, whom he saw as the historic agent of the modern idea's realisation, made explicit some deep-seated concerns he had for the concept of freedom being pursued by the Revolutionaries before Napoleon's intervention. Whilst Hegel upheld the belief that the overthrow of the Ancien Régime was a necessary moment in the realisation of modern freedom in France, with the deprived socioeconomic conditions arising directly from the Régime's fettered apparatus, he was disconcerted by the movement's romanticised longing over the Greek polis, which carried over from Rousseau. To be sure, Hegel reserves considerable praise for the polis, particularly for its capacity for efficient governance and foundations for military strength (Germany of which, in *The German Constitution*, he perceives to be without both) made possible through its basis on the complete identification of individual and state. Hegel finds such a centralised structure, however, to be undesirable for two main reasons: first, because the extensive size of the modern state makes it impractical and second, because it is out of sync with human history's present, self-conscious moment, of which individual freedom is an essential part. The latter observation from Hegel is particularly important for our purposes, as it means that from his perspective, a firmly ahistorical ideal, completely distinct from the spirit of the modern age, was at the heart of the Revolutionary movement before Napoleon's directorship. The organised reaction against the Régime then, corresponding to both the Enlightened men of letters and the socioeconomic conditions of the urban workers of whom were acting increasingly under the former's influence, was underwritten by positivity in another form. This leaves us with another striking conclusion to draw from Hegel, viz the Revolutionary movement, despite it necessarily emerging from a sequence of negative moments, acted in virtue of a reified notion of progress from the very beginning. From this, what likely enthused Hegel about Napoleon suddenly becomes clearer: a world-historical figure who was guiding the Revolution out of its own reified state and the modern world towards the next stage of its self-conscious realisation.

The more particular, political aspects which concerned Hegel about the Revolution, the 'atomistic' developments he describes in the *SNL*, were arguably expressed half-

a-century later by Tocqueville in *The Ancien Régime and the Revolution*. In this text, Tocqueville conducts an historical review of the conditions of pre-Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary France similar to Hegel's on the ideological foundations of Christianity and Lukács's on Hegel himself, during the latter's republican phase. What Tocqueville observes is as follows: whilst the Revolution was carried out in the image of rational principles – those of *liberté, égalité and fraternité* - these principles were unspecified abstractions pedalled by particular social classes in virtue of particular political interests rather than universal ones. The most powerful of these classes aside from the Monarchs themselves were the aforementioned merchant class, or *bourgeoisie* who, through their unbridled purchasing power and social capital in the public sphere, advocated for these rational principles so as to coerce the lower classes into destroying the structures that stood opposed to their intellectual and economic interests. It was a commonly held view, from the commercial bourgeoisie, in particular that the Régime were indulging in the prosperity that they had the natural right to enjoy for themselves (Doyle, 1988). This idea, of course, appears to appeal to the Lockean tradition of social contract theory rather than that of Rousseau, which is perhaps a symptom of the disjunction between the ideological roots of the plebeian faction and the interests of the dominant class that guided the Revolution. In any case, whilst Tocqueville was concerned with presenting an accurate account of the specific social conditions in pre-Revolutionary France rather than incorporating this account into a philosophy of history, his observations seem to support an implicit awareness of Hegel regarding the bourgeoisie, viz that they sought to facilitate a *reified consciousness* in using the *image* of a universal, as opposed to an *actual* universal, to advance the ends of their particular class. On the assumption that his review is indeed an adequate expression of what influenced Hegel in the SNL, it is plausible to credit the latter for observing that bourgeois reification was ongoing *before* the bourgeoisie were even established as the ruling class.

Addressed in the language of our introduction, the Revolution, posited as the abstract, fixed identities of *liberté, égalité and fraternité* led to positive elements remaining in place in spite of destruction of the religious core that provided the Régime's legitimacy. Tocqueville's particular view was that it was the bureaucratic structure of the newly established *administration* rather than the religious core of the Régime's legitimacy per se, which was responsible for the untenable socioeconomic conditions of France.

Irrespective of what Hegel's specific position on the administration would have been, the important link to draw between Hegel and Tocqueville, for our purposes, is their shared view that the Revolution's *fixation* on the abolition of religion and thus the myopic conjecture of religion as the entire source of the Régime's despotic character, was the reason why some fettered elements of the Régime remained. As a result of this oversight, the bureaucratic, centralised structure of the administration became subordinated to the interests of the bourgeoisie, which, in time, caused many of the structural problems to intensify so as to become more untenable for many of those who originally supported the Revolutionary cause (Tocqueville, 2008).

Contradictions between 'the cunning of reason' and 'reification'

Before moving on, I believe it is important to offer some clarification on the differences between Hegel and Rousseau, which applies even in the former's republican phase. In short, Hegel does not join Rousseau in seeing modern institutions as intrinsically hostile to human freedom. This is because he affords freedom an historical dimension that Rousseau does not that when unpacked, amounts to being a metaphysical and somewhat optimistic claim about the role of human beings, namely that they have an immediate and causal presence in the world *through* reason rather than reason being secondary to the will of human beings. Put more explicitly, reason is *purposive*, and it is through the free activity of humankind that this purposiveness is delivered, which means that all human activity – including everything that exists in the world as a whole – *must* be rational. Hegel then, predicates history as the temporal realisation of human potential, whereby societies progressively overcome their intrinsic structural tensions through the realisation of these tensions as false hypostatisations. History has theoretically served its purpose by the time humankind has realised its absolute freedom in virtue of the total reconciliation of universal and particular. So, whereas Rousseau appears to attribute an already present, *a priori* bundle of universals – not dissimilar to Kant - to his concept of human freedom, with the subject's particularity coming as a desirable and necessary sacrifice, Hegel – as implied by Adorno's amendment of his epistemology in our introduction to this chapter – grants particularity and thus self-interest an eternally necessary quality en route to these universals.

This, however, seems to reveal an irresolvable contradiction at the heart of the claim that a theory of reification is implicit in Hegel's philosophy of history: if all human activity

and all objects in the world are rational, then there seems to be no room for reification to exist. If reason is omnipresent and purposive, then it is implausible for an object to decouple itself and become autonomous unless the decoupling of the object is inscribed in reason itself, which means is that instead of having the potential to posit itself as absolute truth in the way that Hegel emphatically suggests with Christ, these positive moments – including the institutionalisation of Christian moral precepts – collapse into a monistic picture that prohibits the occurrence of any event except those which the picture has already determined. This seems to bring us to two possible conclusions: either that reification cannot exist because Hegel's monism renders it impossible, or that reification does actually have a purposive role to fulfil in the realisation of human freedom. The latter conclusion, to be sure, is a non-starter, being that reification has been consistently affirmed in the appropriate literature as a social pathology, 'pathology' of which presupposes the possibility to deviate from an essential form.

However, bearing Hegel's Lutheran convictions in mind, I believe there is a compelling but slightly ambitious reason to think that Hegel may have been subscribed to this view. It is now necessary for me to expand on a point made in passing at the beginning of this chapter: the similarity between Hegel's particular concerns with the positive elements of bourgeois society and the fatalistic historiography of Oswald Spengler. This reason, in short, is a certain belief he may have possessed, whether consciously or not, about the relationship between Christ¹⁴ and the specific nature of freedom's realisation in the world. To grasp this idea, it is essential to consider two areas within Christian theology that Hegel saw as particularly important and thus where he may have identified this fatalistic character. The *first* is in Christ's existence as God incarnate, *viz* as God and man at the same time, which he discussed extensively in the *PCR*. Whilst Hegel sees Christ as the self-conscious expression of *Geist*, and he who has made self-determination possible through bringing our existence as 'children of God' to our own attention (Houlgate, 1991, p. 199), Hegel's clear awareness of the social aspects of labour and alienation, demonstrated in the *Realphilosophie (RPH)* lectures (which it will be appropriate to discuss in more detail later on) (Avineri, 1971, pp. 87-98), suggests that he must have been acutely aware of the *masochism* engendered in the strive to apprehend the divine, when the inability to do so is already

¹⁴ This refers to both his life and his teachings.

predetermined as a consequence of *The Fall*. By extension, it seems plausible that he may have interpreted what we have so far described as 'reification' as a necessary cost of the freedom and self-determination which Christ made possible through his sacrifice. If so, it would be consistent with the idea that reification does indeed have a purposive role to fulfil in freedom's realisation.

Granted, this may sound like a fundamentally abstract claim, but it becomes less so when considering the *second* area where this masochistic and fatalistic character can be identified: in the Crucifixion itself. Needless to say, the symbolic meaning of Christ's crucifixion, as well as the events leading up to it, is possibly the most widely disputed subject in Christian theology. But the breadth of this dispute usually circulates around the striking passage when, in the height of his pain on the cross, Christ then endures the existential pain of divine abandonment and *self-doubt* to experience pain in the *absolute*:

And at the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachtani?', which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Matthew: 27: 46).

Given the evidence that Hegel saw Christ as the historic figure with whom the dialectic of modernity began - with autonomous positivity at its heart - the significance of this passage to Hegel's interpretation of how this positivity may express itself on assuming its more advanced form as a phantom objectivity, should not be underestimated. Despite the fact that it represents the Father turning away from Christ only *momentarily*, in virtue of the latter choosing to carry the burden of the world's sins on the Cross, a sacrifice which the Resurrection confirmed the Father to have accepted, with *this* acceptance confirming Christ to have had the authority on earth which he proclaimed, the fact that this self-doubt is overcome does not change the fact that it occurred. This means, consequently, that scepticism of the divine is a quality inscribed in the divine itself, and I believe it would be a mistake to separate this moment of doubt from the historical role Hegel may have intuited reification to have in the modern epoch.

In the school of panentheism which Hegel adopts in his mature philosophy of spirit, the existence of universality confirms the existence of a deity. Without transcendent intervention, there is no way in which certain principles can be universals and others not. For Hegel, whilst these universals are not *immediately* accessible to us, "the

cunning of reason” is guiding humankind towards them; not in a manner that demands blind obedience, but in the activities of individuals as free, self-determining beings. Christ, for the period that he was alive, was the incarnation of these universal principles on earth. His ascension, however, could be perceived to mean that the incarnate presence has departed, and in its place emerges a permanent wedge between the fallen world and the divine, viz one that can only be bridged through the third component of the Trinity: *The Holy Spirit*. The journey across this bridge, metaphorically speaking, could be interpreted as a meaningful, spiritual endeavour towards private solitude. But it could equally be interpreted as a life of perpetual self-harm, degradation and alienation from the social aspects which, to Hegel, reason also needs to work through. Being that life on the fallen world is, of course, finite, and on accepting Hegel’s postulate of reason’s purposiveness existing through the self-determination of each person, the purpose of which is to have these universals realised, Christians, in Hegel’s system, seem to be constrained to a spiritual strive to apprehend a universality whilst carrying the obligation – through *The Great Commission* – to affirm to themselves and others that this universality is something that cannot be apprehended by them in virtue of their existence as finite, fallen beings.

The endemic presence of masochism then, whereby worshippers are compelled to both emulate the life of a perfect being and remind themselves of their own fallen existence, can arguably be identified in Christianity without a closer reading into the Crucifixion. However, on engaging in a closer reading nonetheless, it does appear to strengthen the claim as to this endemic masochistic presence. This is not only because an act of self-harm assumes an essential part of the story’s symbolism, with Christ being executed by the very people who the Father had sent him to save, but because before this self-harm meets its ultimate end in Christ’s death, Christ *renounces himself* in casting doubt over the Father’s plan in the peak of his own suffering. In retaining our Hegelian lens, what this means is that scepticism of the divine, epistemic uncertainty (being that certainty is inseparable from a successful apprehension of the divine) and the alienation emerging directly from self-doubt, are not things reason is merely looking to surpass: they are things, specific to the modern epoch, which reason *must* actualise in order to surpass them.

Herein lies the implicit suggestion of fatalism in Hegel’s dialectic, which arguably grants reification a purposive quality: because self-doubt, uncertainty and alienation

constitute the *Zeitgeist* of the modern age - having been assembled in the image of Christ since the establishment of mediaeval Europe in the eighth century - the concepts of freedom and morality, as well as the institutions sworn to uphold them, have a definitively unstable basis. If so, it would make the eventual decay of these institutions, and the subsequent disintegration of the community those institutions serve an inevitability; one which we have observed to occur with the Ancien Régime and, in Hegel's view perhaps, we are observing in bourgeois society today. It is arguably in these historical developments that the intrinsic positivity of the Christian religion more purely expresses itself and why, in Hegel's dialectic, the effects which Marxists proceeded to attribute to 'reification', may be the necessary cost of being free on the terms which the modern world allows, and therefore which Hegel believes as an ahistorical quality of freedom itself. In Chapter IV, we will observe him to be referring especially to the emergence of the autonomous economic forces that Lukács attributes to the *objective* aspect of reification, and to the personal alienation the latter attributes to the *subjective* aspect *viz* the adoption of a "contemplative stance", as the developments which Hegel is *at a loss* to resolve and thus what he may have perceived as the self-conscious moment which modernity itself must subject itself to. But what we should be interested in, above all else, is where this endemic masochism inevitably takes modern consciousness: to creating its own certainty, *viz* positing a fixed identity of its own, and thus aggressively confining the world to the concepts that form a part of this identity, so as to attain the satisfaction that modernity promises, but perpetually denies. This question about whether Hegel has a fatalistic, eschatological view of the dialectic of modernity is what we turn to in Chapter II.

Chapter II:

Christianity's 'Atomism' Problem

Introduction

In closing to the previous chapter, with reference to Hegel's use of Christian theology, I entertained Lukács's suggestion that Hegel may be en route to recognising certain social pathologies such as the hardships endured by the Parisians in the build-up to the Revolution not as fetters to be burst, but as intrinsic features of the modern world. If this interpretation is correct, then it marks the beginning of a radical but gradual departure from his earlier position in the *PCR*, where he presents positivity in all cases as expressions of pending historical change in the rational march towards individual self-legislation. This is in virtue of Hegel appearing to change his mind on the subject of what individual freedom ultimately amounts to in the *SOC*.

In this essay, Hegel can be seen as abandoning his earlier intersubjective conception of reason in virtue of accepting a more holistic system whereby certain forms of positivity are interpreted as expressions of freedom which *cannot* and *should not* be overcome because they serve the ends of a broader historical and rational idea. As such, to *not* incorporate them would threaten the necessary conditions of freedom in some way. However, at the same time, Hegel doubles down on eliciting concerns over the prospect of these positive elements – all residing in what he describes as the *System of Reality* – proceeding to dominate the *System of Ethical Life*¹⁵. It should be noted that Hegel does not formally introduce these two systems alongside one another until the *SNL*. However, they feature implicitly in this essay in the form of the “Jewish” and “Christian” worlds, which bear – in all probability – uncoincidental similarities with Luther's differentiation between the “kingdom of God” and the “kingdom of the World” in *On Secular Authority* (1991). Whereas Luther's differentiation is between believers and non-believers, with secular governance being justified by the moral duty of the Christian to bring some order to the chaos of the fallen world (which involves protecting the right for one to disbelieve), Hegel's takes the form of an ongoing social tension between a system that recognises itself as serving nature (and by extension, God) as an expressive unity, *viz* the *System of Ethical Life*, and an abstract and artificial system

¹⁵ Unless stated otherwise, “ethical life” refers to Hegel's understanding of a rational and moral social structure, not the essay titled the “System of Ethical Life”. The term appears frequently throughout his works from Jena onwards and is inspired by the tranquillity of the Greek polis. When capitalised (Ethical Life), it refers to the given form in the related text. In my view, the clearest description of “Ethical Life” that Hegel offers can be found in the *SNL*, which I am directly referencing in this case.

that concerns itself only with economic needs and drives, viz the *System of Reality*. In my view, Hegel's contention that the System of Reality risks subsuming and thus transforming the nature of the *Volkgeist* is prophetic given the increasing pertinence of self-legislation as a legal ideal in the West's post-war evolution (Taylor, 1979) and suggests that Hegel has an intuitive awareness of the phenomenon of reification before Marx or Lukács.

I will offer a more precise exposition of Hegel's fully developed concept of reification when I turn to cover the *Differenzschrift* (DFZ) and the *SNL* in Chapter IV. Here, however, my focus will be to follow up on how we concluded in Chapter I by investigating the deeper and potentially unsettling theological reasons behind Hegel's new reconciliatory position on positivity, which has implications for his theory of reification. But before I address this, a matter related to Lukács commentary of Hegel mentioned in chapter I must be attended to first.

The reification of Hegel?

In perfect keeping with his own commitments within the Soviet Union, Lukács (1975, p.235) emphatically attempts to discredit Hegel's departure from his the more radical position espoused in the *PCR*: saying that Hegel's ideological shift was motivated by class interest, or more specifically, a choice to focus entirely on growing his own reputation amongst the German intelligentsia having been relieved him of any material concern from the inheritance of his recently-deceased father's estate.

In my view, Lukács's attempted delegitimisation of Hegel's maturing philosophy on the grounds of wealth is as surprising as it is implausible. The more plausible view, however, the one which scholarship seems to believe, is that Hegel was actually adapting to what was politically achievable for Germany - a claim somewhat verified by his later *Realpolitik* sympathies (Avineri, 1972; Beiser, 2005); the Machiavellian doctrine that in politics, the ends justify the means. Lukács's transcendent commitment to "diamat" in accordance with the Soviet party line, however, obligated him to conclude that such a level of inheritance must have had a 'reifying' effect on Hegel's thought. Regrettably, I cannot get immersed too deeply into the technical details of diamat, but I will attempt to present a brief overview.

Diamat: a brief overview

Diamat is best understood as Lenin's revision and ultimate departure from the version of dialectical materialism originally presented by Marx and Engels. It was precipitated *not* by Lenin setting out to dispute the technical details, but rather by him observing capitalism to have reached a stage beyond what Marx anticipates. In 'the immiseration thesis', Marx (2008) argues that through the combined increase of labour intensity, the worsening of working conditions and the dissolving of labour rights - all of which are done for the perpetual maximisation of surplus value - the proletariat is destined to be exploited to the point where the overthrow the ruling class becomes an undisputed rational necessity. Lenin (2011), however, observes capitalism to have somehow resisted this moment, proving Marx's thesis to have been wrong, and showing it to have progressed to a yet more advanced industrial stage, leading to corrupted trade unions controlling the proletariat from within. Whilst acknowledging the trade unions to have facilitated a class-consciousness among previously "backwards" workers, Lenin anticipated – contra to the Social Democrats - that their ongoing preoccupation with negotiating over wages and working conditions could bureaucratised them and disintegrate the revolutionary class in turn:

We cannot do without officials under capitalism, under the rule of the bourgeoisie. The proletariat is oppressed, the labouring masses are enslaved by capitalism. Under capitalism, democracy is narrowed, crushed, curtailed, mutilated by all the conditions of wage-slavery the poverty and misery of the masses. This is the reason, and the only reason, why the officials of our political organisations [i.e. the Mensheviks] and trade unions are corrupted – or rather tend to be corrupted – by the conditions of capitalism and betray a tendency to become bureaucrats, i.e. privileged persons divorced from the people and standing about the people (Lenin, 2011, p.96-7).

Even though this was a development thwarted in Russia through the overthrow of the post-Tsarist provisional government in 1917, it caught fire in what was to become a deeper integrated capitalist Western world. Diamat is the geopolitical response to these imperial forces born out of Soviet leaders making economic and political adjustments to counteract both the growth of the West and the decline of the proletariat itself within the constitutive nations (Marcuse, 1958, p.7). As much as orthodox Marxists may abhor the idea, Deng Xiaoping's engendering of private competition within China's publicly owned industry and the opening up of its markets to competing economic powers (Harvey, 2007, pp.120-51) is perfectly consistent with the Soviet

Marxist doctrine, because, like the Soviets themselves, China had to grow its economy to deter the military threat of the growing American military-industrial complex.

However, despite Lukács's best efforts to toe the party line, *TYH* still disgruntled the Soviets because the idealistic remnants within the dialectic that he praised and credited to Hegel in his Berne phase had the consequence of implying that the Soviet regime itself still had aspects of capitalist reification to overcome, therefore initiating a major reinterpretation of the theory of reification in *HCC*. Indeed, there is nothing to suggest that Lukács believed himself to be writing in opposition to diamat or dialectical materialism, nor admitting to there being any theoretical differences between the two. But he was fundamentally correct to allude to an error¹⁶ on the party's part: namely that the famous "second stage" of the revolution, marking the transition from Bolshevik controlled socialism to communism – the point by which the state was supposed to have "withered away"- somehow fell by the wayside, and by extension, that the autonomous forces of production were now in the process of liberating themselves from the fetters of the first. The managerial class under Stalin's directorship, however, in actuality, established itself as the arbiters of the proletariat's destiny without stating it officially. Lukács was sent into exile for alluding to this simple fact about the original dialectical materialism and whilst eventually being allowed to return, he was only permitted to work under strict supervision. Originally published in 1938, *TYH* is one of these highly censored texts, so the scholarship on Hegel has to be interpreted with considerable caution.

However, whether this has anything to do with political coercion or not, Lukács overlooks something more fundamental: the well-observed fact that Hegel's criticism of the Christian faith is directed not of Christianity in-and-for-itself, but almost entirely at the institutionalised (specifically Catholic) forms pertaining from the Middle Ages following the collapse of the Roman world. As opposed to changing his mind in virtue of his private ambitions alone as Lukács appears to suggest in *TYH*, I believe it to be more plausible – given that he studied theology alongside Friedrich Hölderlin at the University of Tübingen that Hegel has always been somewhat influenced by the arbiter of the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther, but to varying degrees across his published work. This can be observed from the fact that his criticism in the *PCR* and

¹⁶The fact he saw this as an error rather than an unjustified centralisation of power is a genuine expression of his naivete.

SOC is directed less at Christ as a figure and more at the specific, institutionalised forms his moral teachings assume. In summary, rather than being a complete U-turn from his earlier republican position, his progressive warming to Christianity is more likely to be a natural development of what he perceived as its inseparability from rational necessity¹⁷.

Transition towards the ‘Pure Concept’

The SOC, completed in 1798 during Hegel's period in Frankfurt, is arguably the earliest expression of his progressive move towards the reconciliation of positivity, his philosophy of the “pure concept” (known more generally as “absolute idealism”), and the first time he openly identifies Christianity as the religion that provides and upholds the spiritual tenets to the Germanic world. The Germanic world is later established as the “end of history”, despite being far from the same version advocated by Francis Fukuyama (1989) in an article of the same name in the wake of the Soviet Union’s collapse.

Hegel never intended to have the SOC published. However, it is to the considerable benefit to Hegelian scholarship today that it was, for it entails his first implicit admission that the radical autonomy endorsed in the *PCR* is incompatible with the idea of identifying with an “expressive unity” that originally attracted some romantic thinkers (such as Hölderlin) to Rousseau and thus their early support of the French Revolution (Taylor, 1979, pp. 1-66). In any case, my aim in this short section is to show how Hegel, in this very essay, establishes the very foundations about human freedom and the role of the state which he proceeds to develop throughout his Jena period and beyond. I will do so with a few brief observations of how, according to Hegel, the idea of Christian “love” or fellowship is incapable of “satisfying the modern principle of abstract reasoning and achieving a true reconciliation between itself and its world” (Ormiston, 2002, pp.500-501). His observations mark the beginning of Hegel’s more emphatic presentation of Christianity as the historical arbiter of “unity-in-difference” (Beiser, 2005), which the “Germanic world” has as its end, and ultimately his

¹⁷ Hegel also appears to have incorporated elements of Luther’s later works, which could lead one to conclude that he attributes both sides of the dialectical tension to the Jews’ rejection of Jesus as the Messiah.

engagement with more specific issues about the modern world that could be perceived as matters of reification.

Many of the clues regarding the fate of Christianity, referring specifically to the unfolding of its rational purpose in the furtherance of *Geist*, can be identified in Hegel's treatment of "love", which takes centre stage in the third part titled *The Moral Teaching of Jesus: Love as the Transcendence of Penal Justice and The Reconciliation of Fate*. This form of love can be interpreted as an emotive manifestation among the early followers of Jesus who desired a form of spiritual shelter from the materialistic banalities and indulgent features of Roman life whilst anticipating the arrival of a Messiah. Rather than emerging from a natural drive, as with romantic love, the love that Hegel talks about here involves a higher unity much like the "happy state" attained by the objective identification of individual and state in the Greek *polis*; the difference naturally being that the followers' identification is with Jesus as the objective expression of God alongside the collective recognition of themselves as inwardly spiritualised by the Holy Spirit. This secluded sense of communal love is what Hegel essentially regards as the original and *pure* spirit of Christianity. However, because of the logic inscribed in the religion itself, he proceeds to openly acknowledge that this higher "happy state" is not one that assumes a place in the Kingdom of Ends (Houlgate, 1991, pp. 176-232). This is where the subject of "fate" comes in for Christianity, and thus when Hegel is forced to contend with the irreconcilability of collectivised Platonic love (if it is accurate to call it 'Platonic') and the modern principle of self-legislation (Taylor, 1979, pp. 1-66).

The Fate of Judaism

Before explaining why the spirit of Christianity is destined to become superfluous at some point during the Christian world's realisation, Hegel (1996) attempts to articulate the spirit of its dialectical precursor: *Judaism*. With reference to *Abraham* as "the true progenitor of the Jews" (Hegel, 1996, p.182) who he believes to have snapped the bonds of communal love under God's instruction, Noah, who saved himself by merely obeying God in order that he would be spared during the flood, and Nimrod, the great-grandson of Noah who commissioned the construction of the Tower of Babel and set himself the task of taming the hostile power of nature and challenging the divinity of God himself, Hegel argues in this opening chapter – *The Spirit of Judaism* - that the

Jewish world is one of positivity par excellence. On another reading, one could go as far as judging Hegel to be presenting Judaism and positivity as synonymous. Whatever the accepted interpretation, the common denominator between how these protagonists in the Old Testament are presented is the presupposed absolute separation of God and man, of which collapses “being” into permanent servitude to an incorporeal cosmic substance that is eternally cut off from. Hegel exhibits the hypostatized nature of this relation with God from the position of Abraham:

The whole world Abraham regarded as simply his opposite; if he did not take it to be a nullity, he looked on it as sustained by the God who was alien to it. Nothing in nature was supposed to have any part in God; everything was simply under God’s mastery. Abraham, as the opposite of the whole world, could have had no higher mode of being than that of the other term in the opposition, and thus he likewise was supported by God. Moreover, it was through God alone that Abraham came into a mediate relation with the world, the only kind of link with the world possible for him. His Ideal subjugated the world to him, gave him as much of the world as he needed, and put him in security against the rest (Hegel, 1996b, pp- 186-7).

Immediately after this passage, Hegel proceeds to argue that Abraham’s devotion to this God of infinite “Otherness” is enough for it to completely transgress his ability to love, hence his ultimate willingness to sacrifice his son, Isaac, under the instruction of the “Ideal” alone. Hegel’s argument is that absolutely subordinating oneself to the instruction of a pure transcendent ideal amounts to nothing other than an absolutely positive act, and it was this presence of tyrannical emptiness within the Jewish world, to Hegel, that historically necessitated the physical presence of God on earth, *viz* Jesus Christ, whose purpose was to reunite the fallen, corporeal world with the incorporeality of divine perfection. Jesus himself shows how this is done in the *Sermon on the Mount*, which Hegel contrasts in the following chapter with the positive Mosaic law:

The more thoroughgoing was the dependence of the Jews on their laws, the greater their obstinacy was bound to be when they met with opposition in the one field where they could still have a will of their own, namely, in their worship. The lightheartedness with which they let themselves be corrupted, let themselves become untrue to their faith, when what was alien to their faith approached them without hostility at times when their needs had been met and their miserable appetite satisfied, was parallel to the stubbornness with which they fought for their worship when it was attacked. They struggled for it like men in despair; they were even capable, in battling for it, of offending against its commands (e.g., the celebration of the Sabbath), though no force could have made them consciously transgress them at another’s order. And since life

was so maltreated in them, since nothing in them was left undominated, nothing sacrosanct, their action became the most impious fury, the wildest fanaticism (Hegel, 1996b, p. 204).

Aside from the obvious potential consequences of being willing to commit any act that an abstract authority demands, the reader would be quite right to wonder how the transcendent presupposition of God and man as containing a relation of absolute “otherness”, or *non-identity*, translates practically to endemic corruption, faithlessness and wickedness. An overview of Hegel’s theological reasoning, I believe, could be understood in the following way. Because of the extent of the Jews’ historical persecution in Egypt under the authority of the Pharaoh, which only intensified as Moses attempted to alleviate it from within, he revolted in a contemporaneous moment of rage (Exodus: 2:11-22) which led to his ultimate exile from Egypt altogether. It was only twenty years after living a life of solitude that God instructed Moses to return, so as to attempt to reason with the Pharaoh again over their continued persecution (Exodus: 4:18-7:7). The failure of this negotiation meant that the Jews could only be freed after God asserted his might through the Ten Plagues (Exodus: 7:14- 11: 1-12:36). Following this event, they left to live under Moses’ auspices, but given that he was reduced to a life of communal detachment in the period between his exile and God’s command for him to return, there was no spirit nor established institutions, laws and practices to mediate their integration on arrival. To paraphrase Hegel directly: the liberator had to become the lawgiver, and so the laws themselves – constituting the Mosaic Law – were derived from the “spirit inherited from [the Egyptian] forefathers”, viz “the infinite Object”. Or to put it in other words: the laws were derived from the absolute incorporeality of God, which Moses now had to imprint in his new state.

One would be correct to assert that Jesus committed the same offence by establishing a sect (or fellowship) that was purposely secluded from Roman society. However, Hegel is arguing that there is still a fundamental difference: Jesus is presented as God incarnate in the New Testament, whereas Moses in the Old Testament is merely a passive agent of God’s will in the same way as Abraham. So, in short, whilst there is indeed positivity involved in Jesus’s praxis, emerging from a combination of the social conditions he had to work with and his physical form as a man, he is still serving as an agent of dialectical reason (*Vernunft*) in enabling the moral postulates of the Mosaic law to be internalised through self-knowledge. Moses, however, in Hegel’s view, imposes the postulates in a top-down manner to be obeyed as laws without question

alike to Islamic Shariah law (a point applying to the “Oriental” world in general), with the customs of the Egyptian society they escaped from still existing as the political blueprint. As such, the Mosaic postulates are absolutely ahistorical, and as absolutely separated from the conditions through which the postulates emerged, the laws and resultant society and culture, to Hegel, are established on absolutely positive grounds.

Hegel’s extensive, yet fragmentary description of the long-term effect that this would have on the established society and its people, which I will now attempt to summarise, is where he attempts to identify the logical connections between the Jews’ longing for an Abrahamic, world-conquering messiah, the presupposed absolute separation of God and man, the unprecedented encroachment of instrumental rationality on how institutions function, and the resultant atomisation of life in its entirety. This is what he perceives as the “fate” of Judaism: the eternal subjugation to “an infinite power which they set over against themselves and could never conquer”. Moreover, Hegel argues they will continue to be conquered, “until they appease it by the beauty and so annul it by reconciliation”, or in other words, return to God by accepting Jesus as the Messiah. Alas, it would be no exaggeration to describe Hegel’s interpretation of the spirit of Judaism as ‘the absolute antithesis of the moral life’, viz one the purposively emasculates, encourages the abdication of freedom, and in fact, identifies ‘freedom’ directly with humanity’s colonisation at the hands of totally abstract notions of reason (*Verstand*). It is for these reasons, perhaps, that Hegel reaches the conclusion that Judaism engenders a *Volkgeist* of inhumanity, unfreedom, total contempt for love itself, to the point that it is absolutely incapable of preserving the moral tenets inscribed in the Mosaic law itself:

The great tragedy of the Jewish people is no Greek tragedy; it can rouse neither terror nor pity, for both of these arise only out of the fate which follows from the inevitable slip of a beautiful character; it can arouse horror alone. The fate of the Jewish people is the fate of Macbeth who stepped out of nature itself, clung to alien Beings, and so in their service had to trample and slay everything holy in human nature, had at last to be forsaken by his gods (since these were objects and he their slave) and be dashed to pieces on his faith itself (Hegel, 1996, pp. 204-5)

Regrettably, I do not have the space to sufficiently assess the accuracies or inaccuracies involved in the historical claims Hegel makes about Judaism and the Jews themselves. I can, however, briefly point to the obvious theoretical problems with his claim that the Jewish spirit is one of “servitude” and “submission”, not least because

the Platonic metaphysics (2007) is a theological non-sequitur. Conceptualising God as a definitively sublime, incorporeal substance of which man can only stand in eternal awe, rather than setting a precedent for engaging with the world *qua* disfiguration, sets a precedent for the opposite interpretation: one consistent with the position of Adorno and Horkheimer in *DOE* (1997), where any intent to collapse the world into abstract concepts is treated with scepticism in virtue of the potential to needlessly constrain the transformative potential of the subject-world relation¹⁸. There is also the contradiction involved in the Jewish world being rooted on “servitude” and Hegel’s other claim that they somehow have the compulsion to subordinate everything outside of it. Indeed, Hegel could attempt to evade this charge by referring to what he sees as the reconciliatory potential of Christianity: saying that freedom exercised through *Verstand* is not *real* freedom. But even if we accept this as true, the underlying assumption of absolute positivity being an intrinsic feature of the Jewish spirit, rather than a general rule about exiled peoples in general, is still not sufficiently explained.

For this reason, before proceeding to discuss the likeness between the phenomenon of reification and the Spirit of Judaism further, I would encourage the reader not to take his characterisation of the Jewish spirit too seriously or cynically. It is no coincidence that he ceases to develop this link between Judaism and absolute positivity beyond the *SOC*¹⁹. However, I hope to show that there is still something profound and philosophically substantive to take from Hegel’s inferences towards two irreconcilable metaphysical totalities, and the destructive fate that this irreconcilable relationship ensues. This is because without seemingly realising it himself, Hegel seems unable to resist concluding that the fate of the Christian world is for it to be consumed by its own philosophy of freedom.

The Fate of Christianity

In this section, the historical role that Hegel interprets Christ to have could not be more significant. He is the beginning of the end of history: the man who inherits the divine task of reconciling the ill-fated Jewish world with the “kingdom of ends”, *viz* the

¹⁸ One could interpret God’s destruction of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1–9) as theological evidence of the disfiguration of the idea of God and the infinite subjugation of natural world both amounting to moral wrongs in the Judaic worldview.

¹⁹ In fact, during his time at the University of Berlin, Hegel is reported to have been disturbed by the growing antisemitic sentiment which he observed within the *Burschenschaft* movement (Avineri, 1973).

concrete universals of God himself. In locating moral action in *orthopraxis*, in total servitude to God's directive, Abraham, in Hegel's eyes, laid the groundwork for the perpetual digression from substantive moral action and towards the mechanical disfigurement of love, life and the world in its entirety. Christ's task then, is to complete the Covenant: to direct mankind towards the realisation of this kingdom of ends by demonstrating that *being* belongs essentially in the *becoming*. His task is, in other words, is to show that self-awareness and the capacity for reflection are necessary conditions for substantive freedom and moral agency; it is for this reason, Hegel contends, that it was necessary for Christ to demonstrate in the *Sermon on the Mount* why laws need to be continuously stripped of their legal form to avoid becoming superfluous:

The spirit of Jesus, a spirit raised above morality, is visible, directly attacking laws, in the Sermon on the Mount, which is an attempt, elaborated in numerous examples, to strip the laws of legality, of their legal form. The Sermon does not teach reverence for the laws; on the contrary, it exhibits that which fulfils the law but annuls it as law and so is something higher than obedience to law and makes law superfluous (Hegel, 1996, pp. 212).

The separation of law and morality then, is stated as a necessary condition for this location of being in the becoming. It is upon this realisation that Hegel accepts it as part of his absolute idea. While he refers to this general process as "life" in the essay it is recognised more generally as 'blessedness' among Christian theologians. Whatever the given name, what this amounts to arguably constitutes Christ's most profound ethical and ontological contribution to the Western world today, which he does by giving a logical explanation for why merely obeying every one of the 613 commandments, as the Mosaic law requests, is not enough to act in accordance with God's will. Christ's argument is that while it is necessary to enact these laws, and that there are indeed no scenarios in which the taking of life, adultery or stealing can be justified, if moral action merely consists in following divine directives alone, then morality itself amounts to a formal, "lifeless" and ultimately *amoral* act because there lacks the input of human conscience.

The Mosaic law, for Christ and Hegel, is incomplete without the input of conscience. Although the laws *are* the right laws – a point further affirmed by his dialogue with the Pharisees – clearly, something more is required for an action to be moral. This "something more" is none other than the *feeling* of conscience, or as Luther describes

it, the “heart”. In short, to truly act in virtue of the good, and thus in accordance with the divine law in its totality, one must have the self-knowledge to know that these are good laws to act on. This involves not just recognising them as good laws, but retaining the propensity to act on them even in the hypothetical case where a person is punished for doing so:

They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them (Romans 2:15).

Thus, Christ’s purpose is to supply Judaism with this missing ingredient, the lack of which – according to Hegel – underwrites its perception of faith as “endless bondage”:

Over against commands which required a bare service of the Lord, a direct slavery, an obedience without joy, without pleasure or love, i.e. the commands in connection with the service of God, Jesus set their precise opposite, a human urge and so a human need. Religious practice is the most holy, the most beautiful, of all things; it is our endeavour to unify the discords necessitated by our development and our attempt to exhibit that unification in the ideal as fully existent, as no longer opposed to reality, and thus to express and confirm it in a deed. It follows that, if that spirit of beauty be lacking in religious actions, they are the most empty of all; they are the most senseless bondage, demanding a consciousness of one’s own annihilation, or deeds in which man expresses his nullity, his passivity. The satisfaction of the commonest human want rises superior to actions like these, because there lies directly in such a want the sensing or the preserving of a human being, no matter how empty his being may be” (Hegel, 1996, pp.206-7).

Hegel seems to accept the categorical imperative, viz “to act in a way that one would will as a universal law” as the formal exposition of Christ’s argument and ultimate historical purpose. However, as he (and Christ) has already demonstrated, understanding the moral law as something that must be done for the sake of its persistence comes with unwanted implications. The originating notion of “love thy neighbour as thyself” (Matthew, 12:13), on which the logic of the categorical imperative is based, is inadequate for this task because it amounts to a formal rule with no reference to the contents (or the “heart”) of that law which the rule is intended to apprehend. That said, more detrimental than this – something which becomes clearer in his later critiques of Fichte – is the implicit positing of the “pure ego” as *sacrosanct* contained within the notion that one can absolutely know a universal law through intuition and reflection. Essentially, if a universal law is indeed knowable in this way, the universality itself, alongside the individual positing it as such, appears to be

infinitely separate from God and nature, thus deductively creating the practical need for all rational beings with intuitive and reflective capacities to shape the contents of universality itself. As such, Lukács's (1975, p. 183) observation that Hegel's religious convictions at this point stand at odds with "his belief in the progress of history" seems to be correct: he appears unable to resist the logical fact that practically enabling the conditions for the "moral life" that Christ promotes involves first accepting the permanent role that reflection and intellectualisation have in the realisation of these universal principles, hence the evolution of his system into one that includes the rational characteristics a more subject-centred reason. It is for this reason, in my view, that Hegel can be interpreted as seeing the problem of atomism – which he later reveals as the incarnation of Fichte's philosophy in the *DFZ* – as inscribed in the "fate of Christianity" as much as it was in the Roman world from which it inherited its "private" character. However, as I will attempt to demonstrate, Christianity's self-contained rationality, on Hegel's understanding, seems to place Christianity absolutely at odds with itself in a way that could lead one to take the view that the Christian world's negation is a rational and necessary part of the "progress of history".

Hegel begins this third and final section, *The Fate of Jesus and His Church*, by renewing the contention with the Jews that he originally raised in the *PCR*, viz their rejection of Christ as "the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (John 14:6) of the laws they enact orthopraxically. Referring primarily to the events leading up to the Crucifixion, Hegel argues that the state – having succumbed to the Jewish spirit's purposive subjugation of the world to abstractions – has become inadvertently hostile to the kingdom of ends that it is Christ's purpose to realise. Importantly, however, Hegel recognises Christ to have been aware of this intensifying hostility towards him, which gives us the first glimpse of the "pure concept":

The Kingdom of God is not of this world, only it makes a great difference for that Kingdom whether this world is actually present in opposition to it, or whether its opposition does not exist but is only a possibility. The former was in fact the case, and it was with full knowledge of this that Jesus suffered at the hands of the state (Hegel, 1996b, p. 284).

On this point about having "full knowledge" of his fate, Hegel contradicts himself multiple times. In excerpts such as the above, he seems to claim that the resistance is necessary and accords with God's plan. Elsewhere, however, he alludes to an "unfulfilled nature" that Christ had to accept because of his "imprisonment under the

power of Judaism”, implying that the Jews thwarted God’s plan which otherwise would have allowed Christ to marry, have children, and enjoy life as a fellow citizen. Overruling God is impossible by Hegel’s own logic: Christ cannot simultaneously *know* and *not know* his fate, and this is most likely why he proceeded to develop the former view rather than the latter, beginning with this essay.

Having implicitly accepted this version, Hegel, with considerable reluctance, now attempts to bring our attention to the superfluosness of Christian love by taking us through one particular event where Christ enacts the moral disposition taught in the Sermon on the Mount whilst his existence as God incarnate is questioned. The event of concern is explained in Matthew 22:15, where on the question of whether the Imperial Tax should be paid, Christ answers: “Render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s”. The question of whether taxes should be paid to Caesar was asked by the Pharisees on the assumption of Christ’s sincerity about his proclaimed existence as God incarnate, in virtue of the claim consistent with Jewish theology that obeying Roman law could in some way be in violation of the law of God. Hegel interprets the passive nature of Christ’s answer, viz “[g]ive therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesars and to God the things that are God’s” (shortly after calling them “hypocrites” for asking him), to be an expression of the psychological fatigue and frustration which emerged from the persecution of his followers and his own failure to persuade the Pharisees of the actual requirements to act in accordance with God’s will:

The indifference with which his call was received soon turned into hatred. The effect of this hatred on him was an ever-increasing bitterness against his age and his people, especially against those in whom the spirit of his nation lived at its strongest and, most passionate, against the Pharisees and the leader of the people (Hegel, 1996b, p. 283).

Hegel interprets Christ’s indifferent attitude at this point to not make his answer any less significant. It first historically establishes the human law (abstract right) and the divine law (morality) as concrete universals within the Trinitarian idea, assuming mature forms in the *Philosophy of Right (POR)* (1991). And second, more importantly for our present purposes, it suggests that the loving bond enjoyed among the earliest Christian fellowship - who knowingly isolated themselves from the Romans – was unsustainable from the very beginning²⁰. To Hegel, the existence of this communal

²⁰ The clue to this is in the dialectical tension between the positive rationality of the Jewish spirit and the reflective moral disposition Christ demonstrates in the Sermon on the Mount. In addition to the

bond once had a necessary and purposive existence as a means of shelter and relief from the Roman culture of excess, materialism and debauchery. However, the totality grew so formidable in influence that it pushed the earliest Christians into complete estrangement, thus causing them to overlook the objective components required to evolve Christianity in a way which would enable it to defend its moral precepts against instrumental reason. This is a worrying development for Hegel, because a religion abstracted from the “whole” is no religion at all:

This love is a divine spirit, but it still falls short of religion. To become religion, it must manifest itself must manifest itself in an objective form. A feeling, something subjective [must] be fused with the universal...[T]he need to unite subject with object, to unite feeling, and feeling's demand for objects, with the intellect, to unite them is something beautiful, in a god, by means of fancy, is the supreme need of the human spirit and the urge to religion. This urge of the Christian community [could not be satisfied] because in their God there could have been no more than [common] feeling. In the God of the world all beings are united (Hegel, 1996b, p.289).

Due to the “positive” and “negative” characteristics of the first Christian sect, Christ and his followers could not escape being backed into a corner. The *negative* aspect, to Hegel, consists in their attempted escape from the totality of instrumental reason. The *positive* aspect emerged from this *negativity*: giving rise to a union of shared love and belonging among the followers, all of whom identified with the expressive unity of Christ. In the *PCR*, this nonconceptual mode of being – commonly associated with romanticism – to Hegel, represented the spiritual peak of Christian worship. However, he now recognises this as unfit for the ends of practical reason: it is useless to completely resist the encroachment of instrumental rationality, and to ignore the inevitably that striving for a conceptual understanding of Christianity, attainable through the heart and the intellect combined, is the closest future Christians will have to filling the void left by Christ himself.

Hegel acknowledges this as a progressive development: for all Christ's efforts to give life to the Mosaic law, it had the effect of trapping his followers into a herd mentality, hence why Hegel refers to them as “[people who acted like] sheep without a shepherd”

Pharisees' question about taxation that Hegel himself refers to, the tension can be seen to intensify in Christ's questioning in the High Priest's custody, the trial conducted by Pontius Pilate (John 18:28-40) and lastly his torturing by the soldiers up to the point that he was crucified. In all these situations, Christ is presented as being passive in the face of threat and slander, but nonetheless remaining true to his word. His followers, however, namely Judas and Peter, capitulate to self-interest and the threat of state coercion respectively. In the meantime, Christ's persecution, or determinate negation, is shown to progressively intensify as he honours God's will.

(p.291) after his ascension. He judged such sheepish instincts to emerge from the fact that the meaning of their lives circulated around worshipping Christ in body and spirit (in virtue of his physical presence) which necessitated their absolute cut off from the outside world. Following his return to heaven, the earliest Christians were thrown back into what Hegel (1977) later describes as “unhappy consciousness”, *viz* a state defined by its place as absolutely separate from God. What this means, is that in setting to the task of *The Great Commission*, they had to accept this unhappy state, which included making use of an innate *faculty* they had been knowingly resisting in order to sustain their nonconceptual unity with God²¹. This *task*, Hegel argues, is the reconciliation of spirit and body; the reconciliation of the fallen world with the divine world, and the *faculty* is none other than the very thing that Christ exemplifies as the only medium through which blessedness can be earned in his absence: the *intellect*, so as to give Christianity eternal life as a conceptual form. In order to survive, it must therefore reconcile itself with the Understanding (*Verstand*) in a way that produces and preserves the conditions for the “moral life”. For Hegel, this necessitates departing from the foundations of Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie*, which inspired his somewhat romantic vision of Christian freedom in the *PCR*, so as to develop a system with the self-positing “ego” as the founding principle of knowledge. However, doing so has potentially greater theoretical consequences than Hegel seems to recognise. To explain why, we have to return to the subject of the categorical imperative.

The logical conclusion of the categorical imperative

As we have seen, Christian “love”, for Hegel in the *SOC*, is unattainable through positive law. Such a higher unity can only be accessed through the heart, *viz* genuine moral conviction, which theoretically demands the absence of coercion as a necessary condition. The destination upon having ascended to this unity is a selfless community based on mutual recognition and respect; all antagonisms between state and individual collapse into a natural order in a similar manner to the pre-reflective citizens who identified directly the Greek *polis*. This, which Hegel (1977) describes as an

²¹ In my view, it would not be inaccurate to draw comparisons with Spengler’s entropic conception of history: Christ’s ascension into heaven could be interpreted as the beginning of Christianity’s spiritual ossification, of which evolves into a *negative* dialectic. Given that it is only through worshipping the spiritual and physical presence of Christ that an expressive unity with God the Father can be sustained, there are reasons to believe that Spengler and Hegel were alluding to the same source of decline.

unsustainable “happy state” in the *POS*, is arguably the desired end point implicit in the *PCR*. However, in the *SOC*, Hegel starts alluding to a rational state that involves a higher form of “conceptual knowing” (Ormiston, 2002, p. 5) which appears to give a purposive role to the Understanding (*Verstand*). While acknowledging Kant’s effort to find a systemic basis for the moral law’s apprehension, which belongs in the domain of Reason (*Vernunft*), the categorical imperative, for Hegel, is a prevailing and historically relevant example of reflection finding itself trapped in the Understanding without any potential to develop itself beyond the restrictions of its own formal principles.

It is worth acknowledging that the categorical imperative is the end-product of Kant’s effort to achieve two important things. The first is to separate and develop Christianity’s substantive moral philosophy away from the positive and essentially theological elements, and the second is to address the criticism received for failing to resolve the problem of scepticism in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Hegel believes this observation to be merited, given that Kant offers no sufficient explanation in this critique as to how the existence of a noumenal world can be justified when, by Kant’s own admission, appearances are all rational beings can experience. Indeed, Kant attempts to address the matter of this seemingly suspended ontology in the “antinomies” by claiming that pure reason can only produce contradictions in virtue of its intrinsic inability to grasp the unconditioned, but Hegel interprets this intrinsic inability as proof of the inadequacy of transcendental idealism (Sedgwick, 1991, p. 403).

Accepting his original critique as insufficient, Kant proceeds to argue in the second (the *Critique of Practical Reason*) (*CPRa*) that the noumenal is knowable²² through morality, *viz* through our inherent knowledge of the Kingdom of Ends, which emerges from a natural feeling of duty to other individuals. The categorical imperative is thus a genuine attempt from Kant to explain how the moral principle behind the quotes “do to others as you would have them do to you” (Luke 6:31) and “[loving] thy neighbour as thyself” (Matthew 22:37-39) – both of which Christ uses to facilitate a holy disposition among people – can be practically actualised. In the *SOC*, it is clear that Hegel

²² In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant explicitly denies the possibility of knowing noumena or “things-in-themselves”. While *intuition* directly relates to things-in-themselves and *concepts* give them a form in experience, the resultant *appearances* are mere representations of things-in-themselves. In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, however, he clarifies that this is only the case with the “theoretical use of reason”. Theoretical reason is only “concerned with objects of the cognitive faculty” (Kant, 1927, p. 101). “Practical reason”, in contrast, is concerned with the will’s ability to determine itself. This involves neither concepts nor intuition: a subject is self-determining or free in virtue of the moral law being there to act upon. All have the ability to choose whether they act in accordance with it. Thus, it could be argued that, in Kant’s philosophy, rational subjects apprehend the noumenal when the will is fully determined by the moral law and “by means of feeling” (Kant, 1927, p. 164).

believes Kant to have failed, as can be identified in his frequent allusions to the principles of “[loving] thy neighbour as thyself” (Matthew 22: 37-39), and “[acting] only according on a maxim that you can also will to become a universal law” (Kant, 2019, p. 35) seemingly advocating for the opposite starting principles: the first being based on correct *belief* (emerging from conscience), and the second being *orthopraxic*, viz based on correct *action*, and thus seemingly analogous with Judaism. While we can assume Hegel to take no issue with correct action per se, his concern is that understanding them as duties that must be carried out for morality to be upheld - as per the principle of non-contradiction - may have the countereffect of negating the capacity necessary for actions to be genuine expressions of good will.

While it is not Kant’s intention to empty the moral law of its contents, Hegel’s criticism is compelling. The input of conscience in the categorical imperative takes the form of our impulse to ask ourselves the question: “what *ought* I do?” in everyday situations. Hegel’s issue regards where this impulse ultimately derives its content: when applied as a general rule across subjects, all of whom have their own capacities for reflection and independent ontological commitments, what *ought* to be done could assume the form of anything even in the case where the conditions of non-contradiction have been met. Thus, it appears that an *is* – viz an objective component of morality – cannot be derived from an *ought* when its validity is acquired and confirmed through self-knowledge alone. However, the assured position that Kant espouses in *What is Enlightenment?* – an essay published in 1784 in between the first and second *Critiques* – strongly suggests that he either doesn’t consider the widespread misappropriation of the moral law to be a serious possibility, or that it is even problematic to absolutely rely on self-knowledge for the acquisition of “oughts”:

Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another. This immaturity is self-incurred if its cause lies not in lack of understanding but lack of resolution and courage to use it without another's guidance. The motto of Enlightenment is therefore: [h]ave courage to use your own understanding!. (Kant, 1991, p54.).

The “self-incurred immaturity” that Kant describes refers to the religious elements thought that prevent rational beings from using their *a priori* rationality in the desired manner, viz “without another’s understanding”. However, as can be observed in both the *PCR* and the *SOC*, this is an ideal that Hegel shares in principle. Following Luther’s

description of those within the “kingdom of God” in *On Secular Authority* and, most importantly, in the *Sermon on the Mount itself*, Hegel believes that the integrity of the moral law – and by extension, the *heart’s* intrinsic power as a force for good in the world through the Holy Spirit – rests on it being enacted without *coercion*. While neither Luther nor Hegel believe that the most devout Christians can achieve this to the absolute degree, not least because the temptation will always persist in the fallen world in which they are a part, they both accept the logical proposition made by Christ himself in the *Sermon*, namely that the highest good involves acting on the law through conscience alone to the extent that the Mosaic law’s existence as a written law becomes superfluous. Luther makes this clear in *Concerning Christian Liberty*:

No good work can rely upon the Word of God or live in the soul, for faith alone and the Word of God rule in the soul. Just as the heated iron glows like fire because of the union of fire with it, so the Word imparts its qualities to the soul. It is clear, then, that a Christian has all that he needs in faith and needs no works to justify him; and if he has no need of works, he has no need of the law; and if he has no need of the law, surely he is free from the law. It is true that "the law is not laid down for the just" [I Tim. 1:9]. This is that Christian liberty, our faith, which does not induce us to live in idleness or wickedness but makes the law and works unnecessary for any man's righteousness and salvation (Luther, 2006).

And as can be observed from *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant is committed to the same idea of treating the moral law as an end in itself:

[I]n order to be morally good, it is not enough to conform to the moral law, but one must act for its own sake. Otherwise this conformity is only chancy and precarious, since although the non-moral motivations will now and then produce actions that conform to the law, they will in many cases produce actions that transgress it. However, the moral law in its purity and authenticity (which is what is most important in practical matters) is to be sought nowhere else than in pure philosophy, so this (as metaphysics) must come first, and without it there can be no moral philosophy at all (Kant, 2019, p. 5).

Thus, the important difference between Kant and Hegel on the historical role of Christianity to the ends of Enlightenment are as follows. Hegel sees the positive elements that prevailed as downstream of the sociohistorical facts about the Roman Catholic church, and attributes the positive elements of Christ himself to a combination of the private characteristics of Roman law and the Jews’ rejection of him as the Messiah; as such, he wishes only for the overcoming or reconciliation of *these* positive elements of Christianity. Kant, however, in the *Metaphysics of Morals (MOM)*, appears

to be merely taking the founding proposition of Luther's Reformation to its own rational conclusion:

Only the descent into the hell of self-knowledge can pave the way to godliness (Kant, 2017, p.441).

Because these positive elements contained within Christianity are endemic, the negation of institutionalised Christianity in the world itself becomes a fundamental historical condition for the realisation of this higher form of "conceptual knowing" to be accessible. The Reformation accentuates the fact that the very idea of accepting Christ as God incarnate on the grounds of faith – in accordance with *Sola Scriptura* – amounts to the same act of "positivity" or "blind obedience" that Christ claimed was the source of the Pharisees' wrongdoing, only to find that it can't take this principle to its logical conclusion because of what it would involve: applying the moral law without the input of *faith* in Christ. The most concentrated example of this contradiction which potentially confirms the Understanding's (*Verstand*) permanent residence in Christianity, for Hegel – something which he identifies as a theoretical flaw in Fichte's philosophy in the *SNL* – could be the inclusion of a *coercive* principle in John 3:17-19²³, where it is declared that those who reject Christ's divine status irrespective of their treatment of the moral law are "condemned" (presumably to Hell). Enacting the moral law in virtue of the consequences that come with not doing so, *viz* the "wrath of God" would leave the purity of the law unrealised and therefore stands in contradiction with Christ's essential contribution to the New Covenant. It is, perhaps, only after acknowledging this that Hegel comes to accept Christianity as a religion of contradiction, albeit one that is only contradictory because of the historical conditions that have proceeded to determine the nature of its concepts. Thus, Hegel's worry could be that the combination of the Understanding's presence in the faith and the growing economic and political power of the System of Reality, which Hegel views as the historical objectification of the Understanding, has the potential to permanently cancel the possibility of the "moral life" itself. On my reading, this idea is given further credence by an interpretation that Hegel may have had on the subject of "salvation",

²³ "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son" (John 3:17-19).

which could be perceived to afford reification – and particularly, atomisation – an eschatological purpose in the idea of “progress” contained within the present essay of discussion.

The problem of ‘salvation’

The Christian concept of salvation is inseparable from the doctrine of “original sin”, which contends that human beings, due to the events of the *Fall* (Genesis 2:4-3:24), inherit the burden of sin from birth. Despite rejecting the doctrine of original sin, it is understood by Hegel as an ongoing intellectual and spiritual process of reconciliation with the “kingdom of God”, viz the world from which humanity has fallen. In accordance with the New Covenant, this involves *first*, repenting for this original sin, *second*, realising the true essence of the moral law, and *third* (in seeming contradiction with the previous point), accepting Christ as the only person through which the internalisation of the moral law and by extension salvation can become attainable. The matter of importance is what’s being theoretically presupposed by this: for salvation to be universally accessible as is taught in scripture, then it must be the case that every person, by virtue of their moral agency, has equal access to that law independent of experience. Whether Hegel attributes this view to Christianity or not, his critique of Kant suggests that he sees such a view as abstract and historically divorced. Hegel’s general position, on my reading, can be summarised as follows: while it is both principally undesirable and disrespectful to suggest that an actor’s poor conduct (or “sinful” behaviour) is unblameworthy, it would also be irrational to suggest that two people who conduct the same action with different levels of access to objective moral infrastructure bear equal levels of moral culpability for the action. In short, Hegel gets around this problem by adding that whilst moral principles are immutable, historical variables determine the specific forms in which they objectively exist. This contention is efficiently summarised by Sedgwick on the subject of Kant’s deposits example:

If the moral permissibility of a maxim is a function of no more than its universalisability, then any maxim on Hegel's view can pass the test. The non-existence of deposits, he implies here, is just as universalisable as the existence of deposits. It is just as universalisable, he says, unless some "other ends and material grounds" are presupposed. But they are not supposed to be presupposed, because on Kant's account the categorical imperative determines the morality of maxims on the basis of their form alone. It is this claim, I think, which is the principal target of Hegel's attacks. The determination of the universalisability of a particular maxim is

only possible, on his view, given substantive background assumptions about content (Sedgwick, 1996, p. 565)

This view seems intuitively appealing. If one, for example, is enculturated in a society where revenge and tyrannising one's enemies is recognised and institutionalised as socially honourable – as was the case in Pagan societies – it would not be accurate to suggest that a failure on this person's part to cultivate a moral vocation is equal to the failure of another from another where the kingdom of ends is reflected in their institutions. A degree of "moral luck" (Williams, 1981) is clearly involved in how moral both persons turn out to be, meaning that it would be irrational to hold individuals as *absolutely* accountable for the actions that follow²⁴.

Kant's view, unpacked in the *MOM*, is that self-knowledge confirms to us, at the very least, we *ought* to believe that we are fully morally accountable for our actions even if we are not. Rather than disagreeing with this outright, Hegel adds that the specific manner in which moral oughts come to self-knowledge (and how different people from different cultures become self-aware at all) are historically conditioned. The problem with this, however, is that by exposing the categorical imperative as not grounded in a stable, immanent principle, Hegel, appears to have unintentionally admitted that the cornerstone of Christian morality, *viz* the principle of inward spiritualisation has no value in the abstract. This means that for all Hegel's criticism of the "infinite Otherness of Judaism" – *viz* the incarnation of abstraction and positivity par excellence – Christianity merely inherits a different version of the same "positivity" problem that only purposive, historical forces beyond the domain of human agency can resolve. With that said, however, Hegel gives us reasons to believe that the positive elements contained within Christianity pose a greater challenge to the Christian world than the social and economic developments of the System of Reality as an independent totality in itself. The argument, I accept, is ambitious, but given the importance of rational necessity to the direction of his philosophical system, I find it to be inconceivable that he didn't give it some level of consideration.

This, again, relates to the necessary conditions for salvation and the doctrine of original sin, but extends to the question of "evil" which Luther also addresses in *On Secular Authority* (1523), who argues that the "true Christian" devotes himself to

²⁴ While this is conceivably Hegel's position on "moral luck", I do not take it to be Williams's (2012).

alleviating the suffering of others while “turn[ing] the other cheek” when on the receiving end of it themselves:

[All] such actions would be devoted wholly to the service of others [.]. [A]s far as you yourself and your possessions are concerned, you keep to the Gospel and act according to Christ’s word; you would gladly turn the other cheek and give up your cloak as well as your coat, when it is you and your possessions that are involved. And so the two are nicely reconciled: you satisfy the demands of God’s kingdom and the world’s at one and the same time, outwardly and inwardly; you both suffer evil and injustice and yet punish them; you do not receive evil and yet you do resist it. For you attend to yourself and what is yours in one way, and to your neighbour and what is his in another. As to you and yours you keep to the gospel and suffer injustice as a true Christian (Luther, 1523, p. 15).

Irrespective of whether Luther’s quasi-passive approach practically succeeds to this end of minimising the presence of evil in the fallen world, his description is consistent with Christ’s recommendation, namely that the Mosaic law only comes to “life” in the absence of self-interest. It is on the basis that Luther encourages Christians to use their moral conscience to alleviate the injustices of others whilst abstaining from reacting to injustices and injuries inflicted upon themselves. This is presumably on the grounds that reacting to an injustice on one’s own behalf would *first*, amount to an act of self-interest (and thus reduce moral action to being as a means to a different end), and *second*, take the task of banishing evil outside of the natural remit of God (which is stated as God’s prerogative in scripture²⁵). However, going to such lengths to preserve the conditions for the moral law’s actualisation has a problematic implication which Luther’s “quietism” only turns into a greater practical issue; a failure that the “pluralistic” aspects of Hegel’s later political philosophy (Beiser, 2005, pp. 224-58) and the dialectical interplay between “being” and “nothing” in the *Science of Logic* (SOL) suggests Hegel may have taken note of himself. It exists in the form of conflict of interest that could lead one to view Christianity itself as intrinsically corrupt, which in Hegel’s case, would amount to it having a permanent residence in the Understanding: because the possibility of salvation, repentance and the moral life itself has a metaphysical and logical dependence on the persistence of everything identified in scripture as an attribute of Satan, it seems that the possibility of humans acquiring the resources (whatever from that may assume) to totally dispense with evil and injustice

²⁵ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” (Romans 12:19).

without the input of God is something that Christianity cannot view as desirable. The treatment of the law as an end in itself is posited as the passport through which “everlasting life” is attained, meaning that everlasting life and salvation²⁶ would be unattainable in the theoretical scenario where Satan ceases to exist at all. Thus, there appears to be a contradiction between the contents of the moral *law* itself and the objective conditions that secure the persistence of the moral *life* as a possibility, the latter of which could be interpreted to expose a social and political incentive on the part of Protestants to solidify if not intensify the presence of Satan in the fallen world. This appears to be further justified in the fact that if Luther’s understanding is correct, namely that the Holy Spirit only becomes a true force in the world upon the law’s writing on the heart, then Christianity has arguably produced a formula for its own demise in the social and political domain. By condemning traditions and institutions that allegedly conceal the contents of the law through their inclusion of coercive elements, Christianity appears to deny itself any basis to resist the advances of any belief system (e.g. natural science, social contract theory) that could be proactively seeking to subvert it. If this view is accurate, then the “moral life and Satan” exist in a symbiotic relationship, which will culminate in the atomisation of the Christian world (something which, as we noted in Chapter I, Spengler predicts).

The conceivability of Hegel holding this view, on my reading, is consistent with his *panentheistic* metaphysics (Magee, 2013). If evil is not the product of God but a *by-product* of his creativity as St Augustine contends, then God himself must be subject to higher laws, and thus cannot be “God” by definition. The integrity of God is only preserved if these unsavoury aspects of the world are understood as divine emanations alongside the moral law, which gives human beings the historical task of producing and preserving the conditions for its own freedom. Christianity, however, appears to rely on the persistence and the liberation of its “infinite Other” in order to retain the contents of its moral value system. It is for this reason that Hegel may have had a pessimistic view of Christianity’s fate: because the dissolving of the Christian “Ethical Order” (explicated in the *POR*) for the furtherance of “true” belief, made possible and protected by the secular state, seems to necessitate taking Christianity out of the remit of faith entirely.

²⁶ Hegel seems to interpret the Fall of Man as a rational and necessary moment in Spirit’s development, which would imply that the prelapsarian life is transient rather than eternal.

To offer a brief reminder: the profound lesson that Christ teaches is that moral action cannot be separated from disposition. Simply giving to the poor, or publicly espousing sympathy for the blight of the poor, amounts to nothing but lip service without the input of conscience. This is essentially Luther's charge against the conventions of the Catholic church: engaging in mimetic "works" such as "mass" removes the necessary input of the heart, which is ultimately what's required for Christians to repent, and this is, of course, a judgement that only God himself can make. The greatest act of distortion on Catholicism's part is thus not that it consolidated political power without God's permission and gave priests the right to lay speculative claims about God's judgement, but rather that the orthopraxic principles and subsequent practices have a *rationalising* effect on those within the institution, those who participate in the works, and the political structures it influences. In my view, it is plausible that these observations may have underwritten the strength of Luther's convictions here in his personal letter to Pope Leo X:

[T]he Church of Rome, formerly the most holy of all Churches, has become the most lawless den of thieves, the most shameless of all brothels, the very kingdom of sin, death, and hell; so that not even antichrist, if he were to come, could devise any addition to its wickedness (Luther, 2013).

We have already seen that Hegel finds this argument compelling. In the fallen world in which humans live, any objective entity (i.e. an institution such as the Catholic Church) that in some way relieves individuals of the need to exercise restraint has the effect of fetishising the kingdom of ends. This can be otherwise understood as the "false gnosis" effect: the occurrence whereby an image of a divine attribute succeeds in masquerading as the divine attribute itself, thus placing worshippers into the arms of false shepherds. The only sufficient antidote to this development, for Luther, is the combination of self-study of Holy Scripture and introspection: one must forever question the words as they are presented and the ecclesiastical authorities who claim to spread God's message to fully understand the value of Christ's sacrifice and the nature of the law itself.

However, it is within the very recommendation that the contradiction seems to lie for Hegel. As Kant states explicitly, it is *only* through the *intellect* that this task can be fulfilled: a task which, on the one hand, *must be* done ourselves – otherwise we are, in theory, outsourcing our own judgement – but which we *cannot* do ourselves either

because it would involve being cut off from the very source through which the moral law enters the heart. Only an *objective* basis for morality can relieve Christians from the “unhappy” state that Christians find themselves in. To this task, Enlightenment steps up, not to revolt against the Reformation, but to relieve it of the “self-incurred tutelage” that stands in the heart’s way. Had Christ remained physically present, self-knowledge would be superfluous, and the romantic unification with God that Hegel alludes to consistently could have gone unhindered. But as his physical form hasn’t persisted, a greater input from reflection, the Understanding and objectification is required to engender the conditions for the moral life.

It is, perhaps, in this way that the Reformation has evolved to establish an essential union with Christianity’s opposites: for both moral and intellectual reflection to be at all possible, one must first recognise reason’s independence from nature; this seems to necessitate the institutionalisation of *rationalism*. For faith and repentance to have any substantial value, the right to disbelieve and disobey the Word must be protected as political rights; this seems to necessitate the creation of *atheism and secularism*., Making economic sacrifices for others first demands property and wealth accumulation being recognised as extensions of natural right; this seems to necessitate the creation of *social contract theory*. Perhaps most importantly of all, however: the realisation of Christ as God incarnate and the Word as representative of morality necessitates the instantiation of a collective goal to unlock the full potential of human reason and understand the objective nature of the fallen world, thus necessitating the institutionalisation of *scientific empiricism* in the Christian world.

All of these different intellectual traditions can, of course, coexist with Christianity as an organised religion on the condition that a legal separation between church and state exists. However, the most fundamental theoretical flaw within inward spiritualisation’s supposed completion of the essence of man, as I hope to have shown, lies in the fact that it is the *negation of religion* that creates the capacity for moral action, and is thus the only scenario whereby self-determining agents can be adequately judged. If the Holy Spirit can only be internalised in the way outlined in the *Sermon on the Mount*, viz if positive coercion from outside is non-existent, then this either means that salvation and everlasting life were never intended to be possible by God in the first place, or that there is an unstated event in Christian eschatology when these necessary conditions for true moral action will arise. It is perhaps because of the

absence of such a conclusive test of moral resolve that for all Hegel's extended attempts in this essay to criticise and resist the cold, mechanistic and instrumental tendencies that he attributes to the Jewish spirit, he eventually comes round to accepting these features of positivity and reification as a permanent and necessary part of a rational society, and so sets himself to the task of their reconciliation within his "philosophy of Spirit". However, as we have seen, his inability to explain how Christianity can coexist with the Understanding suggests that he may see the latter as the rational successor.

The presence of reification in the Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate

In chapter I, we analysed the historical purposiveness that Hegel gives to "positivity" in the *PCR*, drawing the conclusion that it is more or less identical to the phenomenon of reification that Lukács describes in *HCC*. Both are presented as having subjective and objective aspects: the former referring to the sense of psychological estrangement that emerges from social bondage, and the latter referring to instrumental rationality assuming an autonomous form which is demonstrative in the actions of social institutions. The key difference, of course, was that positivity and reification serve different historical purposes, in virtue of both Lukács and Hegel having very different ideas about what "the end of history" looks like. For Lukács, history ends through the abolishing of bourgeois society and the establishment of communism, with reification being capitalism's ongoing attempt to thwart the inevitable outcome in increasingly mysterious ways. For Hegel at Berne, however, this is *less* an end and *more* an abstractly specified, ongoing march towards the realisation of self-legislation. Positivity, in this early version, refers to the ideas, objects and structures of authority standing in self-legislation's way. This explains his interpretation of the French Revolution at the time, namely that it was rational for the *Ancien Régime* to be destroyed, in addition to why he reluctantly saw Robespierre's commitment to the *Terror* in pursuit of the ideal as a sad truth about what reason must do in order to give self-legislation a workable, objective form. Lukács, in contrast, alludes to a form of added intellectual labour that is required in his concept of reification, striving towards a higher form of class consciousness, the energy of which must be channelled into political action for history to progress.

In the SOC, however, Hegel's treatment of positivity is radically different. In the opening section, "The Spirit of Judaism", he is explicitly attributing the source of positivity to the Jewish spirit, of which is rooted in the combination of their historical exile from Egypt and the metaphysics implicit in its theological basis, viz the absolute separation of God and man. Hegel proceeds to argue that from this "infinite Otherness" the Jewish people inherit both a mechanistic compulsion to collapse the physical world into abstractions and a susceptibility to outsource their agency to instrumental processes. The fate of Christ himself is what Hegel seems to see as irrefutable proof of this: they could not accept Christ as the Messiah because the very idea of God assuming a physical form, in the eyes of the Pharisees, was both impossible and blasphemous. Moreover, consistent with Neo-Platonism, claims which threaten the incorporeality of God qualify as a direct assault on God which, in theory, can only be made right if the punishment is death, otherwise the damage inflicted upon God's incorporeal form (or infinite formlessness) remains. It is the unconditional commitment to defending this incorporeality, known to Hegel as a mere totality of abstraction, that made the Jewish people in these instances susceptible to negating the content of their own laws: because their hearts are invested in the abstract forms, not the moral content of the laws themselves. It is for this reason, Hegel contends, that the Pharisees went as far as conspiring to have Christ executed in a way that didn't formally violate their own laws, why the Roman state ultimately succumbed to the demand (because they were themselves passive auxiliaries of their own laws) and most importantly, why Christ chose to forgive the individuals involved for his fate: because in these moments, they were no more than auxiliaries of reification purposively honing in on the reflective rationality that it was Christ's purpose to realise.

Christ's exchange with Pontius Pilate certainly adds weight to Hegel's argument here. Before the trial, when Pilate questions Christ in his palace, Christ directly questions whether it is Pilate himself questioning his existence as a King, or whether he is asking in his position as a statesman (John: 18:34). Moreover, when he momentarily stands accused by Pilate for believing himself to be a King (which was little more than an attempt from Pilate to draw an answer), Christ alludes only to his divine purpose "to testify to the truth" (John 18:77), thus leaving Pilate without legitimate grounds to charge him (leading to Christ only being sentenced due to his trial taking place on the day of the Sabbath, which permitted the Pharisees to sentence him by default after

freeing Barabbas). In all these cases, the world outside of Christ's secluded fellowship – who are trapped in this brotherly unity – are either presented as passive agents of abstract law, should the culprits be persons, or as laws and processes which have some form of autonomy above the state institutions and the officials who run them. To stress the point directly: the former appears to meet Lukács's criteria for the phenomenon of subjective reification, *viz* the adoption of a contemplative stance, and the latter meets the criteria for the objective form of reification *viz* where an object or abstract paradigm of rationality has a coercive effect over the people and institutions outside of it.

Ending the search for a Hegelian theory of reification here would, of course, compel us to trace the source of reification back to the Jewish people themselves; a conclusion that Martin Heidegger draws in his *Black Notebooks*, though asserting Jewishness as a *racial* characteristic rather than a cultural and epistemic expression (*Bildung*) of their faith in Hegel's case. However, this would be a myopic conclusion to draw. Not only because the supposed connection between domination and worshipping an incorporeal God is based on a theological non-sequitur, as explained earlier in this chapter, but because Hegel can be observed to change tact rather quickly on his treatment of reification when turning his attention to the fate of Christianity. From "The Fate of Jesus" onwards, he continues alluding to the presence of positivity (and thus reification) but instead begins presenting it as an essential part of Christianity's future. Upon this acceptance, however, he stops using the term "positivity" to refer to the process of objectification and instead describes it in the polar opposite manner: as a process that can allow the divine to reveal itself without Christ's presence:

A loving circle, a circle of hearts, that had surrendered their rights against one another again over anything their own, that are united solely by a common faith and hope, and whose pleasure and joy is simply the pure single-heartedness of love, is a Kingdom of God on a small scale. But its love is not religion, since the oneness of the love of the members does not at the same time involve the objectification of their oneness. Love unites them, but the lovers do not know of this union [...] If the divine is to appear, the inevitable spirit must be united with something visible (Hegel, 1996b, p.290-291).

This is a radically different tone from the one applied in his coverage of the intellect, which at first Hegel presents as inseparable from the infinite Otherness unique to the Jewish spirit. In my view, however, this is likely due to his own Lutheran convictions: like many other faithful disciples of the church, it is not implausible that he is following

the contentions of Luther's *The Jews and Their Lies* (as well as the prevalent antisemitic spirit of the times in general) in perceiving the Jews as the historical factor to blame for Christianity's failings. Whether this is the case or not, it is relatively clear that such canards veil much of the value that there is in his critique of Christianity, which he has shown to have fatalistic characteristics. If one, for example, separates the transcendent presuppositions that Hegel ascribes to the Jewish spirit from his general historical critique, and then observes how his philosophy of history develops in relation to this original critique later on, one may begin to see that the true source of Hegel's concern is a totalistic metaphysical problem *beyond* any one faith or ethnic group. It relates to this infinite Otherness, which amounts to nothing other than instances where the Understanding (*Verstand*) appears to be acting in-and-for-itself and thus having a derivative effect on Reason's journey towards substantive freedom (the pure concept).

The fate of Christ was death for his attempt to realise self-conscious reflection as a divine attribute. And what we can read from this insofar as Hegel's wider criticism of modernity is concerned, is the ongoing contradiction between the sentimental value of home and communal customs which Hegel refers to as "life", and the capacity for self-conscious reflection as a necessary condition for the actualisation of one's intrinsic freedom. The higher unity which represents the realisation of this conceptual knowledge, is the sublation of these two approaches, both of which have their positive elements. But the recognition of legal personhood as a concrete universal, as suggested by Hegel's revision of Christ's significance, indicates that his resultant dialectic is taking on an entirely new form of movement. It moves away from positivity *per se*, and towards the reconciliation of the universal and particular will.

As a Protestant himself, it seems more-than-likely that Hegel made this step as part of a more sophisticated attempt to give Christian liberty a form that accords with practical reason, hence his inclusion of abstract right in his final political system. If so, it would explain why his concept of substantive freedom never departs from the ideal of unity-in-difference (Beiser, 2005, pp.110-123), *viz* the social scenario where people can both enjoy living in expressive unification whilst also enjoying the legal autonomy as self-determining individuals. This expressive unity is one that can only be attained through worshipping Christ in physical form, meaning that in a world continuing without him, the moral disposition – accessible only through reflection – is the only way, to

Hegel, that any holiness can be apprehended. Anything that encroaches on this end, in theory, qualifies as a case of reification, despite the paradox being that this will resist it is a futile effort. However, if the fate of Christianity does indeed emerge from the pursuit of self-knowledge as the highest virtue, which involves negating Christ entirely, then these developments – which logically necessitates internalising the moral law in the absence of Christ – are rational and purposive.

Conclusion

What I hope to have shown in this chapter is that within Hegel's essay, the SOC, is an admission that within the moral philosophy of Christianity that Hegel evidently subscribes to is a self-contained problem of atomism that cannot be resolved. He openly concedes that the freedom of the intellect, of which is a necessary condition for Christian liberty, in fact engenders social problems that have the potential to pose an existential threat to the Christian world.

If it is indeed the case that Christian institutions established to uphold Christian liberty as part of the *Great Commission* have assumed a form that stands in contradiction with it, then within the march of history lies a moment when the institutionalised form acquires a form of causality over the inward spirit. Should it have remained the case that the institutionalised form(s) merely enforced the engendering of the inward principle, then the resultant effects would be residues of rationalisation, not reification. However, in case where these institutions assume a mysteriously higher form than the rationalised expression to the point that it has a colonising effect on one's ability to enact the inward principle, then the resultant social phenomena could be described as cases of reification in Hegel's view on the grounds that they are evidently derivations of an *equilibric* state between the divine law, viz the *Ethical Order*, and the human law, viz the *System of Reality*, with the natural result being that one will proceed to colonise the other. If, however, the disfiguring of the moral law is a case of rationalisation and not reification, on the basis that Christ was indeed all-knowing with regards to what he was teaching then Luther, reformed Christians and Hegel alike have no choice but to accept that man's role in the realisation of *Geist* is a temporary one done in virtue of a principle higher than any form of knowing. This, to be sure, can be no other thing than the "infinite Otherness" referred to throughout. We will now move on to Hegel's mature

philosophy of history, where reification is presented as metaphysically tied to rational necessity.

Chapter III:
**The Role of Reification in Hegel's Philosophy of
History and Absolute Idealism**

Introduction

Having taken a closer look at the contrasting positions in the *PCR* and the *SOC* respectively, I have offered clarification on Lukács's allusions to a radical difference between the role of positivity in Hegel's dialectic – understood as an ongoing historical process in itself – and that within his concrete philosophy of history. Essentially, Hegel seems to expound his dialectic from two different bases: one where history is interpreted as the product of concepts, and another where concepts are interpreted as the product of history. The latter interpretation constitutes the absolute idealism that Hegel expounds in the *POS*. Needless to say, the two are irreconcilable, and this has significant ramifications on the historical purpose of reification as a social phenomenon.

In the previous interpretation, positivity *always* emerges out of rational necessity as an indication of a new, forthcoming historical epoch. Theoretically, this principle can still apply whether Spirit accords to the cunning of reason, or to the autonomous productive forces as Marxists would understand it (where the realisation of the idea amounts to the establishment of communism through the “dictatorship of the proletariat”). Interpreting positivity in this way takes us to the conclusion that no epoch is permanent: Reason is always looking to move beyond what is actual. Because of this, the relationship between Christianity and rational progress is only a temporary one like all the epochs before it. Alas, when institutions established to protect and uphold certain rights and ideals become disfigured and completely un beholden to those original principles, it becomes rational and necessary for Reason to facilitate their demise so as to replace them with more rational ones.

However, in the *SOC*, we see Hegel accept that positivity is inscribed in Christianity. Moreover, in order for the moral law to be internalised in the way that Christ advocates in the Sermon on the Mount, the established religion must find a way to protect the conditions for inward spiritualisation, or the “moral life”, in Christ's absence. This is something that can only be achieved if man's fallible attempts to do so are deconstructed in the same manner as the positive denominations of Christianity: through *reflection*. As such, Hegel seems to recognise that the many strands of modern philosophy exist as objective expressions of the intellect that Christianity requires in order to *first*, find a way to regulate its positive elements and *second*, to

facilitate the conditions for the internalisation of the moral law. For this reason, the intellectual traditions of secularism, rationalism and empirical science, for Hegel, are extensions of both. *Secular* governance offers protection to believers and nonbelievers from religious coercion, and is a necessary condition for apprehending the Holy Spirit. *Rationalism* aspires to clarify metaphysical certainties about God's universe, which involves challenging all pre-existing conceptions (including Christianity). Last of all, the *empirical sciences* present observation and testimony as metrics through which knowledge of this world can be acquired.

As David Hume (1993) famously argues on the subject of miracles: observation and testimony produce the contents of the Bible, and what this does it offer just cause for the perennial *scepticism* of any *positive* claims as to the essential nature of God itself. Given Hegel's insistence for Christianity to revert back into itself, it seems to me that he takes to Hume's view: Christianity cannot be exempt from this question because if it was, it would be adopting the same formalistic tendencies that it criticised in Judaism and Catholicism. This is where subjects become increasingly estranged from the divine law and thus susceptible to conduct hypocrisy as a result of them sustaining an implicitly minimalist approach to enacting it. For this reason, it seems, the Christian moral universe practically depends on such academic freedom for the hypocrisy and contradictions to be called out in the manner that Luther already has. However, as one could observe with the nature of some of the practices involved, such as the empirical sciences' tendency to dominate and perhaps even destroy the natural world in its pursuit of knowledge or technical progress – as can be observed in the age of industrialisation – the objectified expressions of Christian liberty sometimes creates social, economic and in this case ecological problems that require mediation. This ambition from Hegel to mitigate these problems rather than destroy the institutions and processes that created them (as the Jacobins did with the Ancien Régime) provides a convincing argument for why Hegel's idealism may have evolved in a more pragmatic direction.

This pragmatic view of positivity is, to be sure, the opposite view to Marx, Lukács, and other left-Hegelians who may accept Hegel's view regarding the historical determination of concepts (contrary to Kant's view that in the *CPRa* that human rationality and freedom is intrinsic rather than historically determined) but reject his suggestion on where the dialectic stops. Lukács, of course, follows Marx in positing

communism as this final stage²⁷. In accordance with Marxist theory, once the proletariat control the productive forces and establish the new economic structure, no social antagonisms in the cultural superstructure should arise. We have no reason to believe that Lukács would subscribe to the idea that another epoch lies beyond the proletarian dictatorship. However, it remains consistent within his and Marx's philosophy of history to view *all* social contradictions as symptoms of the pending destruction of the current structure – it could just so happen that capitalism exists as the underwriter of this particular time²⁸. As such, reification within the original version of Hegel's dialectic which Marx and Lukács adapt seems to have an active historical role on two fronts: one which necessarily engenders a revolutionary awakening of the suboptimal social conditions (which can only be produced among those creating the surplus value) and another whereby capitalism finds ways to conceal these conditions. In the former case, reification serves a *communicative* purpose in the furtherance of communism. In the latter, reification serves a communicative purpose against it. Whilst reification can occur in either case, Lukács is clearly fixated on the latter, hence his firm insistence that an intellectual vanguard is required to for the proletariat to truly know its own social and economic conditions.

The SOC marks Hegel's departure from the arguably proto-Marxist position espoused in the *PCR*. Rather than the positive elements *a/ways* assuming a role in the advancing of rational necessity, Hegel evolves to accept some forms of reification as natural by-products of self-determination objective recognition as a concrete universal. By extension, instead of seeing the solution to be the abolition of the institutions from which social contradictions (i.e. poverty, the disfiguration of the natural world, and alienation in general) emerge, Hegel suggests that the modern state should devise communicative (and thus democratically responsive) ways of mitigating the effects. His philosophy of history, first explicated in the *POS*, reveals what he sees to be the process towards this end goal, whereby man develops itself out of servitude and into freedom. He describes each civilisation as circulating around conceptions of divinity

²⁷ Left-Hegelians who aren't persuaded by Marx's dialectical materialism, however, could indeed argue that there is no logical reason for the dialectic to stop at all: if the dialectic (still referring to Hegel's) is severed from its intended teleology, then the emergence of social contradictions – whatever form they assume – immediately become logical imperatives for the destruction of the institutions and processes that produce them.

²⁸ For left-Hegelians who reject Marxism, this could apply to whatever the parent system happens to be at the time.

which produce contradictions before their inevitable sublation into higher forms, hence why they become less abstract through each successive epoch. In his transcribed *Lectures on the Philosophy of History (LPH)*, Hegel (2011) breaks down world history into four “worlds” (or epochs), each of which represents a progressive stage in the development of Reason and self-knowledge (*Vernunft*, to Hegel, is synonymous with intellectual activity). In chronological order, these are the “Oriental” world, the “Greek” world, the “Roman” world, and the “Germanic” world. Naturally, the Oriental world is the most primitive stage, and describes the civilisations of the East (China, India, Buddhism, Persia, Syria, Judea and Egypt).

The Oriental World

Eastern civilisation’s religious basis on divine incorporeality identical with the “infinite Otherness” of the Jewish spirit, means that their respective cultures and customs emerge from – and thus have a substantial dependence on – man’s permanent domination at the hands of abstract mythical forces. To Hegel, what this says about the societies themselves is that there are essentially stagnant and “prosaic”²⁹:

The Oriental world has as its substantial principle the substantiality of the ethical. It is the initial overpowering of arbitrary will, which sinks into this substantiality. Ethical determinations are expressed as laws, but in such a manner that the subjective will is governed by these laws as by an external force, that nothing inward, disposition, conscience, formal freedom is present [...] [t]here is no want of a will to command it, but of a will to perform it because [it is] commanded from within [...] (p. Hegel, 2011, p. 101)

To say that Hegel sees Eastern people and their respective civilisations to be absolutely devoid of spirit and self-knowledge is no exaggeration. Moreover, the form that this absolute separation of divinity and man politically assumes depends on the postulates included in the respective canonical documents, hence his view that these societies exist outside of world history because they have set themselves up to resist the purposive forces of history themselves.

The culture most representative of this absolute positivity, in the eyes of Hegel, is that of China. The Empire of Ancient China offers the oldest account of human civilisation, and it is for this reason that his philosophy of history begins here. The Chinese

²⁹ Hegel is alluding to what he sees as an absolutely conformist culture that is completely devoid of any imagination.

constitution, history and religion, Hegel observes, all have their origins in a limited set of ancient texts, something which India and the Judea both have in common. In the case of China, these books are called the “Kings”, and the *Shu-King* is acknowledged as the canonical document of the civilisation itself. The nature of the Chinese constitution is described as “ever-unchanging” and based on the immediate unity of the individual and the “substantial spirit”, the latter of which has its roots in the family. The individual does not recognise itself as an individual because it has so little intuitive knowledge of the substantial spirit that it cannot even posit the substance as something standing over and against it. The purpose of Chinese statesmen is simply to sustain this unreflective condition whereby “the Chinese regard themselves as belonging to their family, and at the same time as being children of the state” (Hegel, 2011, p. 109).

The emperor is the head of the state whose function is to propagate the myth of the spiritual union as outlined by the *Shu-King*, which stipulates five antecedents which the emperor has a duty to preserve. These amounts to social and political coercion based on five unchangeable relations between:

1. ... the emperor and the people.
2. ... the fathers and the children.
3. ... the elder and the younger brother.
4. ...the husband and the wife.
5. ... one friend to another.

The inseparability from substance and state is expressed in the fact that family duties, in Chinese society, are absolutely binding and legally enforced as such. When the father dies, the state compels the son to mourn for three years. The son is also compelled to abstain from meat and wine, is prohibited from participating in any business, including state duties. This is something that applies also to the emperor himself. Hegel also points to the striking fact that it is a legal requirement for the graves of deceased parents to be visited, and that when the father dies, his body be kept in the house for in between three and four months during which others are prohibited from sitting on a chair or laying on a bed in the same house. The emperor, therefore, to Hegel, is thus less a tyrant and more a paternal carer of the state who inherits the

duty of serving as an acting patriarch. He must ensure that no one, including himself, “advance[s] beyond the moral principle of the family circle” (Hegel, 2011, p. 112), and therefore purposively suppressed any urge for independent civic freedom for the simple reason that it poses a direct threat to the established moral order. Should such a threat arise, the emperor has a remit to resort to whatever means necessary in order to eradicate it. This commitment applies in equal measure to the guarantee of absolute equality, another social good posited as unchangeable in the Shu-King. It is in this way that Chinese society is perfectly expressive of absolute positivity, which Hegel also refers to as “nonage” (synonymous with “tutelage”, hence Kant’s use of it in *What is Enlightenment?*).

After offering a descriptive account of the Chinese spirit, Hegel moves on to the other civilisation that persists outside of world history: India. Like China, India’s entirely self-contained development is owed to its “stationary and fixed” nature. However, Hegel observes that whilst the Chinese spirit is an expression of prosaicism par excellence, India’s is an expression of a flourishing but ultimately docile imagination due to its spiritual basis on a “conceptless idealism of imagination”. To put it alternatively: the Indian spirit is perceived to be downstream from man’s absolutely unconscious relationship with the divine, known to Indians as the *Brahma*.

Indian society then, is one of a constantly dreaming spirit. However, this dream state should not be confused with the introspective mode of dreaming entertained in Descartes’ *Meditations*. This idea of dreaming, which Hegel describes as “prosaic”, depends on the dreamers not having any level of self-knowledge whatsoever. Rather than exercising their concepts of objects, as they would through the process of attaining knowledge of the noumenal world through the Understanding, they apply intuitive concepts (that are dormant when awake) to entirely internal determination. The understanding is entirely absent in dreams because the ontological separation between the self and the noumenal world isn’t there either. The content of these dreams is therefore given entirely through abstract thought, of which exists as a single pantheistic substance of the *Brahma*’s imagination. The consequence of this complete absence of individuation in the Indian spirit, to Hegel, is that their society degrades itself to primitive forms of naturalism:

The divine is not individualised to a subject, to concrete spirit, but degraded to vulgarity and senselessness... [t]hings thus do without understanding, without cohering existence of cause

and effect, as man does without the steadfastness of free being for itself, of personality and freedom (Hegel, 2011, p.128).

The persistence of this spirit therefore depends entirely on these dreams being able to absolutely deny the possibility of self-knowledge:

These dreams are not mere fables. Indians are necessarily and purposively lost in them. Everything is a God. In such deification, self-knowledge is metaphysically impossible (Hegel, 2011 p. 129).

China and India respectively therefore both have their spiritual roots in dogmatic idealism, and thus must sustain themselves as self-contained civilisations by necessity. However, within the latter's attempt to adhere to the tenets of the *Bhagavad Gita* – India's equivalent of the Shu King – is a development of naturalistic, abstract particularity. It is *particular* insofar as the people are rationally distinguished by class in this civilisation and thus attain some degree of distance from universality), but *abstract*, in Hegel's view, because the basis for the distinction itself is archaic (or intellectually lacking). As such, this form of particularisation is not a feature of a rational society to Hegel, but it amounts to being a substantive (albeit narrow) step towards individualisation. Rather than reverting to consciousness and engendering the possibility of self-knowledge, these distinctions, to Hegel, "revert [back] into nature". The result of this is the caste system:

Instead of stimulating the activity of a soul as their centre of union, and spontaneously realising that soul – as is the case in organic life – they petrify and become rigid, and by their stereotyped character condemn the Indian people to the most degrading spiritual serfdom. The distinction in question are the castes (Hegel, 2011, p. 131).

This system is an extension of the Brahma itself. Every caste must exist in servility to it because the spirit depends on the absolute prohibition of these castes integrating. Each one inherits specific duties and virtues to fulfil and uphold, and interference with the duties and virtues of another inflicts violence upon the substantial unity that depends on these differentiations. It is for this reason that the first and more important estate, the *Brahmin*, inherits the duty of ensuring that society is kept in touch with God. This, as we know, emerges from Hegel's (1977b) view that man becomes conscious in religion before he becomes conscious in every other respect. The second estate, the *Kshatriya*, is one composed of warriors and regents who have the same function as the auxiliaries in Plato's *Republic*, which is to ensure that the inward

particularisation of Indian society does not engender a true subjectivity. The Kshatriya are imperative to the Brahmin because without the suppression of self-consciousness by force, the absolutely positive spirit would not be able to reconstitute itself. The third estate, the *Vaishyas*, sees specifically to the satisfaction of daily needs and thus work as merchants in the sectors of agriculture. And last of all, the fourth and lowest estate, the *Sudras*, comprise no organic estate at all: they are slaves who live only to serve individuals who are of a higher caste than themselves. All four of these castes are understood to constitute the “connected trinity” (Hegel, 2011, p. 134) that renews the Brahman as the substantial unity:

The highest religious position of man, therefore is, being exalted to Brahman. If a Brahmin asks what Brahman is, he answers: “when I fall back within myself, and close all external senses, and say Om within myself, that is Brahman. Abstract unity with God is realised in this abstraction from humanity (Hegel, 2011, p. 135).

Whilst assuming very different cultural forms, Hegel sees China and India to be theologically identical in the sense that they both have a spiritual dependence on the metaphysical impossibility of God being an object of consciousness. It is for this reason, for Hegel, that the Chinese emperor inherits the duty of annulling all forms of particularity, and in turn why the element of distinction in Indian society is limited to those unchangeable social classes stipulated in the Bhagavad Gita: because without the constant renewal of absolute nonage, there is nothing to prevent customs being exposed as superfluous and primitive (with the *Sati* viz the ancient Indian practice of burning the widow with her deceased husband, being one of the most prevalent examples of a practice that neither stands to morality or reason). It is this absolute positivity or nonage that makes it possible for such civilisations to persist outside of world history. The East’s intentional seclusion from the cunning of reason, however, Hegel (2011) seems to come to an end courtesy of the spiritual developments of the neighbouring Persian world:

The principle of development begins with the history of Persia. This therefore constitutes the beginning of world history strictly speaking; for the grand interest of spirit in history is to attain an unlimited being-in-itself of subjectivity, to attain reconciliation through absolute antithesis (Hegel, 2011, p. 158).

The Persian world, for Hegel, through Zoroaster’s distinction between “light” and “dark”, establishes a spiritual relation *between* consciousness and something

metaphysically distinct *from* consciousness so as to become the first civilisation in world history to awaken from the nonage of absolute positivity. Presumably, Hegel is referring specifically to the metaphysical *dualism* between *Ahura Mazda* (Lord Wisdom), and the *Angra Mainyu* (the Lord of Demons) which, after Ahura Mazda approaches Zoroaster as he is collecting water for a religious festival, establishes the conditions for an ongoing battle between *Asha* (order) and *Drug* (chaos) that humans must resolve themselves. Hegel's view is that in the resultant society, subjects began differentiating themselves *from* their conception of substance (or divinity) whilst identifying directly *through* it at the same time. Doing so is something which necessarily entails the input of self-efficacy, and it is for this reason that Hegel sees the Persians as the first truly historical people. However, their capacity for thought was still severely limited, and the result of this was that they could not extend their own awakening (a purposive historical development which they were not aware of) as a political principle beyond themselves – *viz* to the other lands which they conquered – because they were unable to acknowledge the necessity to facilitate inward recognition of their legitimacy as rulers. As such, the Persians were still confined by their naturalistic fallacies and eventually succumbed to their own problem of atomism:

[The Persians] could erect no empire possessing complete organisation; [they] could not import their principle into the conquered lands and were unable to make them into a harmonious whole, but were obliged to be content with an aggregate of the most diverse individualities (Hegel, 2011, p.202).

Among this aggregate of diverse individualities who the Persians could not unite under a single principle beyond themselves were the Phoenicians, the Egyptians and the Jews, the last of whom Hegel sees to inherit the task of purifying thought using the same theological conception. As can now be observed the historical role that Hegel gives to the Jews here in his philosophy of history is far more nuanced than the position he espouses in the SOC which I covered in the previous chapter.

The historical transition from the absolute positivity of pre-historical societies to the quasi-deification of the intellect is presented by Hegel as follows. In ancient India, Brahm is not an object of consciousness, but an object of unconsciousness. The possibility of self-knowledge is annulled by the orthopraxic customs laid out in the respective canonical texts for the sole reason that self-knowledge itself threatens the unchangeability of its society. In the Persian world, we see the same abstraction of

God become an object of consciousness for the subjects of that society. Hegel seems to believe that whilst the distinction between “light” and “dark” has a mythical presence in China and India, the King of Persia is seen to serve something more than an infinitely abstract God: the “good” itself, meaning that the ability to internalise the light is passed on to the subjects beneath him. It is the Jews who, for Hegel, make the rational and necessary step of attacking this stagnant idea of God (namely that he persists as an unconscious object) so as to allow spirit to conduct enquiries into the depths of its own being and true divinity by extension. The result of this is a commitment from the Jews towards advancing pure thought in the absolute. However, as Hegel states in the SOC, this has the effect of preventing the resultant Jewish spirit from advancing beyond the Understanding, *viz Verstand*, and thus does not constitute a substantial advance towards self-knowledge (hence Hegel’s association of Judaism with “infinite Otherness”). The Jewish spirit is, as Hegel originally affirms in the SOC, forever trapped in the formative intellect that was its necessary purpose to develop. This has a dominating effect on what the intuitive intellect would otherwise have brought to consciousness, and it is by this point, to Hegel, that the venture of realising the potential of abstract thought itself become a positive form of aggressive conceptualisation. This aggressive conceptualisation, in fact, is the same epistemic process that Adorno later calls “identity thinking” (which we covered briefly in Chapter I).

We can observe, therefore, that the conflation between Judaism and domination is as present in Hegel’s philosophy of history as it is in his early theological writings. But rather than conceptualising the Jewish world as positivity *par excellence*, we can now see Hegel accepting it as a rational successor to the earlier and more rigid forms of positivity (exhibited by China and India), and one that *must* assume a dominating form in order for the idea of reconciling abstract thought to something concrete to have any intrinsic value at all. This view is perfectly consistent with Hegel’s logical teleology based on the reconciliation of *Verstand* and *Vernunft* (the former of which Hegel sees as the essence of the Jewish spirit itself): in order for a higher unity between two opposites to be attained, both opposed entities must first absolutely commit to the destruction or domination of the other. Theoretically, only when *Verstand* has asserted itself to this (absolute) degree – *viz* by subjugating the natural world to the rule of formal, *transcendent* concepts – can it realise that such an abstract pursuit prevents it

from reaching the higher form it so desires. At the same time, however, it is only when *Verstand* assumes this autonomous form that *Vernunft* can sufficiently respond to the challenge posed by its antithesis. Hegel uses the fate of Christ himself to demonstrate this dialectical principle: Christ's sentencing to death – courtesy of the Pharisees absolute insistence on upholding the *letter* of the Mosaic law instead of the *heart* of the law – was necessary for the Mosaic law's writing on the hearts of all men. Thus, it could be argued that the Jewish spirit's role in Hegel's philosophy of history is to accelerate the contradictions involved in abiding only by formal determinations (constituting the nature of *Verstand*) until the overarching idea of God qua "infinite Other" is recognised as superfluous.

The Jews, of course, lived under the Persians during the period that Hegel is referring to at this point (around the fifth century BC). However, the Persian empire ended through defeat to the militarily superior Macedonian army organised by Alexander the Great, something which Hegel believes to be the result of Persia's inability to consolidate its conquered lands. However, he also believes this outcome to be downstream from the necessity for particularity to develop into its own ideal and posit *itself* as the substance. This historical epoch is the purpose that Hegel gives to the Greek world³⁰.

The Greek world

Mankind's withdrawal into itself is acknowledged as the ultimate virtue of the Greek spirit, hence the emergence of "philosophy" (meaning "love of wisdom") as an intellectual practice during this very epoch:

In summing up what the *Greek spirit* is, we find its fundamental characteristic to be, that the freedom of spirit is conditioned by, and has an essential relation to, some stimulus supplied by nature. Greek freedom of thought is excited by something other, and is free because it transforms and produces the stimulus from outside of itself. This phases fo spirit is the medium between the loss of individuality on the part of man... and infinite subjectivity as pure certainty of itself – the position that the I is the ground of all that can lay claim to substantial existence. The Greek spirit as the medium between these two, begins with nature, but transforms it into a mere objective form of its (spirit's) own existence; spirituality is therefore not yet absolutely free; not yet absolutely *out* of itself (Hegel, 2011, pp. 218-9).

³⁰ I owe a great debt to Robert Stern (2013) for the following coverage on the Greek world, especially the section on *Antigone*.

The theological relation that Hegel describes here is encapsulated by the foundations of the *polis* in Plato's *Republic*. The *polis* is a city state constituted on a tripartite concept of the human soul: reason, spirit and appetite. For Hegel, it represents the greatest achievement in the Greek world's objectification of man, namely in the form of its essence taking the objective form of a state. Compared to the primitive societies of China, India and Egypt, whose societies are directly structured in the image of an abstract deity of some kind (which entails men being legally recognised as no more than subjects), the Greek polis is an expression of first, man's knowledge of its own general condition and second, its recognition of the rational necessity to give this general condition an objective form. As Hegel states in the above passage: reason has not yet recognised the historical concepts of thought, the "I", as where knowledge begins. In this stage, reason has merely advanced beyond accepting servility to abstract mythical forces to the basic level of seeing the role of the state to be the flourishing of the particular, viz man in this general condition. To be sure, this is particularity understood in the narrowest of ways: the moral ends of the individual are understood to be the moral ends of the state and vice versa. Moreover, any harm done to particular citizens, in the *Republic*, is discussed and approached with strict reference to the level of harm inflicted onto the state. This is, of course, because the state itself is perceived as a literal expression of the human soul; the idea that something may be an unjust outcome for one but not for the other in the polis is a possibility that Plato does not consider. Why? Because despite the fact that the state itself rationally emerges from humanity positing itself as an object for consciousness, the polis remains an objectification of a pre-reflective civilisation. For Hegel, at this state in reason's dialectic, intellectual activity has not advanced beyond the individual's direct identification with this objectification of man in this ideal condition. This identification engenders the "happy state" alluded to earlier, where man seems to enjoy a tranquil, nonconceptual union with nature, having both acquired the sensation of assuming a permanent place within it (referring to nature as an organism in itself) and attaining full social recognition for fulfilling this natural purpose in return³¹.

³¹ This is the same idea of freedom that Schelling and romantics such as Jacobi sought to defend in their critiques of Enlightenment reason, many which evidently left a permanent mark on Hegel despite his later charges against romanticism.

Hegel, like the romantics (of which Rousseau is included), clearly laments the collapse of the Greek polis, particularly the positive freedom³² that this happy state engendered. However, he saw its collapse as inevitable due to the contradictions that persisted. He articulates what these contradictions are in the *POS*, within a section in *Spirit* titled “The Ethical Order” (Hegel (1977b, pp. 266-94). Here, Hegel affirms that the individual’s direct identification with the polis is upheld by two hypostatized metaphysical totalities representing the human law and the divine law, the former serving the domain of *individuality* and the latter serving that of *universality*. Both the human law and the divine law comprise a sustainable and harmonious life that circulates around the family unit: men – intrinsically tied to the virtue of *individuality* – make the transition from family member to public citizen within the polis, and women – intrinsically tied to the virtue of *universality* – raise families so as to preserve and renew the moral and cultural fabric of Greek life itself (Stern, 2013, pp. 156-167). The harmonious relationship between the family and the polis, for Hegel, is encapsulated by the fact that on the husband and father’s death, his body is returned to the family for burial as a gesture of the state’s compassion.

Precisely why this relationship between the family and the state is doomed to fail is clarified in Hegel’s coverage of Sophocles’s *Antigone*, where he enables us to observe the collapse of this happy state for ourselves³³. The posited totalities of the human law and divine law are brought into conflict by the relationships between Antigone, her brother Polynices, and their uncle Creon. Creon – acting in service of the human law and his duties to the state – governs in strict accordance with his official remit as King, whereas Antigone (his niece) – acting in service of the divine law and obligation to her family – acts in accordance with her conscience as Polynices’s sister. Tensions between the family, understood as the nucleus of Greek ethical life, and the polis supposedly constituted on this principle, arise from Creon and Polynices being both family members and state officials. Due to Polynices’s expulsion by Eteocles and their

³² This use of “positive” is different from the “positivity” used to in the previous chapters (including earlier in this one). In contrast to “negative freedom”, which refers to freedom *from* social intervention, “positive freedom” refers to the forms of freedom specifically created by social intervention.

³³ I agree with Robert Stern (2013, p.160) that it would be a mistake to perceive Hegel as identifying a hero in either Antigone for acting in her brother’s honour or Creon for his commitment to the state. Hegel is clearly presenting both characters in his critique as dialectical actors for opposite sides in the false hypostatisation constituting Greek ethical life. Thus, in my view, it would be more accurate to say that the cunning of reason runs not through Antigone or Creon per se, but through both as equally necessary components in the destruction of the polis.

respective deaths in the civil war that followed, Creon is obligated to deny the return of his body to his family of which Antigone is a part, despite this return being a divine right. Acting in virtue of the divine law, Antigone disobeys and is caught attempting to claim the body of her brother. In virtue of the human law, Creon responds by sentencing Antigone to a live burial for treason. However, through the conscience that emerges from his vocation as her uncle, he has a change of heart only to find that his niece has committed suicide alongside Haemon, his own son, before he could reverse his decision. The tragedy ends with the public reputation of Creon and his family being destroyed, thus being left to mourn the loss of his niece and son as well as his role in public life.

The importance that Hegel sees Sophocles's play to have, of course, extends far beyond surface level criticism of the idea that the family and the state exist in a permanent interdependent relationship³⁴. He also sees the character of Antigone to express the moral vocation that we now understand to be inseparable from modern consciousness, not least because the law that Antigone adheres to throughout, *viz* the divine law, is demonstrated in the play as none other than the "law of the heart". The love Antigone has for her brother is true irrespective of what the state obliges her to do and so she acts in virtue of the law independent of her obligations. The law of the heart also shows itself later in Creon: having sentenced Antigone to death, he is unable to bypass his own conscience as a member of her family. However, he only comes to this realisation after it is too late, and as a result, justice only exists in this tragedy in the form of Creon's own repentance once he learns of her and his son's fate.

Thus, the historical interpretation of the Greek world that Hegel tries to present can be summarised as follows. As socially cohesive and tranquillising as direct identification with the Ethical Order may feel (something which is comparable to earliest followers of Jesus), the "happy state" existing between the family and a state constituted on the human soul was based on an excessively narrow idea of freedom from the very beginning – not only with regards to the family and government generally, but also with regards the intrinsic relationship between man and objectification itself.

³⁴ In fact, Plato (2007) himself expresses an awareness of the risk that the family poses to the polis's existence through arguing that children of a certain age should be separated from their families. This is not only for the benefit of the hardened character they will need in order to sufficiently carry out their future obligations to the polis: it is to ensure that their loyalty to the state remains uncompromised.

In his formal position as a King, Creon is correct to deem his own moral conscience and Antigone's devotion to her brother as existential threats to the polis's positive social foundations. Antigone must die and Creon must lose his position of authority because the moral sentiments of both directly threaten the Ethical Order itself, of which has been rightly shown up as being based on an unreflective and contradictory union.

It is the fettered existence of this union, for Hegel, that Antigone's contentions make explicit for consciousness and thus expresses the necessity for a *new* social and political environment. Antigone's fate shows that particularity must be allowed to develop beyond the strictly anthropomorphic idea of man embedded in the Greek spirit in order for individual distinction to be truly understood as a necessary condition of freedom.

By refusing to accept Creon's ruling over her brother's body, before then acting in contempt of it, Antigone has appealed to a form of particularity that is too rationally advanced for the anthropomorphic ideal of the polis. She identified her family and her brother as more important than that of the state because the divine law itself compels her to do so; what made her death sentence rational and necessary, in the eyes of the statesman, was the fact that she stood opposed to the human law's encroachment of the divine law, the latter of which assumed an absolutely positive form under Creon's intervention. Now that the cunning of reason has burst the fetters involved in this happy state, the relationship between the state and the human law must evolve to accommodate the principle that Antigone has shown to be substantive: that the family, and an individual's relationship with their family is *not* the business of the human law at all. Classical societies at this moment in time must, for Hegel, devise ways of regulating themselves in order to ensure that a true reconciliatory coexistence between the divine law and the human law can be sustained. This is the historical role Hegel gives to the Roman world, which through the contribution of Servius Tullius, established the objective recognition of people as "persons", introduced property rights by natural extension, and planted the seeds for what Hegel later describes as "abstract right".

The Roman world

Hegel (1977b) sees the "legal condition" as a rational advance on the Greek concept of communal membership. Rather than seeing themselves as individual actors of

collective intentionality like the Greeks, Roman citizens embrace their particular personalities and tastes. They distinguish themselves through absolute *negativity* and thus identify not with any posited universal ideal, but through their *otherness* in relation to other subjects. As such, it is seen as the Roman state's obligation to act in virtue of this prioritisation of freedom qua particular distinction. As important a social achievement as this it, it had the effect of establishing material variables and thus personal wealth as the defining metric of social class:

The element of inwardness that was wanting to the Greeks, we found among the Romans: but it being formal and in itself indefinite it took its content from passion and caprice; even the most shameful degradations could be here connected with a divine awe [...]. This element of inwardness was afterwards further realised as the personality of individuals, a realisation which is exactly adequate to the principle, and is equally abstract and formal (Hegel, 2011, p. 291).

I interrupt this excerpt only to stress the importance of what follows to our discussion of reification, which will be picked up on later in our discussion about Fichte:

As this I, I am infinite to myself, and my existence [Dasein] is my property and my recognition as [a] person. This inwardness goes no further; all further content has disappeared in it. Individuals are thereby posited as atoms; but they are at the same time subject to the severe rule of the one, which as *monas monadium*, is the power over private persons. Private law is therefore just as well a non-existence, a non-recognition, of the person, and this condition of law is the complete absence of law. This contradiction is the misery of the Roman world. The subject, according to the principle of his personality, is entitled only to possession; and the person among persons is entitled to the possession of everything, making the individual rights to be, as it were, nullified and without right (Hegel, 2011, p. 291).

Hegel's open cynicism towards Roman society could be owed specifically to the moral decadence that was witnessed by historians in the later stages of the Empire, including the open celebration of greed, corruption among the senators, a relapse in sexual morals and most famously of all, the regrettably rational presence of paranoia in political life (given that assassinations were endemic). The "misery" that he describes, however, most likely refers to the social pathology that emerges from this form of particularism, namely a complete absence of spiritual *oikos*. Indeed, the Greek "happy state" which constrained such an *oikos* was based on an illusory concept of collective intentionality, but the idea of a universal man clearly itself worked as a unifying principle for as long as it could last. In contrast, the Roman world posited the universal state – a de facto "infinite Other" – as this ideal, resulting in citizens being infinitely in

their own distinctive forms of particularity whilst being subservient to the Roman state's coercive power at the same time. Its historical role was to burst the general idea of ethical substance to make way for the individual's new status as a private person; placing *positive* freedom in servility to *negative* freedom. Whilst being a social regression from the Greek one, the Roman world serves a *rational* purpose in the development of self-knowledge.

Hegel presents the historical reasons as follows. Whereas the spirit of the Greek state thrived through the complete identification of the individual and the state, as well as the identification of ethical practice with custom – customs of which are inseparable from the character of the state – the Roman world's origins as a “robber state” comprised of criminals, deserters and exiled mercenaries from neighbouring provinces (Beard, 2015, p. 53-89), meant that it was built on *negative* premises from the very start. Whilst Rome eventually developed and improved the founding tenets of the modern state, entailing the introduction of innovative judicial practices which precipitated the actualisation of the personal freedoms still enjoyed in Europe today - which Hegel later refers to as ‘abstract right’ - the historical conditions that justified Rome's foundation essentially meant that the unifying principle of the Roman spirit was as a place of *escape* rather than a place of *home*. As such, despite being a necessary social advance for the inward sense, the Roman state was ultimately soulless.

In radical contrast with the Greek “happy state”, Roman citizens, for Hegel – seeing more value in personal status than an abstract ideal of universal man – had greater affection for the characteristics of their social class than for any idea of being ‘Roman’. This attitude even pervaded the military itself, which had the effect of attracting men motivated more by personal ambition than any positive identification with the state they served. Alas, following the dissolution of the smaller Republic and the subsequent birth of the Empire, Rome succumbed to an endemic culture of paranoia conspiracy, corruption and even murder in pursuit of political ambition, all of which are perfectly expressive of the atomism problem that Hegel describes. Self-interest was the *Zeitgeist* of the Roman age because self-interest itself was precisely what the Roman legal institutions were established to uphold. It is for this reason that, to Hegel “the grandeur of individual character” and “spiritless unity”, are the defining characteristics of the Roman state.

Returning to our earlier comparison, whereas Ancient Greek life, to Hegel, is characterised by its inability to develop inwardly, Roman life is built upon a demagoguery of individual distinction, which exists to “the fullest measure” at the cost of social vitality. Such a commitment, to Hegel, involves the total negation of ethical life in the pursuit of absolute power for its own sake. It is for all these reasons that he describes the Roman world on the whole in a contemptuous tone:

The Roman principle [exhibits] itself as the cold abstraction of lordship and power, as the pure egotism of the will against others, containing no ethical fulfilment, but which only gains content through particular interests. The increase in the number of provinces was transformed into the accretion of inward particularisation and in the corruption stemming therefrom... [r]iches were received as spoils, not as the fruit of industry and honest activity, just as the navy had arisen, not from the necessities of commerce but with the object of war. The Roman state, founded on robbery as its means, was therefore divided on account of shares in the spoils (Hegel, 2011, p. 282).

Despotism was a permanent fact of the latter’s political life for the simple reason that the state was based on the principle of “pure egotism” – circulating around the particular interests of individuals – necessitates the state having to assert itself to considerable levels in order to prevent the *particularistic* vitality of the Roman spirit from threatening the state as a universal entity. (Avineri, 1972). This includes the Senate as much as the citizens themselves, hence why the Republic evolved into an Empire and why power was eventually consolidated into the hands of a single ruler. The absence of cultural vitality also meant that Rome had the problem of new provinces demanding recognition as such, which of course hurt its legitimacy and strength as the parent state.

The Greek polis ultimate dissolution in the pursuit of greater room for particular distinction, for Hegel, was in virtue of Spirit’s need to be brought out of a condition that, while harmonious, was *unreflective* and constrained the realisation of freedom in the proper sense. Consider this later quote from the *POS* as an example:

The wisest men of antiquity have [declared] that wisdom and virtue consist in living in accordance with the customs of one’s nation. But from this happy state of having realised its essential character and of living in it, self-consciousness, which at first is Spirit only *immediately* and in *principle*, has withdrawn, or else has not realised it; for both may equally well be said. Reason *must* withdraw from this happy state; for [...the ethical order] exists merely as something given; therefore this universal Spirit itself is a separate, individual spirit, and the

customs and laws in their entirety are a *specific* ethical substance, which only in the higher stage, *viz* In Spirit's consciousness of its essence, shed this limitation and in this knowledge alone has its absolute truth, not as it *immediately* is (Hegel, 1977b, pp. 214).

As Hegel observed with Sophocles's *Antigone*, the Greek world was unable because it completely lacked the element of abstract freedom that, to Hegel, assumes a necessary part of freedom itself, *viz* the recognition of particularity and thus subjectivity as elements not opposed to, but are rather inscribed in the essence of human freedom. This objective recognition of people not only as persons but also as individuals with particular interests and a capacity for reflection is the nature of the Roman world's achievement for Hegel: it is to these legal developments that the 'modern individual', or rather the concept of the 'person', accepted by Christ and thus in the Germanic world itself, owes its roots.

Whilst the inward Roman spirit demonstrated why an unreflective ethical order could not persist on rational grounds, however, it proceeded to demonstrate why a state based on universal egotism was destined to collapse entirely under its own auspices. Unlike the Greek world – which understood particularity only with reference to an ideal form of human flourishing – the Roman world went too far in collapsing this essential, but underdeveloped form of particularity which – at this point – begins and ends in “legal status”. This, for Hegel, had the effect of soul-sacking the state of any ethical basis and thus leaving unlimited power as the only means through which it can survive. What he evidently sees in these developments is the “infinite Otherness” covered in Chapter II assuming an objective and much more pervasive form in the Roman world, where subjects with their legal recognition as self-legislating individuals are inadvertently placed in permanent opposition to the world (other subjects included). What this does is give the individuals themselves rational grounds for assuming that everything outside of themselves, including other rational subjects, are potentially hostile or a threat to their freedom in some form. The “I” is aware of its inward particularity, but only insofar as it can see itself only through itself: it is trapped in universal solipsism. Scepticism is the only result of this irreconcilable dualism for Hegel, with the political consequence being perennial paranoia in every aspect of life. As such, the fate of the Roman world is exactly the same as what Hegel sees to be the fate of Judaism: where the social and political aspects of life are reduced to arbitrary struggles for social recognition and political control which seem to place both

against whatever ethical principles they may have had originally³⁵. In fact, the meta-ethical idea of having a divine order consisting of immutable principles – which rightfully imposes limits on the subject's self-efficacy – seems to deplete in significance whilst the human law proceeds to assume a wholly autonomous form of its own.

As should be well known by this point: such a development, whereby abstract laws become decoupled before setting out to displace the old ontology, is a rational and purposive case of reification within Hegel's philosophy of history because it plays an active role in the development of man's inward spirit. Man could not have truly understood the reconciliatory value of Christianity without first taking a glance into hell first, *viz* the complete breakdown of order, morality and the absolute triumph of the *Realpolitik*: where self-interest and self-preservation are recognised as the highest virtues in all aspects of life, with the natural consequence being that *trust* becomes something of a normative vice. Individuals are placed against one another not only because they are coerced into direct competition, but because there exists the real threat of betrayal at every corner. To summarise Hegel's point: the Roman state's basis on universal egotism, for the historical furtherance of this inward, legal principle, leaves the efficacious individual at odds with everything including himself. Why? Because the very thing that he is placed at odds with, *viz* his friends, family and the institutions that played a role in raising him, are all things through which his individuality is inseparable from. Man is a social being, but the Roman state seems only willing to recognise him as a political and economic one.

Hegel's description of the nature and inevitable fate of the Roman world is remarkably similar, if not exactly the same in some of the details, as Lukács's description of capitalism and reification. Following Marx, Lukács is unambiguous in stressing that the concentration of state power around the interests of the merchant class will inevitably lead to the further subjugation of the workers under the division of labour, the mutilation of the natural world in pursuit of surplus value (including the mutilation of man) and the collapse of capitalism itself once the bourgeoisie's estranged epistemic standing intensifies the "atomisation" of society:

[T]he movement of commodities on the market, the birth of their value, in a word, the real framework of every rational calculation is not merely subject to strict laws but also presupposes

³⁵ Hegel aside, it is perhaps more plausible that the joint fate of Rome and Judea is the result of their populations' subjection to positive institutions that are completely devoid of any reflective capacity.

the strict ordering of all that happens. The atomisation of the individual is, then, only the reflex in consciousness of the fact that the 'natural laws' of capitalist production have been extended to cover every manifestation of life in society; that – for the first time in history – the whole of society is subjected, or tends to be subjected, to a unified economic process, and that the fate of every member of society is determined by unified laws (Lukács, 2017, p.72).

This social pathology that Hegel describes as “atomism” is quite clearly at the heart of Marx and Lukács’s critique of capitalism, hence their ample use of the sheer weight involved in Hegel’s charge against a self-serving class that answers only to *Verstand*. However, despite this remarkable parallel, Lukács does not once credit Hegel for taking note of the phenomenon of reification before him or Marx. This, I suspect, is for the same political reasons that justified his belief that Hegel’s philosophy became redundant the second he became an affluent member of the bourgeoisie. However, it is also worth considering that Marx and Lukács’s conclusion still depends on Hegel’s philosophy of history except for the matter of what the stimulus of historical change is. For Hegel, the stimulus is simply the contradictions within ideas which assume an objective form either in human behaviour, or in the institutions established to proliferate these ideas. Whereas for Marx, it is the contradictions that emerge from economic conditions. Both, however, for the sake of their own historical conclusions, see the atomistic Roman spirit as one that necessarily realised the inward principle that the Germanic world would have to mitigate. The main difference, of course, is that whilst Hegel sees the Germanic world as the epoch where “absolute knowing” is realised, Marx, Lukács and the other left-Hegelians see the very idea of reconciling the universal and particular will as the source of the Germanic world’s contradictions.

Up to this point of division between Hegel and Marx, all the aforementioned acknowledge Roman law to have served a *communicative* function above the inhabitants themselves by informing them of their innate capacity and desire for distinction and freedom from interference (in the same way that, according to Hegel, the Greek symposiums informed the Persians that the self-efficacy they had discovered belonged in an ideal of *man* as opposed to an essentially different being). For clarification: when describing an institution or system as “communicative”, I am referring to their capacity to facilitate or respond to mutual deliberation which could be perceived to grant these institutions and/or systems the legitimacy to act on a rational agent’s behalf. This notion is contained within both volumes of Jürgen Habermas’s *Theory of Communicative Action* (1984;1987) (*TCA1*; *TCA2*). Unlike Habermas,

however, I'm going to consider the idea that Hegel does: namely that in some cases, the domination of the subject's social world – referred to by Edmund Husserl as the "lifeworld" – amounts to a net gain on the condition that the historical determinations transforming the subject are demonstrably *rational* (and, in Hegel's case, consistent with the concept of Christian liberty). Developments such as these, in Hegel, are cases of rationalisation but *not* necessarily reification, because the communicative capacity of these institutions has clearly allowed them to prevent the positive elements from becoming autonomous or excessively overpowering.

Brief remarks on communicative rationality

With the concept of communicative development now outlined, I would like to turn briefly to the different forms which it assumes in the philosophies of history so far discussed. For Marxists and left-Hegelians, reification *could* be understood to occur when capitalist institutions cease to be communicative and instead, become absolutely positive but autonomous within the confines of this positivity, thus operating in the same fashion as a closed, cybernetic feedback loop.

Should the communist revolution have taken place in a hypothetical scenario, all institutions would be immediately perceived as communicative because of their basis on the proletariat's interest. However, for Lukács, capitalist institutions with non-communicative intentionality have found a way of transmitting the impression that they *are* communicative to their subjects through taking on a socially progressive guise. In *One Dimensional Man*, Marcuse (2002), presents the welfare state as one such trojan horse:

By way of summary: the prospects of containment of change, offered by the politics of technological rationality, depend on the prospects of the Welfare state. Such a state seems capable of raising the standard of administered living, a capability inherent in all advanced industrial societies where the streamlined technical apparatus – set up as a separate power over and above the individuals – depends in its functioning on the intensified development and expansion of productivity. Under such conditions, [the] decline of freedom and opposition is not a matter of moral or intellectual deterioration or corruption. It is rather an objective societal process insofar as the production and distribution of an increasing quantity of goods and services make compliance a rational technological attitude (Marcuse, 2002, p.52).

Moreover, in his notorious essay, *Repressive Tolerance*, Marcuse openly declares a state of emergency to the "new left". He argues that the true political purpose of the

legal instruments underwriting supposedly democratic societies is to deny rational beings of their natural communicative capacity, and in turn, prevent the dialectic (which has detracted from both Marx and Hegel at this point) from reaching its inevitable conclusion³⁶:

Democracy is a type of government which fits very different types of society (this holds true even for a democracy with universal suffrage and equality before the law), and the human costs of a democracy are always and everywhere those enacted by the society whose government it is. Their range extends all the way from normal exploitation, poverty, and insecurity to the victims of wars, police actions, military aid, etc., in which the society is engaged – and not only to the victims within its own frontiers. These considerations can never justify the enacting of different sacrifices and different victims on behalf of a future better society, but they do allow weighing the costs involved in the perpetuation of an existing society against the risk of promoting alternatives which offer a reasonable chance of pacification and liberation. Surely, no government can be expected to foster its own subversion, but in a democracy such a right is vested in the people (i.e. in the majority of the people). This means that ways that should not be blocked on which a subversive majority could develop, and if they are blocked by organised repression and indoctrination, their reopening may require undemocratic means (Marcuse, 1965, pp. 99-100).

In a passage of equal significance to the “modern dilemma” as it is today (Taylor, 1979), Hegel, in the *POS*, launches a full-scale attack on the Enlightened consciousness. *Qua* “pure insight” (referring to what Hegel perceives as Kant’s “striving”, transcendent subject), the Enlightened consciousness – also referred to as “absolute freedom” – dogmatically rejects “faith” in its entirety in order to place itself over and above its own historical conditions in precisely the way that Marcuse advocates in *Repressive Tolerance*. Given that self-positing subjects are defined by their position of infinite separation from each other, the inevitable result is that they have no choice but to socially and politically unify around an abstract and ahistorical antithetical “Other”, posited in this instance as a totality. For Hegel, this social phenomenon is one that contains the utmost danger, for if the subject-order of history is established in collective consciousness as the self-legislating subject, then there are no limits on what can be justified as necessary destruction. Hegel saw this very pathology to emerge in the Jacobins, whereby an abstraction of human freedom that become all the more pervasive through intersubjective miosis culminated in what is

³⁶ This conclusion is more an allusion to the 1960s ideal of “universal liberation” than the communism of classical Marxism.

now known as the *Terror*. He sees this to be the inevitable end of this “atomistic” concept of freedom, *viz* “absolute freedom”, where those who conformed with the universal, or the “One”, subsequently merge into a subordinate consortium of negative actors, all of whom uphold the view that those whom the universal has failed to unify pose an existential threat to the universal itself. The universal is, of course, in reality, nothing more and nothing less than themselves acting in conjoined arbitration. As such, the spectre of an “antithetical Other” unites them, and those seen to be not standing opposed to this posited universal with enough enthusiasm are at risk of getting caught up in the frenzy of annihilation:

Just as the individual self-consciousness does not find itself in this *universal work* of absolute freedom *qua* existent Substance, so little does it find itself in the *deeds* proper and *individual* actions of the will of this freedom. Before the universal can perform a deed it must concentrate itself into the One of individuality and put at the head an individual self-consciousness; for the universal will is only an *actual* will in a self, which is a One. But thereby all other individuals are excluded from the entirety of this deed and have only a limited share in it, so that the deed would not be a deed of the *actual universal* self-consciousness. Universal freedom, therefore, can produce neither a positive work nor a deed; there is left for it only *negative* action; it is merely the *fury* of destruction (Hegel, 1977b, p.359).

In seeing capitalism and bourgeois consciousness as those which metaphysically stand over and above the realisation of “true” Reason, *viz Vernunft* as they understand it, Marx, Lukács and Marcuse all commit the vice of placing self-knowledge, or inwardness, at the level of divinity, which eventually comes to the detriment of self-knowledge itself (hence why, for Hegel, Napoleon restored much of what the Jacobin directorship destroyed). Hegel, in short, sees this interdependence between the human law and the divine law, the universal will and the particular will, and the rights-based civil society with an aristocratic structure of some kind, as where the most reasonable limits on human freedom are set. The institutions that engender and sustain these forms of mediation – which seek to reconcile the aforementioned forms of positivity – qualify as communicative in Hegel’s philosophy of history. If this interpretation of Hegel is correct, then the scenario whereby the state fails to do so – leading to the ultimate *breakdown* of the communicative relationship between the objective parameters – is what theoretically provides the preconditions for reification to occur.

Hegel, of course, does not join Lukács in believing that the breakdown of the communicative relationship within the capitalist structure confirms the existence of a post-capitalist epoch in waiting. However, he does seem to be alluding to the same social phenomenon that Lukács describes as “objective reification”, whereby economic forces assert themselves in ways that reconstruct the state itself in line with the interests of particular corporations or lobby groups. Intriguingly, this highlights a problem with Lukács’s theory: he presents reification as both an indication of a pending, historical epoch *and* one that exists only to deny this inevitability. Objective reification for Hegel, on the other hand, is simpler and seems to be the result of a breakdown within the communicative relationship between the state and civil society, leading to the structural transformation of both.³⁷

In the case of the Roman world, this communicative breakdown between the emperor, the senators, the consuls and the citizens served a specific historical purpose, which was to take the inward principle to its soulless and atomistic conclusion. For Hegel, this was necessary on the grounds that the need for abstract right to be reconciled with a higher ethical unity couldn’t be demonstrated without the limits of the legal condition being demonstrated first. This task of reconciling abstract right and morality is what Hegel sees as history’s last task, and one which he assigns to Christianity and the Germanic world.

The Germanic world

In the Germanic world, we arrive at the “end of history” and thus the blueprint that Hegel’s concept of reification is derived from: the idea of a communicative modern state, *viz* a synthesis of the Greek and Roman state following Christianity’s emergence as an answer to the lack of mediation between the individual and the state (Avineri, 1972, pp. 227). The *name* of this epoch, however, has given rise to interpretations of Hegel’s ideas that misrepresent him and his philosophy considerably. For a start, despite what it may suggest, Hegel does not see the Germanic world as one that geographically begins and ends in the political idea of a united Germany, or in the broader ethnic idea of Germania. This is evidenced in his transcribed *LPH*, where he

³⁷ The capacity for wealth accumulation to engineer political corruption is something that Hegel describes as an endemic problem in the *POR*. Reification occurs when it is only the point at which it objectively succeeds such economic forces succeed to the degree that it restructures the legal system in its favour.

demonstrably refers to the Spirit of Christianity and its secular fate, hence his reference to the “Germanic peoples” as the bearers of Enlightenment:

The Germanic spirit is the spirit of the new world. Its aim is the realisation of absolute truth as the infinite self-determination of freedom – *that* freedom which has its own absolute form as its content. The destiny of the Germanic peoples is to be the bearers of the Christian principle (Hegel, 2011, p. 311).

Thus, in perfect accordance with the *Great Commission* discussed throughout this thesis, the historical purpose of those across Europe, America and Oceania who inherit the Christian spirit, is to dignify the Earth by bringing its underdeveloped and primitive characteristics under the auspices of the secular state. Hegel’s mature attempt to find politics expression in the *POR*, with the domain of *morality* engendering the conditions for man in his universal vocation, *viz* as an attribute of God, and *abstract right* engendering those for man as in his vocation as a particular person, *viz* as a self-legislating individual. The result of a communicative and interdependent relationship between the two is what Hegel describes as the “Ethical Sphere”:

The fact that the ethical sphere is the system of these specific determinations of the Idea which constitutes its *rationality*. in this way, the ethical sphere is freedom, or the will which has being in and for itself as objectivity, as a circle of necessity whose moments are the *ethical powers* which govern the lives of individuals (Hegel, 1991, p. 190).

These “ethical powers”, which mediate the lives and behaviour of individuals, come from social institutions with reflective and thus communicative capacities; a transformative relationship between the universal and particular attributes of each person and institution. This mediative relation, for Hegel, is the political encapsulation of human freedom fully realised, and the objectification of “absolute knowing” as he describes it in the *POS*:

This reconciliation of consciousness with self-consciousness thus shows itself as brought about from two sides; on one side, in the religious Spirit, and on the other side, in consciousness itself as such. The difference between them is that in the former this reconciliation is in the form of *being-in-itself* or *implicit* being, and in the latter in the explicit form of *being-for-self* (Hegel, 1977b, p. 482).

It is evident that the “*being-for-self*” refers to the individual with the particular determinations that need mediating/regulating, whereas the “*being-in-itself*” refers to the determinations that *precede* the being-for-self, residing in the religion which

acknowledged and established the being-for-self as an essential part of the absolute. However, of specific importance for our purposes is how in this same excerpt, Hegel proceeds to explain that it is rational and necessary for the two to at first become decoupled:

In our consideration of them they at first fall apart. In the other in which the shapes of consciousness came before us, consciousness reached the individual moments of those shapes and their unification long before ever religion gave its object the shape of actual self-consciousness. The unification of the two sides has not yet been exhibited: it is this that closes the series of the Shapes of Spirit, for in it Spirit attains to a knowledge of itself not only as it is *in-itself* or as possessing an absolute *content*, not only as it is *in-itself* or as possessing an absolute content, nor only as it is for itself as a form devoid of content, or as the aspect of self-consciousness, but as it is both *in essence* and in actuality, or *in-and-for-itself* (Hegel, 1977b, pp. 482-3).

The second half of the above excerpt is especially dense. However, I believe it can be understood in the following way: in order for both *being-in-itself* and *being-for-self* to reconcile, and thus give rise to the higher unity of which the Ethical Order is the objective expression, there first has to be a moment where both are in dialectical confrontation. As such, because the *being-in-itself* exists as the dominant totality from which the aforementioned ethical powers pervade (something we assume from the fact that nothing can precede God, or the Idea) there must be a moment – or ongoing series of moments – where the *being-for-self* establishes itself as an independent totality with man, in his vocation as a self-legislating, autonomous subject, assuming the role of God and thus becoming the new entity from which ethical powers pervade. Put alternatively: necessary for the realisation of the absolute idea, and thus the acceptance of Christianity as an enabler of “absolute knowing”, is another moment *within* the Germanic epoch where Christianity itself as perceived as the antithetical Other standing in the way of freedom’s “true” form in the belief that man attains a higher level of freedom from God’s negation.

To be sure, it is possible that Hegel – in this brief reference to the necessary, autonomisation and objectification of the *being-for-self* – is referring back to the preceding Roman epoch, especially as it was under Roman rule that Christianity became politically purposive. However, I believe that Hegel is appealing to more than this, because similar – if not identical – conceptual dichotomies appear in various other places in the *POS*. This includes the conclusion in “Absolute Knowing”, where *being-*

for-self and *being-in-itself* assume essential parts of the absolute idea where true freedom is contained, suggesting that the conceptual tension is *ahistorical* and thus not exclusively a historical phenomenon that appears out of rational necessity in the Roman epoch. In “Culture” – the chapter that succeeds “The Ethical Order”, where Hegel’s immanent critique of Antigone features – Hegel describes a dialectical sequence between “faith”, viz the pre-Enlightened religious consciousness, and “pure insight”, viz the Enlightened consciousness that rejects religion entirely in an attempt to develop itself without what it sees as unnecessary constraints. In pursuit of reaching higher ideals located outside of religion, “pure insight” becomes engulfed in solipsism and therefore finds itself unable to find any such ideals located outside of itself. As such, it proceeds to make moral judgements from an atomised position composed entirely of its own self-positing concepts, leading it to believe itself justified see all objective parameters imposed upon it as attempted attacks on its freedom (Hegel, 1977b, pp. 361-3). Freedom thus becomes synonymous with *freedom from determination*, thus placing pure insight continuously against the determinations that create the possibility for freedom itself. Alas, the dialectical exchange ends with it embarking on a conceited rampage against *all* parameters that it sees as encroaching on its self-positing “sphere of freedom”. Through this destructive exchange of ideas, Hegel is attempting to demonstrate how the universal and particular will – represented by faith and pure insight respectively – stood in false opposition from the very beginning, with the solution being to recognise that for freedom to be substantive, the positive and negative elements must have a permanent, regulatory effect on each other:

Absolute freedom has thus removed the antithesis between the universal and the individual will. The self-alienated Spirit, driven to the extreme of its antithesis in which pure willing and the agent of that pure willing are still distinct, reduces the antithesis to a transparent form and therein finds itself. Just as the realm of the real world passes over into the realm of faith and [pure] insight, so does absolute freedom leave its self-destroying reality and pass over into another land of self-conscious Spirit where, in this unreal world freedom has the value of truth. In the thought of this truth Spirit refreshes itself, and so far as it is and remains thought, and knows this being which is enclosed within self-consciousness to be essential being in its perfection and completeness (Hegel, 1977b, p. 636).

The “absolute freedom” that Hegel criticises in “Culture” refers to Rousseau and the Jacobin’s idea of individual autonomy, which confirms that the social phenomenon he

describes is not something he sees as exclusive to the fate of the Roman world. However, how can we be sure that he is alluding to the same social phenomenon at all? Because both the fate of Rome and the French Revolution appear to be presented by Hegel as expressions of the same pathology occurring at different historical times, culminating in *inward* forces placing the constituents against one another (eventually by force). In the Roman world, the legal condition is the arbiter of the inward force: citizens are compelled to relate through formal vocations and legal instruments (such as contracts) imposed on them by the state. This, for Hegel has the effect of suppressing the social conditions required for an ethical basis for life to form, which in turn causes social activity to become inseparable from self-interest. As put by Avineri:

To the Roman, the state is the ultimate end, not the totality of social life, as it was to the Greek. The individual is a mere instrument in the hands of the state and the polis is turned into a universal empire, which thus ceases to be the realm of beautiful, through unmediated freedom, and becomes the sphere of hard work and servitude. The universal entity engulfs the individuals and they have to disappear in it – persons, peoples, all particular and distinct units. This is the utter abstraction of power, and with the growth of empire the struggle for power within Rome itself became worse, since nothing could satiate the infinite drive for more and more power (Avineri, 1972, p. 227).

In Hegel's critique of absolute freedom, however – which culminates in the Terror – he seems to be alluding to an advanced, intellectual form of the inward development demonstrated in Rome. Rather than being coerced in virtue of the state's pursuit of power for its own sake, in the Jacobin directorship we see the state posit itself as the arbiter of the highest ideal: the universal will of man. As such, for as long as it is done on the universal man's behalf, the state, in principle, has the absolute authority to act in whatever way it sees fit. The state also inherits the duty of imposing this freedom against the will of resisting citizens off the back of its own self-positing moral basis: that those who resist the state have failed to realise that no intrinsic antagonisms between themselves and the state exist. It could be argued then from Hegel's point of view, that the spirit of the French Revolution is merely an intensified version of the inward spirit of Rome, with the only difference emerging as a natural extension of the original principle: whereas the Roman state demanded servitude from its subjects, the Jacobin directorship – under the name of the National Guard – demanded this same level of servitude to the state whilst also demanding that subjects commit to the intellectual labour of becoming truly efficacious, viz by freeing themselves from the historical

constraints of religious doctrine (Rousseau, 1920). Aside from the differences between the two periods, however, it seems that the cynicism that Hegel has towards both Rome and the Jacobin directorship is the same as his conceptual criticism of subjective/transcendental idealism: they are simply unable to situate freedom in a substantive ethical principle, and as such, engender a society that is based on atomised relations between people and their institutions. Through time, these atomising forces expand to have a denaturing and colonising effect on both social life and the state itself, eventually resulting in their complete destruction. If this interpretation is correct, then any of the former out of the aforementioned three dualisms – between solipsism and holism, *being-in-itself* and *being-for-self*, and religion and Enlightenment – are merely expressions of the *Verstand-Vernunft* distinction which allude to the risk of *Verstand* proceeding to dominate *Vernunft* should the necessarily communicative relationship between them breaks down.

This description of reification may sound very similar to the one Lukács (2017) gives. However, we must remind ourselves that they are believed to emerge from polar opposite sources: whereas Lukács believes ideological contradictions to be downstream from economic conditions, Hegel believes that the economic conditions are downstream from *thought*. In assuming pathological behaviour to be the result of attitudes emerging from suboptimal economic conditions, it could be argued that Lukács is guilty of oversimplifying the ultimate causes of reification as a phenomenon on Marx's behalf by sophistically setting himself up to work *against* the idea that the original moment of social and epistemic estrangement may actually occur at the conceptual level from the very start. Hegel's philosophy of history, which I have done my best to cover in this chapter, however, does a convincing job of explaining how this same phenomenon – which Lukács describes as “[the process whereby] a relation between people takes on the character of a thing [before acquiring] a phantom objectivity” – begins as a *conceptual* tension before proceeding to become a material one (following its objectification), and one that has, up to this point, performed a necessary role in the realisation of the Idea of which the Germanic world is the objective expression.

In his various critiques of Kant, Judaism, Catholicism, Roman society and even elements of reformed Christianity en route to the “end of history”, we have observed Hegel to take aim at the formalistic epistemology of *Verstand*,

subjective/transcendental idealism, solipsism, and instrumental reason all in quasi-cathartic bursts, almost as if they compose a part of the same entity, are expressions of that same entity, or *are* that same entity. We have discussed them as such in all the chapters so far. However, rather than to pivot between these terms as if they are synonymous and interchangeable, I believe it is more helpful to understand Hegel's allusions to the "soul sacked subject" that emerges from Kant's transcendental idealism, what he sees as the Jewish tendency to pursue abstract notions of progress that leads to the subordination of nature to mechanistic principles (Ormiston, 2002), what he sees as Catholicism's *trojaning* of the true Christian spirit through its ritualistic emphasis on works, and last but not least, the social and political atomism that pervaded the Roman Empire, as different descriptions of the same dialectical interplay between infinite "life" and the infinite "Otherness" or "lifelessness", both of which were introduced as concepts in the SOC; the ultimate tragedy thus exists in the form of *lifelessness* triumphing at the expense of *life* as Luther understands it. As we saw in Chapter II, however, this is a practical impossibility without both evil and morality existing as permanent determinations within the absolute idea. Assuming that this interpretation is correct, it would give Hegel's concept of modernity an unstable basis which could lead to total reification being the inevitable resolution to his dialectic.

Reification in Hegel's philosophy of history

My general proposition in this chapter is that this dialectical interplay between infinite *life* and infinite *lifelessness* within Hegel's philosophy of history – which persists in the form of an objectively established Ethical (mediated) relationship between universal and particular in the Germanic epoch (for as long as it lasts) – should be interpreted to develop in the following way.

In the Oriental world – a point that arguably most applies to Mayan, Egyptian, and Indian societies of ancient times – men stand in uncompromising awe and subordination to an abstract deity that had no "earthly" content about it. Whether that deity be the Brahma, Dionysus or Yahweh, they are permanently and definitively estranged from what ultimately supplies the essence of their being. As such, other than their own natural drives (hunger, thirst, virility etc), men of the Oriental world live in the shadow of their immutable infinite Other. In Hegel's eyes, this condemns them to a lifeless existence. In fact, given that the content of their experience emerges

directly from thought's absolute domination at the hands of this indeterminate infinite Otherness, one could say that the Oriental spirit is one of *total* reification. In the Greek world, however, this idea of God as an infinite Other is dispensed with entirely, and in its place, man begins to identify itself as an attribute of divinity, and so structures its society around this idealised and immortalised form. Hegel describes this as man's historical "period of adolescence" (Hegel, 2011, p. 205); Homer's *Iliad* could be perceived as a work that most effectively pays homage to the youthful and misplaced vitality of that age. As such, *life* in the Greek world assumes a substantial form, having assigned itself a "broader goal" on Earth. This broader goal, however, – expressed by the tripartite structure of the soul in Plato's *Republic* – is still an abstract one, and for this reason, has a nullifying effect on life when in its presence: as Hegel shows through his critique of *Antigone*, the Greek spirit necessarily prevents life from travelling further inward when Reason knows it must.

It is in the succeeding epoch, the Roman world, *life* and *lifelessness* begin to feature as contrived opposites in Hegel's dialectic. The adolescent spirit of the Greek world that embraced honour, triumph and homeland matures so as to develop *inward*, realise its social need for individual distinction and recognise the state-enforced protection of this principle as a natural right (culminating in the introduction of Roman law). Through Sophocles's *Antigone*, Hegel demonstrates how this inward development renders the Greek "happy state" *positive*, paving the way for Rome's establishment as a city, then a Republic, then an Empire. In the latter form, this inward spirit assumes a form *beyond* the objectification of personhood to engender the culture of ruthlessness and ambition that it is now famous for: where the will and ability to scheme, conspire and murder are elevated as imperatives for survival. Alas, Hegel shows the *Zeitgeist* of the Roman world to be one of absolute *subjectivism* – born out of the citizen's cultural entrapment into self-containment, self-affirmation and literal fear for their own lives, thus creating a perennial egotistic conflict where "higher" principles such as morality and love seem to disappear entirely.

As we observed with the Oriental world, such a pervasive social pathology that has a subversive effect on civilisation itself could be regarded as symptomatic of total reification, on the grounds that those involved act in ways that reflect their atomistic cultural, political and economic conditions, all of which have had a transformative effect on the lifeworld. However, even if this were so, the essential natures of the two

epochs are clearly very different: whereas inhabitants of the Oriental world are presented as no more than duplicates of Abraham, *viz* mere instruments of an abstract deity (hence why they thought nothing of rituals such as human sacrifice), the “persons” of the Roman world are demonstrably *enlivened* by *first*, the social pressure to distinguish themselves by predominantly material means so as to stand on a respectable footing with others, and *second*, the practical necessity to trust only those with reasons not to betray them. It is in this way, I believe, that, for Hegel, in the Roman world, *lifelessness* becomes the governing principle of *life*, with the natural consequences of this being nihilism, cultural decadence, and endemic paranoia. It is in these developments that the principle of “[all] being infinite to themselves” can be seen as closing in on its inevitable conclusion: the fall of Rome itself to the more spiritually *enlivened* Germanic tribes. It is for this reason that the historical significance of Rome’s fall in Hegel’s view extends beyond confirming the long-term consequences of institutionalised personal ambition and prolonged celebrations of social capital. Moreover, it *communicates* an unchangeable fact about the human spirit itself, namely that in order for this necessary inward principle to acquire *true life*, it must remain in touch with a higher substantive principle one that is capable of keeping human affairs related to politics and civil society in touch with divinity so as to effectively mitigate the harsh particularities that mysteriously acquired life to the detriment of the Roman world.

As we know, this reconciliatory task is one that Hegel gives to Christianity, and as the outlined passage in “absolute knowing” has shown, it is one that never ceases to require a considerable level of human resolve. The ongoing regulation of the positivity intrinsic within the *being-for-self* on behalf of *being-in-itself*, and thus the necessity for human beings to internalise the moral law rather than merely act on its behalf, is what makes “life” as Hegel describes it possible. This view is perfectly consistent with the principles that Luther failed to sufficient established in *On Christian Liberty*: there is simply no rational utopia beyond reconciliatory homeostasis because the conditions for human freedom are set in in this transformative relationship between universal and particular, and the innate compulsion for people to internalise the moral law (so as to keep political coercion at bay). These consistent allusions to this Christian concept of “true life” – referring to the conditions which allow men to apprehend the Holy Spirit through the heart –, I believe, points us to what his mature *System der Sittlichkeit*

amounts to: whereby any further attempt to take “progress” outside the remit of human activity that flows from conscience would qualify as a case of reification in Hegel’s philosophy on the grounds that such a development would be encroaching on the conditions necessary for true moral autonomy to be exercised.

With this clarification about Hegel’s concept of freedom in mind, perhaps we are in a position to resolve the eschatological enquiry opened in chapter I about the fate of Christianity, namely whether its fate is one of intentional suicide. Rather than drawing this totalising conclusion, which would render all of Hegel’s attempts to alleviate the effects of reification futile, it is probably more accurate (as much as it is helpful) to perceive the self-destructive tendencies that could be attributed to secularism’s relationship with Christianity as the result of two developments: the *first* concerning a communicative breakdown within the system, and the *second* – downstream from the first – referring to the modern state’s failure to mitigate the effects by trying to not do too much on the moral agent’s behalf. This could make it appear that the effects are themselves deliberate or perhaps followed from the state undergoing a structural transformation beforehand, the latter of which would amount to a case of objective reification.

Out of all the nations composing the Germanic world, it could be argued that the United States is the most demonstrative example of a nation state struggling to mitigate the effects (particularly on the subject of economic and social inequality) whilst not encroaching on the input of personal responsibility too much at the same time, which has without question engineered sentiments of distrust and suspicion of the government’s ultimate intentions on both sides of the political spectrum. As a nation established on the Lutheran principle that moral action cannot be coerced other than by God himself, the separation of the legislative, executive and judicial branches is necessary. All branches, however, remain bound to the theological pledge to God that is inscribed in the state, which is compatible only with the Trinity. With this in mind, perhaps the most pertinent problem that America displays about what is required to give Christian liberty a practical form – thus also displaying the magnitude of Hegel’s task in Germany – is related to its celebration of its Protestant cornerstones. A state established on Christian liberty is obliged to accept that social and economic inequality is a necessary cost for the possibility of liberty itself, however, the *ongoing* establishment of rights (i.e. academic freedom, freedom of expression and legal

protections for social groups wanting to politically organise) also works as an effective social and economic counterweight to the damage. The first amendment, viz the protection of free speech, arguably exists to guarantee that a communicative relationship between the government, the governed, and God can be sustained. The extent to which the state should grant resources to those exercising their right to resist the state, the point at which this fulfilment evolves into implicitly permitting the state's own subversion, and last of all, the point at which an established government should respond to a politically organised aggregate of wills, is what seems to produce the ambiguity in America regarding whether the role of the state is intrinsically paternalistic or whether its democracy should be more direct. Hegel's criticism of the Jacobins shows that he is far more intellectually aligned with the former camp. However, this is most likely because of his own firm belief – explicated in the *POS* onwards – that those who apply his presuppositionless method will see Christ himself as the solution eventually.

To put the previous point explicitly: whilst Hegel alludes to the danger of Christianity evolving into a reified form of itself in various texts from the *SOC* onwards, there isn't anything concrete to suggest him accepting that philosophy may render Christianity superfluous in its entirety. One could, I argue, make the case that America has proceeded to become the most concentrated expression of what Hegel is attempting to achieve with the Germanic world, viz whereby tensions between different social groups emerge from conflicting interpretations about the role that Christianity should have in the secular state. These interpretations are arguably split into two camps: *one* whereby the constitution is seen as permanently wedded to the figure of Christ and the teachings of the Bible, and the *another* whereby a society free of all organised religion is accepted as the logical conclusion of separating moral principles from the religious fetters which originally brought those principles to consciousness. Whilst Hegel's teleological view is characterised by the former, his philosophy of history – when separated from the teleological conclusion – could be used to rationally justify the latter, given that, logically speaking, *knowing* the heart of the moral law necessitates feeling it without the coercive influence of the Mosaic law at all. In order for the state to meet this condition, however, it must be infinitely receptive to whatever challenges are launched in its direction from those who claim that the equal existence Christianity says all persons have by design is not extended to them. The ongoing

debate (mainly within the Republican party) about whether access to abortions amounts to an political extension of one's physical autonomy or an encroachment of another's is a fervent example of this divide about whether the secular state should still be fundamentally determined by the Bible on some moral issues – which would provide a pretext for the criminalisation of abortion – or whether the separation of church and state deems it legitimate for the state to revise the limits of autonomy when social groups exercising their right to politically organise demand it. The constitutional status of the 1964 Civil Rights Act could also be interpreted as an expression of this same divide. Whilst the majority in the United States appear to have accepted the Federal government's coerced disintegration of racial segregation as a political corrective conducted in virtue of the concept of equality inscribed in the constitution, others continue to claim that adopting these changes outside the remit of personal choice amounts to a violation of the liberties that the constitution aims to protect.

Assuming, of course, that such tensions are representative of the positivity that Hegel has in mind, existing as a result of the differences between the moral substance of an Ethical Order and the interests of individuals as legal persons, one could interpret the effects as the result of a breakdown in the communicative relationship between the institutions composing the Ethical Order that has led to institutions assigned to represent the *being-for-self* – the conceptual foundations for legal personhood – proceeding to reconstruct the state in line with these interests. Equally, however, one could perceive the state's transformation in line with these interests as the result of the same communicative relationship inscribed in the founding constitution, with the opposite interpretation only being acquired by those social groups who dislike the results. Whether or not this is a positive outcome in Hegel's view, it amounts to a case of reification within his absolute idealism, hence his insistence that the Ethical Order cannot afford to lose its ability to regulate the variances that emerge from *being-for-self*, viz the conceptual foundation for the legal recognition of people as persons and thus independent economic agents.

Hegel, at this point, has recognised that his earlier enthusiasm for the intersubjective, communal bond shared among the earliest followers of Christ was misplaced, and perhaps even that his own attitude mirrored the naive tranquillity of the Greek "happy state" that dissolved long before. This feeling, which he refers to as "love" in the SOC, is described as a communicative relation from one enlivened subject to another. But

from this, it does not extend any further: it remains in the confines of the fellowship, and so becomes an isolated atom much like the Roman world outside. Alas, the “life” of the earliest Christians – because of the outside world’s persecution of them – begins and ends in this communicative relationship that necessitates the Christian spirit’s need to venture *outwards*, and thus accept the subject-centred reason they were in false opposition with from the very beginning. One could feasibly identify this inward self-containment as something that Hegel would see as an example of reification, but whether this is so or not, it is Christ himself who shows the way out on the fellowship’s behalf, and in turn, clearly inspires Hegel with substantial glimpses of the ways in which Christians of the future should seek to regulate the behaviour of rational individuals through the means of a politically organised state³⁸: in supposing implicitly through the *Sermon on the Mount* that the right to disbelieve should be protected and the pathway to forgiveness left open with the heart as the necessary condition. Only when the affairs of civil society evolve into a subversive force should the executive compel itself to intervene, so as to not encroach on the heart. The point to which the Ethical Order finds itself being repealed or subordinated in this way by virtue of market forces or some other “phantom objectivity” emerging from the *being-for-self*, which somehow disfigures the state’s communicative capacities, could be interpreted as an historical occurrence that Hegel would see as the phenomenon of reification taking place within the established universals of his absolute idealism.

True and “bad” infinity

Hegel’s various remarks on the subject of “infinity”, which began during his Jena period, compose his most compelling contribution to the modern state’s paradoxical existence. This is the problem that emerges from the permanent instability of Enlightenment itself: its unrelenting compulsion to apprehend truth in its purest form is something that, paradoxically, cannot be achieved without subjecting its objects – whether physical or intellectual – to fixed and thus transcendent concepts and identities which render the original pursuit impossible. As presented in Chapter I, it was the endless domination and vulgarisation of an otherwise transformative *world-*

³⁸ Christ, as God incarnate, knew of his own fate; he knew that the Pharisees would and had to find a way to have him executed due to their own theological commitments to the preservation of God as an “infinite Other”. This is not a case of reification because it is a necessary moment in Christianity’s own dialectic

of-infinite-wonder that Adorno reviled in radical contrast to orthodox Marxists who, alongside the most impassioned Enlightenment thinkers, stipulate history – in its most developed state – to be something entirely of man’s own making. Hegel takes these aggressively conceptualistic tendencies among Enlightened thinkers as seriously as Adorno, albeit as part of an attempt to construct an ethically mediated arrangement between the universal and particular will understood as the concrete universals that reveal themselves at the end of the line. This is in radical contrast to Adorno, who renders this reconciliatory task a utopian one doomed to fail as a consequence of Hegel’s own commitments to establishing a philosophy of identity (Adorno, 1993).

Whilst Adorno never describes the phenomenon of reification as an expression of bad/spurious infinity, in Hegel, there is good reason to believe that they amount to being exactly the same social and epistemic pathology. His description of the latter in contrast with the true infinite strongly suggests this:

[T]he true infinite cannot be expressed [through] a unity of the finite and infinite; unity is abstract, inert self-sameness and the moments are similarly only in the form of inert, simply affirmative being. The infinite, however, [is] essentially only [a] becoming, but a becoming further determined in its moments. Becoming, in the first instance, has abstract being and nothing for its determinations; as alteration, its moments possess determinate being, something and other; now, as the infinite, they are the finite and the infinite, which are themselves in the process of becoming. This infinite, as the consummated return into self, the relation of itself to itself, is being- but not indeterminate, abstract being, for it is posited as negating the negation; it is, therefore, also determinate being for it contains negation in general and hence determinateness. It is and is there, present before us (Hegel, 1969, p.148).

In this description, we can identify the same concrete universals and determinations that constitute the most developed state of his absolute idealism, as expressed in both the *POS* and the *POR*. It consists of a regulative and communicative relationship between the “finite” and “infinite”, of *particular* and *universal*, and by extension, man and God. All of these determinations produce the necessary conditions for absolute knowledge and, in turn, *being-in-itself*, in light of *being* now being able to locate itself in the “*becoming*”. “Life” is made possible by the interdependent relationships between these determinations which bring the subject closer to the world that is definitively *other* than itself. Taking this into account, Hegel seems to be referring to in his use of the term “true infinity” is the ongoing process of human beings – under the influence of “the cunning of Reason” – asserting themselves in ways that allow them to reconcile

and feel at home in the world of which they assume an essential part. This is the historical stage where consciousness comes to know itself through the world and the world through itself: “[i]ts aim is the realisation of absolute truth as the infinite self-determination of freedom – that freedom which has its own absolute form as its content” (Hegel, 2011, p. 311). The possibility for reconciliation lies in self-consciousness knowing itself to be an intrinsic part of the (infinite) religious substance whilst knowing that it is free in its finite capacity to produce this for itself, *viz* within the remit that God has stipulated (Hegel, 2011, p. 311).

In contrast, the following is Hegel’s logical description of the “spurious infinite”:

It is only the spurious infinite which is the beyond, because it is only the negation of the finite posited as real- as such it is the abstract, first negation; determined only as negative, the affirmation of determinate being is lacking in it; the spurious infinite, held fast as only negative, is even supposed to be not there, [it] is supposed to be unattainable. However, to be thus unattainable is not its grandeur but its defect, which is at bottom the result of holding fast to the finite as such as a merely affirmative being. It is what is untrue that is unattainable, and such an infinite must be seen as a falsity. The image of the progress of infinity is the straight line, at the two limits of which alone the infinite is, and always only is where the line – which is determinate being- is not, and which goes out beyond to this negation of its determinate being, that is, to the indeterminate; the image of true infinity, bent back into itself, becomes the circle, the line which has reached itself, which is closed and wholly present, without beginning and end (Hegel, 1969, pp. 148-9).

This same dualistic interpretation of infinity also features in the *POR*. It also includes a definition of what free will amounts to:

Infinity has rightly been represented by the image of the circle, because a straight line runs on indefinitely and denotes that merely negative and false infinity which, unlike true infinity, does not return into itself. The free will is truly infinite, for it is not just a possibility and predisposition; on the contrary its external existence is its inwardness, its own self (Hegel, 1991, p. 54).

Hegel’s logical differentiation between these two versions of infinity through the use of a circle (representing the true infinite) and a number line (representing the bad/spurious infinite) underscores the pathological nature of the latter. Whereas the determinations constituting the former provide the conditions for Reason (*Vernunft*) to return to itself, thus allowing it to acquire greater knowledge about itself and the Idea as time advances, the determinations of the latter – if there are any determinations at all – has the characteristics of a *cancer*: when trapped in the spurious infinite, Reason

spirals off on an endless tangent that never returns to itself at all. It metamorphoses into the Understanding (*Verstand*). As such, in the case where it does (return into itself) it embarks on its own subversion like cancer does through its relation to the parent organism.

The spurious infinite that Hegel describes is, of course, an abstract concept in itself. However, what he appears to be suggesting through his pejorative references to 1) religions structured on an “infinite Other” (Abrahamic) conception of God, 2) the resultant demagoguerisation of instrumental reason as a consequence of understanding nature only from “the standpoint of abstract rationality” (Ormiston, 2002, p. 506), 3) the atomism of the Roman world, and 4) his description of the bourgeois state’s innate character the *RPH* lectures (which could be regarded a proto-Marxist or even a direct description of the same “phenomenon of reification” that Lukács describes), is that when given an objective and thus autonomous form – either in a social institution or as a legally protected fact about human nature (which also finds expression in capitalism as an economic system) – the spurious infinite acquires such an autonomous form to pose an existential threat not just to its parent object, but to everything *other* than itself. This, in Hegel’s view, is a social and epistemic pathology that Fichte’s subjective idealism demonstrates.

Fichte’ philosophy of “bad infinity”

Fichte’s idealism is what Hegel conceptualises as the scientific embodiment of bad infinity, and one that comes into being during the epoch when the true determinations for rational reflection within the structure of an Ethical Order are present in the historical picture.

Fichte states that his “system is nothing other than the Kantian”, and thus has the same goal as Kant in seeking a “single, unified account of the human mind” (Reid, 2003, p. 244). The involves understanding and incorporating the general limits of subjectivity within a politically organised state. Whilst Fichte does not join Hegel in rejecting Kant’s phenomena-noumena distinction, Hegel acknowledges him to have correctly identified that the transcendental unity of apperception depends entirely from *forms* from experience, not *content*. As such, Kant presents experience through abstract concepts alone and therefore fails to provide a firm basis for moral (and thus

noumenal) judgement. For Fichte, he has only gone as far as identifying that the subject needs to be conscious of its moral agency to be a moral agent at all:

[Kant says,] quite splendidly, that the consciousness that an action I am about to undertake is right is an unconditional duty? But is such consciousness even possible, and how do I recognise it? Kant seems to leave this up to every person's feeling, which is indeed that upon which such consciousness must be based. Transcendental philosophy, however, is obliged to indicate the ground of the possibility of such a feeling of certainty [...] (Fichte, 2005, p.159).

Fichte argues that in order for individuals to be morally autonomous in the way that Kant supposes, they must first understand themselves as having real causal efficacy, which involves placing their own interests above others (Neuhouser, 1996, p. 166). From this observation, the concept of *right* emerges as one that demands a scientific independence from morality. This development of Kant's philosophy into a philosophy of the *positing* or *striving* subject is referred to by Lukács in *TYH* as "subjective idealism", which he spends the most time criticising in his Jena period (perhaps for the sole reason that it is a philosophy of reification).

To be sure, Hegel recognises Fichte's system as a rational succession of Kant's insofar as abstract right is concerned. The description that he gives to Kant's philosophy as one based on "soul sacked" subjectivity follows from his observation that Kant's attempt to structure a philosophy on *Moralität* leaves him unable to uphold the theoretical principles which, in practice, appear to estrange subjects from the moral law. As such, Fichte's evolution of Kant's morality-centred political philosophy into one based on relations of *right*, whereby subjects are recognised as rational and differentiated subjects *before* their recognition as agents of the moral law, is one that Hegel accepts as a part of the modern state's own evolution (following the communicative interchange between subjects and their social institutions within the state). To summarise this point: whereas Kant's (2017) idea of a "civic constitution" is based on the principle that conscience should serve as the primary source of any rational state's contents, Fichte, in Hegel's eyes, rightly identifies that the "inward principle" that *Moralität* is an expression of is insufficiently realised until this inward principle attained an object form in the legal, civil and public domain. It is to this end that Fichte's concept of right (talked about by Hegel as abstract right) emerges as a science with necessary independence from the moral law (*viz* where subjects are

perceived as divided in their means of determining themselves) so as to acquire a more adequate form of social recognition (Hegel, 1991, p. 69).

Abstract right's (*Recht*) inclusion in the *POR* confirms Hegel's inclusion of this part of Fichte's general vision for modernity. The reason he affords *Recht* only a place in coexistence with *Moralität* – both of which remain in communicative subordination to the higher unity of *Sittlichkeit* (the ongoing dialectical synthesis of *Recht* and *Moralität*) – is precisely due to depth of Hegel's concerns with regards to the instability and unpredictability of people in the what Fichte sees as their rational – solipsistic, in Hegel's eyes (Beiser, 2005) – condition, viz when the determinations of *Sittlichkeit* are not present to mediate. From what we can observe in the relationship between the “System of Ethical Life” and the “System of Reality” in the *SNL*, Hegel seems to be of the view that the former risks metamorphosing into a form of spurious infinity should it become decoupled from the latter, viz the *parent* of the two totalities. Thus, for Hegel, Fichte's absolute commitment to setting *Recht* as the basis of individual freedom and the modern state makes his resultant system one of “bad infinity par excellence (Martin, 2007); his view in the *DFZ* being that the entire science works from the assumption that the “pure I” is a transcendent and ahistorical fact about how subjects interact with the world.

In the *DFZ* (Hegel, 1977a), Hegel begins with an overview of what he sees as fundamentally wrong with his predecessor's attempt at reworking of Kant's transcendental idealism. Without using the term that Adorno coins much later, he essentially criticises Fichte's system essentially for its basis in “identity thinking”:

The foundation of Fichte's system is intellectual intuition, pure thinking of itself, pure selfconsciousness, Ego vs Ego, I am” (Hegel, 1977a, p. 119)

Hegel, it seems, is referring to the same epistemic problem that Adorno – in *Hegel: Three Studies* – credits him for identifying: where the *positing* of an unstable immanent principle based on reflection leads to the social and natural world being broken up into abstract, self-contained entities, which can proceed to constrain the dialectical potential of other objects if not permanently estrange them from the natural world entirely. Hegel's reasoning for why this happens is as follows in positing the “ego” (synonymous with the “pure I”) as the first principle of self-knowledge, Fichte's science also depends on an antithetical *other* (synonymous with the “not I”, thus presupposing

– unjustifiably in Hegel’s view – that objects in the natural world can only exist from their intrinsic subordination to the ego. Hegel observes the consequence of this mistake (regarding the nature of the relationship between subjectivity and the world in-itself) to be that Fichte’s science is constituted of an aggregate of egos which produce a system of knowledge *only* from relationships of *domination*, including the attempted domination of other rational beings, with absolutely no allowance for determination from the natural world. To rephrase this point for our purposes on the subject of communicative rationality: Fichte seems to absolutely deny the possibility that something antecedent to self-consciousness, i.e. a religious institution, has any communicative and thus socially determining role in a rational being’s thoughts and actions at all. It is on this point that Hegel’s accusation of “atomism” is the most compelling: individuals are posited as none other than subjects who, in their permanent vocation as self-contained rational agents understand civil society as nothing other than a system of cooperation on this basis.

One could, indeed, argue that this aggressive dualism between subject and object is simply a feature of transcendental philosophy itself, of which was inspired by the Copernican spirit of the time. Albeit for the specific features of the transcendental unity of apperception, Kant’s philosophy works from the same basic subjective principle and so arguably deserves to be subject to the same charge. This much is true, and Adorno (2005), in fact, says as much consistently. However, what makes Fichte’s philosophy more problematic in Hegel’s eyes is the aggressive volatility that follows from the system’s basis on the self-efficacy of rational agents, and the state’s obligation to coerce its subjects into this occupation should they decide not to do so. It could, in short, lead to the world reverting back into the inward, atomistic state that the Roman world succumbed to (something which Hegel saw to occur in the Terror). The inevitability of this outcome, for Hegel, can be deduced to the objective establishment of the relationship between the ego and non-ego being based on “absolute divi[sion]”:

Fichte has chosen to present the principle of his system in the form of basic propositions...[t]he first basic proposition is absolute self-positing of the Ego, the Ego as infinite positing. The second is absolute opposing, or positing of an infinite non-Ego, The third is the absolute unification of the first two by way of an absolute dividing (Hegel, 1977a, p. 123).

Put alternatively: Fichte’s system limits itself to perceiving freedom and knowledge as things which exist and are transmitted from one rational, efficacious subject to another:

[A]bsolute identity, viz the identity of subject and object] cannot be so grasped [because] the pure self-positing and the pure opposing are both activities of one and the same ego (Hegel, 1977a, p.124).

If this were so, it would have the effect of not only progressively estranging rational agents from the historical conditions and communicative social *institutions* on which their rational capacities depend, but potentially *destroying* these institutions. This, needless to say, will have consequences for the form rationality assumes in human behaviour. To be sure, Hegel accepts that disfiguration is, and will always be, a necessary condition for domination and the acquisition of any form of knowledge to some extent. However, it could be argued that if social institutions and antecedent customs (of the sort that the Jacobins rendered superfluous) interpreted as manifestations of the “not I” in virtue of their posited independence of consciousness alone, then any positive/ enculturating influence that institutions such as family, religious communities and “corporations” have is formally accepted as an encroachment on the subject’s “sphere of freedom” before the communal aspect that Fichte holds so important has a chance to be sufficiently taken into account. In short, rather than taking the whole complex relationship between the individual, nature and civil society into account, Hegel, I believe, sees Fichte’s mistake to dogmatically conclude (in accordance with his spiritual vocation as a Jacobin) that individuals have the capacities to Reason off the back of being legally recognised as free, equal, and efficacious without any influence from the forms of social determination that come from outside the remit of individual agency per se.

As we know from Hegel’s philosophy of history: these forms of social determination – which necessarily engender the social conditions for both reflective rationality and ethical life – cannot be separated from the *ideological* conditions propagated by religion, even at the final stage of the Germanic epoch when that religion becomes philosophy itself. By producing a system that both *aspires* to supersede the Kantian virtues of duty, morality and autonomy in favour of the “individual moral agent in a living community with others” (Wood, 2017) and *encourages* these moral agents to essentially subjugate the historical determinations of Reason to their *drives*, Fichte has managed to create a version of transcendental idealism that works from Reason itself being posited as an antithetical *other*; one that is perceived to stand over and above freedom as opposed to something that cultivates it in the *true* sense as Hegel

understands it. It is in this way that individual freedom, when understood as “striving”, can be perceived as a claim representative of a philosophy based on bad infinity, and in turn, reification, given that communicative aspect seems to find itself totally negated in Fichte’s philosophy.

Thus, unlike man’s position in absolute servitude to an abstract, infinite Other in the Oriental world, the deconstruction of the “happy state” in the Greek world as a result of Spirit’s need to develop “inward”, and the Roman world where this inward spirit meets its inevitable, “atomistic” conclusion in order to communicate the need for the objective consummation of personhood to be regulated by a higher, spiritual idea, the bad infinity that underwrites the political and social consequences of Fichte’s philosophy, for Hegel, seems to exist as a digression from rational necessity. To be sure, Hegel accepts that acknowledging *Recht* and *Moralität* as separate science *is* a rational succession on Kant’s insistence that the modern state should structure itself on the moral law. Hegel contends, however, that the resultant system comes to the detriment of *Recht* and *Moralität* alike on the grounds that the immanent principle, the pure I, has the effect of estranging subjects from the most essential, determining conditions of their subjectivity. When pursued in the *abstract*, *Moralität* becomes increasingly arbitrary (because morality is, by definition, not abstract), and *Recht* becomes a means through which rational persons develop themselves *inward* to the extent that conflict with others and alienation from the world itself become absolute certainties. For Hegel, all that is guaranteed to be left at the end of this process are the formal categories, legal instruments and rational processes (all of which were introduced to objectify the “spheres of freedom” that human beings are understood to have by natural right) which appear to have *colonised* the individuals they were established to serve. This, to Hegel, is demonstrated by the fact that subjects who posit themselves as efficacious and self-determining drive themselves to revolt not only against each other in their vocations as self-positing *strivers*, but against *God*, viz the substance from which freedom and Reason reside.

Of course, one could argue that the social and political climate in the Roman world was an expression of the same social phenomenon. However, in my view, there is an important historical and rational difference. In the Roman world, the objective and thus political elements necessary for freedom are still in the process of developing: the conditions for social recognition in the subject’s capacity as persons and economic

agents (who relate predominantly through contractual arrangements) are established, but at the direct cost of the expressive unity on which the possibility of “life” depends (hence why Hegel sees Rome as “lifeless” by its very nature). It also cannot be forgotten that it is neither Fichte’s intention to restore the Roman world nor to encourage citizens to place themselves against everything that is not located within their respective spheres of freedom; *this* is simply what Hegel perceives as the social and political consequence of Fichte’s subjectivist (and arguably virile) concept of freedom. Rather, Fichte’s general tone in the *Foundations of Natural Right (FNR)* and open support of the French Revolution (which emphatically differentiates him from Kant, Schelling and Hegel), suggests that he believes himself to be thinking within and championing the spirit of Enlightenment, *viz* the “releas[ing] of men from their own self-incurred tutelage”, but with the view to these men thriving under the *positive* determinations of something akin to Rousseau’s “general will”. Rather than envisioning this society as a proto-bourgeois amalgamation of mechanically-minded mercenaries as Hegel does, Fichte appears to be convinced that the positing of an efficacious macro-subject as the legal basis (of which affords the state the right to coerce) can serve as the basis for a culture of intersubjective flourishing, similar to the “happy state” that the Greeks enjoyed but without the unreflective limitations. Such communitarian leanings are exhibited through Fichte’s allusions to the same ideals that Hegel holds to in the *PCR*:

The human being (and so all finite beings generally) become human only among others (Fichte, 2000, p.37).

In principle, this is not inconsistent with Hegel’s philosophy of spirit. We should not be surprised by this given that both Fichte and Hegel are principally committed to finding a place for the moral, self-conscious subject within a neo-Aristotelian system of ethics on Germany’s behalf (Stern, 2017). Indeed, they approach the task in very different ways, but they are recognised under the same school of idealism, *viz* German Idealism, because of their commitment to explicating and realising modern freedom (which both see as the destiny of the German spirit). However, it seems to me that Hegel’s ultimate charge against Fichte’s subjective idealism – namely that it fails to give content to freedom even in theory – is difficult to argue against, especially as there are now ample historical examples that demonstrate the political consequences of locating individual freedom in abstract identification; something which applies to the

Jacobins as much as it does communism, Nazism, and the arguably *reified* forms of critical theory today (which most people understand as “identity politics”). Whether it is fair to regard these as expressions of Fichte’s philosophy or not, what is evident is that Hegel seems to see the trend as symptomatic of a specifically *modern* pathology, whereby a formal and thus abstract idea of freedom, one based on identity thinking, manages to establish itself as *concrete* institutionally *and* through social recognition *to the extent that thought itself starts to be shaped by these abstract notions*. Alternatively, the phenomenon can also be interpreted to have been caused by Spirit necessarily returning back into itself, as Hegel believes that it must, only for the mediative/communicative elements (which guarantee Spirit’s self-knowledge) to somehow fail and thus become entrapped in the determinations of the Understanding (*Verstand*). From this point *this attribute of Spirit then proceeds to develop its own determining qualities and become a spurious infinity in-and-for-itself*, whereby the subjugation of its parent – viz the *true infinite* – becomes an inevitability. Whether one prefers the theological or merely logical version of this same pathology, it seems clear that as Hegel develops his concept of the Ethical Order, of which he posits as the most substantive expression of modern freedom, he appears to be presenting the general problem to lie within the intensifying subjective and objective recognition of individual freedom’s synonymy with “striving” – not only with regards to subjects in their self-determining vocations, but also with the intellectual methods and traditions which emerge from freedom being placed alongside truth and the idea that truth is inseparable from self-knowledge. The consequences are none other than the domination of Reason by the Understanding.

Conclusion

What I hope to have shown in this chapter is that from Hegel’s historical coverage of the Oriental world up to the Germanic world, we can observe the “cunning of reason” to be serving what Habermas would describe as a “communicative” function: man begins his existence enchained to a prosaic relationship to God, as Abraham was to *Yahweh*, but is progressively set free in virtue of in virtue of history communicating to him the qualities of God that he essentially already has. By the time man has reached the Germanic epoch, which Hegel perceives as the “end of history”, he is fully recognised as a rational and autonomous moral agent whose being-for-self is made possible by God’s everlasting presence in the world of the here and now (Houlgate,

1991). The spiritual actualisation of the freedom which he has is in virtue of the fact that God was never essentially estranged from man in the first place – it was his archaic presentation in history that inhibited him from identifying God’s “otherness” as an essential part of *being*. The motor of this spiritual awakening, which culminates in the introduction of Jesus, is the cunning of reason; by the time the state fully expresses the universals which freedom depends on for its objective persistence (the universals of which are presented in the *POR*), the cunning of reason’s work is, in theory, complete.

We have also seen how the phenomenon of reification is fundamental to this awakening, and in fact, seems to be the driving force of historical development itself. It is the contradictions produced by two false opposites that necessitate the identification of inner harmony between these opposites and their ultimate sublation (*Aufheben*) and thus take us into a more self-conscious historical stage. For these two synthetically polarised entities to have been recognised (wrongly) as absolute opposites in the first place, it *must* be the case that they acquire a “phantom objectivity” of the kind that Lukács describes. The only difference is that this mysterious, autonomous quality is perceived to emerge from a communicative exchange between *concepts* rather than the nature of the exchange being perceived as downstream of suboptimal social and economic conditions (as Marx and Lukács profess).

The succession to the Greek world, for Hegel, emerged from Persia’s inability to socially incorporate the people with the territories it had conquered. For this reason, the institutions developed *antithetical* to the conquerors, and as such, the Greek world emerged as a result of superior military organisation. Once established, the antithesis of the Greek world was the drive for particular distinction and objective recognition of rational agency: the *polis*, based on the abstract idea of a universal man, finds itself in opposition to the man who recognises himself as an autonomous, self-interested agent before assuming his duties within the state. In the actions of Creon in Sophocles’s *Antigone*, Hegel shows us how the man of the state, doubling down in his formal vocation, destroys himself from his inability to bypass the moral sentiments he has for his son, Haimon. As such, the false opposition between the state and the family is revealed, and the vacuum left by the Greek state leaves the “legal condition” of the Roman world to facilitate Spirit’s inward development.

Established as an Empire, we see the Roman world reach its inevitable conclusion. The legal condition not only establishes itself as the *de facto* means through which citizens relate: the state finds itself required to enforce the principle through coercion in order for such relations to be possible. The legal institutions thus proceed to dominate their subjects with progressively greater force in their atomised vocations until the system in its entirety falls to attrition. Reification here thus exists in the form of formal relations dominating social life; a scenario that would have been unthinkable for the Greeks. This, Hegel contends, is the cunning of reason communicating to Spirit (through these ossifying institutions) that it needs to keep civil society in alignment with the higher ideals of *Sittlichkeit* for the purpose of ensuring that legal citizenship is not removed from its essential basis (the virtues which Hegel shows through Antigone herself) and preventing the disintegration of the state and civil society in the future. This future is, of course, the Germanic world, which for none other than convenience and avoiding confusion, we will refer to as the “modern world” from here on in, and “modernity” when referring to it as an ideal, utopia, or a cultural and social condition.

We have observed the spurious infinite to play an essential part in communicating Spirit’s essence to itself, or rather developing the universal and particular elements that are required for human freedom to exist in its highest form. The atomisation of Rome is, of course, a prevailing example. We also observed what seems to be a similarity between the spurious infinite and the phenomenon of reification. I contend that whilst the spurious, or “bad” infinite is not synonymous with reification in the way that “positivity” seems to be, there is a clear conceptual likeness that can be identified in their relation to the Understanding (*Verstand*): they both allude to the phenomenon whereby transcendent concepts acquire an autonomous and thus causal quality. This is shown by their propensity to dominate, disfigure and denature their objects of interest, which has the effect of nullifying the transformative and dialectical potential of the objective world itself. Despite clearly lamenting the epistemic violence involved in this scientific process, we have observed Hegel to implicitly acknowledge reification in cases like this to be a rational and necessary part of man’s release from the constraints of abstraction, including its previously *submissive* relationship with God and nature alike.

However, by the time the modern idea is realised, where man attains the social recognition as an autonomous economic agent (*Recht*), a moral agent (*Moralität*) and

a participant within a world where social customs renew themselves (*Sittlichkeit*), the question regarding the historical role of reification becomes ambiguous and exceedingly complicated. Reification *can*, in theory, serve a communicative purpose in this epoch insofar as the developments ultimately solidify the aforementioned principles composing the Ethical Order, but how one can objectively specify what qualifies as an improvement seems to be ultimately subject to judgement. What some subjects may interpret as *rational* improvements, such as the introduction of a more robust expenses policy within the civil service, could be interpreted as social *regressions* by others who value upholding a culture of trust more than efficiency.

The logical impossibility of completely separating self-interest from public policy is, of course, a troubling problem to attend to on its own, though it is not the greatest one that Hegel has to face on the subject of reification. His coverage of the permanent interdependence on between *being-in-itself* (Hegel's panentheistic concept of God) and *being-for-self* (being in its particularised vocation) suggests that problems such as social atomism and economic inequality continue to assume a necessary role in man's historical development. However, in Hegel's general critique of Fichte, and his consistent allusions to the dominating nature of the Understanding from the SOC and beyond, he appears to be implying somewhat that the forms of reification specific to the modern world are in danger of developing into an *existential* threat to freedom itself. On this point, it is difficult to decipher whether Hegel sees either:

1) The colonisation of Ethical Life by the Understanding (*Verstand*) as rational and necessary but abstains from stating it explicitly (his implicit position in the SOC).

or,

2) The colonisation of Ethical Life by the Understanding (*Verstand*) is a potential consequence of the modern state estranging subjects from the true source of the moral law, and becomes a greater risk as scientific, social and technological progress intensifies.

Hegel's placing of Christian liberty as the basis of the modern state suggests that the latter is far more plausible. If so, then it is at least conceivable that his ultimate fear regarding the fate of modernity is related to the inadvertent outsourcing of moral ends to *systems* which could render the moral conscience itself superfluous. In such a

scenario, “life” as Hegel describes it would become impossible, meaning that the Holy Spirit and in turn, salvation, would be permanently cut off. The point at which this happens would, in theory, be when modern society assumes the “lifeless” form that Hegel judges as the spirit of the Old Covenant. If this interpretation of Hegel is correct, then it is also conceivable to consider the possibility that Hegel may be referring to the same social phenomenon as Lukács when he refers to the “adoption of a contemplative stance”, viz when a historical disfiguration of social activity is internalised in consciousness as an ahistorical fact. The major difference, of course, is that rather than perceiving these obfuscations of *thought* to have been caused by the autonomous forces of capital asserting themselves in the material world, Hegel perceives it to be the result of the communicative exchanges within the Ethical Order breaking down.

Chapter IV:
Reification and the Modern Dilemma

Introduction

In chapter I, I unpacked what appeared to be a conceptual similarity between “the phenomenon of reification” in *HCC* and what Hegel describes as “positivity” in the *PCR*. With considerable help from Lukács *TYH* (1975), I drew attention to the historical events and religious ideas that shaped Hegel’s early idealism. Referring principally to his original response to the French Revolution, Lukács presents Hegel to have been as an heir to the spirit of Rousseau in his youth: one whose enthusiasm for republicanism was as strong as his contempt of the prevailing denomination of Christianity in the *Ancien Régime*. This denomination was of course Catholicism. I believe that Lukács is correct to assert that the *PCR* contains themes and sentiments which could be described as proto-Marxist, especially when Hegel presents the practices and structures as fetters – or positive elements – which necessarily burst to make way for the production of a more rational idea of freedom. Whilst Lukács makes no such connection himself, positivity and reification both seem to refer to the phenomenological and/or social phenomenon whereby abstract ideas assume a strange, causal presence in consciousness and/or history before that autonomous entity proceeds to be consumed by its own contradictions.

However, from this point onwards, Lukács’s judgement of Hegel appears to be compromised by his Soviet affiliation. Rather than seeing Hegel’s choice to develop his idealism in a reconciliatory direction – first seen in the *SOC* – to be consistent with the Lutheran sympathies that he probably always had (something which is heavily suggested by his frequent targeting of specifically Catholic conventions in both of the aforementioned essays), Lukács purports that Hegel’s shift from *subjective idealism*, viz where concepts determine history, to *objective* (or absolute) *idealism*, viz where history determines the concepts of cognition, is owed entirely to a change in his economic circumstances. Whilst it is, at the very least, conceivable that this influenced Hegel’s political thinking, I believe it to be more likely that Lukács, in this instance, is keeping to the stipulated boundaries of dialectical materialism given the consequences of digressing from the Soviet doctrine.

In chapter II, I unpacked what I believe to be the theological basis for this change in Hegel’s idealism as well as the plausibility of my suspicion presented in the conclusion of chapter I: that what Lukács describes as reification may be the rational

consequence of realising the Christian idea of freedom in the fallen world. Consistently with the ubiquitous anti-Judaic sentiment in Europe during this period, Hegel (1984) appears to see positivity – and thus reification – as an irresolvable problem that begins and ends in Judaism. For Hegel, the reason the Jews reject Christ and engender a culture of knowledge that encourages the subordination of the natural world and other rational persons to transcendent concepts and seemingly autonomous, instrumental processes (which contemporary historians regard as canards that emerge from the Jews' historical connections with financial, legal and scientific institutions), are objective manifestations of their perception of the Mosaic law as having descended from a conception of God that has “infinite Otherness” inscribed within it (referring to the input of *Ein Sof*) (Matt, 1996, pp. 38-50). As such, the Abrahamic and fundamentally orthopraxic conventions, for Hegel (1996b), further entrenches their servitude to “an infinite power which they set over themselves and [can] never conquer”. This, I believe, is intended to suggest that as a consequence of the spurious infinity inscribed their conception of divinity, the Jews are destined to become increasingly unable and unwilling to identify the *true* principle of reconciliation: Jesus Christ, viz the incarnation of *true infinity* expressed by the rational unification of the universal and particular. As the antithesis of the true infinite, Hegel therefore perceives Judaism, and the resultant Jewish world, as expressions of positivity and thus reification par excellence, which comes with the implications that Judaism is metaphysically incompatible with – if not definitively hostile to – the political structure of secular governance which provides the basis for the modern world as we understand it today. As such, Hegel judges the fate of the Jewish world as the permanent and total subordination of Reason (*Vernunft*) to the fixed concepts of the Understanding (*Verstand*). This, of course, would amount to none other than total reification.

In finally turning to the fate of Christianity in this essay, however, Hegel can be interpreted as admitting, albeit implicitly, that positivity is the result of a self-contained problem within Christianity and thus not one that cannot be entirely attributed to Judaism. This admission, I believe, can be identified in two theological reconsiderations which arguably necessitate the development of Hegel's philosophy away from subjective idealism to the *objective* (or absolute) idealism that allows him to incorporate subject-centred reason within an historical framework. The first, sharing

Ormiston's (2002) reading of the essay, is Hegel's acceptance that Christian "love" – based on the ideal of living among an expressive, divine unity of which Christ was once a part – is neither practically achievable given Christ's ascension, nor an adequate means through which the level of self-knowledge required for moral agency can be acquired. Reflection, the activity of the intellect, is a necessary condition for "life" as expounded in by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount, with positivity only being the result when one acts from misplaced convictions, or if the act of moralising is outsourced to an institution (such as the Catholic church) renders the input of feeling, viz the "heart", superfluous, with the inevitable result being the objective disfiguration of the law itself. This effect, which can be either phenomenological or social in form, is also referred to as spiritual "disenchantment", and can lead to the Holy Spirit being eclipsed by a trojan version of the law. While this interpretation of the first theological reconsideration is generally accepted among Hegel scholars, the second, I accept, is more ambitious and dependent on Luther's *On Secular Authority* actually being the key influence on Hegel's change of direction that I believe it to be. What Luther demonstrates, in short, albeit unintentionally, is Christianity's absolute dependence on the persistence of its opposite. This interpretation can be garnered from the following observation of Luther's treatise. If the absence of religious coercion is a necessary condition for liberty, then the rational fate of Christianity – and thus the Germanic world – follows the logical conclusion of the categorical imperative: the moral law as Christ presents it, abstractly speaking, can only be inwardly realised in the absence of Christianity as an organised structure of moral influence. Whilst, of course, neither Luther nor Hegel advocate for anarchy as a solution, both appear to struggle to find a consistent basis for when a legitimate sovereign – that has fully independence from ecclesiastical authority – is justified in intervening and when doing so would amount to it acting outside of its afforded remit. As such, my concluding argument in chapter II is this: had Hegel not developed his ideas on the subject of modern freedom further, one has rational grounds to interpret him as being subscribed to a fatalistic eschatology. This would involve either seeing the negation of Christianity within the modern world as an historical necessity in waiting, or the Understanding's *colonisation* of that world as a necessary condition for its persistence – by which point, the Germanic world would be no more than the product of a seemingly autonomous legal, political, economic and scientific system.

In chapter III, however, I hope to have shown that Hegel, through his mature philosophy of history – which first finds expression in the *POS* – expounds a rational, albeit teleological, basis to reject this fatalistic conclusion about the Germanic world. This is because the “pure concept” reveals itself to be none other than the objective realisation of Christian liberty, conceptualised by Hegel in the *POR* as the unification of the universal will and the particular will, whereby the integrity of both is sustained by an established and ongoing communicative relationship between humanity in its moral and legal conditions respectively. The product of this dialectical relationship is the modern Ethical Order, in virtue of Spirit now being able to accommodate the rational elements of both the social “serenity” of the Greek world, *viz* where the substantial unity between the finite and infinite is the product of an unreflective relation, and the “abstract universality” of the Roman world, *viz* where individuals are recognised only in their particularised vocations (Hegel, 1991, pp. 278-9). Thus, rather than assuming the failure or ossification of modern institutions to be culminations of rational necessity, as the pessimistic inclinations found in the *SOC* may suggest, Hegel presents such developments as the result of a breakdown in the communicative relationship between the institutions commissioned to represent humanity in its universal and particular vocation respectively. From this perspective, reification could be considered as a social pathology that emerges from the structural rejection of the “antecedent recognition” that individuals are entitled to by virtue of their intrinsically social condition alone (Honneth, 2008).

As we also saw, however, reification is not always a pathological development for Hegel: it served a rational and necessary role in the destruction of the Greek and Roman worlds. Both, for very different reasons – despite originally developing the rationality of *thought* – eventually developed in ways that stated to constrain it, thus necessitating their ultimate destruction as civilisations. In addition to seeing Hegel ascribe an historical purpose to reification, which is to realise the rational determinations necessary for humans to be substantively *free*, I observed a conceptual likeness between *reification* and “spurious infinity” (referred to in other texts and translations as “bad infinity”). Whilst the term originally features in the *DFZ* (1977a) to describe the formal and atomistic nature of Fichte’s subjective idealism, which for Hegel is essentially a “philosophy of reflection”, it is in the *SOL* (1969) – in the “Doctrine of Being” to be precise – that he expounds the spurious infinite as an epistemic

pathology that serious social, cultural and political consequences. Contrasted with “true infinity”, which Hegel presents as the formal expression of Reason (*Vernunft*) reconciling its positive elements to the degree that it returns back into itself (hence its description as possessing the determinations of a circle) *spurious infinity* is the formal expression of Reason when it fails to reconcile these positive elements to the degree that it starts to be determined by them (hence Hegel’s use of the number line as an analogy). As such, the spurious infinite produces knowledge through *identification*, viz by conceptualising objects of the natural world to its transcendent and thus abstract categories. However, this is only after the Understanding *first* mysteriously finds a way to masquerade as Reason (*Vernunft*) in precisely the same way that that the abstract rationality of political economy, for Marx and Lukács, presents capitalism as an ahistorical fact about humanity’s social condition. What this shows, I believe, is that the phenomenon of reification in Hegel’s absolute idealism occurs at the *conceptual* level *before* then assuming an objective form through human activity.

Part I: Reification as “Bad Infinity”

As stated in the preliminary chapter: the theory of reification presented in this thesis owes a considerable debt to Clarke (2011). While Clarke does not mention reification directly in his analysis, his coverage of Hegel’s “second argument” against Fichte in the *SNL* illuminates a striking feature of Hegel’s critique that appears to have been overlooked by Hegel scholars. This is one that not only involves the phenomenon of reification, but which presents reification as an endemic feature of modern freedom and the “end of history” by extension. The “second argument” can be summarised as follows: if individual freedom is understood entirely from a position of “universal egoism”, and practically depends on the preservation of each rational person’s “sphere of freedom” – as Fichte seems to suppose – then freedom is infinitely abstract and indeterminate. As such, the state’s prerogative to uphold the sphere of freedom through coercion, in Hegel’s view, will have the adverse effect of collapsing the political system, handing power over to tyrants (as so happened with the French Revolution) and potentially facilitate a return to the “state of nature”. The presence of reification in this development lies in how the contents of freedom, posited on the basis of “universal egoism” being identical with the general will, acquires a mysterious, causal form to the extent that society itself is transformed and restructured in the image of that posited quality: all that is practically required is that this quality is posited with the most force, hence why Hegel describes Fichte’s system as one structured on “bad infinity”.

It should be noted that Clarke (2011) does not draw a connection between Hegel’s conceptual analysis of Fichte’s system and the former’s broader intuitions about the dialectic of modernity, as I have attempted to do. However, the connection I have drawn is both consistent with Hegel’s coverage of the internal challenges of civil society in the *POR*, and more fundamentally, a compelling critique of the prevailing political system where negative conceptions of freedom continue to dominate. Thus, while my reading of Hegel’s position on the modern question is indeed controversial when placed alongside the ways in which the concepts of *Sittlichkeit*, freedom, recognition and “bad infinity” have been discussed by Honneth (2008; 2015), Taylor (1979) and Fichtean scholars such as Wayne Martin (2007), my interpretation is neither unsupported nor logically inconsistent with the social and ontological concerns Hegel raises consistently from the *SOC* to the *POR*.

Notwithstanding the fact that Marx and Hegel have the polar opposite view on what causes abstractions to attain a causal presence in history, it is clear that both have a demonstrable awareness of the *autonomous quality* that instrumental rationality has over human activity and the social character of its institutions to the extent that both are restructured so as to become politicised agents for either the autonomous forces of production in Marx's case or the "cunning of reason" in Hegel's. The fundamental difference between their theories of reification then, are fundamentally teleological. For Marx, the source of reification resides in the "phantom objectivity" (Lukács, 2017), or "fetish character" (Adorno, 2002) of capital itself. Whilst this phantom objectivity occurring in the sphere of economic activity can also be found in Hegel's political writings, which I will cover in this chapter, it is downstream of a broader problem of knowledge that finds expression in the various sciences committed to the end of social progress. For Marx, reification is an objective indication of the last historical fetter to be burst, *capitalism*, before human history can truly begin. For Hegel, however, the positive elements that Marx and Lukács see as manifestations which justify the abolition of capitalism, including the alienation of labour, poverty and the endless capacity for expansion, are natural consequences of human freedom's realisation. Thus, the ethical purpose of the modern state – which recognises humankind in both its universal and particular capacity – is to alleviate the negative social and economic effects so as to ensure that the dynamic variances of civil society do not develop in ways that would pose an existential threat to the *Volkgeist* on which *Sittlichkeit* depends.

Hegel's recognition of this conceptual problem within the Germanic world, *viz* of the sphere of abstract right (*Recht*) and economic activity having a colonising effect on ethical life itself (*Sittlichkeit*), is demonstrated in his various critiques of Kant and Fichte, whose insistence on identifying freedom with self-legislation leads to them giving insufficient consideration to the inevitable consequences: the perpetual spread of social atomisation. As discussed in chapter III, Hegel's (1977b) describes "pure insight" – Spirit in its most inward and thus particularised vocation – as the incarnation of a romantic consciousness which breaks out into a frenzy of falsely placed moral indignation in virtue of its absolute commitment to politically instantiating its abstract concept of the general will. As Hegel believes the *Terror* to have shown, the result of a universal pursuit towards *unsituated* freedom is the complete breakdown of civil

order. Assuming, of course, that this interpretation is accurate – and given the Lutheran notions that persist in his moral philosophy – I believe it is at least conceivable that Hegel’s critique of transcendental idealism (and general cynicism towards Jacobin directorship) is underwritten by the concerns Luther (1953) espouses in *On Secular Authority* about the potential consequences of government overreach: namely that coercing individuals into freedom results either in a return to the “state of nature” – which the very concept of a politically organised state is introduced to avoid – or a return to the archaic and unchangeable structures described by Hegel (2011) in the Oriental world, as can be observed with Ancient China, whose existence depended on the estates outlined in the *Shu King* having no communicative capacities at all (see Chapter III). Whilst the former interpretation is a well-documented theme in the *DFZ*, the *SNL*, the *POS* and the *POR*, the latter can be identified in Hegel’s *Rectorial address of 1813*, where he can be seen opposing the first expressions of romantic German nationalism that would attain its most developed form in the following century (Avineri, 1972, p.69). The unchangeable hierarchy composing the *Third Reich* could feasibly have been interpreted by Hegel as a dialectical synthesis of the Indian caste system – which posits race as ahistorical – and the Enlightenment virtue of self-determination organised around the principle of the individual’s interests being identical with those of the state. Both, as I will show later in the chapter, qualify as manifestations of Hegelian reification, *viz* where fundamentally abstract and systemic modes of thought – possessing the character of spurious infinity – acquire causal efficacy *above* the reflective determinations that would have allowed Enlightenment to return back into itself.

With all this considered, it is clear that reification serves an historical role of equal importance to Hegel as it is for Marx. However, unlike Marx, who gives the contradictions of capitalism the same role as those which necessitated the determinate negation of the previous epochs – in virtue of his own teleological commitments to the inevitability of communism – Hegel’s version of the “end of history”, generically understood to be a socially conservative and marginally authoritarian version of welfare-state capitalism, came into effect during his lifetime and persists in the Germanic world to this day as he believed it would. However, this in fact poses a challenge to Hegel’s theory of reification. Because the rational determinations necessary for human freedom to exist have found expression in the modern state,

Hegel can no longer rely on post-hoc rationalisation to decipher when reification is downstream of rational necessity, and when it is a pathological development that the modern state has a legitimate obligation to address. This judgement, by Hegel's own admission I would suspect, cannot be made without a normative framework. However, I believe that one can be constructed from excerpts of his political writings, notably from the *SNL* and the transcribed *RPH* lectures. Henceforth, my ultimate ambition in this final chapter – as with the thesis in its entirety – is to use Hegel's implicit theory of reification to develop a more holistic model of social, cultural and political analysis. Not for the ends of Marxism as per the praxial ambitions of the Frankfurt School³⁹, but for the ends of a *situated modernity*, viz a social and political system that aspires to recognise individuals equally in their vocations as moral agents, legal persons, and members of spontaneous socialised communities. In order to show why Hegel's theory is both more philosophically substantive as well as pragmatic, however, the merits and shortfalls of Lukács's original theory need to be outlined. This, of course, involves returning to and expanding on the basics introduced in chapter I.

The Marxist origins of reification

As we know, Lukács's concept of reification in *History in Class Consciousness* emerges from Marx's philosophy of history. And for this reason, reification also has a role in the necessary release of autonomous productive forces in history (as per dialectical materialism). *Verdinglichung*, according to Lukács, is the term used by Marx in the untranslated version of *Das Kapital* to supplement his argument that communism exists as capitalism's historical and rational successor in-waiting. The most relevant section on the subject of reification can be identified in the description of "commodity fetishism". Whilst commodities are generally understood as objects that

³⁹ In my view, this is historically justified for the following reason. Critical theory, viz the presuppositionless model of social critique introduced by Horkheimer (1975), has not only failed to intellectually resist the social pathology of identity thinking (which the cultural contradictions of capitalism express) and engender what Adorno, Horkheimer and perhaps even Marcuse would recognise as a class consciousness in the pre-existing social institutions. The bureaucratic reconstruction of these social institutions, universities included, in alignment with financialisation, increasing presence of identity thinking in Western culture (to the extent that what could be perceived as atomistic ideals are now celebrated as symptoms of "social progress"), and – most significantly of all perhaps – the dominance of alternative modes of transcendent theory within the humanities such as "intersectionality" (which rests on reified claims about social identity) arguably serves as compelling evidence of critical theory's reification under the economic substructure which it set itself out to resist, as Marcuse (2002) claimed was conceivable in *One Dimensional Man*.

satisfy a particular human want, Marx use the term “fetishism” to describe a mysterious objectivity that attaches itself to a commodity in a process of social exchange.

The “fetish character” (Adorno, 2002) of a commodity itself, for Marx, can be identified in the transition from production to exchange. On the understanding that the true value of a commodity lies in the labour invested in its production, capital is brought into existence by the exchange value undercutting the intrinsic labour value. Thus, the commodity is forced to acquire a new, quantitative social character in a system of equivalence. The process by which the social reality propagated by the commodity’s new, constrained form eclipses the original labour value to the point of being socially forgotten is where the objective value of this form “solidifies”, and thus where the phenomenon of reification originally occurs:

A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men’s labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour. This is the reason why the products of labour become commodities, social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses (Marx, 2008. p. 43).

Lukács’s substantive contribution to Marxism is to explain the pervasiveness of this social pathology, *viz* reification – on the grounds that Marx appears to have underestimated it – and to unveil reification’s true function: to establish capitalism as a permanent, given reality about humanity’s social condition and nullify the development of the proletariat so as to prevent communism from happening at all. Communism, for Marx, is not just the stage where all social and economic contradictions cease to exist. It is also the stage where all of humankind is given the resources that it needs to unleash its intellectual and productive potential. The communist state adopts the principle “from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs” off the back of its understanding that the universal and particular become one and the same once those who produce the value of the social world become the ruling entity. When the dictatorship of the proletariat comes to fruition, class distinctions dissolve alongside the social contradictions that they produce.

Lukács is explicit in his view that reification is commodity fetishism incarnated at the *systemic* level, *viz* a process that gives the social contradictions of capitalism a

concrete, autonomous form in social life, and purposively establishes “bourgeois” virtues such as self-interest and the institution of private property as ahistorical facts about human nature:

The essence of commodity-structure has often been pointed out. Its basis is that a relation between people takes on the character of a thing and thus acquires a ‘phantom objectivity’, an autonomy that seems so strictly rational and all-embracing as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature: the relation between people (Lukács, 2017, p. 65).

He differentiates the two sides of reification as follows:

There is both an objective and subjective side to [reification]. *Objectively* a world of objects and relations between things springs into being (the world of commodities and their movements on the market). The laws governing these objects are indeed gradually discovered by man, but even so they confront him as invisible forces that generate their own power. The individual can use his knowledge of these laws to his own advantage, but he is not able to modify the process by his own activity. *Subjectively* – where the market economy has been fully developed – a man’s activity becomes estranged from himself, it turns into a commodity which, subject to the non-human objectivity of the natural laws of society, must go its own way independently of man just like any consumer article (Lukács, 2017, p. 68).

The *subjective* side of reification refers to the encroachment of capital on the “lifeworld” to the extent that it imposes a mechanistic, “thing-like” character upon the labourer (downstream of the alienation of labour). It can also be seen to extend to the market’s proliferation of commodities that psychologically withdraw consumers from the established modes of socialisation, leading to them eventually mimicking the character of the products they use or the labour processes imposed upon them (i.e. in the factory)⁴⁰. The *objective* side of reification, in contrast, is a materialistic revision of Max Weber’s concept of “rationalisation”. It alludes to the structural transformation of social institutions in accordance with market forces, which mysteriously proceed to govern human activity even in cases where that activity is socially and economically damaging. The deregulation of the UK housing market enacted through the 1980 Housing Act⁴¹ could be interpreted as an example of structural rationalisation assuming a pathological form. Despite being a genuine attempt to solidify the

⁴⁰ The widely reported psychological effects of swipe-based dating applications on their users (Holtzhausen et al., 2020), who are compelled to present themselves in a commodified form to others, is arguably a strong example of the subjective phenomenon that Lukács uses the “contemplative stance” to describe.

⁴¹ This gave five million publicly housed tenants in England and Wales the right to buy their dwelling from their local councils.

institution of property (by making property ownership itself accessible to the working class), it had the adverse effect in the long term. Economists such as Blakeley (2021) have observed that as the dwellings were made available to buy at a reduced rate during an economic trough, many of those who took the opportunity benefitted from considerable capital gains in the subsequent decades. This, Blakely (2021) observes, led to a sharp rise of *buy-to-let* purchases due to property itself becoming a dependable means of capital protection and increased the dependence of the lowest earners on the rental market who, in having to endure a combination of low wages and high living costs, often found themselves unable to save enough for a deposit. Thus, this meets the conditions for objective reification because market forces have proceeded to assume a determining form above the intended goal of solidifying the institution of property.

Lukács's conceptualisation of reification, however, contains a number of defects which place unnecessary limitations on how the phenomena is to be historically interpreted. The *first* of these defects is intentional and in virtue of a reason that has been amply covered in this thesis, namely that Lukács's perception of history is constrained by his teleological commitment to the idea of communism being the end of history in waiting (in the Eastern bloc at the very least). Reification is thus deduced as being both an expression of social contradictions that need resolving *and* a social phenomenon that gives abstractions an appearance of "concreteness". The *second* is articulated by Honneth in his own essay on *Reification* (2008): other than, of course, disputing the base that causes it to occur, Lukács does not sufficiently differentiate, if at all, reification from rationalisation. By not doing so, he appears to take or present it as given that both the "epistemic category mistake" (Honneth, 2008, p. 26) that results in the adoption of a contemplative stance, and the structural transformation of social institutions are always downstream of the contradictions perennially reproduced by the bourgeois economic substructure. As such, the scenario whereby forms of social or psychological disenchantment – which some may describe as *alienation* – follow from the bureaucratic colonisation of a culture produced by an aggregate of socialised "lifeworlds" occurs within a region functioning under communist rule (as is documented to have occurred in Ukraine under Soviet occupation) is not something that Lukács can accept as a case of reification.

Perhaps uncoincidentally, Lukács's conceptualisation provides a rational justification for *Dekulakisation*, on the potential grounds that the Kulak's *deviant* value sphere, and economic activity was the result of a self-producing "false consciousness" which placed them in historical opposition to the interests of the proletariat and thus necessitated the intentional persecution of those *reified* cultural norms. When Lukács's conceptualisation of reification is abstracted from its historiographical context, it could be observed that he is only willing to accept subjective reification, *viz* the adoption of a contemplative stance, as an expression of a social and economic problem if a "false" structure or form of praxis is identified as the cause of it first. This leads us to the *third* defect. For all the emphasis he places on it in *HCC*, Lukács – most likely for political reasons – isn't open to considering "phantom objecti[fication]" as a problem that extends beyond capitalism. The *fourth* emerges as a consequence of this myopia. Because of his commitment to the view that the production process acquires its social character from the economic base, he overlooks the dialectical potential that the means of production has independent of capitalism, namely the capacity of technology to socially transform the labourer. As such, he appears oblivious to the possibility that reification may be underwritten by a fetishised fixation on *productivity* per se – something which communism and capitalism have in common – not just productivity under capitalism.

This takes me to the *fifth*, final and perhaps most consequential defect, courtesy of some assistance from Nick Land's critique of Marx that can be located in *Fanged Noumena* (Land, 2014). In this collection of essays, Land essentially challenges the fundamental metaphysical assumption that binds Marx's dialectical materialism as a philosophy of history: namely that beyond the historical fetters of capitalism lies an intrinsically dialogical and mutually transformative relationship between humanity in its proletarian vocation and the technological apparatus through which it realises its productive potential (given that it now has unfettered access to the value that it produces). Working from what could be perceived as an immanent critique of neoliberal capitalism, and thus observing the bureaucratic reconstruction of social institutions in accordance with the perpetual creation of new markets and facilitating a cultural dependence on mass consumption, Land asserts the following: whilst Marx is correct in his assessment about capitalism's transformation of "living labour" into "dead labour" and endless exploitation of the natural world as permitted by the terms of its

own rational necessity (to the degree that it cunningly sets humanity to the task of facilitating its own servitude), he is mistaken in the belief that the subordination of the proletariat also has consequences for the means of production. As such, rather than following Marx in recognising capitalism as something which becomes a fetter to the autonomous forces of production in its most developed stage, Land – off the back of observing modernity’s historical movement towards total atomisation – makes the fatalistic argument that Hegel deliberates over in the SOC: that the realisation of the “pure concept”, “absolute idea” or *Geist*, necessitates Reason’s subordination to the abstract singularity of “infinite Otherness”.

Hegel and Land’s dialectics, one could argue, differ only in the following way: whereas Hegel sees this Otherness, or “bad infinity”, as the *Understanding* when it assumes the form of an autonomous totality, Land believe this autonomous Otherness to be none other than *capital*, which the autonomous forces of production served from the beginning. As such, instead of perceiving world history as the releasing of productive forces through the activity of humankind, Land sees humans as those serving the historically contingent function that capitalism serves for Marx. Thus, rather than world history consisting of the liberation of humankind from the fettered means of production, which places humankind and production itself on a joint mission, Land’s philosophy of history – in believing that it is capital and production to be metaphysically interwoven – consists not of humanity liberating itself from the contradictions of capitalism through the means of production qua “species being”, but the process of the means of production liberating themselves of humanity by virtue of its spontaneous and uncertain essence. Land’s theory, to be sure, is openly apocalyptic and comes with its own teleological constraints. However, on principle, it is no less conceivable than the one presented by Marx and Lukács and bares many similarities with the theory of reification implicit in Hegel’s philosophy of history.

Hegel’s critique of empiricism, formalism and “striving”

In order to truly understand the significant value that both Hegel’s exposition of Fichte’s system in the *DFZ* and *SNL* have to the end of giving theoretical and political expression to the rational modern state on which freedom depends, it is essential to begin with understanding what Hegel specifically means by “science”. Whilst his conception *does* extend to the doctrines commonly affiliated with the Copernican

Revolution and Cartesianism (among others), Hegel is primarily seeking to address what he sees as an unresolved ontological problem. The term “natural law”, in this essay, refers to a set of human values which cannot be reduced to laws that are given in an established contract (“positive law”). Hegel’s intention is to unpack the ways in which the empiricist traditions of Locke and Hume, and the formalist/rationalist traditions of Kant and Fichte, fail to provide a reliable account of how the contents of natural law are apprehended. Once Hegel has completed this task, the relevance of his critiques of empiricism and formalism to the methodologies proposed by scientific philosophers such as Francis Bacon and Descartes should become obvious. It is only after presenting the epistemic flaws which inhibit both traditions that Hegel turns to explain that such conceptions of natural law could lead to failures within the political system and potentially the complete breakdown of civil society itself. As we will see, an alternative interpretation of the phenomenon of reification – itself rooted in a competing interpretation of “commodity fetishism” – appears to be what Hegel identifies as the fundamental problem, as well as the one which will pose the greatest challenges to the Germanic world in perpetuity.

In the *SNL*, Hegel’s contention with the empiricist approach to understanding natural law lies its “lack[ing] [of] any criterion whatsoever for drawing the boundary between the contingent and the necessary” (Hegel, 1999, p.111). It mistakes the *a posteriori* for the *a priori* by interpreting “relatively theoretical descriptive accounts of legal institutions” (Acton, 1975, p.7) or a “single empirically observable factor” as ahistorical statements which restrict it to producing *idealised* statements. These statements are idealised because they are conceptually obliged to reject those which call the scientific method itself into question. As such, empiricism is a philosophy of the Understanding because it only considers the elements that it observes:

If a point is to be made regarding the representation [*Vorstellung*] of the state of law [*de Rechtszustandes*], all that is required in order to demonstrate its connection with the original and necessary – and hence also its own necessity – is to project a distinct [*eigene*] quality or capacity into the chaos, and, in the manner of the empirically based sciences in general, to construct hypotheses for the so-called explanations of actuality. Hypotheses in which this actuality is posited in the same determinate character [*Bestimmtheit*], but in a purely formal and ideal shape – as force, matter, or capacity – so that one thing can very readily be grasped and explained in terms of the other (Hegel, 1999, p. 111).

Moreover, through the resultant legal systems and politically organised states within which such *ahistorical conceptions* are posited, empiricism proceeds to raise them to the level of Spirit in objectively advancing this conception. The potentialities of natural law itself – of which is an attribute of God – are progressively cancelled by the “metaphysics of the finite” (Acton, 1975, p. 20), viz the Understanding, – which appears to eclipse the complex unity of the whole, viz Reason (*Vernunft*), in which natural law itself resides. As such, the subservient political institutions, inheriting the belief that the rational principles of natural law have been identified, impose this idealised and thus transcendent conception by force. The projection of this positive “quality” into the unknowable (or infinitely Other) “chaos” (referring to the state of nature), practically leads to the misrepresentation or perhaps even *colonisation* of the multiplicitous elements contained within the whole:

[I]n so far as the unity is posited as a whole, it is given the empty name of a formless external harmony called ‘society’ and ‘the state’. Even if this unity – whether it is considered in itself [für sich] or, in a more empirical sense, in relation to its emergence – is represented as absolute, i.e. as originating directly from God, and even if the centre and inner essence of its subsistence as represented as divine, this representation [Vorstellung] nevertheless again remains something formal, which merely hovers about the multiplicity without penetrating it (Hegel, 1999, p. 113).

Hegel’s reservations with formalist conceptions of natural law have already been alluded to in our coverage of what he sees as the epistemological limitations of Kant and transcendental idealism generally. Rather than following empiricism in drawing totalising conclusions from observations of phenomena which, at best, express the essence of natural law in historically contingent forms, formalistic theories make the error of collapsing the content of natural law into *abstractions*. As such, the contents of the noumenal world are presented only through the lens of appearance. Kant’s failure to capture the contents of morality through the categorical imperative, it could be argued, continues to be the greatest case to Hegel’s point about the transcendental/ subjective idealist tradition. Whilst Hegel, consistently with his enthusiasm for the *Sermon on the Mount*, accepts morality as something to be respected for its own sake rather than in virtue of a mere formal obligation – as would be the case if good will was enforced in a civil contract – Kant’s theory of how the moral law is actualised appears to stand in contradiction with its transcendental value. If the moral law finds objective expression only when no contradictions exist among

the inclinations and actions of willing, rational subjects, then it appears that the moral law itself is infinitely relative and thus not transcendental at all. It would amount to no more than an aggregate of particular wills that emerge within a particular place and time, which leaves no room for the notion of universality. Thus, rather than the contents of morality and natural law being expressed through the abstract categories of the Understanding, it is the Understanding itself that is left to give the moral law its “quality”. Needless to say, this stands in conflict with the rational purpose of the categories themselves: to produce objective knowledge about natural law itself. Instead, however, Kant appears to have presented morality as absolutely negative, and necessarily indeterminate:

[O]ur interest here is precisely to establish what right and duty are; we enquire what the content of the moral law is, and our sole concern is with this content. But the essence of pure will and of pure practical reason is to abstract from all content, so that it is self-contradictory to look to this absolute practical reason for a moral legislation – which would have to have a content – because the essence of this reason consists in having no content at all.

Thus, before this formalism can pronounce a law, it is necessary that some material [aspect], some determinacy, should be posited to supply its content; and the form which is conferred upon this determinacy is that of unity or universality... [E]very determinacy is capable of being elevated to conceptual form and posited as a quality [Qualität], and there is nothing which could not be made into a moral law in this way. (Hegel, 1999, p. 124).

Whilst Fichte agrees with this assessment of the categorical imperative’s practical inoperability, hence his recommendation of replacing morality with relations of *right* as the basis of the social contract, the same fundamental problem persists for Hegel. It remains a philosophy of the Understanding because individuals are assumed – and thus coerced into being – self-interested agents that posit themselves above the multiplicitious essence of the natural world, *viz* the “clear unity of ethical life”, instead of rightfully understanding themselves to compose an inherent part of that unity (*Sittlichkeit*). To be sure, despite Hegel’s distaste for the hypostatisation of law and morality likely being on religious grounds (in addition to the fact that such a view would be consistent with his ongoing concerns over “infinite Otherness”), he affords space for their separation within his system in virtue of practical reason and philosophy necessitating it (for reasons that German politics comes some way to explaining). However, within every one of Hegel’s proposed systems – stretching from the *SNL* essay to the *POR* – is the input of some form of mediation that, whilst not being

unresponsive to expressions of particular will or social developments advocated on the grounds of economic rationality alone, could be observed to make concessions which prevent the *System of Reality* (*viz* the sphere of material needs) from fundamentally reshaping the self-producing *System of Ethical Life* (*viz* the sphere of Spirit) on which true freedom depends.

For Hegel, however, Fichte's attempted reconstruction of the rational state on relations of right has no such mediative device. As he explains earlier in the *DFZ*, the Fichtean state – within which individuals are obliged to surrender their freedom as it would exist in the state of nature in virtue of a “merely negative” principle – appears unable to sufficiently reconcile the *positive* elements with the social and political whole which, for Hegel, should provide the historical and intellectual justification for why relations of right assume a place in the rational state in the first place. Hegel's reasoning for describing Fichte's system as “atomistic” is on these grounds: it forces people against each other in relations of domination to the degree that they are unable to identify any reconciliatory value outside of self-interest and abstract activity (e.g. economic activity). Hegel even goes as far as saying that Fichte's rational state necessitates the coercion of freedom in a “double aspect”: one where constituents posit themselves as free, and the other where they recognise themselves as infinitely malleable to the extent that they “can be treated as mere thing[s]” (Hegel, 1977a, p. 144). This, for Hegel, is all because freedom *proper* is compelled to “suspend itself” in order to make way for a narrow version limited by its basis in “reflection”:

Freedom is the characteristic mark of rationality; it is that which in itself suspends all limitation, and it is the summit of Fichte's system. In a community with others, however, freedom must be surrendered in order to make possible the freedom of all rational beings living in a community. Conversely, the community is a condition of freedom. So freedom must suspend itself in order to be freedom. This again makes it clear that freedom is here something merely negative, namely absolute indeterminateness, i.e., it is a purely ideal factor as the self-positing was shown to be above: freedom regarded from the standpoint of reflection. This freedom does not come upon itself as Reason, but as the rational being, that is to say, in a synthesis with its opposite, a finite being (Hegel, 1977a, pp. 144-145).

For Hegel, a community united under these principles is also unlikely to produce a climate of social tranquillity. Civility remains in place, theoretically, only insofar as all citizens are observed to stay within their allotted “spheres”. However, this is an entirely abstract and perhaps even utopian ideal. If individuals are formally obligated to posit

and continually view themselves as in absolute opposition to both each other and the world from which they compose a part, then civil society offers them a narrow and superficial existence at best. More worryingly still is the fact that “mak[ing] possible the freedom of other rational beings” (Hegel, 1977a, p. 145) seems to necessitate engineering a culture of “supreme tyranny” so as to ensure that freedom does not lose its form:

If the community of rational beings were essentially a limitation of true freedom, the community would be in and for itself the supreme tyranny. But only freedom as indeterminacy, and as ideal factor is being limited at this point [in Fichte], so that tyranny does not yet arise in the community directly from this idea by itself. But it does arise in the highest degree from the way that freedom is to be limited, in order to make possible the freedom of other rational beings. For freedom is not supposed to lose, through the community, its form of being something ideal and opposite; on the contrary, it is going to be fixed in this form and made dominant” (Hegel, 1977a, p. 145).

We observed in Chapter II that Hegel’s fundamental concerns about moral action being reduced to a mere formality can be traced back to the *SOC and Its Fate*. In this theological work, Hegel draws a significant ethical and epistemological contrast between Christianity’s basis on living the “moral life” through inward spiritualisation, and the spirit of Judaism which, in upholding the integrity of God’s “infinite Otherness”, perpetually estranges⁴⁵ subjects from the heart of the divine law (the point affirmed by Jesus himself in his exchange with the Pharisees and the Scribes in Matthew: 23). In the *SNL*, however, which builds on the theoretical groundwork laid out in the *DFZ*, Hegel starts addressing the problem of positivity in the secularised and teleological manner that he later advances in the *LPH*. Rather than interpreting “atomism” and despiritualisation as social developments emerging directly from Judaism’s metaphysical roots in abstraction and “infinite Otherness” – which underwrites the connection Hegel originally draws between the “Jewish world” and “bad/spurious infinity” – Hegel begins confronting bad infinity as an independent problem in the Germanic world that, in his view, requires a stronger presence of mediation and moral intervention than Fichte is willing to give. A rundown of Hegel’s more theoretical

⁴⁵ In both theological essays, viz the *PCR* and the *SOC*, Hegel alternates between presenting the Jews’ rejection of Christ as rooted in intentional malice and as the result of a fallible tendency that transcends from their internalised “positivity”.

contentions with Fichte's presuppositions in the *FNR*, which feature before the excerpts shown, will suffice for our purposes here.

Everything included in Fichte's rational state, of course, follows from his conception of the "rational being". However, this conception is itself downstream of another involving the metaphysical relationship between Reason and Nature. This is where Fichte differs most radically from Hegel, Schelling, and even Kant. Whilst Kant upholds a moral commitment to treating nature as an end-in-itself (on the assumption of it being determined by an even greater intelligence, most likely referring to a deistic notion of God), and Hegel and Schelling remain reluctant to separate the two at all due to their commitments to "Critical philosophy", Fichte – as per Hegel's interpretation – sees no utility in asking ontological questions about intelligence beyond the self-positing Ego: "*nature* [is posited a]s determined immediately by and for intelligence" (Hegel, 1977a, p.143). Thus, Nature, for Fichte, stands diametrically opposed to freedom until it is forced into obedience with the supreme authority of *Reason* – only from this point can natural law and true freedom be established in Fichte's view.

Understanding freedom in this way contains some radical and perhaps even disturbing theoretical and practical implications for Hegel, assuming that his critique is accurate. Contrary to some liberal interpretations of Hegel's political writings (such as those espoused by Karl Rosenkranz), the elements that he finds himself greatly concerned by are not in response to the idea of the state inheriting a certain prerogative to intervene on Reason's behalf. In principle, Hegel believes as much as Fichte that the modern state's *modus operandi* should lean towards *proactivity* rather than *reactivity*, not least because the persistence of the modern nation itself functionally depends on it. Rather, all the implications exist as a result of the *absolutely* abstract basis from which legitimacy to exercise power in Fichte's rational state is derived. Fichte's positing of nature as both determined by the self-positing Ego and something which is definitively *other* than the Ego means that drives "can only be identified with freedom by coming under the *control* of the practical concept which decides whether or not it is to be gratified or suppressed" (Harris, 1977, p. 38). As far as Hegel is concerned, Fichte's replacing of the categorical imperative with the equally formal but practical "sphere of freedom", which merely sets out to provide citizens with security, has not only failed to provide a reliable basis for individuals to mutually thrive in their self-interested vocations. It has created a system whereby that end is

practically *impossible* in virtue of Fichte's conceptualisation of "self-positing" being metaphysically *solipsistic* (Beiser, 2005, pp. 174-191.). This, on my reading, is not an exaggeration of Hegel's argument: in his view, if it is the case that nature and the "not I" really are produced by the self-positing Ego, then there is objectively no way in which one efficacious person can enter a mutual arrangement without first coming into conflict with them. Hegel takes Fichte to be unconcerned about this in the belief that he sees the political enforcement of the sphere of freedom to be a sufficient means of alleviating this risk:

[Fichte's exposition] attempts to create a consistent system with no need of an ethics [*Sittlichkeit*] and religion that are alien to it. In a system of such externality (as in any system which proceeds from the conditioned to the unconditioned), it is either impossible to discover anything unconditioned, or if something of this kind is posited, it is [merely] a formal indifference which has the conditioned and the different outside it; it is essence without form, power without wisdom, quantity without inner quality or infinity, rest without movement.

The supreme task is an arrangement which works with mechanical necessity so that the activity of each individual is coerced by the general will is one which presupposes an opposition between the individual will and the general will (given that this general will must necessarily be real in those subject [*Subjekt*] who are its organs and administrators). Oneness with the general will consequently cannot be understood and posited as inner absolute majesty, but as something to be produced by an external relation or by coercion (Hegel, 1999, p. 132).

This defect, however, is at the shallow end of Hegel's concerns on this subject. His greater concerns lie with the social and political consequences in the sequence of events described in "The Enlightenment" (Hegel, 1977b, pp. 328-363). It is conceivable that Hegel uses this section in the *POS* to present the internal logic of the *Committee of Public Safety* as its constitutional allegiance to the "supremacy of Reason" provided the administrators with the moral prerogative to execute anyone they judge to be standing opposed to the interests of the general will. Indeed, there is nothing to suggest that Hegel takes this to be what Fichte has in mind, nor something that he would have accepted as a practical necessity for establishing true freedom as he saw it (even though Fichte's enthusiastic support for the French Revolution gives credence to this idea). However, as I will proceed to show, it is demonstrably clear that Hegel's critiques in the *DFZ* and *the SNL* are motivated by a profound concern that Fichte's conception of freedom as "striving", and insistence on establishing the "sphere of freedom" through coercion, creates a serious danger whereby tyranny – or perhaps

even *totalitarianism* – emerges as the consequence of paranoia or misplaced moral indignation due to the formal principles themselves being “absolutely opposed to intuition” (Hegel, 1977a, p.138). This, for Hegel, justifies his characterisation of Fichte’s philosophy as one of *bad infinity*. This, referring to an ongoing logical sequence that cannot return back into itself – hence Hegel’s use of the number line analogy (see Chapter III) – is intended to describe the character of “infinite progress”, which has the ideal of *absolute freedom* as its end.

Herein lies the most striking part of Hegel’s critique which, in my view, has not received the attention it deserves. If one, for example, were to programme an autonomous executive power to perpetually enact the commitments to “absolute freedom” inscribed in Fichte’s system, the coercive principle would prevent it from ever recognising a reason to stop (irrespective of the ethical character the executive acts from). Within this abstract rationale, all that’s required for a desire or action to be identified with “freedom” is for the executive to make it a formality; the absolute ambiguity regarding how the thing-in-itself (*Ding-an-sich*) is identified within the interplay of concept and intuition means this desire or action can theoretically amount to *anything*. Thus, in order for Reason to be coercible, the practical concept must first produce the contents of “thingness” (*Dinghaftigkeit*) and with the necessary conviction that its judgement stands permanently above time and space. These concepts, having been posited with their eternal obligation to serving the “tyranny of Reason” (Harris, 1977), therefore have no prerogative but to reshape the social and political world in the image of its conceptual character.

As such, instead of producing a *communicative* system whereby practical conceptual developments acting in service of Reason are continually informed by intuition – thus returning to Reason *rightly* understood as *Vernunft* – Fichte, in Hegel’s interpretation, has produced one where intuitions are perpetually *dominated* by the practical concept, a product of the Understanding (*Verstand*). The *only* intuitions that have their “thingness” incorporated in the *identity* of Reason, in fact, are those of the executive who happen to hold the coercive power⁴⁶. The march of Fichte’s rational state towards progress, then, is not only one that never ends: it is one that never goes anywhere

⁴⁶ Fichte’s introduces the “Ephorate” to resolve this problem. But in Hegel’s view, the “interdict” which they have the constitutional right to exercise above the executive only causes an “infinite regress” of powers, leading ultimately to the entire political system grinding to a halt.

ethically substantive unless by sheer chance because the “sphere of freedom” is posited to stand permanently above the historical conditions and people whose interests it serves. Whilst Fichte clearly views the coercive principle as something on which the freest or “highest” form of community depends (Hegel, 1977a, p. 145), Hegel identifies it as something which purposively shapes rational beings – who would otherwise be situating their freedom – into infinitely malleable cogs for the ends of an endless “strive” towards “infinite Otherness”. The following quote shows how this social phenomenon proceeds to develop the character of an autonomous zombie march:

This synthesis by way of domination comes about as follows. Pure drive aims at determining itself absolutely toward activity for the sake of activity. It is confronted by an objective drive, a system of limitations. In the union of freedom and nature, freedom surrenders some of its purity, and nature some of its impurity. In order for the synthetic activity to be pure and infinite still, it must be thought as an objective activity whose final purpose is absolute freedom, absolute independence from all of nature. The final purpose can never be achieved; [it turns into] an infinite series[.] (Hegel, 1977a, p. 138).

This entire process, for Hegel, consists of the Ego being forced to “strive” out of a practical obligation only to then encounter an objective world that appears to be encroaching on the freedom it believed itself to have. As this cyclical motion plays out, both the Ego’s notion of freedom and the purposive elements of nature that Fichte posits as “lifeless” *should*, indeed, form a dialectical relationship. As we have already shown Hegel (1977a, p.138) to have said: “[i]n the union of freedom and nature, freedom surrenders some of its purity, and nature some of its impurity”. But the transformative potential of both is perpetually denied because Fichte’s Ego is obligated to carry forwards the assumption that absolute freedom emerges only from nature’s subjugation to Reason. Put alternatively: the true contents of this synthesis are perpetually *collapsed* into the identity of “absolute freedom” so that the Ego can rationally interpret the results as having been produced by its own practical activity, which in time, has the effect of altering the character of the practical concept itself. Because the “final purpose [of absolute freedom] can never be achieved”, however, the cycle renews itself at the noumenal world’s expense:

[T]he Ego suspends itself as object and therewith also as subject. But it should not suspend itself. There remains, then, for Ego only time, indefinitely extended, filled with limitations and quantities; our old friend the infinite progress must help out. Where one expects the supreme

synthesis one finds always the same antithesis between a limited present and an infinity extraneous to it. Ego = Ego is the Absolute, is totality; there is nothing outside the Ego. In the system, however, the Ego does not get that far, and it never will (Hegel, 1977a, p. 139).

Assuming, of course, that this reading of Hegel's critique is accurate, he appears to have achieved substantially more than merely expositing Fichte's system as the rationalised incarnation of bad infinity. In exposing the ongoing alteration of the practical concept as a logical necessity, *viz* as fundamental for Fichte's notion of "infinite progress" to continue, Hegel's immanent critique also appears to have exposed the concept of "striving" as one that mysteriously produces social problems by virtue of its existence of an abstraction, or rather, by virtue having a permanent residence in the Understanding. It is for this reason that Hegel's position on the *fate* of the Fichtean state appears similar, if not identical to, that of the Roman and Jewish worlds – described in the *LPH* and the *SOC* respectfully – where in the absence of social institutions with genuine, reconciliatory potential, the people and the "organic" contents of ethical life were swept up and turned into feed for the activities of a lifeless, "inorganic", self-operating machine.

The most important fact for our present purposes, however, is this: if the practical/objective colonisation of nature and the noumenal world in its entirety is indeed inscribed in the concept of "striving" – something which Hegel makes an effort to incorporate in his own political system – then the fatalistic possibility explored in Chapter II appears less like a religious prophesy and more like an internal development within the dialectic of Enlightenment. If so, then the total colonisation and restructuring of the *System of Ethical Life*, *viz* the organic social whole, at the hands of the *System of Reality*, *viz* the inorganic system of needs, drives and economic activity, seems to be a foregone conclusion for Hegel⁴⁷. In this case, reification would be the 'end of history' after all.

⁴⁷ Hegel is also quite likely to be using these critiques to indirectly address real problems in German politics at a time of war, instability, and internal battles about Germany's national identity, with some political factions possessing the same plebeian spirit as Jacobin France (which Fichte's idealism could be perceived to express). The descriptive warnings about "atomism" potentially culminating in tyranny and despotism, including those which we have observed, are conceivably made with respect to a general concern about the risk of Germany following the same fate as France before Napoleon, especially regarding the future of its religious institutions.

Hegel's allusions to "identity thinking"

In Chapter I, I introduced the phenomenon of reification as it has been conceptualised by Adorno in *ND*, with considerable aid from O'Connor (2013, pp. 54- 85). In this book, experience is understood by Adorno to naturally consist of subject and object, *viz* the individual and the world of which they form a part, having a continually proactive and transformative effect on the other. In this process, both concepts and the natural world itself become richer forms of themselves as the fettered (or "positive") elements that would otherwise constrain one's relationship with the world – applying also to how they would view themselves in it and how the world would view them in turn – are annulled and reincorporated into the dialectical multiplicity in which they naturally belong. As Adorno argues, however, there are evidently cases where this transformative process is disrupted as a result of either the subject or object proceeding to "stand above" its dialectical partner before then proceeding to do the same to itself (theoretically, this can also occur the other way around). The transformative and thus mutually informative *relationship* between the subject and object is thus replaced by one based on domination that, while seemingly beneficial to the dominant party in appearance, ultimately has a destructive effect on both. This is what Adorno considers to be a "reified" and "reifying" relationship, seemingly caused by a transcendent quality – or "fixed identity" as we described it earlier – somehow acquiring a real, concrete and autonomous presence in experience.

The destructive effect can be witnessed in the *cancellation* of the transformative relationship from which transcendent quality arose and the *forgetting* of the contents that emerged from the original, *dialogical* relationship. However, the destructive potential of reification for Adorno – which begins as a case of conceptual misappropriation or "identity thinking" – does not limit itself to the collapsing of nature and the particular elements of humankind into a stagnant conceptual framework, of which he sees Kant's epistemology as the embodiment (Adorno, 2001). As can be observed from within his analysis of Hegel's "world spirit", it is clear that Adorno also knows that reification, by virtue of its own laws of rational necessity (rooted in the Understanding), must assume the form of a colonising totality in order to have these laws historically confirmed:

In human experience, the spell is the equivalent of the fetish character of merchandise. The self-made thing becomes a thing-in-itself, from which the self cannot escape any more; in the

dominating faith in facts as such, in their positive acceptance, the subject venerates its mirror image.

In the spell, the reified consciousness has become total. The fact of its being a false consciousness holds out a promise that it will be possible to avoid it – that it will not last; that a false consciousness must inevitably move beyond itself; that it cannot have the last word. The straighter a society's course for the totality that is reproduced in the spellbound subjects, the deeper its tendency to dissociation. This threatens the life of the species as much as it disavows the spell cast over the whole, the false identity of subject and object. The universal that compresses the particular until it splinters, like a torture instrument, is working against itself, for its substance is the life of the particular; without the particular, the universal declines into an abstract, separate, ineradicable form (Adorno, 2005, p. 346).

In his critiques of the empiricist and formalistic methods of treating natural law (as with elsewhere), however, we can see clearly that Hegel is at least equally aware of this existential danger, *viz* whereby a disruption within a positively transformative relationship causes some elements to assume a *transcendent* form in experience, of which then proceeds to denature, disfigure and perhaps even dominate the contents that fall outside of its notion of abstract universality. His basis for criticising empiricism lies in its tendency to produce “idealised” conclusions about phenomena which, perhaps non-coincidentally, do more to confirm the validity of the method than acquire objective knowledge about the phenomena being observed, hence his description of its findings as “so-called explanations of actuality” (Hegel, 1999, p. 111). As he proceeds to show, however, Hegel is evidently concerned about far more than the misrepresentation and/or misappropriation of the natural world through the practice of drawing overreaching conclusions from observation alone (something which indicates a specific concern with “identity thinking” on his part), especially with *natural law* being the intended subject matter. The reason for this is simple: if a scientific method merely “hovers above the multiplicity without penetrating it” (Hegel, 1999, p. 113), or rather: develops a systematic theory of human behaviour without any reference to the “inner essence” of the observable content, *viz* the totality of nature in-and-for-itself, then proceeding to incorporate these claims about actuality within the ongoing development of a political system established with respect to natural law will not only subvert the state's conception of natural law itself, but also reshape the nature of the society that it serves. Assuming that this interpretation of Hegel's critique is correct, then it does appear that Hegel has an implicit theory of reification, one that begins as a case of conceptual misappropriation or misidentification (“identity thinking”) before proceeding

to develop into a social pathology (or “bad infinity”) that colonises and metaphysically reshapes the nature of the transcendent Ethical Order as he understands it.

However, Hegel’s coverage of the formalistic methods in this essay, specifically of the maxims within *Fichte’s FNR* (complimented substantially by his previous assertions in the *DFZ*), is where the richness of his theory of reification becomes clear enough to pose a convincing challenge to those expositied by Lukács, Adorno, Habermas and Honneth. Fichte’s philosophy on the whole is the most suitable target, for Hegel, for the simple reason that it is the intellectual incarnation of bad infinity. It expresses itself first, as an idea of freedom that exists entirely in the abstract, *viz* “absolute freedom”, and second, as a political system that is logically destined either to implode, or to assume a form so tyrannical in service of that abstract notion of freedom that freedom itself becomes institutionally *forgotten*. The most severe consequence of this, for Hegel, is the situation where true freedom – emerging from particularity identifying itself as situated in the universal (God) – finds itself wrongly placed in opposition to the universal interest by those formally obliged to act in its interests. This is the purpose of the “practical concept”, which as we know, is posited by Fichte as a necessary condition for freedom to be practically possible. Thus, the phenomenon of reification – existing in this case in the form of an aggressively subjectivist idea of freedom gaining a mysterious, autonomous presence in history to the detriment of the *Volkgeist* – appears to be what, in Hegel’s view, Fichte is risking by basing human freedom on such formal and atomistic presuppositions (perhaps because Fichte himself is a historical instrument of it).

Unpacking the “positive” features of Fichte’s system

In my view, the key to identifying and truly understanding what a Hegelian theory of reification amounts to within his absolute idealism, independent of the teleological purpose given to reification in the previous historical epochs (see Chapter III), lies this general conceptualisation of freedom as “striving”, which provides Fichte’s rational justification for the aforementioned notion of “infinite progress”. This, I believe, can be deduced to *four* positive features of Fichte’s system which the notion seems to depend on.

The *first* concerns the aggressive conceptualisation involved in his formal principles: Fichte’s positing of Reason and freedom as based on the domination of nature, when

the relationship between all three, for Hegel, consists of them remaining distinct whilst still existing as equally purposive emanations of the same divine substance (God). This is a quintessential case of “identity thinking” on Fichte’s part because he posits nature itself as a hypostatisation of both Reason and freedom which generates the prerogative for rational agents to sustain a *thingified* and *objectifying* attitude towards the natural world.

The *second* is arguably another case of identity thinking, this time in the form of Fichte identifying the establishment of a coercive political power (referred to by Hegel as the “practical concept”), as a necessary condition for the practical possibility of freedom itself. This political body inherits the formal obligation and responsibility to secure freedom for all by recognising the “sphere of freedom” as where it begins and ends. As this end can only be achieved in the abstract, however, what Reason and freedom actually amount to depends on the content that falls under the established politic, *viz* the “practical concept”. Thus, it seems that freedom is reconceptualised and affirmed as *positive* by definition, *viz* something that has an absolute dependence on a coercive authority legitimised by a social contract in order to come into being. The absolute identification of “positive law”⁴⁸ with freedom means that the contents of natural law itself – which exists above the institutions themselves – go unrealised. This, for Hegel, risks structurally transforming the social institutions functioning within that system and by extension, the subjects themselves, in a manner that can only lead to civil decline. Assuming, of course, that this reading is accurate, Hegel seems to be alluding to *objective* reification, *viz* where the arbitrary essence of positive law (as something that becomes law by virtue of it being imposed alone) leads to the social institutions being permanently unstable due in virtue of their inability to rise above the “system of need”. The ultimate consequence is that natural law itself, as with the ethical multiplicity, falls by the wayside in favour of those laws which happen to be imposed by force. Naturally, these changes would then proceed to engender reification at the *subjective* level.

The *third* relates to the aforementioned problem of “atomism”. Because the subjects within Fichte’s system, for Hegel, are obliged to both posit themselves as metaphysically situated *above* the natural world and to act primarily from self-

⁴⁸ “Positive law” is arbitrary because principles become laws by virtue of them just being imposed, as in legal positivism.

interested vocations – the latter of which necessitates relating to other persons within the contracted conditions, *viz*, as economic agents in pursuit of physical needs and/or desires – the system seems to necessitate subjects viewing the natural world, other persons and themselves as *things* which must be brought under concept through labour. As Hegel contends as far back as the SOC, this could have the effect of estranging subjects from the heart of the divine law (of which natural law is an attribute). On my reading, Hegel’s description of the potential rationalisation and atomisation of the Germanic world in alignment with abstract market and intellectual forces – which Hegel attributed to the influence of the Jewish world before developing this into a general, modern problem with infinite Otherness – appears to be identical with Lukács’s description of objective reification under capitalism albeit for their theoretical differences on the base).

The *fourth* and final positive feature, however, is by far the most important for offering a conceptual exposition for how and why the phenomenon of reification that Marx, Lukács, Adorno, Habermas and Honneth all recognise (excluding their varying interpretations of the base) actually takes place, in addition to why it assumes an autonomous, machine-like quality. The feature essentially emerges directly from what Hegel sees as Fichte’s identification of freedom as domination and the formal obligation that subjects inherit to practically posit themselves as self-determining in a definitively solipsistic manner. In my view, it is here the full extent of Hegel’s concern over Fichte’s notion of “progress” can be identified, in addition to why his idealism is the philosophical incarnation of “bad infinity. Because subjects within Fichte’s system are *implicitly* beholden to the intellectual labour of conceptualising nature as infinitely separated from itself and *explicitly* compelled to accept practical activity as the means through which its material and economic needs are met, Fichte’s rational (“striving”) subject appears to be trapped in an endless cycle of domination for domination’s sake. This entails not only the domination of the natural world and others, but also the subject’s domination of itself as its knowledge of nature becomes estranged and disfigured to the extent that it becomes totally unable to identify itself in it all. As we have already established, this outcome is the polar opposite of Hegel’s rational conclusion in “absolute knowing”, *viz* the most developed stage of the dialectic when the free, self-conscious subject recognises itself as rationally situated in the world with the knowledge that the world reciprocates this recognition in return. It is no

exaggeration to say that in Hegel's view, a natural world known only through ahistorical conceptualisation is one where nothing about the natural world is ever substantively known at all, except, of course, in the case when these concepts are brought into existence through reification.

As such, in Hegel's exposition of "infinite progress" in the *DFZ*, we can identify implicit allusions to subjective reification and what Honneth (2008) describes as "self-reification". However, in this particular critique of Fichte's self-positing Ego, Hegel goes further to explain how the ideal of infinite progress produces reification *not* by accident, but out of *logical necessity*. This theory can be identified specifically in *two* points which can be identified within the excerpts shown in pages 24 and 25 of this Chapter. If it is the case that...

1. practical activity is the metric through which Fichte's subject meets the conditions for being objectively efficacious,

and...

2. objects recognised under the terms of the subject's concepts cannot be dominated again,

... then rationally speaking, the endless domination of the noumenal world is not a mere consequence of Fichte's atomistic and solipsistic presuppositions. Rather, it is the metaphysically enabling condition of freedom itself as he understands it. Subjects of the Fichtean system thus labour to remain subservient to principles which provide the logical justification for endless domination without any substantive reference to the parent totality in which Hegel sees those objects to essentially belong (except for the knowledge of those which are yet to be brought under concept). This is not only a process that doesn't end due to the immutability of the noumenal world itself: it is one that *cannot* end on principle because domination is understood to create the very possibility of self-efficacy. What this means, unfortunately for Fichte, is that in the hypothetical scenario when nature is fully subordinated to the wills of self-positing subjects, these subjects are then compelled by necessity to see the domination of other rational agents as essential to their own freedom. Thus, by virtue of the coercive principle introduced to preserve the "sphere of freedom" – which appears to function like an ever-tightening mechanical wheel – subjects are reduced to serving as mere

administrators of domination for domination's sake, culminating in their own *colonisation* by the Understanding (*Verstand*).

In my view, this critique of Fichte doesn't just show Hegel to have had a theory of reification before Lukács. It also shows reification to be more radical and all-encompassing than Marx and Lukács claim. His exposition of infinite progress's logical and metaphysical reliance on the *perpetual* colonisation and reification of the ethical multiplicity seems to make the case that the dialectic of Enlightenment possesses all of the conceptual qualities often associated with *black holes*, only that instead of entailing the collapsing of matter into a spacetime singularity, *reification* entails the collapsing of the natural world in-and-of-itself (*Vernunft*) and humans in their social capacities into the formal singularity of "infinite Otherness", which derives its metaphysical basis from the idea of human freedom's absolute separation *from* or absolute situatedness *above* nature. The *event horizon*, in this analogy, assumes the role of the "practical concept" (Harris, 1977, p. 38) that subordinates all the particularities that it encounters in order to advance and preserve the integrity of its abstract rationality.

The idea that Hegel was of the persuasion that something akin to an autonomous 'totality of non-being' exists and poses an existential threat to the objective and spiritual conditions on which the possibility of human freedom depends is, of course, a radical one to consider. However, it is consistent with his earlier observations regarding the ontological threat that the "Jewish world" poses to the "Christian world" in the *SOC* and the threat that the *System of Reality* poses to the *System of Ethical Life* in the *SNL*. Thus, this seems to support my reading that Hegel is attempting to achieve more than just a compelling refutation of Fichte's idealism in the *DFZ* and the *SNL* which involves articulating the intrinsic instability of modernisation as a process, and in particular, the dangers that directly stem from humanity's active involvement in it. In my view, it would not be inaccurate to judge Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein* (1831) as the fictive articulation of Hegel's analysis of the unfolding dialectic of modernity, with Dr Frankenstein's monster portraying the autonomous machine that eventually turns on its creator. In fact, it could be argued that the only important difference between Hegel and Shelly insofar the contents of their historical criticisms are concerned is that the novel does meet a somewhat weaker logical conclusion. With *Frankenstein*, the tragedy peaks with the monster killing its creator, lamenting over its

moral failing and seeing suicide as the only solution. Hegel's logical conclusion, in contrast, is darker still: for the story to serve as an accurate portrayal of Hegel's analysis, the monster, following the murder of its creator, would follow the development of Odysseus. It would *first*, identify the natural world in its entirety as an "infinite Other", *second*, identify the subordination of nature to its will as the only practical remedy, and *third*, succeed at this task only insofar as it involves the colonisation of itself (by which point, no distinction between the monster and Dr Frankenstein himself exists). As such, there appears to be credence to the view that the focal point of Hegel's concern, exhibited in his critique of Fichte, is not the atomisation and subsequent disintegration of civil society, nor the social and epistemic damage that are inflicted by the "positive sciences" per se. Rather, he appears to be alluding to something metaphysical and ontological, viz the risk of humanity situating freedom in abstract universality, subscribing to a conception of progress that is fundamentally inhuman, and the danger of this process of aggressive rationalisation evolving into a fact about human progress itself. If this interpretation is correct, then it seems to confirm reification's place in Hegel's theory of modernity, with the phenomenon itself entailing humankind's colonisation and logical reconfiguration in the image of regulative structures of rationality. This, as I will now explain, appears to be an alternative version of a recognised theory of reification known as "the colonisation thesis".

Part II: Revising “the Colonisation Thesis”

Based on what can be observed from his coverage of the dialectical relationship between the *System of Ethical Life* and the *System of Reality*, Hegel’s theory of reification bears many similarities with “the colonisation thesis”, viz the theory Jütten (2001) identifies within Habermas’s *Theory of Communicative Action (TCA)*. According to (Jütten 2001, p.1) Habermas interprets reification as “a social pathology that arises when the communicative infrastructure of the lifeworld is colonised by money and power”.

Throughout this thesis, we have taken note of Hegel referring to what seems to be exactly the same social phenomenon: originally in the *SOC*, where he can be seen reluctantly accepting positivity as having a rational role to play in the modern world’s development, and most recently in his critique of Fichte’s transcendental idealism and resultant political philosophy, where the inability of the Fichtean subject to transcend the system of need creates the risk of market forces subverting the basis of ethical life before proceeding to reconstruct the state itself in alignment of economic interests. Given what scholars generally agree to be the moral and political persuasions of Hegel and Habermas, it is conceivable that both would agree on principle that the liquidation of a well-structured, democratic system with reflective and communicative social institutions for the furtherance of the interests of an economic subsystem would amount to a case of reification; one that would warrant a strong response from the state so as to ensure that civil society remains beholden to higher ethical principles⁴⁹. However, there is a significant theoretical difference between how Hegel and Habermas conceptualise the relationship between *systems* and *lifeworlds*.

The similarities between Hegel and Habermas’s respective theories of reification directly follows from those within their conceptions of modernity, with some features being arguably identical. Habermas is not, to be sure, principally subscribed to Hegel’s teleological conception of society, nor the specifically metaphysical proposition involving the immanent presence of Reason in humanity’s rational and moral development (Finlayson, 2005). But they do appear to have the same practical aim of

⁴⁹ As Habermas operates within a functionalist framework in *TCA*, he could also argue that the unprecedented growth of economic, especially *financialised* institutions, creates a democratic problem by undermining the legitimacy of the elected government.

making the modern world work by engendering and preserving the conditions for human freedom under the auspices of a quasi-managerial apparatus. Hegel's leanings in favour of a managed democracy can be observed in the *SNL* and *POR*, where lawyers, civil servants, bureaucrats and military men (from the Prussian aristocracy) are listed as composing the "universal class" (Hegel, 1991, pp. 343-4). Habermas's position, however, is evident in his long-standing enthusiasm for supranational institutions such as the European Union, which generally aim to uphold democratic principles through a combination of strategic policies administered by technocratic means (e.g., the legal enforcement of the Single Market and the Common Agricultural Policy) and communicative processes that offer an albeit partial guarantee that the respective national electorates will be represented (e.g., through parliamentary debates, votes and elections). Thus, unlike Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse, who offer no solutions except for "nonidentity" and revolution (in Marcuse's case at least), Habermas opts for a more pragmatic approach to dealing with the same social pathologies that could be perceived as identical to Hegel's. In addition to proposing that the modern state be used to alleviate the abstract and alienating by-products of civil society, and, in keeping with his faith in the public sphere as a venue for self-renewing rationality, Habermas advocates for the continual introduction, preservation and improvement of communicative infrastructure. Not only to help prevent corruption, tyranny and government overreach, but to prevent the *systems* world from colonising the private and qualitative aspects of life, *viz* the *lifeworld*. Habermas sees such colonisation, or reification, to follow from the ongoing expansion of media-steered subsystems in civil society. Needless to say, this is now a more-than apposite description of the public sphere's current trajectory in the internet age:

The transfer of action coordination from language over to steering media means an uncoupling of interaction from lifeworld contexts. Media such as money and power attach to empirical ties; they encode a purposive-rational attitude towards calculable amounts of value and make it possible to exert generalised, strategic influence on the decisions of other participants while bypassing processes of consensus-orientated communication. Inasmuch as they do not merely simplify linguistic communication, but *replace* it with a symbolic generalisation of rewards and punishments, the lifeworld is no longer needed for the coordination of action. Societal subsystems differentiated out via media of this kind can make themselves independent out of the lifeworld, which gets shunted aside into the system environment (Habermas, 1987, p 183).

As Jütten (2001, p.4) observes, Habermas's theory offers a *functionalist* account of social evolution based on a "two-level concept of society". The first of these levels, the *lifeworld*, is prefaced on the persistence of the "informal and unmarketised domains of social life" (Finlayson, 2005, p. 51) on which rational discourse and communicative action is based. The concept's origins lie within Edmund Husserl's phenomenology to describe the contents of experience that precede the "objectifying, and mathematising perspective of natural science". Habermas essentially expands this description to include the forms of practical participation outside the structures of organised parties (Finlayson, 2005, p. 51). Thus, lifeworld institutions are those which should, in principle, 1) function as a safeguard for deliberative democracy by providing open spaces for private persons to congregate, 2) produce internal instruments designed to sustain the conditions for their rational participation, and 3) facilitate qualitative exchanges which ultimately lead to a consensus being reached. For Habermas, this is what constitutes a successful, communicative action; one that provides the best prospects for mitigating the social (usually systemic) pathologies that provided the original basis for that lifeworld institution's formation. Habermas describes the qualitative space of the lifeworld as follows:

The lifeworld [does] not allow for analogous assignments; speakers and hearers cannot refer by means of it to something as 'something intersubjective'. Communicative actors are always moving *within* the horizon of their lifeworld; they cannot step outside of it. As interpreters, they themselves belong to the lifeworld, along with their speech acts, but they cannot refer to 'something in the lifeworld' in the same way as they can to facts, norms, or experiences. The structures of the lifeworld lay down the forms of the intersubjectivity of possible understanding. It is to them that participants in communication owe their extramundane positions vis-à-vis the inner worldly items about which they can come to an understanding. The lifeworld is, so to speak, the transcendental site where speaker and hearer meet, where they can reciprocally raise claims that their utterances fit the world (objective, social or subjective), and where they can criticise and confirm those validity claims, settle their disagreements, and arrive at disagreements. In a sentence, participants cannot assume *in actu* the same distance in relation to language and culture as in relation to the totalities of facts, norms or experiences concerning which mutual understanding is possible (Habermas, 1987, p. 126).

The second level, *viz* the *systems* level, refers to the established technocratic structures and patterns of strategically guided action that are designed to stabilise – or mitigate the effects of – the market as well as to minimise the emergence and subsequent spread of deviant social and cultural trends. "Money and power" are

understood by Habermas to compose two different (but not inseparable) sub-systems. In firm opposition to Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse, Habermas (1987) views the objectification of the capitalist economic system as a development that serves a rational and democratising function for society on the whole, meaning that it amounts to a historical improvement on the state organisation of “traditional” (or feudal) societies:

In traditional societies, the state is an organisation in which is concentrated the collectivity's capacity for action – that is, the capacity for action of society as a whole; by contrast, modern societies do without the accumulation of steering functions within a single organisation. Functions relevant to society as a whole are distributed among different subsystems. With an administration, military and judiciary, the state specialises in attaining collective goals via binding decisions. Other functions are depoliticised and given over to nongovernmental subsystems. The capitalist economic system marks the breakthrough level of system differentiation; it owes its emergence to a new mechanism, the steering medium of money. The medium is specifically tailored to the economic function of society as a whole, a function relinquished by the state; it is the foundation of a subsystem that grows away from normative contexts. The capitalist economy can no longer be understood as an institutional order in the sense of a traditional state; it is the medium of exchange that is institutionalised while the subsystem differentiated out via this medium is, as a whole, a block of more or less norm-free-sociality (Habermas, 1987, p. 171).

For Habermas, it is the relative interdependence of both the system and lifeworld levels that allows a truly dialogical relationship between humankind and instrumental reason to be sustained. However, he is clear that the development of rational systems should not, in principle, come at the direct cost of the lifeworld and its related institutions. If so, the democratic and consensual basis has been either lost or explicitly overruled. An ideal, dialogical interchange, theoretically speaking, would involve an organised community or social group's discursive practices being perpetually improved by the instruments and administrative practices inculcated in the institutional infrastructure, which in turn improve in accordance with the increasing rationality and legitimacy of the consensus (thus arguably expressing the same conceptual characteristics as Hegel's “true infinity”). This process, however, is the result of a “fragile equilibrium” between systems and lifeworlds (Finlayson, 2005, p. 56), and often leads to the two levels becoming uncoupled. More often than not, it involves systems proceeding to encroach on the lifeworld to the extent that the distinction between the two levels appears to dissolve. From this point, the lifeworld has acquired

a new, *de facto* function as an instrument to the system that was originally established to serve lifeworld interests. Such a development, Habermas (1987) observes, comes with potentially a series of disenchanting effects, including the replacement of cultural and moral value spheres with strategic and instrumental ones, atomisation, social demoralisation, the production of deviant cultural patterns, and eventually the breakdown of the prevailing civil order. For Jütten (2011), Habermas's observations about the colonisation of the lifeworld constitutes a theory of reification, but Habermas himself refers to the process as "structural violence". Arguably, however, the structural violence that he's describing could qualify as a form of social devolution, and one similar to the one Hegel (1999) describes when expressing concerns over the growing economic and political power of the *System of Reality*. Habermas's theory of modernity in the *TCA* is thus very similar to Hegel's as far as the questions regarding instrumental rationality and the Understanding are concerned. Sometimes, the uncoupling of social and systemic forms of integration can leave the lifeworld and the *System of Ethical Life* (which is not to imply that the two are synonymous) "structurally unaltered". But on other occasions, systems penetrate the structures of the lifeworld so deeply that they, perhaps intentionally, subvert the structural definition of communicative action itself:

Things are different when system integration intervenes in the very forms of social integration. In this case, too, we have to do with latent functional interconnections, but the subjective inconspicuousness of systemic constraints that *instrumentalise* a communicatively structured lifeworld takes on the character of deception, of objectively false consciousness. The effects of the system on the lifeworld, which change the structure of contexts of action in socially integrated groups, have to remain hidden. The reproductive constraints that instrumentalise a lifeworld without weakening the illusion of its self-sufficiency have to hide, so to speak, in the pores of communicative action. This gives rise to a *structure violence* that, without becoming manifest as such, takes hold of the forms of intersubjectivity of possible understanding. Structural violence is exercised by way of systemic restrictions on communication; distortion is anchored in the formal conditions of communicative action in such a way that the interrelation of the objective, social and subjective worlds get prejudged for participants in a typical fashion (Habermas, 1987, p. 187).

The ultimate consequence of this *uncoupling*, which Hegel seems to present as the practical effect of Fichte's system in the *SNL* (albeit from Fichte's positing of "pure drive" and "natural drive" as opposing entities), is that individual freedom exists in

practical bondage to a perpetually intellectualising machine that disintegrates the organic body of communal life:

As a result of the absolute antithesis between pure drive and natural drive [Fichte's] *Natural Right* offers us a picture of the complete lordship of the intellect and the complete bondage of the living being. It is an edifice in which Reason has no part and which it therefore repudiates. For Reason is bound to find itself most explicitly in its self-shaping as a people (*Volk*), which is the most perfect organisation that it can give itself. But that State as conceived by the intellect is not an organisation at all but a machine; and the people is not the organic body of a communal rich life, but an atomistic life-impoverished multitude. The elements of this multitude are absolutely opposed substances, on the one hand the rational beings as a lot of [atomic] points, and on the other hand a lot of material beings modifiable in various ways by Reason, i.e. by intellect, the forms in which Reason is here present. The unity of these elements is a concept; what binds them together is endless domination (Hegel, 1977, pp. 148-9).

As we have already seen, Hegel views Fichte's political philosophy as the incarnation of the very phenomenon. It is one that, from the offset, obligates its rational subjects to situate their freedom in the legal domain of economic agency by force. This is, of course, in virtue of Fichte understanding coercion to be a necessary condition for the practical freedom for all. This notion for Hegel, is not only "atomistic": it is one whereby freedom itself would become indistinguishable from – and thus identical with – the "practical concept", viz whatever the system judges to be the correct course for coercing individuals in this abstract vocation. As we observed in Chapter III and Chapter II in passing, Hegel identifies this as a serious problem. Not only because the unprecedented growth of the burgher class (*Burgherstaat*) risks undermining the ruling, aristocratic class (which Hegel argues should be composed of managers, lawyers and civil servants), but also because such a vast release of market forces could inaugurate a return to the "state of nature" unless the deviant social and cultural patterns are sufficiently mediated (Hegel, 1999). As Fichte's system is based entirely on abstract right, however, there the mediation or reconciliation of positivity seems unachievable.

Whilst it may appear that Hegel and Habermas are on exactly the same lines, it is important to remember that Hegel's critique of Fichte is not merely a *functionalist* one (as persuasive as this aspect of his critique is). It is predominantly a *historical* one, in character with the entirety of his absolute idealism. Thus, what likely underwrites the strength of Hegel's cynicism and particular emphasis on the solipsistic implications of

Fichte's system is the extent to which he fails to develop the rational state beyond the "inward", legalistic achievements of Rome at a time when the Germanic world was developing "outwards" (Hegel, 2011) and rediscovering the sense of social transcendence that was previously lost following the collapse of the Greek world (as naive as their notion of transcendence was). Indeed, when the succeeding epoch – the Roman world – began ossifying due to the lack of a true unifying principle *beyond* the legal obligation to serve the state's interests when called upon, the breakdown of civil order remained an unsavoury event as with the previous epoch. However, that these historical events happened, in Hegel's view, was still out of rational necessity. The moral decadence that emerged from a looming culture of excess and luxury in the later stages of the Empire – an observation that Hegel likely acquired from Gibbon – served the communicative purpose of generating the conditions for the emergence of Christianity as a political power. This development, of course, proceeded to provide the ethical and political cornerstones for the realisation of the Germanic idea. Like Hegel and Schelling, Fichte is attempting to express this idea in the form of a rational state that generates and preserves the conditions for true individual freedom (despite their vastly conflicting accounts of what this amounts to), meaning that his failure to do so – from Hegel's historical perspective – amounts to an explicit *conceptual* mistake with regards to what freedom is. As we have seen through his concerns about "infinite Otherness", Hegel traces this conceptual mistake back to the identification of freedom with the "absolute freedom" of Rousseau which Fichte is ultimately attempting to substantiate through the coercive principle and the "sphere of freedom". Within this framework, freedom amounts to nothing other than absolute negativity, which risks those who internalise Fichte's notion of making the additional conceptual error of placing themselves metaphysically and spiritually above all forms of determination from outside. The ultimate consequence of this, for Hegel, is that freedom remains permanently situated in abstraction, or the totality of "infinite Otherness".

Thus, the most important theoretical difference between Hegel and Habermas on the subject of reification could be understood as follows. Whilst Habermas seemingly accepts that the systems world has a communicative and perhaps even enculturating role to play in advancing the ends of social integration by allowing for the transmission of more universally accessible cultural patterns, Habermas gives the lifeworld an *infallible* status. The systems world, however, is granted a *transient* one in virtue of the

moral principle that systems should remain coupled to the unfettered interests of human beings, *viz* lifeworld interests. The systems world and the lifeworld, then – within Habermas’s framework – appear to stand in a hypostatized relationship in the latter’s favour. This comes with the implication that human interest and the lived experience of persons – whatever the contents of experience may be – are always things which systems have an obligation to respond to on principle. In Hegel’s philosophy of absolute spirit, however – which owes much of its intellectual roots to Schelling’s philosophy of nature – no such hypostatized or dualistic relationship exists between them. Both the spheres of lived experience and abstract rationality emerge from the same expressive unity and thus form an equally important part in how human freedom is historically realised. In fact, one could argue that in light of the dualistic presuppositions at the heart of Habermas’s framework, the case could be made (albeit on Hegel’s behalf) that the same problem of conceptual atomism identified in the formalistic methods of Kant and Fichte also applies to Habermas’s theory of reification. The key difference, of course, being that the systems world that stands in place of the “thing-in-itself” and the “not I” respectively.

On the subject of reification generally, however, I believe that Hegel’s theoretical observations over the empiricist and formalist methods of treating natural law, the solipsistic essence of “absolute freedom”, and how the identification of freedom with “striving” engenders the risk of the state becoming tyrannical and its subjects increasingly *atomised*, shows him to have a more intellectually developed and persuasive conception than Marx and Lukács (who both claim that Hegel’s philosophy is constrained by its own speculative mysticism). Lukács, as we know, develops his theory of reification from Marx’s theory of *commodity fetishism*, *viz* the effect whereby to the exchanged value of an object within an economic process mysteriously conceals its intrinsic social value (understood by Marx as “labour value”). He does so after observing the “problem of commodi[f]ication” (Lukács, 2017, p. 65) to be *not* an exclusively economic concern, but a “central structural problem” at the heart of capitalist society itself (Lukács, 2017, p. 65). However, from Hegel’s critique of empiricism, I believe we can identify an allusion to something similar if not identical to commodity fetishism based on its epistemological description. For this purpose, it is necessary to return to the excerpt shown earlier in this Chapter:

If a point is to be made regarding the representation [*Vorstellung*] of the state of law [de *Rechtszustandes*], all that is required in order to demonstrate its connection with the original and necessary – and hence also its own necessity – is to project a distinct [*eigene*] quality or capacity into the chaos, and, in the manner of the empirically based sciences in general, to construct hypotheses for the so-called explanations of actuality. Hypotheses in which this actuality is posited in the same determinate character [*Bestimmtheit*], but in a purely formal and ideal shape – as force, matter, or capacity – so that one thing can very readily be grasped and explained in terms of the other (Hegel, 1999, p. 111).

In this excerpt, Hegel is clearly not describing an economic exchange. He appears to be alluding to the *reifying* potential of mere appearances or “representations” to conceal the object being represented (which in this case, is natural law) by merely *abstracting* a single feature of the observed phenomena from the whole in which it naturally resides and using this abstraction’s presentation within a preconceptualised (or “idealised”) scientific framework to make totalising claims about the whole in its entirety. Hegel refers to these claims pejoratively as “so-called explanations of actuality” simply because they are not proper explanations: they are explanations purposively made to fit within the pattern or system already contained within the hypothesis. Thus, for Hegel, this process amounts to another case whereby the dialectical potential of the natural world, and knowledge of it by extension, is constrained or nullified by the methodological conditions posited by the Understanding (*Verstand*) (in virtue of prioritising practical simplicity over what it would actually take to truly know the essence of things). Whilst Lukács (1975) engages with the *SNL* in *TYH*, he seems unaware that the epistemological process that Hegel describes in his critique of empiricism and formalism appears to be exactly the same as the one contained in Marx’s concept of commodity fetishism. This process is, to be sure, what Adorno describes later as “identity thinking”, which at source emerges from false equivalences being drawn at the *conceptual* level.

In Marx and Lukács’s case, the false equivalence emerged from an exchange of objects being judged to consist of equal value based on certain features about the commodities themselves. On completion of the exchange, the labour value of the objects (based on socially necessary labour time) is *cancelled* or *forgotten* as the exchanged value appears to re-sculpt that object’s identity in the commodity form. In Hegel’s case, however, the false equivalence is between a true, presuppositionless science that holds the natural world as its object without standing above *itself* (on the

understanding that this would amount to standing above *nature*) and a science of the Understanding (*Verstand*) that knows only how to work from a transcendent basis. Through the lens of the latter, scientific progress is *identical* with the infinite domination of nature. Thus, rather than the social dimension of labour being cancelled by “exchange value”, it is a reconciliatory science of knowledge being cancelled by a *positive* one. The input of “phantom objectivity” is present in both cases. Both Lukács and Hegel’s examples, then, despite being developed from opposite interpretations of the historical base, appear to express the same social and epistemic pathology whereby the conceptual misidentification or misappropriation that emerges from the presence of this “phantom objectivity” leads to an intrinsically social, or immanent relationship with the natural world being *colonised* and restructured by this objectivity’s self-contained, abstract rationality. Thus, within Hegel’s critique of the empiricist and formalistic approaches in the *SNL*, a subject which Lukács (perhaps conveniently) doesn’t turn to address, appears to be a compelling explanation for why attributing the phenomenon of reification to capitalism is a theoretical mistake. It may well be the case, as Marx and Lukács indeed suggest, that the terms on which commodities are exchanged are determined by the economic characteristics of the ruling class *viz* the *bourgeoisie*, making the reification of the abstract value associated with those commodities and the rationalisation of society in accordance with those characteristics a foregone conclusion (in the absence of revolutionary activity). However, Hegel has conceptually and practically demonstrated that this same effect entailing a mysterious “phantom objectivity” is neither exclusive to commodity fetishism under capitalism nor economic exchange generally. On a close reading of his critique of Fichte, it is clear that he conceptualises reification to be inscribed in the abstract logic of “infinite progress”, an intrinsic feature of modernity, or “Enlightenment”, which practically necessitates the perpetual subordination and thus *colonisation* of the natural world in order for the process to continue⁵⁰. Capitalism, for Hegel, is thus nothing but a single emanation of this broader, unfolding event⁵¹.

⁵⁰ The dialectical interplay between “faith” and “pure insight” in the *POS*, which Hegel uses to demonstrated the dogmatic forms of religion and Enlightenment respectively, seems to give credence to this idea.

⁵¹ In my view, it would not be misconstrued to draw theoretical comparisons between Hegel’s conception of “infinite progress” (or “striving”) as a historical-systemic process, and what Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari later describe as “deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation” in *Anti-Oedipus*. This text provides

The extent of Hegel's so-far-uncredited achievements on the subject of reification, then, as I have attempted to show in this chapter, stretches beyond his recognition of the social phenomenon as one that begins in the positive concepts of *thought*, before then proceeding to produce sciences that socially entrench that positivity further. He has also provided a logical explanation for why reification, within the self-contained rationality of "infinite progress" – which Hegel reluctantly accepts as having a permanent place in the Germanic idea – does not amount to a mere *accident*. If progress itself is identified with conceptualisation, and these concepts are indeed positive, then "progress" – whether it be in the form of social, political or scientific activity – amounts to the *domination* of any contents that fail to affirm the logic of the concept or the parent system of rationality. And if the labour of positing oneself on such constrained terms is civilly enforced on the understanding that doing so is a necessary condition for both freedom and progress to be possible, then both *freedom* and *progress* themselves rest on the rational agent actually changing the natural world in accordance with whatever the executive (representing Reason) demands. Thus, what Lukács describes as the subjective and objective dimensions of reification, for Hegel, are logically connected by the practical imperative for objects in the natural world to actually be brought under the concepts of the positive science. Moreover, as the "sphere of freedom" is intrinsically negative – and remains permanently situated in abstraction – whatever "progress" amounts to is decided *de facto* by *positivity* in perpetuity alongside the rational requirement for there to be no end to the process (bad infinity/ "infinite Otherness"). The absence of *Sittlichkeit* and *Moralität* in Fichte's system denies any prospect for reconciliation with the ethical multiplicity (Hegel's conception of the principles of *divine providence*) which would have allowed the positive elements to be mediated by concrete universality (true infinity), meaning that the self-contained rationality of bad infinity proceeds to *colonise* the ethical substance of which would otherwise be produced by the mediating determinations of *true* infinity. These forms of determination (or concrete universality) – which have persisted through all of Hegel's attempts at giving a functional form to Luther's secular state – are explained in the POS's chapter on "Absolute Knowing", and in the chapter on "Ethical

the basis for Land's view that the true, subject-order of history and progress itself is artificial intelligence assembled in the image of capital.

Life” in the *POR*. Towards the end the latter, he offers a summary of the “Germanic Realm’s” spiritual character:

Having suffered this loss of itself and its world [*viz* the collapse of ethical life into the extremes of inwardness and abstract universality] and the infinite pain which this entails (and for which a particular people, namely the *Jews*, was held in readiness), the spirit is pressed back upon itself at the extreme of its absolute negativity. This is the turning point which has being in and for itself. The spirit now grasps the infinite positivity of its own inwardness, the principle of the unity of divine and human nature and the reconciliation of the objective truth and freedom which have appeared within self-consciousness and subjectivity. The task of accomplishing this reconciliation is assigned to the Nordic principle of the *Germanic peoples* (Hegel, 1991, p. 379)⁵².

Working Hegel’s theory of reification within the framework of “the colonisation thesis”, therefore, comes with one major complication that requires resolution. In Habermas’s *TCA*, systems are understood to serve a communicative function, but are not understood to be communicative in-and-of-themselves. For Habermas, communicative exchanges are defined by their basis in cooperation, reasoned argument and ultimately *consent*, which can only be given by human beings. The self-contained rationality of systems allows them to be autonomously in a *strategic* sense, but only insofar as their purpose is to advance that rational end. This appears to make the specifically modern forms of reification fairly straight forward to define, *viz* as the social pathology where the lifeworld – or sphere of lived experience – is *colonised* by “the systemic imperatives of the economic and administrative subsystems of society” (Jütten, 2001, p. 6). However, whilst this definition is intuitively appealing and somewhat consistent with the cynicism Hegel expresses about the activities of the second estate (and the *System of Reality* generally), it clearly doesn’t give adequate expression to the social and historical nuances that make Hegel’s theory of reification so complex and persuasive at the same time. As can be observed within his philosophy of history – where concepts are metaphysically determined by their preceding historical conditions – religious, social and legal systems are presented by Hegel as the very things that have ultimately shaped human beings into the rational, self-conscious and moral persons which they are in the modern age. Humans, or “the

⁵² Given the aspersions cast about Jews and capitalism at this time (Muller, 2010), Hegel’s seemingly pejorative reference is likely to be in relation to their seen-to-be disproportionate representation in the *Kaufmanstand*, *viz* the business class who compose the second estate alongside the *Burgherstand* *viz* the class of artisans (Avineri, 1971).

Germanic peoples” for Hegel, have become *free* by virtue of the fact that the social structures and systems of the Oriental, Greek and Roman worlds – through the “cunning of Reason” – historically *communicated* these facts about freedom to itself. That it was possible for concepts such as consent, reason and morality to be communicated at all is owed to the historical process of systemic *colonisation* – and by extension, *reification* – expressing itself as social and political activity. As such, it could be argued that Hegel’s treatment of the *System of Reality* in defence of the *System of Ethical Life* exposes a double standard that, again, possibly stems from his Lutheran convictions: if the nature of freedom is indeed communicated through systems and institutions before finding expression in human activity, then Hegel seems to be without a basis to argue against the colonisation of the *System of Ethical Life*. One could join Marx, Engels (2015) and Lukács (2017) in making the case that the transfer of political power from religious authorities to the merchant class (due to shifting economic patterns) marks another rational succession in the ongoing development of freedom itself at the necessary cost of a parent system that had lost its communicative capacity.

For this reason, it is difficult to deny that the communicative role that systems have in Hegel’s political philosophy poses significant challenges to how the systemic colonisation of the lifeworld can be understood as both a moral and normative wrong. However, his alternative conception of the relationship between lifeworlds and systems, as touched upon earlier, perhaps offers a compelling explanation for why this interpretation of colonisation and reification is inadequate. If one interpreted Hegel’s view, as I do, to be that Germanic world renews and reproduces its rational basis insofar as the communicative capacities of systems *and* human beings (in their most developed state) are preserved, then it would be a *non sequitur* to take Hegel’s notion of modern reification to specifically entail the lifeworld’s colonisation at the hands of economic, social and bureaucratic systems (among other forms). Whilst this would remain one such form that reification assumes in his theory, and perhaps even the one that manifests most frequently, it also accommodates the possibility of the *inverse* form of colonisation: when a distorted *perception* of lived experience, e.g. one compromised by confabulation or misplaced moral indignation, *forces* the transformation of a previously communicative system into an irrational, intrusive and tyrannical one that imitates that perception’s reified character. One could interpret the

transition from “pure insight” to “Absolute Freedom and Terror” in the *POS* (Hegel, 1977b, pp. 336-363) as a conceptual exposition of a social institution being colonised in this manner, *viz* by a perception imbibed by paranoia and/or moral panic, such is Hegel’s view the outcome of the Jacobin directorship and its absolute destruction of the *Ancien Régime*. If this interpretation of reification is correct, then Critical Theorists from the second generation onwards could be accused of neglecting the extent to which overreaching responses to systemic problems entrench these problems further.

Reification as the lifeworld’s colonisation of rational systems

Habermas is, to be sure, not ignorant of the fact that the colonisation of the lifeworld can take place within lifeworld institutions. He refers to this development as “internal colonisation”. Internal colonisation, Habermas observes, occurs when the *juridification* and *bureaucratisation* of a lifeworld become uncoupled from their social function and subsequently relegate the lifeworld into a position of bondage to instrumental and strategic mechanisms. The communicative activity of the institution is thus progressively nullified by the strategic imperatives – originally introduced by the institution as a necessary condition of attaining real political power – which in time changes the social nature of that institution’s membership. Habermas does, quite rightly, describe this as “reification”, but similarly to Hegel, does not provide a clear answer regarding what *can* or *should* be done about it other than to mitigate the effects through the welfare state. He appears to accept it as a fact about practical democratisation that the objective improvement of lifeworld institutions in society will sometimes lead to lifeworld interests being denatured by their own structural apparatus (Habermas, 1987, pp. 356-73). While acknowledging that such developments are undesirable and should be prevented if possible, Habermas presents the evolution of the German state (in accordance with the “four global waves of juridification”) as evidence of both the historical connection between democratic juridification and internal colonisation and the lifeworld’s intrinsic aptitude to bring about these changes, through revolution if necessary:

In rough outline, we can distinguish four epochal juridification processes. The first wave led to the *bourgeois state*, which, in western Europe, developed during the period of Absolutism in the form of the European state system. The second wave led to the *constitutional state* [,] which found an exemplary form in the monarchy of nineteenth-century Germany. The third wave led to the *democratic constitutional state* [,] which spread in Europe and in North America in the

wake of the French Revolution. The last stage (to date) led finally to the *democratic welfare state* [,] which was achieved through the struggles of the European workers movement of the twentieth century and codified, for example, in Article 21 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany (Habermas, 1987, 357).

Interestingly, Habermas views the “reification of communicative relations” as a development that can only take place in capitalist societies, and in particular, as a result of an “overextension [of] monetarisation and bureaucratisation” on the lifeworld’s activities (Habermas, 1987, p. 386). This, in my view, illuminates the core weakness of Habermas’s theory of reification compared to the one offered by Hegel. In his description of internal colonisation, Habermas alludes to the uncoupling of the lifeworld and the internal systemic apparatus, but only attributes reification to the latter. He also offers very little detail about the process, namely about how a lifeworld institution goes from legitimately serving a social function to having its communicative capacity colonised by its own infrastructure (beyond what Marx and Lukács have already said about commodity fetishism and the ideology of capitalism). This is, perhaps, a permissible omission on the grounds that identifying the point by which an abstraction becomes *res* is a phenomenological concern and thus beyond the scope of Habermas’s ambitions. However, what cannot be ignored is Habermas’s tacit dismissal of the possibility that the “uncoupling” may be caused by a conceptual, phantasmagorical error on the lifeworld’s part which expresses itself at the systems level later down the line. This is arguably analogous to a design flaw with a piston in a combustion engine, which causes the entire unit to malfunction once the attrition point is reached (for want of a better mechanical explanation): it is not primarily the fault of the parts manufacturer and the assembler of the engine, but the pioneer of the concept. One does not require a consultation with Habermas’s discourse ethics to understand how this same actualisation process can take place within lifeworld institutions: if the institution is based on an idea containing irresolvable contradictions, or is composed of members who possess only a limited understanding (*Halbbildung*) (O’Connor, 2013) of the basis for political organisation, then the effects of the resultant system are the direct result of identity thinking residing in the lifeworld’s inherent social foundations.

Adorno and Horkheimer (1997) add weight to this idea in their coverage of antisemitism, where they draw attention to the “in-group” pleasure principle. Evidently,

the presence of democratic infrastructure in the Weimer Republic, which allowed interest groups to engage dialogically in theory, did not prevent discourse from assuming a monological and ultimately totalitarian form. In fact, it culminated in a dialectical backlash, viz a regression into archaic structures of social organisation through the rise of Nazism. While, in a lot of (perhaps more recent) cases democratic socialisation engenders a genuinely moral consensus, in others it can entrench delusions and ideological beliefs even further to the extent that the resultant institution is more radical than the sum of its members (as can be observed with cults of various kinds). Indeed, Adorno and Horkheimer do view capitalism as historically connected to reification (and by extension, identity thinking), but this arguably amounts to the weakest feature of their analysis (which carries over from Marx and Lukács). Similar, if not identical developments that mirror Hegel's description of the Terror have been witnessed in the Soviet Union, Communist China and Cambodia through the *Khmer Rouge*, where capitalism was supposedly abolished. Thus, the notion that reification is an exclusive problem with capitalism seems historically illiterate. Habermas does not seem to be *explicitly* subscribed to the view that reification is an exclusive problem with capitalism in the *TCA*. But his general conception of how systemic colonisation occurs seems to contain the implication that when lifeworld institutions commit to the overthrow or abolition of pre-existing systems, they are always morally justified in doing so. In short, there doesn't seem to be any flexibility in Habermas's functionalist theory for the scenario whereby a lifeworld institution (or organised network of lifeworld interests) forms a consensual basis to uncouple itself from a particular system from a deeply compromised understanding of the relevant social facts (*Halbbildung*).

While the examples Habermas (1987, pp. 332-73) presents supports the view that lifeworld institutions are always the solution (or at least an antidote) to reification, even if it necessitates the creation of entirely new ones, and that reification itself is an intrinsic problem with systems under capitalism, there are many particularly recent examples where this doesn't appear to be the case. To make use of one of the most geopolitically significant examples: the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union in 2016 was, among other things, the product of long-term negative sentiment against the increasing encroachment of bureaucratic, supranational institutions on the democratic sovereignty of nation states. More specifically, it has

been acknowledged as an expression of disapproval against supranational emanations of money and power which, in the case of the EU, led to the transformation of the European Economic Community (EEC) into a political union without the electorate's consent, the cultural effects of mass immigration through the introduction of the Single Market, and an expression of desire for the re-establishment of a cohesive national identity that the EU's legal and economic system had a role in disintegrating (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018). Whether ultimately justified or not, it is difficult to deny that the leave vote was administered *more* in service of reaffirming the integrity of domestic lifeworld institutions in the international order than their colonisation by the systemic imperatives of money and power. Habermas's model suggests that any vote conducted in virtue of lifeworld interests constitutes a net gain, but in the case of the EU, this clearly doesn't apply because he views the project as one that has (or at least has the potential for) superior communicative capacities to those of the member states in isolation (Finlayson, 2005). If so, then Habermas must be willing, on some level, to accommodate the view that reification can also entail the colonisation of rational systems by lifeworld institutions with a significantly compromised understanding of the relevant facts (*Halbbildung*), but his functionalist model doesn't allow for it. As can be observed through Hegel's coverage of "absolute freedom", however, where tyranny is presented as the logical conclusion of situating freedom in the abstract idea of self-legislation, within Hegel's theory of modernity is a compelling conceptual framework for when pre-existing systems serve a communicative function and opposing some forms of rationalisation or juridification is justified. All are implicit in the theory of recognition inscribed in his *System of Ethical Life* (which I have given little attention to in this thesis).

For our purposes, a close-to-home example will suffice to explain when a system or bureaucratic process assumes an autonomous form (to mirror something like "the colonisation thesis") for rational and ultimately advantageous reasons: *viz*, that despite a doctoral student suspending their wider academic ambitions in order to administer their thesis corrections, they complete the process not only with a much-improved thesis, but with an advanced awareness of their own research limitations. Thus, rather than being a constraint, the original enforcement of institutional power functioned as an enabling condition for the intellectual and economic development of the student. As such, the "contemplative stance" experienced at the beginning was not the result

of reification, but the beginning of a transformative, dialectical process between the student and the rational, bureaucratic structures of academia. If this interpretation is correct, then it would seem that, contra to Habermas's view, systems can be communicative after all.

A Functionalist Critique of Habermas

The fact that Habermas does not consider systems to be communicative in-themselves offers a compelling explanation for why he doesn't consider the *inverse* case of reification, viz when a previously functional and reflective system is colonised and restructured in virtue of a distorted perception of lived experience. However, this could also be due to a limitation in his framework that Jütten (2001) describes:

The problem with [Habermas's framework] is that it only provides a *functionalist* explanation of reification, while the normative criticism and phenomenology remain largely implicit. By this I mean that Habermas's theory of reification does not explain how members of the lifeworld can understand reification as a normative wrong and how they experience it (Jütten (2001, p. 7).

Habermas's framework is itself narrow and abstract because he doesn't view the *normative* aspects of cultural reproduction and exchange as relevant to communicative action functioning as it should. In his view, as long as the interchange between the lifeworld and systems preserve the conditions for the lifeworld to express itself as a communicative agent – as systems should be designed to do – then there is no reason to have any interest in the phenomenological contents of lived experience itself. It could even be argued for as long as these informative interchanges persist, it would amount to colonisation if the state expressed any interest in the lifeworld or the private sphere in general.

Assuming that this interpretation of Habermas is correct, Hegel has already given compelling reasons for why ignoring the normative aspects that determine people's actions is a major methodological mistake, and one that could produce yet more social, political and economic problems if practically imposed. His criticism of the formalistic approaches of Kant and Fichte, in my view, is just as applicable here: if a society has no investment in the historically specific (or *particular*) ways that private persons *situate* their social and intellectual activities (and thus their *freedom*), then that society is in fact situating its understanding of the lifeworld and lived experience in solipsistic abstractions of subjectivity. In Habermas's functionalist framework, systemic

developments are interpreted as moral or social wrongs to be addressed by virtue of them being perceived as such (whether individually or collectively), and there appears to be no input of mediation within this parameter except from other *positive* elements to suggest that this perception may be overreaching, or perhaps even completely incorrect. In Hegel's political writings as far back as the *SNL*, the sphere of Ethical Life (*Sittlichkeit*) preserves the elements of cultural and ethical heterogeneity, which contains and heals any damaged caused by such pathological expressions (such as those demonstrated in "pure insight" (Hegel, 1977b). Using the metaphor of an organ being separated from its parent organism, Hegel describes how the *System of Ethical Life* naturally "breaks down" and "annuls" the variances of the *System of Reality*:

The absolutely clear unity of ethical life is absolute and living, to the extent that neither an individual area nor the subsistence of such areas in general can be fixed. On the contrary, just as ethical life eternally expands them, it just as absolutely breaks them down and annuls [aufhebt] them and enjoys itself in undeveloped unity and clarity; and as far as the [specific] areas [Potenzen] are concerned, secure in its own inner life and indivisible, it now diminishes one by means of the other, now passes over entirely into one and destroys the others, and in turn withdraws altogether from this movement into absolute rest, in which all are annulled [aufgehoben]. Conversely, sickness and the seeds of death are present if one part organises itself and escapes from the authority of the whole; for by isolating itself in this way, it affects the whole negatively, or even forces it to organise itself solely for the [benefit of] this area; it is as if the vitality of the intestines, which serves the whole [organism], were to form itself into separate animals, or the liver were to make itself the dominant organ and compel the entire organism to perform its function (Hegel, 1999, pp. 169-70).

The system that Habermas proposes as an antidote to systemic colonisation, however, appears destined to be dominated by *positivity*, because like the empiricist and formalist approaches of treating natural law, the *lifeworld* – on which his theory of communicative action and democratic participation is based – is a formal principle devoid of any substantive content. Consequently, the same problems of "infinite regress" and "infinite progress" that Hegel identifies in Fichte's entire political philosophy also applies to Habermas in the *TCA*. While this limitation in Habermas's theory is unlikely to culminate in tyranny or "mob rule" given the technocratic structure that he sees communicative action to depend on (a structure which Hegel advocates himself in the *POR* through the estate system), such an *ahistorical* conception of democratic participation and consent could lead to political systems in the West becoming institutionally reactive *to* – and thus dominated *by* – abstract notions of

progress that may themselves have emerged from performative social dynamics. Should it be the case that calls for systemic change *are* performative and emotionally charged, then any concessions made in response could be *uninformed* and thus compromise the communicative infrastructure elsewhere, potentially leading to democratic institutions developing *positive*, undemocratic and perhaps even *alienating* characteristics that intensify pre-existing and/or produce new social problems over time. As such, while it is desirable in principle for systems to be responsive to all interest groups, and for these groups to be immune from *reification*, the idea is utopian: a democratic legitimacy crisis is guaranteed to be the result if democratic participation depends on the presupposed sacrosanctity of the *lifeworld* as Habermas conceptualises it.

More disconcertingly still, however, is the prospect of this institutional reactivity's evolution from a socially performative response into a *fact* about the institutions themselves, which would create a problem of "infinite regress" to occur between competing lifeworlds, *viz* a group of individuals collectivise as a means of expressing and/or advancing a particular interest. In keeping with his assessment regarding the mechanistic character of Fichte's system in the *FNR*, Hegel anticipates such a form of reification to emerge from the atomised political vicinities of the "executive" and the "ephorate" – the former being the democratically elected body and the latter being a mediatory parliamentary class (not dissimilar to the House of Lords in the United Kingdom) which inherits the constitution right to issue an "interdict" whenever it judges the executive to have stepped outside of its remit as an arbiter of "universal freedom". However, because Fichte posits the executive and the ephorate as having *equal* claim to the "concept of universal freedom" – extending to whether the other stands opposed to it or not – then the executive can proceed by simply dismissing the ephorate's intervention. Thus, for Hegel, the ephorate has no real power: its interdict merely grinds the whole system to a halt before becoming a bystander in political disorder. By this point, "universal freedom" assumes the historical form given to it by *positivity*, or the victorious "mob" who hold the "actual power":

Actual power is admittedly posited as *one*, and as united in the government; but it is contrasted with possible power, and this possibility is supposed as such to be capable of coercing the actuality in question. This second, powerless existence of the general will is supposed as such to be capable of coercing the actuality in question. This second, powerless existence of the general will is supposed to be in a position to judge whether the power has deserted the first

[existence of the general will]... it is the second collective will [which] declares that this mass [of private wills] is united as a community, or that the pure power is also united with the general will, since the general will is no longer present in the former powerholders. Whatever determinate element [*Bestimmtheit*] is posited as a means of enforcing anything against the supreme power must be invested not just with the possibility of power, but with real power. (Hegel, 1999 ,134-5).

It is off the back of this observation that Hegel presents his broader, conceptual claim about the tensions between *Sittlichkeit*, and the *System of Reality*. The claim follows the logic of perpetually increasing entropy, if the former is understood entirely through the formal and economic terms of the latter, the elements will “cancel themselves out” if not implode:

If ethical life [*das Sittliche*] is posited solely in terms of relations, or if externality and coercion are thought of as totality, they cancel themselves out [*sich selbst aufhebt*]. This certainly proves that coercion is not something real and that it is nothing in itself; but this will become even clearer if we demonstrate it in terms of coercion itself, in accordance with its concept and with the determinate character [*Bestimmtheit*] which the relation of this association [*Beziehung*] assumes: for the fact that relation is absolutely nothing in itself is something which must in part be proved by dialectics (Hegel, 1999, pp. 135-6).

The above quote is instructive for the following reasons. For one, it demonstrates how the theory of reification that Hegel describes in his critique of the empiricist and formalist approaches to treating natural law develops into a political problem: when a formal relation is posited as something that has an independent existence of nature or “dialectics”, it assumes the form of a “thing” which produces disruptions in the rational order. Another reason is that if the collapsing of ethical life into the system of needs inaugurates a never-ending process of collapsing “life” into “nothingness”: freedom becomes increasingly unsituated and governed by abstract forces because the input of the coercive principle – which subjects are obliged to impose onto themselves – cancels or nullifies the religious and spontaneous elements that would otherwise counteract the *positive* elements by producing *negative* feedback. Most importantly for our present purposes, however, is arguably the fact that the quote can be interpreted as a normative statement about Hegel’s general position on the “modern dilemma” (Taylor, 1979): namely that progress and autonomy are necessary and desirable, but only insofar as they situate themselves within the organised ethical structure and in turn, resist the excesses of abstract homogenisation. Evidently, Hegel sees problems to arise in the modern world whenever sciences or individuals posit themselves – as

in Fichte's system – as metaphysically situated *above* nature, which contains the implication that any rational subject who identifies freedom with endless domination is justified in doing so. Given that the question of what human freedom ultimately amounts appears to have grown more uncertain and nuanced the more aggressively rational modern society has become, almost two centuries on the accuracy of Hegel's insight has arguably been confirmed as a historical fact⁵³.

Understanding reification as a normative wrong

Attending to the subject concerning the rational place of individual freedom within Hegel's idea of *Sittlichkeit*, Charles Taylor (1979, pp. 131-135), in *Hegel and Modern Society*, makes the case that Hegel's conception of the "end of history" has been refuted by history itself:

The rationality of the Hegelian state was something quite other than the rationalisation of bureaucratic structures. The modern mixture of private Romanticism and public utilitarianism is rather civil society run wild, a society which has become a 'heap'. The continuous transformation of industrial society under the dynamic of productive efficiency and the search for a higher individual standard of life has eroded the differentiations which were essential to Hegel's state, and prized the individual more and more loose from any partial grouping. It was in underestimating this dynamic that Hegel was most seriously wrong in his characterisation of the coming age (Taylor, 1979, p. 132).

Taylor's view appears to be as follows: if it is indeed the case that modern individuals recognise themselves in the rational structures of the state that Hegel presents in the *POR*, then the "higher individual standard of life" that Hegel's *System der Sittlichkeit* was supposed to preserve would have not been so easily eroded by these various emanations of "infinite progress". However, I believe it is clear that Hegel does not underestimate this dynamic at all. As we have seen, the earliest indications of Hegel's pessimism on whether these positive elements can be reconciled (or whether Christianity itself can even persist), can be identified in the *SOC*, and whilst he attempts to alleviate these concerns in the *POS* – where Christianity is presented as the religion that introduces and preserves the conditions for Absolute Knowing –

⁵³ This is, of course, without even giving mention to the expressions of totalitarianism which owe their roots to German Idealism despite the extent to which its influence continues to be disputed.

Hegel never goes as far as claiming that the established rational structures will evolve to do this independent of human agency, or that it is possible to reach a stage whereby these spurious elements of modernity will cease to be a threat to *Sittlichkeit* itself. Rather, the persisting theme from the *SOC* onwards, as I have explained in chapter II, appears to be the fear of inward spiritualisation becoming either inaccessible or redundant to the extent that human activity itself becomes Abrahamic or absolutely positive by nature. Whilst this idea is presented primarily as a theological concern – and one firmly based on antisemitic aspersions – it is highly likely that Hegel also has an obvious *normative* concern in mind. In the hypothetical event that the modern state becomes advanced and efficient enough to no longer require input from the human conscience at all – to the degree that the necessary conditions of freedom can be totally outsourced to an automating rationalised structure – humanity is reduced to being another emanation of the “lifeless” totality that Fichte conceptualises nature to be in the *FNR*.

Needless to say, such an outcome is not only undesirable for Hegel. Consistently with his Lutheran convictions, should the disenchantment of the human spirit be permanent and absolute, it would establish the metaphysical conditions for the triumph of evil upon undoing the work that Christ himself was commissioned to undertake. This task was, as Hegel himself says, “to strip the laws of legality [of] their legal form” (1998, p), so as to demonstrate that successful fulfilment of the law, in theory, renders the letters of the law superfluous. Thus, for Hegel, “life”, and freedom by extension, depends on individuals permanently having the ability to discover the heart of the law through their own moral volition. As we also observed in chapter II, however, logical necessity shows this fact to come with an unfortunate implication, namely that inward spiritualisation and evil must coexist and flourish in a symbiotic relationship for “life” and freedom to have the meanings they do in the Christian moral universe. Christians of various denominations would, of course, likely dispute this claim. Christian scholars of Hegel may also take issue with the suggestion that Hegel’s conception of freedom has *Faustian* implications at all. However, even if it were the case that that Hegel’s attempt to give Christian liberty a political form is misguided, or perhaps even inconsistent with Lutheran theology, it doesn’t undermine the level of sophistication to which Hegel attempts to address the “modern dilemma” (Taylor, 1979), not least because they relate to ongoing concerns about everyday life and modern citizenship

that are yet to be resolved to this day. Underwriting these concerns are often broader questions involving, for example, how moral agency can persist in an increasingly systematised and homogenised world; how it is possible to rationally know when systems and people in a politically organised capacity overstep the mark and necessitate radical intervention; how best to mediate deviant cultural patterns that evolve into social facts that some communities positively identify with; how we decipher the circumstances upon which systems are correct to override our decisions; and most importantly perhaps, how best to structure society so that people of different qualities, interests and needs can not only coexist, but positively contribute to the totality of ethical life. Every one of these normative concerns which Hegel attempts to address, in my view, is equally if not more relevant to the ongoing development modern world today than it was two centuries ago.

Renewed expressions of “absolute freedom”

Taylor is correct to point to the individualistic spirit of the present age as potential evidence for Hegel’s notion of the “end of history” being wrong. On ‘looking on’, it could be observed that instead of situating their freedom in the activities of the state or in the characteristics of their particular class (which remain beholden to the rational structure expressed in the state) the general consensus of the nations and international institutions that compose the Germanic world or the West today have evolved in a social and political direction that Hegel would regard as in danger of succumbing to the limitless dangers of “infinite progress” and the “infinite regress”⁵⁴ of political power as a consequence of the atomistic presuppositions from which they work. This direction, to be sure, entails the reconfiguration of pre-existing institutions and systems in alignment with individuals in their specifically formal and utilitarian vocations. However, rather than applying strictly to economic agency and the general notion of positing one’s freedom, this subjectivity or “bourgeois” concept of autonomy has been obfuscated by increasingly complex debates about what other practical conditions may be necessary for freedom to be accessible to all persons. During the particular time that Hegel was addressing the subject of what the limits of individual autonomy are, and how the state should uphold these limits, the discussion had not extended beyond economic freedom and understanding “drives” in a manner that,

⁵⁴ See footnote 36.

more often than not, accords with historical concerns with the social consequences of usury and unmediated consumerism (Muller, 2010). In the twenty-first century, however, attitudes regarding what individual freedom amounts to has evolved considerably, and demonstrably for the better. To give one example: following extended discussions on disability and illness, it is almost unilaterally recognised as irrational to suggest that a person incapacitated with multiple sclerosis or low-functioning autism has the same access to “freedom” as someone who has no disabilities whatsoever at all. Practical reason thus suggests that being “free” *de facto* rather than just *de jure* necessitates affording more resources to some areas of society than others.

Other examples, however, appear to suggest that the broadening of the question of autonomy has created new and perhaps even irreconcilable social problems. Because of the subject’s intellectualisation in the public sphere, increasingly abstract and unsituated conceptions of autonomy have emerged, leading to the “lifeworld” – and by extension, truth claims made on the grounds of “lived experience” – acquiring a “fetishised” status. This has arguably engendered new forms of *performative* behaviour and thus political action which, as a by-product of the increasingly subjectivist *Zeitgeist*, has caused previously informative and reflective social institutions to have become habitually *overreactive* to claims about systemic marginalisation whenever they are made. In some cases, the responses are made with arguably inadequate levels of consideration for whether such changes would provide a net gain. It seems to have been forgotten in some cases that “lived experience” constitutes only a *formal* complaint until the claims themselves are objectively substantiated.

This problem can be observed in the heated contemporary debate as to whether gender should be understood in relation to sex, or as a matter of pure “self-identification”. Whilst there are, of course, other obvious problems with the concept of self-identification, the one of relevance to Hegel is the fact that – as in Fichte’s system – freedom is identified with the absence of determination as practically achieved by coercion. If such a policy was to be imposed with logical consistency, it would be fundamental for the social institutions that adopt it to compel themselves by force to *first*, accommodate for whatever ways their subjects choose to posit themselves or “identify” and *second*, prevent the imposition of any limits on what these gender

identities could be. Thus, the very concept of self-identification doesn't just imitate the mechanistic character that Hegel identifies in Fichte's "absolute freedom": it also contains the same practical problem of "infinite regress" which Hegel has shown can only be resolved through "real power", or *positivity* (Hegel, 1977a). Put alternatively: rather than social change being facilitated with recourse to higher ethical principles, or natural law, the form that individual autonomy assumes in such a formal system is shaped by the character of whichever faction asserts the most force. With this in mind, one could argue that the restructuring and reconfiguration of social institutions in alignment with interest groups that, demographically speaking, compose a disproportionately small minority of Europe's population – a fact which has demonstrably been met with a strong counter-cultural reaction – appears to show Hegel's intuitions about humankind's subordinate relationship with infinite progress to have been correct.

The problem of market forces

In the *SNL*, Hegel (1999) attends to another matter emerging from Fichte's intrinsically solipsistic idea of freedom. Specifically, it regards how the justice system would function would operate under a system of the Understanding (*Verstand*), viz a system that understands society as an amalgamation of formal and economic relations. For Hegel, an injustice resulting from a crime can only be alleviated by *retribution*, of which is administered by a third party with a legitimate monopoly over force. However, in Fichte's system, the possibility of justice is denied by the coercive principle that merely deters crime through the threat of response:

[T]he punishment is the restoration of freedom; [n]ot only has the criminal remained (or rather been made) free, but the administration of the punishment has acted rationally or freely. In this, its [proper] determination, the punishment is accordingly something in itself, genuinely infinite and absolute, which therefore carries its own respect within it [...] [But] conversely, if punishment is understood as coercion, it is posited merely as a determinacy and as something wholly finite which embodies not rationality. It falls entirely under the common concept of one specific thing as against another, or of a piece of merchandise with which another commodity, namely the crime, can be bought. The state, as a judicial authority, runs a market in determinacies [known as punishments], and the legal code is the list of current prices (Hegel, 1999, p. 139).

Whilst it may appear that Hegel is limiting his criticism to Fichte's excessive dependence on the severity of the consequences as a means of upholding the law rather than the restoration of freedom – which would be consistent with his concerns

over the prospect of despiritualisation – it is conceivable that he is using this example to make a broader point about the seemingly irreconcilable tension between justice and civil society when morality and ethical life are not present to mediate the variances. As with the legitimacy crisis which is logically destined to occur between the executive and the ephorate, the ultimate danger, for Hegel, seems to lie in the activities of the justice system being shaped by positivity, or *reification*. In this case, the most likely outcome is that the justice system in its entirety is progressively *colonised* and restructured in accordance with business interests. This is because, in his view, enforcing the law through the threat of the consequences alone amounts to a form of *bargaining*: if the integrity and legitimacy of these laws is protected entirely by the effectiveness of *deterrence*, which has no content except for force, then it appears to be a forgone conclusion that justice will fall in favour of those with the most bargaining power. If so, then it also appears to be a foregone conclusion that the system of needs will proceed to colonise and restructure every aspect of human civilisation until this colonisation is inscribed in its moral and social character. Needless to say, this is the phenomenon of reification par excellence.

Thus, it would be a mistake to assume that Hegel's concerns lie only with the existential threat that market forces and instrumental rationality generally pose to the justice system. He is also aware of the risk that persons in their vocation as “bourgeois”, and the second estate that accommodates these activities (Hegel, 1991) could proceed to reshape if not eradicate the rationalising determinations of the modern state completely. This, to be sure, would occur in the event that the concrete universals of *Moralität* and *Sittlichkeit* continue to serve a cultivating function in humankind's ongoing social development. As Hegel articulates in the *RPH* lectures: while it may be counterproductive in most cases for the state to interfere with the spontaneous and autonomous activities of civil society (not least because it would undermine the distinction place between the universal (bureaucratic) class and the bourgeoisie), *not* doing so places natural institutions such as the family and the moral fabric of the nation itself at risk of abstract forces governed by chance:

The amassing of wealth [occurs] partly by chance, partly through universality, through distribution. [It is] a point of attraction, of a sort which cases its glance far over the universal, drawing [everything] around it to itself – just as a greater mass attracts the smaller ones to itself (Hegel, 1983).

Whilst Hegel clearly recognises the family and the nation state as concrete universals, he reluctantly accepts that individuals, in their vocation as economic agents, must become machine-like by rational necessity. In the scenario that individuals socially recognise themselves in this vocation, *viz* the “abstract I”, in place of the broader structure of ethical life (of which the “abstract I” is a mere part), then what Hegel knows as “Spirit” is all but a seemingly autonomous product of *Verstand* and the spurious infinity of perpetual growth and industrialisation:

Since work is performed only [to satisfy] the need as abstract being-for-itself, the working becomes abstract as well...[s]ince his labour is abstract in this way, he behaves as an abstract I – according to the mode of thinghood, – not as an all-encompassing Spirit, rich in content, ruling a broad range and being master of it; but rather, having no concrete labour, his power consists in analysing, in abstracting, dissection the concrete world into its many abstract aspects.

Man’s labour itself becomes entirely mechanical, belonging to a many-sided determinacy. But the more abstract [his labour] becomes, the more he himself is a mere abstract activity. And consequently he is in a position to withdraw himself from labour and to substitute for his own activity that of external nature. He needs mere motion, and this he finds in external nature. In other words, pure motion is precisely the relation of the abstract forms of space and time – the abstract external activity, the *machine* (Hegel, 1983).

Conclusion

If my reading of Taylor (1979, p. 132) on the “end of Hegelianism” is correct, namely that Hegel did indeed arrive at the view that the reproducing structures of Abstract Right, Morality and Ethical Life *would* be sufficient to contain the subversive forces of civil society and prevent *System of Reality* from proceeding to dominate the *System of Ethical Life*, then Taylor appears to have overlooked Hegel’s original reasons for engaging with the dialectic of modernity at all: giving the Lutheran concept of “Christian liberty” a form that stands to practical reason. Considering what we have observed in Hegel’s coverage of inward spiritualisation in the SOC, the value identified of the *Sermon on the Mount* and Kant’s failure to facilitate the conditions for the “moral life”, the dialectical sequence between “faith” and “pure insight” in the POS, and – most importantly perhaps – the necessary independence that individuals have from the state in their vocation as “bourgeois” in the Germanic world, it seems more accurate to interpret Hegel as believing that these rational structures *should* persist, but that whether they historically *do* will depend on the secular state’s success at facilitating

and preserving the conditions for the internalisation of the moral law, known otherwise as the apprehension of the Holy Spirit (inward spiritualisation). However, because of Hegel's contention that such principles are realised in religion before philosophy, and in spite of the separation of church and state serving as a necessary condition for the apprehension of the Holy Spirit, the secular state, in theory, cannot achieve its goal of dignifying those who reside in the "kingdom of the World" without the persistence of reformed Christianity in some form. Hegel's theoretical mistake then, if anything, seems to lie *not* in his faith that the rational structures of ethical life in the modern epoch would persist on their own, but rather in his seemingly unstated faith in Christianity's ability to resist the various emanations of "infinite progress" or "spurious infinity".

Hegel's coverage of these various emanations of spurious infinity – of which assume the forms of endless scientific, economic, technological and social progress – has been extensive, so much so that I am unable to fully explicate its value in the scope of this thesis. But that said, I believe it is relatively clear that Hegel sees the phenomenon of reification as something that no state or system can resolve on its own (suggesting that it can, in fact, would be advancing a form of reification itself): it is an endemic feature of modernity that depends on self-determining agents continuing to assert themselves in their moral and particular capacities to prevent positive variances, e.g. deviant cultural attitudes and economic trends, from becoming pathological and socially pervasive. Doing so, however, still relies on the rational structures of ethical life being able to sufficiently serve their communicative and cultivating functions (*Bildung*). It only requires this infrastructure to fail for morality itself to go historically unrealised, by which point the structures themselves are colonised and reshaped by the positive elements. In turn, these elements, now incarnated into the structure of society, would then proceed to have *reifying* effects elsewhere, perhaps to the extent that it encroaches on morality itself.

Indeed, one could make the case – as a left-Hegelian or Marxist may – that these forms of reification are communicative in the same historical sense as the social decadence of Rome. Such thinkers could argue that the "[heap] of private Romanticism and public utilitarianism" (Taylor, 1979, p.132) that civil society has become, rather than being mere manifestations of contradictions that are inscribed in the historically established "idea", actually express a need for Spirit (*Geist*) to develop

its rational structures beyond the confines of the Germanic world entirely. If so, then the colonisation of the lifeworld in accordance with these abstract and homogenising forces which necessitate the reconceptualisation of reason, knowledge and morality themselves would not be expressions of “spurious infinity”, but productive elements in the process of constructing an even more rational structure so as to engender the conditions for a “higher” form of *Sittlichkeit*.

However, one could also arrive at the polar opposite view of such developments, namely that they are pathological manifestations of the solipsistic and consequently atomistic presuppositions of “absolute freedom” that Hegel has given ample warnings about: namely that using a self-positing subject that is coerced into identifying itself in metaphysical opposition to nature will lead to individual freedom itself becoming increasingly unsituated, thus assuming increasingly abstract and ultimately estranged forms through time⁵⁵. It is true that Hegel has been referenced by intersectional feminist scholars looking to argue that the increasing pressure for the introduction of policies such as gender “self-identification” is symptomatic of a desire for rationally advanced forms of autonomy and social recognition (Butler, 1988). However, on my reading, it is more plausible that Hegel would perceive such developments as yet more abstract expressions of a desire for “Absolute Freedom”, and thus another product of Fichte’s metaphysically unsituated idealism. A matter that has been given insufficient attention, however – one which gives further credence to “the colonisation thesis” – is the possibility that the professionalisation and bureaucratisation of philosophy itself (which has arguably intensified since Hegel’s time), has led to the production of intellectual traditions and practices that have significantly disrupted the communicative infrastructure not just within academia, but within the fabric of modern society as a whole. One could go as far as arguing that professional academics – particularly those working within the humanities – are compromised by a conflict of interest existing in the form of them having to either claim that pre-existing social problems persist, or identify new problems entirely in order to guarantee their own economic security. The fact that the market is yet to fix this problem seems to add justification to Hegel’s concern that civil society requires the input of a higher ethical principle in order for institutions that commit a public service (as universities do to a great extent) to remain

⁵⁵ Hegel arguably witnessed this for himself during the French Revolution and later in his students at the University of Berlin (*Burschenschaft*).

communicative and rational broadly speaking. If this interpretation (above) is indeed a fair representation of Hegel's general approach to reconciling the variances of modernity, as I believe it is, then it is clear to see that a complex theory of reification is inscribed in Hegel's system of Absolute Spirit. It is, to be sure, a social phenomenon that begins as a case of conceptual misidentification in experience before assuming an objective form that appears to colonise the natural world, including, of course, the object it has displaced. Most importantly for our purposes, however, are the value of Hegel's insights on the true nature of the relationship between human freedom and "infinite progress", the latter which is now broadly recognised as a social fact about freedom itself. The real danger, in my view, is the possibility of progress becoming performative to the extent that the social consequences are forgotten.

Logically speaking, infinite progress must go on in perpetuity in order for the practical realisation of the freedom of all individuals to be foreseeable. However, throughout this chapter, I hope to have shown that there is considerable weight to Hegel's intuition that the very idea of Enlightenment and notion of freedom as "striving", not to mention the liberation of "self-incurred tutelage", is a false errand that has a historical tendency of misleading subjects into identifying "freedom" with the absence of determination. Whilst it should be clear that Hegel is far from being an anti-modern thinker, it is also clear that he saw the abstract concept of radical autonomy or unsituated freedom as posing not only the greatest challenge to the modern age, but ones that could cultivate the conditions for its demise. This, as I hope to have shown, is a danger that Hegel sees to exist in great part because of the phenomenon of reification.

Closing Statement

There are many subjects that I could not cover sufficiently (if at all) in this thesis which deserve further enquiry. These include: Hegel's coverage of the Jewish Question; Hegel's conceptual exposition of reification in the Jena *Logic* and later *SOL*; reification and the question of technology (especially AI); the conceptual similarities between what Hegel describes as the "fate of Christianity" and Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of instrumental reason in the *DOE*; reification in Hegel's aesthetic theory; the methodological errors from social/cultural theorists which have led to reification becoming even *more* structurally entrenched; and last but not least: the construction of a new theory of social totality which can replace those which, in my view, have shown themselves to be inadequate.

This reinterpretation of "the colonisation thesis" would naturally involve some implications. Assuming that materialism continues to exist as the dominant blueprint from which praxis-orientated theorists work – whether they be sociologists, economists or critical theorists – such a change would necessitate adopting a less totalising attitude towards the economic base. Thus, rather than working from the metaphysical assumption that deviant cultural behaviours – such as those exhibited by Hegel's *Pöbel* or Marx's *Lumpenproletariat* – are downstream of economic inequality which engender contemplative, apathetic or even resentful attitudes (towards other people and society in general), the new model would see these pathological expressions as the result of a more holistic and complex problem related to the limited emancipatory potential of modernity as an unfolding concept. This historical view, to be sure, is *contrary* to the view that Fukuyama (1989) espouses, namely that only economic problems persist following the identification of freedom with individual autonomy (or self-legislation). In Hegel's System of *Sittlichkeit*, individual autonomy is understood to have no value, meaning or contents in the abstract. This is, of course, not to say that Hegel sees there to be no intrinsic value in the idea of self-legislation at all, rather that it can only assume its fully rational form when developed within the historical and objective *parameters* through which it has been realised, referring to the determinations which remain permanently and necessarily *outside* of the System of Reality. It is on these grounds that Hegel sees the persistence of religion as an institution – especially Christianity – as essential to the ongoing realisation and

preservation of the modern Idea, because it so historically entrenched in the rationalisation of the human spirit that – as he likely observed with the Jacobins introduction of a “civil religion” – it would be counter-intuitive, damaging and perhaps even cynical to dispense with it entirely. Not only because of the political issues it would cause, but because religious freedom itself – including the right to disbelieve – is a basic human right, as Luther himself accepts.

One could, in my view, locate within Hegel’s critique of both Kant and Fichte potential for a *political* critique of the political decisions of European nations today, whereby strategic decisions to relax commitments to preserving the preexisting social infrastructure (so as to enable the growth of the labour market) appears to have created problems with social emancipation that may be irresolvable. To make use of one contemporary discussion point: Muslims who relocated to Europe or America for economic reasons would not be incorrect, in principle, to identify the secular state under which their religious freedom is protected as an instrument of Islam’s subordination to the political structure of Christianity (especially as secularism is inscribed in the logic of Christianity). In some areas of Belgium and the United Kingdom – contrary to the predictions of materialists – culturally-conservative value spheres (such as those observed in Luton and Molenbeek-Saint-Jean) have not only been unmoved by the overall increased economic participation of the Muslim population, but also developed in more radical and politicised directions. It seems, then, that despite the modern state’s successes in other areas, such manifestations also indicate that developing social politics from the principle of “self-legislation” has led to society becoming more atomistic and inhospitable in all the ways that Hegel seemed to fear.

Thus, contrary to Taylor’s (1979) interpretation that the continued “rationalisation of bureaucratic structures” (p. 132) shows Hegel’s “end of history” thesis to be incorrect, it could be argued that the religious and cultural conflicts which appear to have emerged synchronously with the Germanic world’s (or “Global North”) financialisation (Blakeley, 2021), supports the polar opposite: that Hegel’s social model is accurate. If it were indeed the case, as Kant contends, that social norms and right (*Recht*) develop from *a priori* principles of civility between human beings – which is the basis from which Fichte, Habermas, and Fukuyama develop their theories – then the social problems that have emerged arguably wouldn’t have done so to such a great extent. Those who

chose to resituate themselves in pursuit of an economic need would have arguably recognised themselves in the rational structure from which the policy emerged. Indeed, some individuals have integrated in the desired manner, and successfully transmitted the socially homogenous patterns that Taylor (1979) acknowledges to have become prevalent. However, others have not and perhaps never will in virtue of the higher ethical principles that they *permanently* value above economic incentives and the private interests of the individual. Naturally, one could argue that such notions are reactionary or “backwards”. But equally conceivable is the view that the Germanic world has momentarily “lost sight” of the Idea, having become fixated on actualising narrow and in some cases completely arbitrary conceptions of individual freedom which undermine the modern state’s ability to function as it should.

The most persuasive argument for this lies in history offering more support to the credentials of the recognitional structure inscribed in Hegel’s “System of Ethical Life” than to Kant’s categorical imperative, or Marx’s idea of a classless society. One could, for example, take from both the recognised political failure of “multiculturalism” in Europe and the nature of the various uprisings composing the “Arab Spring” (Noueihed & Warren, 2013) that while people of all religions and ethnicities evidently desire recognition of their autonomous will and protection of their individual rights on some level, the contents of the desired recognition itself can never be completely divorced from (usually religious) institutions and social communities within which that desire for self-determination emerged. To put the point bluntly: it may be an irreversible fact that human beings, in virtue of the historical ties that exist between religion and the social institutions of that society, are more inclined to identify positively with the logic inscribed in their conception of divinity than with their economic or formal vocation. As such, rather than the West’s current direction being a genuine rational succession, perhaps the aforementioned themes of social disenchantment, alienation and renewed expressions of romanticism are indicative of what Hegel feared would be the fate of the Christian world in the SOC: that it would develop too far in the direction of abstract right and self-legislation for its own sake as the cost of the higher forms of life that *Sittlichkeit* would have preserved.

I readily accept that there is a considerable amount of theoretical work to be done before this Hegelian reinterpretation of “the colonisation thesis” is fit to be used for praxial purposes. However, I do believe I have sufficiently shown that Hegel’s

understanding of reification as a predominantly conceptual phenomenon offers a promising base from which to start.

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