Introduction

Even Hegel’s most abstract and metaphysical concepts are saturated with experience. (Marcuse 1960: vii)

There is no single element or relation in the logic that cannot be ultimately referred back to elements and relations of the actual world, and does not ultimately have to be so referred. (Lukács GLW 13: 504, 1978: 48)

1 Reading the Logic as a Social Theory

Hegel’s official work in social and political philosophy, the Philosophy of Right, is arguably a text aimed at the justification and legitimation of the bourgeois-capitalist social order, of what he calls “modernity” [Neuzeit]. The project of the book, as he avers in the Preface, is to “recognize reason as the rose in the cross of the present.” That is, Hegel seeks to show that, despite undeniable problems, modern society is inherently rational. By demonstrating the rationality of modernity, Hegel expects his readers, who might feel alienated from their society, to find “reconciliation” with it and thus to “delight in the present.” The main concept of the Philosophy of Right is freedom, and Hegel seeks to show how freedom permeates the major institutions of modern society. The modern legal code, the bourgeois individualist morality, the nuclear family, the market, and the representative state are all ways of giving concrete expression to different aspects of freedom, and together constitute a “system of the ethical world,” which is, as a whole, rational.¹

¹ To preempt misunderstanding, some clarification is warranted. The recent scholarship on Hegel universally acknowledges that the old charge, according to which Hegel aims to legitimize his contemporary Prussian state, is simply wrong. Indeed, in the Philosophy of Right, Hegel is not
Hegel lived in an era which was still suffused with enthusiasm for the prospects of the bourgeois-capitalist social order. This enthusiasm, although tamed and not at all romantic, inflects the entirety of his social and political philosophy. Yet historical changes since Hegel’s death in 1831 have, I believe, proved that he was wrong. Today, I presume, nobody in earnest can be reconciled or even seek reconciliation with a world of sharp contrasts between gated communities and urban ghettos, where the prospect of any substantive social solidarity seems completely obliterated. The political process, which for Hegel was supposed to be the realm of the “universal,” is today heavily determined by the “particular” interests of the financial sector. The mentality appropriate to the market has penetrated almost all areas of social life, and the resultant loss of communal bonds, so it unfortunately seems, can only be compensated by the “false” universality promised by various sorts of virulent nationalism or religious fundamentalism. And beyond this, of course, there is the rapid deterioration of our common habitat, which we observe with a sense of sheer helplessness or cold indifference. It must be conceded that, in light of the historical experience since Hegel’s death, the affirmative project of the *Philosophy of Right*, which aims at proving the rationality of the bourgeois-capitalist social order, essentially fails.

The failure of Hegel’s project in the *Philosophy of Right* cannot only be ascribed to the fact that it was written in a different world. The failure is conceptual, and mainly has to do with the way Hegel conceives of the economy in capitalism. It is true that Hegel clearly saw important problems that the capitalist economy engenders. Namely, he acknowledges the seemingly unsurpassable gap between the rich and the poor in modern society (PR §185); shows how a group of people, through extreme poverty and continuous unemployment, are degraded to the status of the “rabble” (PR §244, §245); and even touches on the economic necessity of imperialism under capitalism (PR §248). Nonetheless, he thought that these problems, disturbing as they are, remain marginal, and ultimately do not threaten the rationality of the basic structure of modern society as a whole.

A thoroughgoing critique of Hegel’s view on the economy under capitalism would require another book. Here I mention only what I think constitutes two main pitfalls of Hegel’s account. Hegel correctly saw the

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2 The best exposition and critique of Hegel’s economic views remains Lukács (1975 [1948]: 319–420). Lukács shows how Hegel’s economic views influence his philosophy in general, and how the
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major spheres of the modern society to consist in the private sphere of family, the social sphere of the market, and the political sphere of the state. He considered these spheres to be, by and large, in harmony with each other, such that the excesses of one can be compensated for by the workings of the others. In particular, he thought that the problems inherent in and produced by the market can, to a large extent, be redressed by the rational intervention of the state. Contrary to Hegel, however, today it is almost self-evident that the economy under capitalism—and most blatantly in its current phase of neoliberalism—is not merely a “moment” of the modern society which can be confined to its proper place. Rather, the economy is so powerful that it infects, and tends to colonize, the entire life-world. In capitalism, to invoke Marx, capital is “a general illumination, which bathes all the other colors and modifies their particularity; it is a particular ether which determines the specific gravity of every being” (MEW 42: 40, G 107). In fact, in the age of the sovereignty of capital, the state which was supposed to regulate the economy is itself regulated by the economy.

Hegel’s second failure lies in his conceptual determination of the economic sphere itself. Hegel divided the economic sphere along the lines of “estates” based on the type of the work that people do: roughly into the agricultural, the commercial, and the administrative estates. He thought that these estates have different functions, and yet that the relation between them is horizontal and devoid of power. Nonetheless, the mechanism of capital proves that in capitalism the type of work that people do is not economically relevant, and that civil society is divided not culturally by “estates” but economically by “classes.” What defines classes, to remind ourselves of Marx’s view, is the structural relation to the means of production. Those who own the means of production constitute the capitalist class, and those who must sell their labor-power to the former constitute the class of wage-laborers. The relation of classes is not horizontal, and cannot in principle be so, but is a vertical relation of power, or more precisely a relation of “opposition.”

shortcomings of the former translate into those of the latter. For a recent, sympathetic, exposition of Hegel’s economic thought, see Herzog (2013).

3 This is not to claim that any and all phenomena of the modern society are determined by capital. It is not a claim that any action in the private realm of the family (say, a birthday gift that a son gives to his mother), or in the public domain of the state (say, a certain speech in the US Congress against war-mongering) must be explained in economic terms. Rather, it is a claim that the basic structure of society in capitalism, i.e., its “totality” or “actuality,” is determined by capital; which is to say that the family in capitalism becomes the capitalist nuclear family (as distinct from other forms of family in premodern times), and the state in capitalism effectively functions as a capitalist state. For a thorough explanation of why “totality” is not to be construed in terms of allness, see Section 3.2.
Hegel’s two major failures – the conception of the capitalist economy as subordinate to politics, and the horizontal differentiation of people in the economic sphere – are conceptually interdependent. Since Hegel thought that the estates are on a par with each other, he concluded that their interests could be equally represented in the political sphere, such that the state would function as the true universal, as that which in fact unites people with each other, and indeed as the realm of “the actuality of concrete freedom” (PR §260). However, if we accept that the economic sphere is constituted by opposition between classes and the power of one class over another, we must concede, with Marx, that the state cannot in principle function as the true universal, but will inevitably be contaminated by the relation of power inherent in the economic sphere. That is to say, the representative liberal democracy in a class-based civil society necessarily fails to be truly representative.  

Thus the Philosophy of Right, which by and large has an affirmative view of the bourgeois-capitalist social order, cannot ground a genuinely critical social theory. But does that mean that Hegel doesn’t have any genuinely critical theory of capitalism? The answer is no. Hegel does have such a critical theory: but that theory is not located in his official social and political philosophy. Rather, as I will show in this book, the locus of

There are two other major pitfalls in the Philosophy of Right, which I cannot discuss here, but which I can at least mention. The first is the explicitly “rechtlich” or legalistic framework that Hegel espouses in that book. It is true that “abstract right” constitutes a low form of freedom for Hegel; nonetheless, by beginning the book with it, Hegel frames – and thus effectively constrains – his conceptual reconstruction of modern society, and this is true even of his later discussions of social and political life in the “ethical life.” Secondly, in the Philosophy of Right Hegel takes a political stance that is against popular democracy. He believes that the affairs of the state must primarily be decided by the so-called universal estate, namely, the government employees and the bureaucracy; which is to say that for him there is not much room left for the actual sovereignty of the people. Hegel’s distrust of the people is also clear in his conception of the economic outcast, i.e., the rabble. It is true that he refreshingly castigates the economic system – and not the rabble – for their predicament; nonetheless, he regards the rabble only as a victim of civil society, and not as a potential agent of history. See Lukács (1975 [1948]: 365–97). This does not mean that the Philosophy of Right does not have any critical potential, but it does mean that its critical potential is thin and limited. Recently, Honneth (2010, 2014) and Neuhouser (2000), to name two important contemporary scholars, have used the Philosophy of Right to criticize our current predicament. The merits of their work notwithstanding, I believe their approach suffers from the same shortcomings as Hegel’s own work. Namely, their work, firstly, remains insufficiently attentive to the actual encroachment of the economic sphere upon all areas of social life in capitalism, and secondly, conceives of the economic sphere not in terms of opposition, but explicitly as a sphere of mutual recognition. Thus their approach ultimately remains affirmative towards the bourgeois-capitalist social order, as does Hegel’s own, although they criticize the (supposedly inessential) excesses of economic deregulation. Also, it is worth mentioning that Ruda (2011) has attempted to develop a radical critical theory of society in capitalism on the basis of the Philosophy of Right. His attempt is both important and interesting, but is achieved only by doing a great deal of interpretive violence to the text, or so I believe.
Hegel’s critical theory of capitalism is to be found in his *Science of Logic*. As I hope to demonstrate, the logic has a great critical potential that far transcends Hegel’s own official appraisal of the modern social order, and this potential has as yet not been fully explored, let alone exploited. According to Negri, “Spinoza’s true politics is his metaphysics.” In an analogous way, my aim is to show that Hegel’s true politics resides in his metaphysics.

In undertaking a project of developing a critical theory of society on the basis of the logic, I deliberately depart from the general trend of scholarship on Hegel’s social and political philosophy, especially the Anglophone scholarship. Perhaps under the influence of Rawls, who thought questions of metaphysics wholly irrelevant to questions of politics, the recent scholarship on Hegel has tried to disentangle Hegel’s social and political philosophy from its support in the logic. Some prominent examples will suffice: Honneth, who bases his “normative reconstruction” of Hegel’s social thought on the *Philosophy of Right*, explicitly states that in “our post-metaphysical standards of rationality” appealing to the logic in the context of practical philosophy is not allowed. Honneth’s reading of Hegel, as he himself remarks, “does not depend on any argumentative backing by his logic.” Similarly, in the introduction to his now classic book on Hegel’s philosophy of right, Wood programmatically announces that “speculative logic is dead; but Hegel’s thought is not.” And Neuhouser adopts a more modest type of the same approach by intentionally ignoring the logic in discussing Hegel’s social theory.

Nevertheless, despite the current academic interpretation of Hegel, there is a long tradition of using the logic for developing critical social theory, a tradition that goes back to Marx. In his youth, Marx offered a devastating critique of the affirmative character of Hegel’s philosophy of right, yet he remained fascinated by Hegel’s dialectical logic throughout his life. It is worthwhile emphasizing that the view that Marx grappled with Hegel only in his “philosophical” youth, and then abandoned Hegel in his later “scientific” or “economic” phase, is simply mistaken. While working on his economic theory in 1858, Marx wrote to Engels that the logic had greatly helped him to solve a seemingly technical problem in economics:

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6 Throughout the book, the term “logic” refers to Hegel’s conception of logic, as expounded mainly in the *Science of Logic*, but also in the *Encyclopedia Logic*.


I am, by the way, discovering some nice arguments. e.g. I have completely demolished the theory of profit as hitherto propounded. What was of great use to me as regards method of treatment was Hegel’s Logic at which I had taken another look by mere accident . . . If ever the time comes when such work is again possible, I should very much like to write 2 or 3 sheets making accessible to the common reader the rational aspect of the method which Hegel not only discovered but also mystified. (MEW 29: 260, MECW 40: 249)

The attention to Hegel’s logic continued in the Marxian tradition. In 1878, Engels published Anti-Dühring, which was greatly influenced by the logic. (However, since Engels’s aim was to popularize the dialectical logic, he unfortunately oversimplified Hegel, an oversimplification that proved later to be more harmful than helpful to the reception of Hegel.) Similarly, it was arguably Hegel’s logic that helped Lukács to develop his revolutionary theory in History and Class Consciousness. The logic, although with a different interpretation, remained pivotal to Lukács’s later project of developing his elaborate account in Ontology of Social Being. Finally, in the case of Adorno, multiple courses of lectures on sociology and sociological philosophy as well as the Negative Dialectics clearly demonstrate the centrality of engagement with Hegel’s logic to his critical theory of society in capitalism.

The Hegelian-Maxian tradition thus made ample use of the logic to explain society and politics in capitalism. But what is Hegel’s own understanding of the relation between the logic and society? There are two relatively distinct questions in this regard. First, does Hegel rely on the logic in his own social and political philosophy in the Philosophy of Right? In fact, despite the current scholarship that tends to refute or ignore the logical foundations of Hegel’s social theory, there is textually no doubt that Hegel himself regards his social and political philosophy as presupposing the logic. Not only in the Introduction to the Philosophy of Right does he explicitly state that the philosophical foundation of the book must be found in the logic (PR §2, §6, §31), but at crucial stages of the book he also makes his argument mainly by appealing to the logic (PR §141, §272, §280). In the present book, I will not explore how the logic is used in

9 Also, in the 1873 postface to Capital, while referring to Hegel’s dialectical logic and despite the fact that Hegel was not fashionable at the time, Marx does not hesitate to “openly avow [him]self as the pupil of that mighty thinker [i.e., Hegel]” (MEW 23: 27, C: 103).
10 There have, however, been a few recent attempts to revive the interpretation of the Philosophy of Right on the basis of the logic. See especially Goodfield (2014).
11 The issues for which Hegel directly appeals to the logic in his social and political theory include, among others, the transition from morality to the ethical life (§144), the critique of the liberal
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the Philosophy of Right. My aim is rather to use the logic to develop a critical social theory on the basis of the logic, and this brings us to our second question: namely, is the logic itself affected by social relations in bourgeois-capitalist social relations, or is the logic a purely metaphysical theory that is not sensitive to historical experience?

Hegel seems to be equivocal regarding the question of the historicity of the logic. It is true that in the 1812 Introduction he avers that the content of the logic is “the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence, before the creation of nature and a finite mind” (WL I: 44, SL 50). Yet he simultaneously insists that “the system of the logic is the realm of shadows” [das Reich der Schatten] (WL I: 55, SL 58), clearly implying that the logical categories are not self-standing, but shadow, or track, the empirical world – and the empirical world for Hegel is developed in history. He makes the same point, more strongly, in the 1831 preface to the second edition by describing the project of the logic in terms of the “reconstruction” [Rekonstruktion] of the empirical, historical experience in the realm of pure thought (WL I: 30, SL 39). And finally it is not in vain that Hegel compares the logic to the grammar of a language. The grammar, of course, cannot exist independently of the language whose grammar it is, and yet it is possible to extract the rules of grammar, and articulate them in an abstract and general manner. It is worth mentioning how Hegel compares a beginner in learning a language with a competent speaker:

He who begins the study of grammar finds in its forms and laws dry abstractions, arbitrary rules, in general an isolated collection of definitions and terms which exhibit only the value and significance of what is implied in their immediate meaning; there is nothing to be known in them other than themselves. On the other hand, he who has mastered a language and at the same time has a comparative knowledge of other languages, he alone can make contact with the spirit and culture of a people through the grammar of its language; the same rules and forms now have a substantial, living value. Through the grammar, he can recognize the expression of spirit as such, that is, logic [Ausdruck des Geistes überhaupt, die Logik]. (WL I: 53, SL: 57, my emphasis)

conception of the division of powers in the modern state (§272), and the nature of sovereignty in the modern state (§280).

Similarly, in the Introduction to the Encyclopedia (1830), Hegel writes that “the process of taking up this [empirical] content, in which thinking sublates its mere givenness and the immediacy that still clings to it, is at the same time a process of thinking developing out of itself.” Thus, in Hegel’s view, philosophy aims at “depiction and replication” [Darstellung und Nachbildung] of what is found in experience in terms of pure thought (EL §12). See also Hartmann (1976: 6) and Pinkard (2002: 250), who take the view that the logic is reconstructive. The opposite, aprioristic, reading of the logic is taken by Höslé (1998) and Houlgate (2006).
The grammar of a language obviously co-evolves with the language itself. It is not the case that first, there is a grammar, which then gets embodied in the language. Similarly, the logic does not obtain antecedently to history, but develops as history develops; which is to say that the logic is constituted by historical experience. Interestingly, for Hegel, it is the abstract grammar of the language – rather than its lexicon or semantics – that expresses the inner life of the language. Similarly, my aim is to show that it is the logic, rather than Hegel’s political philosophy, that expresses the spirit of capitalism.13

Even if the question of the relation of the logic to history cannot be decided on the basis of Hegel’s official pronouncement in the Science of Logic, a stronger case for the historicity of the logic can be made specifically for the “logic of essence,” which is the focus of the present study. As we will see in detail later, the central category of the logic of essence is “actuality.” While, in the logic of essence, Hegel conceives of actuality, proper to the subject-matter of the book, in logical terms, in various other places in his corpus he emphasizes its empirical and historical import. In the Introduction to the Encyclopedia, for example, he warns that philosophy must be aware that its content is not purely a priori, but is “the basic content that has originally been produced and reproduces itself in the sphere of the living spirit,” and he calls this historically produced content “actuality” (EL §6). Actuality is therefore, at the same time, both a logical and a historical concept, and thus provides the very basis of the historical ontology that Hegel develops in the logic of essence.14

If we take this view of Hegel, namely, that Hegel’s logic is the reconstruction of historical actuality in terms of the most general categories of thought, we will have to accept that Marx’s view – despite his recurrent rhetoric against Hegel’s “idealism” – is in fact very close to Hegel’s. In the Grundrisse, Marx first criticizes what he takes Hegel’s logic to be about – i.e., “thought concentrating itself, probing its own depths, and unfolding itself out of itself, by itself” – in order to contrast it with his own view. Rejecting such supposedly Hegelian apriorism, Marx holds that the correct

13 It is worthwhile to refer one more time to Negri, who asserts that “it is only in the complexity of metaphysics that the modern age can be read” (Negri 1991: xix).
14 According to Lukács, Hegel’s logic is “essentially oriented to the knowledge of society and history.” That is to say, the logic is not a historically invariant ontology, but forms a “zeitgemäße Ontologie,” i.e., a contemporary ontology (GLW 15: 303, 474). Hegel erred, according to Lukács, when he took as self-subsistent the logical categories that are in fact distilled out of the historical experience of modernity, and then overextended their applicability to the entire realm of being, inclusive of nature and of any society throughout history. This latter point – namely, that Hegel himself intends his logic to be purely a priori – is what I try to question here.
method should aim at “the reproduction of the concrete by way of thought” [Reproduktion des Konkreten im Weg des Denkens] (MEW 42: 35, G 101). Contrary to Marx’s self-understanding, it is not difficult to see how Marx’s “reproduction” and Hegel’s “reconstruction” of the concrete in thought are of the same ilk.

Marx’s point here is a part of his broader “materialist” view, according to which ideas are not simply autonomous, but in some constitutive way depend on the social and historical context in which they arise. Following Marx, Adorno emphasizes that even abstract, metaphysical concepts have an “experiential content” [Erfahrungsgehalt], and thus can properly be understood only through relation to the contexts in which they are nested. Following Adorno – and no matter what we eventually take Hegel’s own view regarding the relation of the logic to history to consist in – my aim in this book is to render the experiential content of the categories of the logic of essence explicit.

2 General Aims and Method

The main concept of this book is “power” [Macht]. Hegel is usually considered to be the philosopher of freedom, and not of power. However, upon a close reading of the Science of Logic, one realizes that the concept of power plays a pivotal role in the ontology that Hegel develops in the logic of essence.\(^\text{15}\) It is true that Hegel does not use the concept of power frequently, yet when he does he uses it decisively. The importance of power for Hegel is especially manifest in his discussion of “substance.” For Hegel, substance is the highest category of the logic of essence and of objective logic. Substance, therefore, is the most determinant ontological category for Hegel, and retrospectively provides the bedrock for all other categories. Importantly, both in the Science of Logic and in the Encyclopedia Logic, Hegel conceives of substance as “absolute power” [absolute Macht].\(^\text{16}\) I read the concept of power backwards in the logic of essence, and show how the development of the categories of essence is best understood in terms of the development of the concept of power.

\(^\text{15}\) A brief note about the structure of the Science of Logic is necessary. The Science of Logic is a two-volume book, consisting of the “objective logic” and the “subjective logic.” The objective logic itself is divided into two parts: the logic of being and the logic of essence. The subjective logic is also called the logic of the Concept. My project is on the logic of essence. For methodological reasons that will become clear later, I entirely ignore the subjective logic (except for a brief discussion in the Conclusion). I will also deal with the logic of being only marginally, namely, insofar as it is necessary for understanding the logic of essence.

\(^\text{16}\) See WL II: 220, 224, 246, SL 556, 559, 578, and EL §151, §152.
In focusing on power as an ontological category, I have two distinct, yet closely interrelated aims. Firstly, I will show that Hegel’s ontology in the logic of essence is an ontology of power. This means that power is constitutive of the structure of individuals. That is, individuals are what they are only in and through the relation of power that obtains between them. Secondly, I will show that Hegel’s ontology of power in the logic of essence specifically captures the structure of social domination in capitalism. To this end, I make substantial use of Marx’s mature critique of political economy, and also Adorno’s later social theory.

The mode of domination in capitalism has two features that make it distinct from domination in precapitalist social formations. Firstly, while in societies based on slavery or serfdom, there is no claim of equality between masters and slaves or serfs, in capitalism capitalists and workers are equal before the law. Importantly, the structure of domination in capitalism is such that it obtains, not despite equality, but actually on the basis of equality. Secondly, while in slave or feudal societies, the relation of domination was direct and personal—a particular slave or serf was bound to a particular master—in capitalism domination takes on an indirect and impersonal character. A worker is able, or should ideally be able, to change her employer, and yet she continues to be dominated all the same. To use Marx’s own phrase, in capitalism individuals are primarily ruled not by persons, but by “abstractions” [Abstraktionen] (MEW 42: 97, G 164).

This book is not a comparative study of Hegel and Marx. Rather, I aim to offer a Marxian interpretation of Hegel’s logic and a Hegelian interpretation of Marx’s critique of political economy. From a scholarly point of view, this approach might strike the reader as confusing, and thus warrants some clarification. The main focus of the book is and remains Hegel’s logic. Although a significant portion of the book is on Marx and on Adorno, this does not mean that I am trying to force a Marxian interpretation on Hegel. Rather, my methodological principle is to analyze Hegel’s text closely, and to make explicit only what is already implicit in the text. I concede that adhering to the text may occasionally give the book a dry character, but this strategy pays off. It becomes clear how a close and

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17 In this book, I use the terms “power” and “domination” interchangeably. This is not to say that all forms of power are dominating—there are indeed legitimate forms of power that are not dominating. But it is to say that, insofar as the logic of essence and the structure of capitalism are concerned, power is dominating. Hegel discusses the legitimate form of power, what he calls “the free power,” in the logic of the Concept, but fleshing that out requires another book.