

12-12-2018

Machine Automation and the Critique of Abstract Labor in Hegel's Mature Social Theory

Matthew J. Delhey

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/philosophy_theses

Recommended Citation

Delhey, Matthew J., "Machine Automation and the Critique of Abstract Labor in Hegel's Mature Social Theory." Thesis, Georgia State University, 2018.

https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/philosophy_theses/248

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Philosophy at ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Philosophy Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gsu.edu.

MACHINE AUTOMATION AND THE CRITIQUE OF ABSTRACT LABOR IN HEGEL'S
MATURE SOCIAL THEORY

by

MATTHEW J. DELHEY

Under the Direction of Sebastian Rand, PhD

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines Hegel's critique of abstract labor in the *Philosophy of Right* and the sections on objective spirit in the *Encyclopaedia*. Against both Frederick Neuhouser's and Marxist interpretations, I argue that abstract labor, for Hegel, characterizes the specific kind of mechanical labor undertaken in the nineteenth-century factory. Such repetitive labor, Hegel claims, leads to the deadening (*Abstumpfung*) of the worker through the deforming of her ethical subjectivity, a social pathology he hopes will be resolved by machine automation. By developing two key aspects of Hegel's social theory—that labor produces ethical subjectivity or education (*Bildung*) and that this education is the central locus of civil society's ethicality—I argue that we ought to understand Hegel's hope for machine automation as a critique of those forms of labor which prevent the worker's rational participation in the totality of the labor process and thus fail to actualize her social freedom.

INDEX WORDS: Hegel, Civil Society, Abstract Labor, Machine Automation, Education

MACHINE AUTOMATION AND THE CRITIQUE OF ABSTRACT LABOR IN HEGEL'S
MATURE SOCIAL THEORY

by

MATTHEW J. DELHEY

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2018

Copyright by
Matthew J. Delhey
2018

MACHINE AUTOMATION AND THE CRITIQUE OF ABSTRACT LABOR IN HEGEL'S
MATURE SOCIAL THEORY

by

MATTHEW J. DELHEY

Committee Chair: Sebastian Rand

Committee: Peter Lindsay

Calvin Thomas

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

December 2018

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without the generous help of an innumerable number of people. I first thank Sebastian Rand for his patient teaching and mentorship, and Peter Lindsay and Calvin Thomas for their support, instruction, and advisement. I also thank those who have facilitated my philosophical development over the last two years, especially Bill Edmonson, Sandra Dwyer, Eric Wilson, and Susan Richmond.

I also thank all those who have supported or otherwise made possible my graduate studies. In particular, I thank Charles Siewert, H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr., and John M. Stroup for their instruction, guidance, and support during my undergraduate studies, Robin Lydenberg and Miguel Beistegui for kindly allowing me to audit their seminars at Boston College, John Balch for his friendship and guidance during my time in Boston, and the members of the Deleuze reading group and the Boston University religious studies department for their kind acceptance of an outsider.

I also thank my many interlocutors during my time in Atlanta for their insight and comradery: Ryan McCoy, Kat Nelson, Tyler van Wulven, Matthew Schrepfer, Paul Fryfogle, Hansen Breitling, and the members of the Hegel reading group, especially Peter Nennig, Ben Leake, Bobby McKinley, Nate Saint Ours, and Jasleen Ahluwalia. Finally, I would also like to thank Preston Olds, Jean Langau, Aleigh Davis for their friendship and encouragement.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS		iv
1 INTRODUCTION		1
2 THE CONTEXT AND SCIENCE OF THE <i>PHILOSOPHY OF RIGHT</i>		8
3 HEGEL’S CONCEPTS OF LABOR AND ABSTRACTION IN THE <i>PHILOSOPHY OF RIGHT</i>		15
4 WHO LABORS ABSTRACTLY? ABSTRACT LABOR, HABIT, AND <i>BILDUNG</i> IN THE <i>PHILOSOPHY OF RIGHT</i>		23
4.1 Misunderstandings of Abstract Labor		26
4.2 <i>Bildung</i> and Ethical Subjectivity		33
4.3 Habit, Second Nature, and Practical Education		42
5 THE PROBLEM OF ABSTRACT LABOR AND THE SOLUTION OF MACHINE AUTOMATION		51
5.1 The Problem of Abstract Labor: The <i>Abstumpfung</i> of the Laborer		51
5.2 Hegel’s Solution to the Problem of Abstract Labor: Machine Automation		63
REFERENCES		68

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- PR Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge University Press, 2011).
- EM Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, trans. M. J. Inwood, Arnold V. Miller, and William Wallace (Oxford University Press, 2010).
- VPR Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über Rechtsphilosophie*, ed. K.-H. Ilting.

Citations of the *Philosophy of Right* and the *Encyclopaedia* are given by section number (§), followed by an 'R' or 'A' to denote a Remark (*Anmerkung*) or Addition (*Zusatz*). When no paragraph number is available (e.g., Hegel's prefaces and editor notes), the translation page number is given. Citations of the *Vorlesungen über Rechtsphilosophie* are given by volume and page number.

1 INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, I seek to critically examine the answers that we find in G. W. F. Hegel's (1770–1831) mature political writings—the *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (*Elements of Philosophy of Right*), first published in 1820,¹ and the *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse* (*Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline*), first published in 1817 with second and third editions appearing in 1827 and 1830, respectively—to a broad set of questions regarding the role of labor in modern societies: why must we, as citizens of a modern state, secure ourselves a line of work in order to live a properly ethical life? What kind of subject is enculturated, formed, and educated by and for this required labor? And what kinds of labor processes and labor-related institutions count as successfully establishing ethical subject-formation? While Hegel is usually taken to hold a commonplace or even conservative view of labor and its institutional arrangement, affirming, critics say, the strict Protestant work ethic found in Kant and analyzed by Weber, my contention is that this interpretation of Hegel is fundamentally challenged by a close reading of his critique of abstract labor and his endorsement of machine automation as the immanent solution to the rising tide of the unskilled and repetitive labor nascent within his industrializing nineteenth-century European milieu.

While Hegel's critique of abstract labor illuminates many of the compelling aspects of his theory of labor, such as its disruption of any straightforward distinction between the political and the economic aspects of modern society, its careful interweaving of the interest of the individual with those of a more universal bent, and its insistence on the irreducibility of substantial norms in any ethical evaluation of the labor process (and is thus a worthy object of inquiry for Hegel

¹ While the published edition was dated 1821 (PR xlvii), the *Philosophy of Right* was in fact published in 1820 (PR xxxv). Cf. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox and Stephen Houlgate (Oxford University Press, 2008), x.

scholarship in its own right), the set of immediate political concerns it addresses is also very much our own. Today, the ethical status of labor is in crisis. The most industrialized economies are now facing a new wave of automation in spheres usually understood to be immune to it, such as the service, retail, and transportation industries. This has led many political theorists to seek out alternative ways of distributing not just the fruits of productive labor conceived as the result of social cooperation but also labor itself, generating a revitalized interest in policy proposals such as universal basic income,² the reduction of the working week, mandated automation,³ publically guaranteed jobs,⁴ state-funded job training,⁵ and so on—all of which directly challenge the primacy and independence of labor in the formation of ethical subjectivity. Universal basic income and other calls for further automation even question the very necessity of labor for ethical subject-formation, rejecting the very desirability of the work ethic which permeates much of the history Western social and political thought.

This thesis addresses these contemporary concerns by asking whether there are any Hegelian resources for conceptualizing these kinds of political demands in the name of actualizing social freedom at an institutional level. While a full response to this broad question requires an analysis of these demands on their own terms and is thus outside the scope of this

² For a recent overview of the varieties of universal basic income, arguments in its favor, and responses to several standard criticisms, see Philippe van Parijs and Yannick Vanderborght, *Basic Income: A Radical Proposal for a Free Society and a Sane Economy* (Harvard University Press, 2017).

³ For a recent overview of proposals for a reduction in the working week and increased automation (in addition to universal basic income) from a leftist perspective, see Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work* (Verso, 2015).

⁴ E.g., Bernie Sanders' proposal for state-guaranteed employment for workers unable to find a job. Jeff Stein, "Bernie Sanders to Announce Plan to Guarantee Every American a Job," *The Washington Post*, April 23, 2018. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2018/04/23/bernie-sanders-to-unveil-plan-to-guarantee-every-american-a-job>.

⁵ E.g., Barack Obama's push for state-sponsored job skills training through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. Gregory Korte, "Obama Signs Bill to Overhaul Job Training Programs," *USA Today*, July 22, 2014. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2014/07/22/obama-job-training-bill/12987339>.

historically oriented thesis, I argue that Hegel’s encounter with machine automation permits us to respond with a provisional *yes*, primarily because of his insight that we cannot remain blind to the inner-workings of particular jobs and labor processes, i.e., their content and quality, in evaluating their normative desirability at a political-institutional level.⁶ The *quality* of one’s labor is ethically significant because it fundamentally shapes the *Bildung* or ethical subjectivity of its undertaker, and does so not just at the idealist heights of one’s self-conception but even at the material base of one’s habituated and embodied “being-together-with-one’s-own-self” (EM §410A). This moment of Hegel’s general critique of moral and economic formalism invites us, alongside Marx, into the hidden abode of production so that we may question the desirability of institutions which encourage and support the existence of, say, numerous meta-search engines for wealthy tourists, the proliferation of messaging and networking platforms which profit primarily off of their users’ unpaid labor, or the any number of “bullshit jobs”⁷ which occupy the time and concern of large swaths of the working population of the increasingly “deindustrialized” economies of Western countries.⁸ In this way, Hegel’s two-sided ethical treatment of labor which identifies *both* labor’s contributions to subjective *Bildung* and its radical inability to prevent subjective deformation—an acknowledgement, in other words, of both the market’s irreducible importance as well as its fundamental limits—has particular contemporary relevance.

⁶ Hegel calls the state’s institutional arrangement its political constitution, which he understands as also including the political attitude of the its citizens (PR §§260–270).

⁷ David Graeber, “On the Phenomenon of Bullshit Jobs: A Work Rant,” *Strike*, August 2013, <https://strikemag.org/bullshit-jobs>. See also David Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory* (Simon & Schuster, 2018).

⁸ Wolfgang Streeck, “How will Capitalism End?,” *New Left Review* 87 (2014): 35f.

Before turning to Hegel's text, however, I would like to position my interpretive project more explicitly among contemporary Anglophone scholarship on Hegel's political philosophy and social theory. The most influential study of labor in the interpretation of Hegel's thought in the twentieth century has been Alexandre Kojève's (1902–1968) lectures on the *Phenomenology of Spirit* delivered at the Sorbonne between 1934 and 1939.⁹ Influenced by both the young Marx's recently published notebooks—the so-called *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*—as well as Heideggerian existentialism, Kojève's lectures extend the role of labor and recognition developed in the *Phenomenology's* master-slave dialectic to characterize the inner core of Hegel's conception of history and, ultimately, the whole of his social and political thought. “All of History—that is, the whole ‘movement’ of human existence in the natural World,” Kojève writes, “is nothing but the progressive negation of Slavery by the Slave, the series of his successive ‘conversions’ to Freedom [through Work].”¹⁰

My interpretation of the role of labor in Hegel's politics, however, fundamentally differs from that of Kojève's and his followers', as my focus is on Hegel's mature political thought as he develops it in the *Philosophy of Right* and, to a lesser degree, the sections on objective spirit in the *Encyclopaedia*. Kojève, in contrast, takes an exclusive interest in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which, alongside other Marxists readers of Hegel of the day such as Georg Lukács (1885–

⁹ Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Raymond Queneau (Cornell University Press, 1980).

¹⁰ Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 225. Kojève discusses the importance of labor in the master-slave dialectic throughout the famous first chapter (3–30). See also 144f: “It is Work, and only Work, that transforms the World in an *essential* manner, by creating truly *new* realities.” For critical discussions of Kojève's reading as it pertains to the *Philosophy of Right*, see Anders Bartonek, “Labour Against Capitalism? Hegel's Concept of Labour in Between Civil Society and the State,” *Culture Unbound* 6, no. 1 (2014): 120 and Giorgio Cesarale, “Hegel's Notion of Abstract Labor in the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*,” in *Hegel and Capitalism*, ed. Andrew Buchwalter (State University of New York Press, 2015), 98n14.

1971), he argues contains Hegel's most rigorously philosophical conception of the state, society, and political life.¹¹ As a consequence of my exclusive focus on Hegel's mature writing, I will not directly address Kojève's interpretation of Hegel's concept of labor (through which he ascribes world-historical significance to the slave's labor) or his critics.¹² While a treatment of the consistency of Hegel's social and political thought throughout his lifetime is beyond the scope of my thesis, I hope to evince that Hegel provides compelling arguments for his concept of labor and its ethical implications within his mature political writings.

Today, many of the most influential Anglophone interpretations of Hegel's mature social theory have moved away from ascribing a central role to labor in either his theory of subject-formation or the various problems which arise in his theory of civil society. Thus, for many contemporary influential interpreters of Hegel's social theory such as Frederick Neuhouser, the ethical significance of the processes of civil society—both their deficiencies and achievements—are evaluated in terms of which the labor process is largely absent.¹³ As a result, interpreters like Neuhouser are subsequently unable to satisfactorily make sense of Hegel's notion of abstract labor, which fundamentally characterizes the deplorable conditions of a repetitive, unfulfilling, and uncultivating factory labor process, or how Hegel could endorse the automation of *some*

¹¹ Georg Lukács, *The Young Hegel: Studies in the Relations Between Dialectics and Economics* (MIT Press, 1977), 449–464 and passim.

¹² For just a couple of these criticisms see (most recently) Paul Redding, “The Role of Work within the Processes of Recognition in Hegel's Idealism,” in *New Philosophies of Labour: Work and the Social Bond*, ed. Nicholas Smith and Jean-Philippe Deranty (Brill, 2012), 41ff and 59f; H. S. Harris, *Hegel's Ladder* (Hackett, 1997), 379n33; Armstrong George Kelly, “Notes on Hegel's ‘Lordship and Bondage,’” in *The Phenomenology of Spirit Reader: Critical and Interpretive Essays*, ed. Jon Stewart (State University of New York Press, 1998), 172–91; Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Hegel's Dialectic of Self-Consciousness,” in *Hegel's Dialectic: Five Hermeneutical Studies*, trans. P. Christopher Smith (Yale University Press, 1976).

¹³ Frederick Neuhouser, *Foundations of Hegel's Social Theory: Actualizing Freedom* (Harvard University Press, 2003). While undiscussed here, both Charles Taylor and Allen Wood also neglect labor in their interpretation of Hegel's social theory (Charles Taylor, *Hegel* [Cambridge University Press, 1977]; Allen Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought* [Cambridge University Press, 1990]).

jobs, but not others. To make these claims intelligible, I argue, we must take Hegel as articulating substantial constraints on what kinds of market-determined activity counts as properly subject-forming. Of those contemporary Anglophone interpreters that do investigate Hegel's mature concept of labor on its own terms, most are concerned with the issues of poverty and the rabble (*Pöbel*) rather than the labor process itself.¹⁴ While the problem of poverty in Hegel's theory of civil society is certainly salient in the analysis of abstract labor and machine automation, any investigation which fails to extend its analysis of poverty and the rabble to modern labor processes also fails to acknowledge the essential connection between labor and ethical life and the importance of Hegel's remarks on mechanistic labor and machine automation. By considering Hegel's critique of abstract labor primarily from the perspective of the labor process itself, my interpretation of this concept challenges those similar to Neuhaus's, which understand abstract labor instead as describing the novel kind of *social relations* produced by civil society's requirements of universal exchange and formal equality.

In the following section, I address the context and general argument of the *Philosophy of Right* and explain the concept of the free will which stands at its base (Section II). In the third section, I give an account of Hegel's concept of labor as it develops out of the sociality of needs and explain in broad outline why Hegel thinks labor plays a central ethical function in modern society (Section III). Next, I address Hegel's complicated notion of abstract labor and its most common misinterpretations (Section IV). In this section, I also show more specifically how labor

¹⁴ The most notable scholar in this camp is Shlomo Avineri, who tackles many of the issues concerning civil society addressed in this thesis from the perspective of poverty rather than the nature of the labor process itself (Shlomo Avineri, *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State* [Cambridge University Press, 1972]). More recently, Frank Ruda has analyzed the rabble as the irreducible hole within civil society that, as the sole example of non-sublatable, non-dialectical difference in Hegel's system, retroactively both challenges and makes possible the state (Frank Ruda, *Hegel's Rabble: An Investigation into Hegel's Philosophy of Right* [Continuum, 2011]).

is, for Hegel, necessary for the formation of *Bildung* and that Hegel's concept of *Bildung* is importantly linked to the ideas of habit and ethical subjectivity or subject-formation. In the fifth section, I address why abstract labor deadens its undertakers and show that Hegel purposes machine automation as their remedy, which I argue ought to be read as consistent with his scientific approach to the state and labor described in sections II, III, and IV (Section V).

2 THE CONTEXT AND SCIENCE OF THE *PHILOSOPHY OF RIGHT*

The stated goal of the *Philosophy of Right* is to “comprehend and portray the state as inherently rational entity” which entails “showing how the state, as the ethical universe, should be recognized” (PR 21). This task is fulfilled by an ever-deepening account of freedom as it develops through the stages of right (PR §30), which ultimately culminates in the state, “the spirit which is present in the world” (PR §270R).¹⁵ The state is worthy of rational recognition precisely because it actualizes “substantial freedom,” the fullest, most self-aware expression of human freedom (PR §257). The modern state’s “strength” comes from its assurance of the individual’s “complete freedom of particularity” (PR §260A) though its integration of the two other institutions of modern ethical life: the family and civil society (PR §§260–261). For Hegel, “civil society”—literally *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* or bourgeois society—signifies the “system of atomism” (EM §523) in which the natural immediacy fostered by the family is superseded by the private and productive “universal egoism”¹⁶ of particularized individuals (PR §182A; PR §289R¹⁷).

Within Hegel’s philosophical system outlined in the *Encyclopaedia*, the *Philosophy of Right* expands on the *Encyclopaedia* sections found under the heading “objective spirit,” which itself is located in the last position of the architectonic sequence: logic, nature, spirit. The full realization of objective spirit is achieved in what Hegel calls ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*), which is itself divided

¹⁵ The state, for Hegel, is thus the central locus of ethical life and always takes on an ethical significance beyond that of a prudent political organization; the state describes the total organization of a world: “the state is the divine will as present spirit, *unfolding* as the actual shape and *organization of a world*” (PR §270R).

¹⁶ Avineri, *Hegel’s Theory of the Modern State*, 134.

¹⁷ “Civil society is the field of conflict in which the private interest of each individual comes up against that of everyone else” (PR §289R). Marx rightly suggests reading this passage as Hegel’s “definition of civil society as the *bellum omnium contra omnes*” (Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel’s ‘Philosophy of Right’*, ed. Joseph J O’Malley, trans. Annette Jolin [Cambridge University Press, 1972], 42).

into three parts: the family (PR §§158–181), civil society (PR §§182–256), and the state (PR §§257–360).¹⁸ The institution of the modern family in marriage, the sharing of familial resources, and the rearing of children constitutes the immediate and natural existence of ethical life (PR §157; PR §160). This realm of ethicality is primarily engaged through individuals’ love and feeling (PR §158), and, in general, casts the “sensuous moment which pertains to natural life... in its ethical context” (PR §164). Hegel’s sections on the family thus attempt to recuperate the spontaneous kinship relations found in any human society into a modern theory of ethical life, giving these at first merely natural kinship relationships an ethical role and value.

We will develop the two other spheres of ethical life more fully throughout our investigation; however, two points of clarification about the relationship between civil society and the state are now in order. First, Hegel’s tripartite division of ethical life does not give equal weight and interconnectedness to each division.¹⁹ Rather, civil society is closer to the state than to the family. In the both the *Philosophy of Right* and the *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel calls civil society the “external state” (PR §183; EM §523) and, in the former, acknowledges that civil society is often confused with the state (PR §258R), a misrecognition unlikely to be made between the family and civil society despite Hegel’s attempt to characterize civil society as a “*universal family*” apropos the corporations (PR §239). Second, we must resist the temptation to map the spheres of civil society and the state to the spheres of economics and politics as we ordinarily understand these terms. While this mapping does capture some sense of Hegel’s distinction between civil society and the

¹⁸ Ethical life is the full realization of spirit and freedom because it actualizes *both* subjective and objective well-being and thus provides genuine reconciliation: “the unity of the subjective with the objective good which has being in and for itself is *ethical life*, and the reconciliation which takes place in it is in accord with the concept” (PR §141A).

¹⁹ In typical Hegelian fashion, this gradation of the divisions’ depth and importance is reflected in the amount of content required for their development. Measured quantitatively: 23 sections (about 20 pages or 11%) for the family, 74 sections (54 pages or 37%) for civil society, and 103 sections or (105 pages or 52%) for the state.

state, his insistence that the corporations, the police, and the juridical system all fall within the realm of civil society, if taken seriously and not as an external forcing of this material into a ridged and dogmatic schematic, indicates that Hegel views civil society as encompassing aspects of social life that we would ordinarily consider to be political (hence his description of civil society as the external state).²⁰ Moreover, Hegel was aware of the ambiguities in the English usage of the term civil society, which found divergent and often contradictory meanings in the works of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Adam Smith, and Adam Ferguson, and took this ambiguity to indicate the true dialectical nature of the political-economic relationship.²¹ Thus, we ought to understand Hegel's state as referring in the first instance not to the political aspects of society in opposition to the economic ones, but rather to the spiritual-organic unity and logical ground of the sociopolitical realm itself.²²

While the state may be something like the last word on social freedom, the other stages of right are not to be understood as wrong paths taken along the way. Rather, each prior stage of right develops a particular aspect of freedom missing from the others. Each “is a distinct variety of right, because each of them gives determinate shape and existence to *freedom*” (PR §30R). The upshot of Hegel's progressive conception of right is that each stage of right must be understood as uniquely contributing to the actualization of freedom—including, of course, civil

²⁰ Cf. Avineri, *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State*, 4f.

²¹ For Hegel's knowledge of the conceptual confusion surrounding the term civil society see Gareth Stedman Jones, “Hegel and the Economics of Civil Society,” *Civil Society: History and Possibilities*, 2001, 105–30 and Avineri, *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State*, 141ff. According to Avineri, Hegel was likely “reading Adam Ferguson's *Essay on the History of Civil Society*” during his time in Berlin (Avineri, *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State*, 141n28).

²² Despite appearing last in the mode of presentation, Hegel understands ethical life, and, in turn, the state, as the logical foundation of each preceding moment. Thus Hegel writes that “the sphere of right and that of morality cannot exist independently; they must have the ethical as their support and foundation” (PR §141A). Frank Ruda has helpfully theorized this process of grounding as Hegel's logic of retroaction, cf. Frank Ruda, *Hegel's Rabble*, 105f and Frank Ruda, “Hegel's First Words,” in *The Dash—The Other Side of Absolute Knowing* (MIT Press, 2018), 87–105.

society. Understood as rational, the social practices of civil society must not exist merely as necessary evils to be contained and remediated by the state, but must instead somehow positively contribute to human freedom. Therefore, Hegel must explain how any practice identified as a necessary element of civil society (such as labor) contributes to the actualization of freedom, or, at the very least, he must make intelligible the sacrifices that such an element demands as a part of an organic whole. In short, Hegel is faced with the task of reconciliation: he must demonstrate how each aspect of civil society substantiates and preserves our “subjective freedom” within the modern state (PR 22).

This process of actualizing social freedom begins with the concept of the free will (PR §4). Each stage of right is, taken formally, the embodiment of a new kind of will (PR §§5–7; EM §487), and each obtains its “external material” from both the natural realm, including within it human biology, and the sociosymbolic realm of human social relations (EM §483). The free will which emerges from this process of actualization both obtains *objectivity*—my freedom is no longer my arbitrary caprice but is instead the result of my conscious interaction with nature and others—and is raised to the world of *spirit*, a process which Hegel characterizes as *translation*: “the activity of the will consists in sublating the contradiction between subjectivity and objectivity and in translating its end from their subjective determination into an objective one, while at the same time remaining *with itself* in this objectivity” (PR §28, cf. PR §§8–9). This means that the “absolute drive” of the free will is to realize itself within objective social existence, which requires that it sublimate the realm of “*negative freedom*” or “the freedom of the

understanding” and enter realm of substantial freedom mediated through rational thought. This unity of the free will and its existence Hegel calls the idea of right (PR §29).²³

The *Philosophy of Right* is Hegel’s sustained investigation of this idea of right as the unity of concept of right and its realization (PR §30). The investigation is a *science* because it is an immanent development of this idea such that no external logical or empirical content need be imported to articulate its rational organization; it employs a method in which “its progress does not depend on the assertion that various circumstances *are present* or on the subsequent *application* of the universal to such material of extraneous origin” (PR §31).²⁴ Hegel’s scientific method thus places his political thought between the two poles of positivistic empiricism and rational formalism.²⁵ Contra empiricism, the presence of contingent circumstances (this or that kind of state, political constitution, election result, etc.) cannot be the ultimate arbitrator of what counts as the actualization of right. Thus, unlike the contemporary understanding of science as the realm of thought concerned precisely with the empirical investigation of natural and social states of affairs, for Hegel the significance of science is garnered only when thought severs its unequivocal dependency on contingent circumstances, which does not, of course, amount to a denial of contingency *tout court*. Contra formalism, however, the philosophical project of the *Philosophy of Right* cannot be understood as an *ex ante* application of logic for the construction

²³ For a full account of what Hegel takes to be the insufficiency (yet necessary presupposition) of the concept of the free will for the development of a complete account of objective spirit, see Allen Wood, *Hegel’s Ethical Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 58–73 and David James, “Practical Necessity and the ‘Logic’ of Civil Society,” in *Hegel’s Elements of the Philosophy of Right: A Critical Guide*, ed. David James (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 179–184.

²⁴ Cf. Hegel’s discussion of science’s “absolute method” in the 1812 and 1831 prefaces to the *Science of Logic*, esp. pp. 9–12 and his similar methodological reflections in the final section on absolute idea, pp. 736–753 (Georg Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. George di Giovanni [Cambridge University Press, 2010]).

²⁵ For an account of why this opposition of empiricism and formalism is, in the context of Hegel’s absolute spirit, a false dichotomy, see Rebecca Comay and Frank Ruda, *The Dash*, 11–28.

of the necessary and sufficient conditions of a just or ethical society *à la* Plato, a task which amounts to nothing more than the thoughtless subsumption of a given content under an abstract universal.²⁶ Rather, as Hegel famously writes in the introduction to the *Science of Logic*, the task of philosophy-as-science is “simply to take up, *what is there before us*”²⁷ or, equivalently, “to comprehend what *is*” (PR 21). For a scientific analysis of society Hegel need only take up what is before him because “it can only be *the nature of the content* which is responsible for *movement* in scientific knowledge, for it is the content’s *own reflection* that first posits and *generates what that content is*.”²⁸ The social world, in other words, generates its own rational content or undertakes its own autoanalysis, and any divergence from this methodological principle can only introduce heteronomy and externality into its philosophical deduction. Each aspect of true sociality returns to its rational kernel as its own result: the “series of concepts” (the categories of the *Philosophy of Right*) and the “series of *shapes*” (the empirical content of the ethical state) are ultimately “one and the same thing (PR §32).

As an implication of its status as a science, Hegel’s social theory is deeply historicist as well as historical such that the theory itself as well as our comprehension of it cannot be separated from the concrete conditions of its actuality.²⁹ Consistent with his thoroughgoing critique of empty oughts—whatever philosophy is, it certainly does not involve “*issuing instructions* on how the world ought to be” (PR 23)—Hegel’s account of labor and civil society is not intended to be a series of commandments from on high; rather, it takes the rationality and actuality of the

²⁶ Hegel condemns Plato’s *Republic* as an “*empty ideal*” (PR 20f) and a suppression of the principle of subjectivity (PR §262A).

²⁷ Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, 47/21.55.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 9f/21.7f.

²⁹ For Hegel’s inversion of Kant’s abstract and necessary conditions of possibility, see Rocío Zambrana, *Hegel’s Theory of Intelligibility* (The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 74.

present as its point of departure (PR 20).³⁰ Thus, in light of Hegel's dialectical method, the *Philosophy of Right* must be read as simultaneously directing its gaze solely upon sociopolitical reality, never beyond or above it, while also discerning within this reality a logic or rationality of which this reality would be its symptom, appearance, or expression—and all of this without reducing the real to a mere determination of the universal *logos* alone (as this would eliminate the principle of subjectivity so central to Hegel's theory of modernity [PR §316A; PR §317A]). Thus, Hegel's own historical milieu, and especially the economic and political realities of *his* early nineteenth-century Germany, are essential constituents of (yet nonidentical and nonisomorphic with) his political thought. And while a proper addressing of these historical conditions would take us beyond the scope of this thesis, it is important to bear in mind that machine automation was more or less non-existent in Germany during the period in which Hegel wrote the *Philosophy of Right*. Thus, Hegel likely arrived at the idea from both a logical following out of the tendencies of already-existing industrial production and from second-hand accounts of English political economists.³¹ The significance of these methodological and historical observations will be seen when we consider the success of Hegel's solutions to the problems of civil society.

³⁰ It is for this reason why the label 'social theory' is more apt than 'political philosophy' for describing Hegel's project. If political philosophy today is concerned primarily with what is known as ideal theory or, as Isaiah Berlin writes of his Oxford mentor Douglas Cole's view, that today we accept that "political theory is a branch of moral philosophy, which starts from the discovery, or application, of moral notions in the sphere of political relations," then the *Philosophy of Right* is in many ways *un-*, or even *anti-*, philosophical (Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," in *Liberty: Incorporating Four Essays on Liberty*, ed. Henry Hardy [Oxford University Press, 2002], 168).

³¹ See Georg Lukács, *The Young Hegel*, 367: "[Hegel's political philosophy's] essential features reflect less the contemporary state of Germany than the social and economic problems that arose on a European scale in the wake of the French revolution and the Industrial Revolution in England."

3 HEGEL'S CONCEPTS OF LABOR AND ABSTRACTION IN THE *PHILOSOPHY OF RIGHT*

The concept of “labor” or “work” (*Arbeit*)³² plays various roles throughout Hegel’s philosophy. We can sort these roles into approximately three categories: the activity or general form of labor (developed primarily in the *Phenomenology*’s master-slave dialectic), the objectivity and sociality of labor in modern economic life (developed primarily in the *Philosophy of Right*), and the conceptuality of labor or labor in thought—the labor of the negative, the labor of the concept, the labor of spirit, and so on (developed primarily in the various introductory material of the *Phenomenology*, the *Logic*, and the *Encyclopedia*).³³ While there is some sense of unity between these three meanings of labor in Hegel’s writings, in accordance with my focus on Hegel’s mature social theory I limit my analysis to Hegel’s treatment of the second, more directly economic type of labor in the *Philosophy of Right* and *Encyclopedia*.

Hegel’s account of civil society is divided into three parts: “The System of Needs” (PR §§189–208), “The Administration of Justice” (PR §§209–229), and “The Police and the Corporation” (PR §§230–256). His account of economic labor is primarily laid out in the first of these three divisions, in three paragraphs grouped under the subheading “The Nature of Work” (PR §§196–198). Broadly speaking, in these three paragraphs Hegel gives labor a central role

³² Throughout this thesis, I use the English word “labor” to refer to the German noun “*die Arbeit*.” Nisbet’s translation of the *Philosophy of Right* uses both “work” and “labour” to translate *Arbeit*. Quotations using “work” or “labour” always refer to *Arbeit*.

³³ We could also add a fourth kind of labor found in Hegel’s philosophy of religion concerned with the Protestant question of justification by works. However, in these contexts, Hegel, following Martin Luther, often uses the noun *Werke* instead of *Arbeiten* (e.g., “*des Gesetzes Werke*” in Luther’s translation of Romans). For a brief account of Luther’s influence on Hegel regarding the ethical necessity of laboring in civil society see Frank Ruda, *Hegel’s Rabble*, pp. 6–9. For a longer treatment that also touches more generally on Hegel’s philosophy of spirit, see Joachim Ritter “Hegel and the Reformation,” in *Hegel and the French Revolution: Essays on the Philosophy of Right*, trans. Richard Dien Winfield (MIT Press, 1984).

within civil society, characterizing it as “process of formation” which gives “means their value” and the “mediation” of these means by needs (PR §196). Labor is, in other words, the medium through which need and satisfaction become socially intertwined, as is evinced in Hegel’s definition of the system of needs as “the mediation of *need* and the satisfaction of the *individual* through his work and through the work and satisfaction of the needs of *all the others*” (PR §188). Moreover, Hegel’s ethical conception of labor relies on its formation not only of the “material which is immediately provided by nature” but also of the subjectivity and needs of the worker. It is this characterization of labor as formative of *both* the product of labor and the laborer herself that constitutes labor’s fundamental determination for Hegel; and it is both product and worker, subject and object, individual subjectivity and external nature that give and receive from through labor.³⁴ The achievement of rational human subjectivity through labor is a dialectical working-through of *both sides* of this relation, a “process of self-production both by going out of himself and by educating himself inwardly” (PR §10A). This reciprocal formation of subject and object permeates each of labor’s three guises outline above, but is particularly central in Hegel’s theory of modern civil society and its influence on the process of ethical subject-formation.

In addition to reciprocally mediating subjectivity and sociality through the generation and satisfaction of need, modern labor processes also impute on both of these extremes a certain form of universality that Hegel calls *abstract*. This tendency towards abstraction manifests repeatedly in Hegel’s theorization of social need, reoccurring in PR §§190–192 and EM §525. In these sections, Hegel argues that abstraction infects not only the “quality of both needs and means” but also “the mutual relations between individuals” (PR §192) and, of course, the labor process itself

³⁴ Hegel’s distinction between labor’s two kinds of formation—educational versus productive—is described in Anders Bartonek, “Labour Against Capitalism?,” 115 and Michael Hardt, “The Withering of Civil Society,” *Social Text*, no. 45 (1995), 28f.

(PR §198). As the division of labor and economic interdependence become ubiquitous within civil society, social needs, labor processes, and subjective attitudes towards others all become colored by abstraction, leading individuals to develop a “habit of abstraction in enjoyment, information, knowledge, and behavior” (EM §525).

However, despite the proliferation of abstraction in his account of the various features of modern needs-satisfaction, pinning down the precise meaning of abstraction in this context is difficult. Unlike other of Hegel’s central metaphysical categories, abstraction and its contrast term, concretization or the concrete, never receive a direct treatment in either of the two logics. Yet, the words abstract and concrete proliferate throughout all of Hegel’s writings. This situation has led one interpreter to conclude that the intelligibility of Hegel’s concept of abstraction is even more dependent upon grasping the totality of the logic than the other standard-issue categories that fill its table of contents.³⁵ Nonetheless, while abstraction is usually charged with a negative valiance for Hegel (and a positive one for concretization)—take the narrowness of abstract right,³⁶ the one-sidedness of the abstract determinations of the understanding (PR §1R; PR §10R), or the notorious abstract universal, for just a couple of examples—Hegel clearly

³⁵ “Hegel’s doctrine of abstraction is not finally intelligible apart from the details of his most distinctive conception, the Concept, the explication of which is, in a sense, the whole burden of the Logic” (Philip Grier, “Abstract and Concrete in Hegel’s Logic,” in *Essays on Hegel’s Logic*, ed. George di Giovanni (State University of New York Press, 1990), 59–76). Grier intends this point to be non-trivial, as he thinks many of the other Hegelian categories *can* be understood, at least in their most important significations, outside of the totality of the logic. Cf. also Errol Harris’ response in which he argues that abstract/concrete are *not* categories and can thus be appropriately applied in equal degree to every stage of the dialectic or category of the logic (Errol Harris, “A Reply to Philip Grier,” in *Essays on Hegel’s Logic*, 77–84).

³⁶ Thus, Frank Ruda correctly writes that the “abstractness” in abstract right “refers to the fact that personality as fundament of right is gained by abstracting from all determinations which define an individual in a state” (Frank Ruda, *Hegel’s Rabble*, 199n9).

understands processes of abstraction to be a constitutive part of social freedom.³⁷ The term's fundamental ambiguity, both in its metaphysical and its ethical-political senses, has not failed in leading astray many interpreters of Hegel's concept of abstract labor, two of which we will address later. Before that, however, I will outline briefly what I take to be the most salient aspects of abstraction within the context of the *Philosophy of Right*, with an emphasis on its significance for Hegel's understanding of the modern labor process.

In his account of concept of the will in the introduction of the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel characterizes abstraction as the will's ability to strip away any specific content or determinacy from one's self-conception or, in other words, the will's capacity to eliminate any external relations it has to the world, other wills, objects, and so on—an ability which constitutes the will's moment of pure indeterminacy.³⁸ The deeper meaning of this seemingly arbitrary capacity of abstraction held by self-consciousness is, for Hegel, that such a stripping-away necessitates a decontextualization from the constitutive elements of self-consciousness; that is, to conceive of a thing abstractly or to conceive of a thing in isolation from its relations to others is to conceive of the thing as not the thing that it really is. It is for this reason, as Hegel repeatedly points out, that complete abstraction is, strictly speaking, impossible, as any abstraction from all determinations is always itself an act of determining, namely a determining *as* abstract. As a result, the will's capacity for abstraction “is not true infinity or the *concrete* universality of the concept, but only something *determinate* and one-sided” since “abstract[ing] from all determinacy, it is itself not

³⁷ Hegel sees this tendency towards abstraction as an underlying feature of modern society and modern subjectivity more generally. See for example the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 9.

³⁸ In his 1824–25 lectures on the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel gestures more explicitly towards the ethical implications of the will's capacity for abstraction: “The human being can abstract from every content, make himself free of it, whatever is in my representation I can let go, I can make myself entirely empty... the human being has the self-consciousness of being able to take up any content, or of letting it go, he can let go of all bonds of friendship, love, whatever they may be (VPR IV 111f)”

without determinacy; and the fact that it is abstract and one-sided constitutes its determinacy, deficiency, and finitude” (PR §6A). In other words, in abstracting from any given content or from all determinacy, the will fails to achieve what it sets out to do—viz., realize itself as a genuine universal—and so its striving for “*pure indeterminacy*” (PR §5) turns out to be just another kind of determinacy.

Shifting our focus back to abstraction in the context of civil society, it is for this reason that we cannot say that modern civil society’s needs, labor processes, and social relations—all characterized by abstraction—are *indeterminate* and ethically neutral. While such needs, labor, and social relations are *formally* free (in the sense that their determining is the result of legally unrestricted subjective arbitrariness³⁹), they are nonetheless determined by this formal freedom *as* the products of subjective caprice (and thus are not necessarily in accordance with the demands of self-conscious ethicality). Hegel argues that this formal freedom is deficient in part because it is the product of conceptual distinction-making and social differentiation undertaken without concern for whether these abstractions actually realize the freedom of all members of society, and, as such, are one-sided activities characteristic of the cognitive faculty of the understanding (EM §525).⁴⁰ In this sense, Hegel’s notion of abstract social need may be mapped onto the standard concept of *utility* central to economic thinking at least since Samuel von Pufendorf (1632–1694), generally defined as “the capacity of a good or service to satisfy a want,

³⁹ In civil society, “the ultimate and essential determinant is subjective opinion and the particular arbitrary will” (PR §206). On this point, see Hans-Christoph Schmidt am Busch, “Why Ethical Life is Fragile: Rights, Markets and States in Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*,” in *Elements of the Philosophy of Right: A Critical Guide*, ed. David James, 142.

⁴⁰ “The intellect draws distinctions among needs and thereby multiplies indefinitely both the needs themselves and the means for these different needs, making the needs and the means ever more abstract.”

of whatever kind.”⁴¹ However, for Hegel, the notion of abstraction extends beyond the confines of descriptive theorizing of decision-making under scarcity and comes to characterize “*formal culture* in general” or the entire sphere of civil society, both the subjectivities of its members and the objective forms of labor, need, and social relations (EM §525). In these spheres, the tendency towards abstraction is a movement towards formal universality, in the sense that each of these spheres begins to orient itself around exchange and need in general rather than concrete need, on the one hand, and their processes of realization become mechanistic and narrowly specialized, on the other. For example, Hegel argues that, under the sway of abstraction, the generation of social needs becomes determined primarily by the principle of profit as opposed to the concrete desires of individuals (PR §191A); relations between individuals become formally identical as persons are treated as universal consumers, not as members of a particular gender, class, race, nationality, etc. (PR §209A); these social relations become mediated by the universal means exchange, money (PR §204); and each labor process becomes oriented around the specialized mass-production of a single commodity against the background of wide-reaching markets of exchange (PR §192).

While the specifically modern innovation of abstraction is a constitutive moment of actualized social freedom, Hegel is quick to ethically problematize what he takes to be the widespread yet unjustifiable elevation of this moment of freedom above all others. As we have seen, Hegel associates the subjective attitude which unduly privileges the will’s capacity for abstraction with the undialectical *Verstand* or faculty of the understanding (as opposed to *Vernunft* or reason). In the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel even connects this attitude with the

⁴¹ R. D. Collison Black, “Utility,” in *The New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics*, eds. Lawrence E. Blume and Steven N. Durlauf (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

subjective disposition of the rabble.⁴² While this first mode of entangling the processes of abstraction with the understanding is to be expected—Hegel correlates these two in nearly all of his writings—the second is more surprising. The rabble, the abjected and indignant poor unintegratable into ethical life, are characterized precisely by their lack of education and rebelliousness towards government and society writ large. That the rabble is simultaneously for Hegel a paradigm of an essential, albeit deficient, moment in the process of cognition and social freedom in general is puzzling. However, we can make some sense of Hegel’s entanglement of the rabble with the understanding’s abstraction by noting that, for Hegel, an over-emphasis on abstraction in theory has implications for the development of ethical subjectivity in practice. In fetishizing the theoretical moment of the “*negative understanding*” (PR §272), the rabble become ethically deficient by developing an unconditional distrust of the state and its bureaucrats. This is because by privileging abstraction in their conception of right, the rabble “take the negative as a starting-point” and thus view “malevolence and distrust of malevolence” as the fundamental motors of political-institutional organization. In characterizing the rabble in this way, Hegel connects abstraction with disparate aspects of his social theory: the constitution of the will (the moment of the will’s negativity), the activity of thought (the faculty of understanding), and a deficiency in one’s ethical disposition (the rabble’s distrust), in addition to the descriptive transformations in labor, need, and social relations produced by the ascendancy of abstraction within the system of needs, thus demonstrating the wide and multifarious roles

⁴² “To take the negative as a starting-point and to make malevolence and distrust of malevolence the primary factor... is, as far as thought it concerned, characteristic of the *negative understanding* and, as far as the disposition is concerned, characteristic of the outlook of the rabble” (PR §272); “it characteristic of the rabble, and of the negative viewpoint in general, to assume ill will, or less than good will, on the part of the government” (PR §301). For the topic of the rabble’s relationship to the understanding and abstraction see Matt S. Whitt, “The problem of Poverty and the Limits of Freedom in Hegel’s Theory of the Ethical State,” *Political Theory* 41, no. 2 (2013), 280.

abstraction plays in his mature social theory.⁴³ As Michael Hardt writes, Hegel's civil society is in the first instance not the organization of labor as such, but the "organization of abstract labor."⁴⁴ It is to this notion that we now turn.

⁴³ For a critical discussion of Hegel's association of the rabble with the negative understanding, see Frank Ruda, *Hegel's Rabble*, 115ff. Ruda argues that Hegel cannot make this association, as the negative understanding's abstraction from all determination is always an arbitrary subjective decision whereas the making of the rabble is a necessary development of civil society, independent of any subjective caprice.

⁴⁴ Michael Hardt, "The Withering of Civil Society," *Social Text* 45 (1995), 29.

4 WHO LABORS ABSTRACTLY? ABSTRACT LABOR, HABIT, AND *BILDUNG* IN THE *PHILOSOPHY OF RIGHT*

Now that we have laid out a few of the many meanings of abstraction at play in Hegel's conceptualization of civil society, we may turn to the central focus of the remainder of my argument: Hegel's concept of abstract labor (*abstrakte Arbeit*). Given my focus, I quote its section in full in both the *Philosophy of Right* and the *Encyclopedia*:

The universal and objective aspect of work consists, however, in that process of *abstraction* which confers a specific character on means and needs and hence also on production, so giving rise to the *division of labour*. Through this division, the work of the individual becomes *simpler*, so that his skill at his abstract work becomes greater, as does the volume of his output. At the same time, this abstraction of skill and means makes the *dependence* and *reciprocity* of human beings in the satisfaction of their other needs complete and entirely necessary. Furthermore, the abstraction of production makes work increasingly *mechanical*, so that the human being is eventually able to step aside and let a *machine* take his place. (PR §198)

Labour too thus becomes more abstract, and leads on the one hand by its uniformity to ease of labour and to increased production, on the other hand to restriction to *one* skill, and thus to a more unconditional dependence on the social system. The skill itself becomes in this way mechanical, and develops to the point where the machine can take the place of human labour. (EM §526)

Summarizing briefly, abstract labor is the structure of labor typical of modern modes of needs-satisfaction; it describes, for Hegel, the “universal and objective” aspect of modern labor processes, characterized in effect by a sophisticated division of labor, wide-scale interdependency, and an increasing mechanization of, and use of machines in, the labor process. By abstract labor, Hegel means something more than just the social division of labor or the particularization and specialization required for success and competitive productivity in the

marketplace, a kind of labor we may henceforth call *divided* labor.⁴⁵ Divided forms of labor are a subset of abstract labor; they engender a highly adaptive labor process in which each element tends towards its full discretization and independence, separating both the raw material and the laborer from the unified final product. Divided labor thus stands in contrast to many other kinds of labor such as the artisan's craftsmanship, the peasant's agricultural labor, and even the state bureaucrat's intellectual labor. However, the notion of divided labor does not capture the subject-forming aspects of abstract labor that Hegel wishes to highlight.

Given Hegel's emphasis on the ethical role of labor as subject-forming over its more overtly economical functions, it is no surprise that it is the deadening effects of abstract labor that most concern him.⁴⁶ This priority of subject-formation in Hegel's problematization of modern labor is evident in his distinction between mere poverty and the dehumanized rabble: "Poverty in itself does not reduce people to a rabble; a rabble is created only by the *disposition* associated with poverty, by inward rebellion against the rich, against society, the government, etc." (PR §244A, emphasis mine).⁴⁷ In the case of the rabble, the heart of the problem lies in the specific kind of *subjectivity* produced by their position within the social structure. It is for this reason that Hegel is required to equally problematize a luxurious rich rabble in addition to an indignant poor one.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ I owe this distinction between merely divided and fully abstract labor to discussions with Sebastian Rand. Neuhouser makes much the same distinction when he gestures towards abstract labor as that "feature unique to civil society" which is "responsible for its having a formative function beyond those that follow merely from the general requirement, implicit in any social division of labor, namely, that labor be socially productive" (Neuhouser, *Foundations of Hegel's Social Theory*, 162).

⁴⁶ This interpretation of Hegel's concerns over abstract labor is aligned with those given by Waszek, "The Division of Labor," 71f, Bartonek, "Labour Against Capitalism?," 115ff, and Cesarale, "Hegel's Notion of Abstract Labor," 93ff.

⁴⁷ The centrality of labor's role in forming subjectivity is likewise evident in Hegel's theory of the estates, discussed below.

⁴⁸ For a discussion of the distinction and necessary intertwining of these two forms of rabble see Frank Ruda, *Hegel's Rabble*, chapters 4–6.

In his expansive study of the Scottish Enlightenment's influence on Hegel's social theory, Norbert Waszek expands on this tension between abstract labor's potential for subjective forming and deforming, on the one hand, and the efficiencies gained through divided labor, on the other, arguing that Hegel views abstract labor as a "two-edged weapon."⁴⁹ This is because, on the one hand, the spread of abstract labor in society brings many benefits to its members, in terms of both their material well-being and their intersubjective freedom. The division of labor, conceived by Hegel as a consequence of abstract labor, simplifies the tasks of labor and thereby increases the skill of each laborer at their limited task, and thus ultimately increases the overall productive output.⁵⁰ Moreover, economic-productive interdependency becomes "complete and entirely necessary" (PR §198), solidifying the grounds of mutual recognition in civil society. Finally, by simplifying labor tasks and demanding continual increases in productivity, abstract labor also furnishes the possibility that deadening living labor may be replaced by machines in the future.

On the other hand, however, abstract labor poses several ethical and political issues for the realization of social freedom. In particular, Hegel identifies three fundamental and wide-reaching social problems associated with the prevalence of abstract labor, all of which reappear throughout Hegel's political writings: (1) "short-term economic disruptions" resulting in unemployment and poverty (2) social inequality, and (3) the deadening (*Abstumpfung*) of the

⁴⁹ Norbert Waszek, "The Division of Labor: From the Scottish Enlightenment to Hegel," *The Owl of Minerva* 15, no. 1 (1983), 72. See also Norbert Waszek, *The Scottish Enlightenment and Hegel's Account of 'Civil Society'* (Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1988), esp. chaps. 4 and 6. Avineri makes much the same point when characterizing "Hegel's ambiguous attitude to civil society," writing that "on one hand, [civil society] is the major achievement of the modern world; on the other, woe to that society of men that allows the forces of civil society to rule unimpeded" (Avineri, *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State*, 240).

⁵⁰ "Through this division, the work of the individual becomes *simpler*, so that his skill at his abstract work becomes greater, as does the volume of his output" (PR §198); abstract labor "leads on the one hand... to ease of labour and to increased production, on the other hand to restriction in *one* skill" (EM §526).

worker's subjectivity as well as that of her community.⁵¹ Importantly, Hegel understands these problems to be structural, systematic, and necessary results of the modern labor process.

Following the English economists whom he read, Hegel knew that such problems ought not to be “seen as a mere slip in the execution of an otherwise flawless scheme, but as a *necessary* result” whereby “the disadvantages are most intensely felt ‘where the division of labour is brought to perfection’.”⁵² Taken together, these issues demonstrate that Hegel was aware of many of the problems immanent to the nascent civil society emerging in the Western Europe at the beginning of the acutely nineteenth century.⁵³ Only the issue of *Abstumpfung*, however, reflects the internal conditions of the changing labor process wrought by abstraction, so we will limit our analysis to it.

4.1 Misunderstandings of Abstract Labor

Hegel's concept of abstract labor leads itself to a host of misunderstandings, not only because of its multitudinous role throughout his writings but equally because of the influence of Karl Marx on interpretations of Hegel's social and political thought. Perhaps the most common line of misinterpretation of Hegel's notion of abstract labor is the Marxist one, which attempts to find one of Marx's concepts in Hegel's. However, Marx's notions of abstract labor, complex

⁵¹ Ibid., 72. According to Waszek, Hegel maintained the primacy of these three problems throughout all of his political writing, from the “Jena manuscripts to his last Berlin lectures.” (Waszek, “The Division of Labor,” 56). Shlomo Avineri also affirms the continuity of Hegel's concern in his political writings for the social ills produced by the expanding scope and centrality of abstract labor in modern life (*Hegel's Theory of the Modern State*, 98f).

⁵² Waszek, “The Division of Labor,” 57, quoting Adam Smith, *The Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith*, Vol. V, 539. As Karl Marx would later put a similar point, “it is inevitable that many people not of a criminal disposition are cut off from the green tree of morality” (Karl Marx, *Debates on the Law on Thefts of Wood*, quoted in Frank Ruda, *Hegel's Rabble*, 81).

⁵³ Avineri correctly reiterates Waszek's conclusion, writing that “Hegel emerges... as a philosopher acutely conscious of the achievements and the limitations of the modern age” and whose social theory contains “one of the most acute insights into the working of modern, industrial society” (*Hegel's Theory of the Modern State*, ix, cf. 94).

labor, and alienated labor—the three most commonly misapplied—are decidedly *not* Hegel’s despite the latter’s influence on their development.

For Marx, abstract labor refers to the labor process conceived from the perspective of its production of exchange-value as opposed to its production of use-value. Thus, Marx writes that abstract labor is “the general character as expenditure of human labor-power in the abstract”⁵⁴ or the “common quality of being human labour in general.”⁵⁵ Abstract labor is, in Marx’s sense, the common element that unifies all the different kinds of particularized concrete labor. Thus, while Marx and Hegel agree that abstract labor is characteristic of the capitalist mode of production insofar as it orients labor around the production of exchange-value, Hegel’s abstract labor differs from Marx’s for two principle reasons. First, Hegel’s concept of abstract labor cannot be separated from the formation of ethical subjectivity, understood as encompassing the needs and social relations of individuals. Abstract labor both constitutes and challenges these aspects of subject-formation through its influence on the laborer’s *Bildung*. Second, Hegel’s concept of abstract labor refers to a particular kind of production process—modern industrial manufacturing and, the trade labor of the petite bourgeoisie, and all else that belongs to the “*estate of trade and industry*”—and *not* simply the quality of being labor in general, modern or otherwise, as in Marx (PR §204).

Related to Marx’s concept of abstract labor is the infamous ‘reduction problem’ found at the beginning of *Capital*: the operation of reducing, for the purpose of analysis, all complex labor to its social average or to the amount of socially necessary simple labor.⁵⁶ This, too, however, is not

⁵⁴ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes, vol. 1 (Penguin Classics, 1992), 308.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 142. See also Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (Penguin Classics, 1993), 296f.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 135.

Hegel's concept of abstract labor. As Hegel's discussions of political economy demonstrate, he certainly agrees with Marx that abstract labor is open to analysis (especially the discovery of universal laws working behind the backs of its undertakers) in a way unprecedented by previous organizations of labor and social need (PR §189R; PR §189A). However, this view of abstract labor fails to recognize that, for Hegel, not all labor in civil society is abstract in the social and ethical sense that he is concerned with; for Hegel, there exists labor which is not abstract labor, not so for Marx. The concrete labor of the peasantry and other agricultural laborers represented by Hegel's "*substantial* or immediate estate," despite holding an important role in civil society and being subject to discoverable economic laws and even to capitalistic industrial practices, *opposes* the abstract labor processes of the second "*formal* estate" that Hegel sees as more essential to modern civil society (PR §201). Thus, in his theory of the estates Hegel carves out a sphere of modern civil society that, while not appearing as this sphere's distinguishing mark, is nonetheless uncolored by abstract labor as far as the ethicality of its way of living is concerned:

In our times, the [agricultural] economy, too, is run in a reflective manner, like a factory, and it accordingly takes on a character like that of the second estate and opposed to its own character of naturalness. Nevertheless, this first estate will always retain the patriarchal way of life and the substantial disposition associated with it. The human being reacts here with immediate feeling as he accepts what he receives; he thanks God for it and lives in faith and confidence that this goodness will continue. What he receives is enough for him; he uses it up, for it will be replenished. This is a simple disposition which is not concerned with the acquisition of wealth; it may also be described as that of the *old nobility*, which consumed whatever it had. In this estate, the main part is played by nature, and human industry is subordinate to it. In the second estate, however, it is the understanding itself which is essential, and the products of nature can be regarded only as raw materials. (PR §203A)

Since through the estates labor becomes correlated with a way of living and a particular subjective disposition (i.e., a certain kind of education and habit)—or rather, that the estates are the rational organization of these subjective phenomena emerging from the different kinds of

labor—the differences in disposition found among members of the three estates ultimately represent the ethical and educational differences among the three corresponding labor processes. Thus, for Hegel, the very existence of the agricultural and universal estates indicates that abstract labor is just one out of many ways of laboring in the *ethical* and *educative* sense, despite Hegel's admittance that at least the former sphere “takes on a character like that of the second estate” and thus begins to incorporate aspects of abstract labor in a *descriptive* sense. It is for this reason why Hegel's concept of abstract labor can neither be the commonality in which all forms of labor participate in (i.e., Marx's concept of abstract labor oriented around the production of surplus-value in the capitalist mode of production) or the analytic prerogative to qualitatively reduce all labor to some quantity of a unified and simple labor process (i.e., Marx's reduction to simple socially necessary labor).

Finally, Hegel's forthright depiction of the negative ethical consequences of abstract labor (its dire working conditions, its inevitable poverty and social inequality, its separation of the laborer from the final product, its deadening of the laborer's subjectivity and physical well-being, and so on) has led some interpreters to read his concept of abstract labor as a prototype of the young Marx's concept of alienated labor.⁵⁷ While this interpretation has the benefit of correctly conceiving of Hegel's concept of abstract labor as referring to a specific kind of labor process and its normative consequences, it fails to recognize that the ethical problems Hegel associates with abstract labor are decidedly *not* those of alienation critique. In a modernity in which “self-consciousness [has become] infinitely reflected into itself,” alienation, understood by Hegel as self-externalization, is *constitutive* of ethical subjectivity as opposed to the source of its deficiency. Quite simply and as our discussion of social need has made clear, for the mature

⁵⁷ Karl Marx, *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (Penguin Classics, 1992), 326–330.

Hegel of the *Philosophy of Right* there simply is no authentic subject from which the laboring subject could be estranged from. The ‘mineness’ of all social need and desire, even that of the most sinister origin (e.g., profitability for the few), excludes the possibility of ever discovering a true desire lying beneath the surface of social appearance as Marx’s alienation critique demands. Moreover, while we have not discussed the meaning of labor as spiritual activity as developed in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, it is worth noting that labor’s significance at that level is precisely that of a spiritual self-externalization and alienation that is constitutive of *Bildung* and subjective freedom. Following Avineri, we can say that while for Marx the split between economic and political aspects of subjectivity produced by modern industrial labor is “the measure of the laborer’s alienation in modern society,” for Hegel this alienation “is the basis of his integration into it.”⁵⁸ Abstract labor for Hegel cannot be a means of Marxian alienation critique, as his view of modern human subjectivity excludes even the possibility of an unalienated subjectivity, a presupposition upon which Marx’s alienation critique depends.⁵⁹

Outside of a narrowly Marxist framework, another common misinterpretation of abstract labor takes it as a synonym for what is today called intellectual labor, immaterial labor, or cultural labor.⁶⁰ It should be clear, however, that this too cannot be Hegel’s concept of abstract

⁵⁸ Avineri, *Hegel’s Theory of the Modern State*, 104n62.

⁵⁹ It is for this reason that alienation critique, Marxist or otherwise, is rightly criticized for presupposing a true and authentic self or subjectivity from which one becomes alienated. For compelling rearticulation of alienation critique that seeks to eliminate this presupposition, see Rahel Jaeggi, *Alienation*, trans. Frederick Neuhouser (Columbia University Press, 2016).

⁶⁰ The notion of *immaterial labor* has been popularized in large part by the work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* [Harvard University Press, 2003]; Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Labor of Dionysus: A Critique of the State-Form* [University of Minnesota Press, 1994]), who have in turn drawn on Maurizio Lazzarato’s work in Italy (Maurizio Lazzarato, “Immaterial Labor,” in *Radical Thought in Italy*, eds. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt [University of Minnesota Press, 1996], 133–147). For a sociological perspective on the same tendency towards cultural labor in deindustrializing nations, see Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Gregory Elliott (Verso, 2005).

labor. For one, the very possibility of machine automation demonstrates that abstract labor cannot be another name for intellectual labor, since the latter is by its very nature the kind of labor that resists automation so far as its genesis is concerned.⁶¹ Second, Hegel explicitly contrasts the labor of the culturally educated and intellectual class, i.e., the universal labor of the third estate, from the abstract labor of the second estate of trade and industry. Finally, while certain kinds of immaterial labor have their place in civil society such as trade and the exchange of commodities in the estate of commerce, Hegel sees abstract labor as being chiefly constituted by mass manufacturing and craftsmanship (PR §204). It could only be anachronistic to equate Hegel's concept of abstract labor with that of immaterial labor which predominates in our contemporary economies.

The final misunderstanding of abstract labor that we will consider is that of Frederick Neuhouser.⁶² Neuhouser argues that we ought to interpret Hegel's concept of abstract labor as primarily referring to the specific *social relations* that laborers have with each other in modern civil society.⁶³ Furthermore, Neuhouser correctly argues that the social relations of production are abstract because they are determined from in principle by the exchange of goods and money in the marketplace; abstract labor is undertaken for the satisfaction of the abstract social needs of others or need in general as opposed to, say, my own immediate purposes or the commodity's use-value. Thus, in summarizing his view on abstract labor, Neuhouser writes that "the point here is not simply that the fruits of one's labor can in fact be exchanged for the products of others but rather that production is carried out with, and determined from the very beginning by,

⁶¹ See PR §68 for Hegel's brief discussion of "intellectual production" in the context of abstract right.

⁶² Frederick Neuhouser, *Foundations of Hegel's Social Theory*, 155–165.

⁶³ Neuhouser writes that abstract labor's "formative function" and most ethically salient feature "resides in a certain way the members of civil society relate to one another, or take each others' wills into account... that the relations individuals have to one another in civil society are *abstract*" (ibid., 161f).

the conscious intention to do so.”⁶⁴ In other words, labor is abstract when it is undertaken primarily for the purposes of exchange (i.e., undertaken for the production of surplus-value instead of use-value).

By understanding abstract labor as describing a particular set of social relations in which members see each other exclusively in terms of their abilities as need-satisfiers instead of understanding it as describing industrial labor processes, Neuhouser naturally finds nothing ethically objectionable about abstract labor. That labor is oriented in the first instance towards the valorization of commodity-objects and the satisfaction of market-mediated needs does not raise any ethical issues, such as the deadening of the laborer, on its own. However, it is precisely its neutrality which proves that the view cannot be Hegel’s. First, while Hegel’s use of the term “abstract” indeed intends to capture the structural influence of exchange on the labor process and consequently on the *Bildung* of the laborers, it cannot be reduced to or even summarized by this meaning. The issues arising from abstract labor of concern to Hegel are not merely the result of wide-scale exchange. Hegel understands abstract labor as instead essentially involving a machine-like work process undertaken in atomistic isolation from any kind of intelligible or rational end. The individualistic ends realized within the marketplace are only “*abstractly*” universal (PR §208) and without “actual universality” (PR §207A) in part because they lack a rational teleology. And, as we have seen, these abstract ends and social needs around which production is oriented primarily serve to reproduce these very conditions of exchange and to benefit the few who are to profit the most. Abstract labor therefore threatens the *Bildung* of its undertaker both insofar as it forces the laborer to take up physically and spiritually damaging processes and insofar as it excludes the possibility of achieving one’s genuinely universal ends,

⁶⁴ Ibid., 163.

two threats to the laborer's *Bildung* to which Neuhausser's view of abstract labor is blind. Second, Neuhausser's interpretation is ultimately inconsistent, or at least in tension, with the problematic nature Hegel ascribes to abstract labor. If Hegel really understood abstract labor as posing no ethical threats, as principally characterizing the structuring role of exchange without the intrusion of any serious ethical concerns, then his insistent concerns over its potential to generate wide-spread social pathologies through worker deadening would be unintelligible. For Hegel, the deadening of the laborer is not a contingent flaw in the application of abstract labor, but inherent within the very logic of abstract labor itself. Thus, just as in the case of poverty, the issues arising from abstract labor cannot be mitigated by restrictions and checks imposed externally by other social institutions, leaving Hegel with a less pleasant view of abstract labor than Neuhausser's interpretation suggests. For these reasons, we ought to reject Neuhausser's neutral and exchange-based view of abstract labor and adopt the labor-procedural account we have been developing here.

4.2 *Bildung* and Ethical Subjectivity

Despite our rejection of Neuhausser's interpretation of abstract labor, we must agree with his insistence on the primacy of its subject-forming aspects in coming to an understanding of Hegel's mature social theory. Hegel calls this subject-formation *Bildung*, and often talks of its "infinite" (PR §187R) and "absolute" (PR §20) value, as well as its "infinite importance" (PR §209R). Hegel's *Bildung*, however, refers both to the education of the individual over the course of her life as well as to the progressive and formative development of society writ large. Put simply, Hegel's *Bildung* has both subjective and objective components, applying to both the

cultivation of subjectivity and the objective institutions responsible for this cultivation.⁶⁵ Developing the German philosophical trends of his time,⁶⁶ Hegel's notion of *Bildung* concerns not so much institutionalized educational apparatuses and practices (although these are contained within it as a part, such as in Hegel's discussions of the education of children [EM §521; PR §§173–175]) as much as the formation of subjectivity in general.⁶⁷ These ordinary educational practices of “child-rearing, upbringing, and school education” are usually addressed by the German word *Erziehung*, not *Bildung*.⁶⁸ One can even read the *Philosophy of Right* as a kind of *Bildungsroman* or coming-of-age story in which the will and its institutional framework are progressively enculturated into universality.⁶⁹ From the perspective of the will, for example, Hegel writes that “the particular *self-consciousness*” achieves substantiality and actuality in the state “when this has been raised to its universality” through processes of education (PR §258). However, the most important role of *Bildung* in the *Philosophy of Right*, I argue, is precisely its role in the development of properly ethical subjectivity: the formative processes of the individual

⁶⁵ Shlomo Avineri, “Labor, Alienation, and Social Classes in Hegel's *Realphilosophie*,” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 1, no. 1 (1971), 111.

⁶⁶ Kristin Gjesdal, “*Bildung*,” in *The Oxford Handbook of German Philosophy in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Michael N. Forster and Kristin Gjesdal (Oxford University Press, 2015), 710f: “With Hegel... *Bildung* is philosophy, that is, it is identified with the dynamic that leads reason to express and understand itself so as to enable its historical and systematic determination, thus realizing, in a grand philosophical synthesis, the Fichtean idea that freedom consists in the ability to live up to one's concept. In this way, Hegel, like Herder, links *Bildung* to an overall historical development, that of the human species.”

⁶⁷ Thus Allen Wood writes that “education is not only a prominent but also a fundamental theme in Hegel's philosophy. But perhaps surprisingly in view of his career, Hegel does not usually deal with this theme primarily in terms of a theory of pedagogical practice or method” (Allen W. Wood, “Hegel on Education,” *Philosophers on Education: New Historical Perspectives*, 1998, 300). See also Wood's discussion of the distinction between *Bildung* and pedagogy (*Pädagogik*) in Hegel's philosophy of education (Ibid., 311ff).

⁶⁸ Gjesdal, “*Bildung*,” 695, cf. 697.

⁶⁹ For an account of the influence of the German *Bildungsroman* (especially Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* and Hölderlin's *Hyperion*) on Hegel's thought and German Idealism more generally, see, Gjesdal “*Bildung*,” 695–8 and Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (MIT Press, 1971), 132–44.

that shape her beliefs, attitudes, habits, and practices (what Hegel calls her “knowledge, volition, and action”) into ones that are ethical and free (PR §187). In short, “education is the art of making human beings ethical” (PR §151A).⁷⁰

To begin our demonstration of this interpretation, we can first turn to an important remark in the introduction to civil society in which Hegel characterizes *Bildung* as the “absolute transition” to ethical subjectivity:

Education [Bildung], in its absolute determination, is therefore liberation and work towards a higher liberation; it is the absolute transition to the infinitely subjective substantiality of ethical life, which is no longer immediate and natural, but spiritual and at the same time raised to the shape of universality. (PR §187R)

In raising individuals out of natural immediacy, *Bildung* is the process by which an individual acquires a kind of universality or an ethical substantiality which is “infinitely subjective.”⁷¹ As we have seen in our discussion of the reflective will, a key part of this infinite subjectivity produced by *Bildung* is the will’s purification of the drives and the “*formal universality*” that this purification confers, about which Hegel explicitly writes that “this cultivation of the universality of thought is the absolute value of *education*” (PR §20).⁷² As the concrete and ethical actualization of the purification and socialization of need, civil society thus

⁷⁰ In this addition attributed to both Hotho and Griesheim, Hegel uses *Pädagogik* instead of *Bildung*: “Die Pädagogik ist die Kunst, die Menschen sittlich zu machen.” However, the constellation of concepts that Hegel is discussing in this context (habit, second nature, the becoming-substance of the spiritual will) provide good evidence that this dictum applies just as well to *Bildung* as it does to *Pädagogik*.

⁷¹ Knox and Houlgate’s slightly more transparent translation makes it clear the absolute transition concerns ethical substantiality which only through the formative processes of *Bildung* becomes infinitely subjective: “education is the absolute transition from an ethical substantiality which is immediate and natural to the one which is spiritual and infinitely subjective and which has been raised to the shape of universality” (Hegel, *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, 185).

⁷² See also: “it is education which vindicates a universal” (§20A, Knox and Houlgate’s translation). Later in the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel defines *Bildung* explicitly in terms of this raising of the will’s immediate content into the form of conceptuality and universality: “the process of *Bildung* begins with a content whose form is sensuous and immediate and, by means of long and arduous work, arrives at the form of thought appropriate to this content and thereby gives it simple and adequate expression” (PR §217R).

comes to play a fundamental role for Hegel's conception *Bildung*. In the context of civil society, *Bildung* encapsulates

the *process* whereby [members of civil society's] individuality and naturalness are raised, both by natural necessity and by their arbitrary needs, to *formal freedom* and formal *universality of knowledge and volition*, and subjectivity is *educated* in its particularity." (PR §187)

In this second passage, two key features of the *Philosophy of Right's* definition of *Bildung* emerge. First, subjectivity is educated *in* its particularity and not *in* its universality. It is clear that by this Hegel does not mean that the *result* of education is somehow a form of particularity, as this would contradict the raising of need to universality that constitutes *Bildung* in the first place. Instead, subjectivity is educated *in* its particularity because it is educated *through* its particularity: I obtain my practical education⁷³ not by any explicit concern for the universal, but instead through the following of my own particular interests. Thus, Hegel writes that this education is *unconscious* in this sense as the universality acquired is "not present in the consciousness of these members of civil society as such" (PR §187). The kind of universalizing practical *Bildung* engendered through the movement of civil society occurs behind the backs of its members, "since these persons as such have in their consciousness and their aim not the absolute unity, but their own particularity and their being-for-self" (EM §523).

Second, the universality which the individual acquires through civil society's educational processes is not universality as such but formal universality. In the preceding section, Hegel makes clear that this formal universality is a deficient form of universality: "This unity [of the principles of particularity and universality] is not that of ethical identity, because at this level of division, the two principles are self-sufficient; and for the same reason, it is present not as

⁷³ As discussed below, practical education has a technical meaning for Hegel in which it refers to the kind of *Bildung* produced through laboring in civil society.

freedom, but as the *necessity* whereby the *particular* must rise to the *form of universality* and seek and find its subsistence in this form” (PR §186). Formal universality appears to the individual as necessity, not freedom, and thus cannot be the final word on the rational actualization of substantial freedom that Hegel understands himself to be demonstrating in the *Philosophy of Right*. What is left open in this passage, however, is what, precisely, are these particulars that rise to formal universality. But, as we have already seen, the particulars that Hegel has in mind are the needs of individuals; these are raised to social universality because their satisfaction is mediated through labor and abstraction and this mediation thereby confers on them objectivity and the “*form of universality or of the understanding*” since they are now systematically integrated into the totality of social need (PR §187R).⁷⁴ In universalizing social need, *Bildung* also coterminates with the universalization project that is the “end of reason” altogether: “[reason’s] end is... to work to eliminate *natural simplicity*, whether as passive selflessness or as barbarism of knowledge and volition – i.e., to eliminate the *immediacy* and *individuality* in which spirit is immersed, so that this externality may take on the rationality of *which it is capable*” (PR §187R).

What is still unclear, however, is *why* this universalization of social need through abstraction that Hegel calls *Bildung* constitutes a *formal* as opposed to a concrete universality. One answer to this question is historical-linguistic. In her discussion of the religious roots of *Bildung* in nineteenth century German philosophy, Kristin Gjesdal points out that *Bildung* first gained a foothold in German philosophy through its theological association with the noun *Bild*

⁷⁴ In other words, in civil society particular interests are necessarily universalized, since despite that within it “each individual is his own end, and all else means nothing to him... he cannot accomplish the full extent of his ends without reference to others... but through its reference to others, the particular end takes on the form of universality, and gains satisfaction by simultaneously satisfying the welfare of others” and thus “particularity is tied to the condition of universality” (PR §182R).

(image, picture, figure) and the verb *bilden* (to form, shape, or cultivate).⁷⁵ Both of these etymological siblings of *Bildung* invoke a sense of formalism, and so it's no surprise that Hegel, the great thinker of the German vernacular, would preserve the formality of whatever is described by his conception of *Bildung*. Thus, in the *Encyclopaedia*, we find Hegel writing that the “habit of abstraction in enjoyment, information, and behavior,” i.e., the ethical disposition cultivated in civil society, “constitutes *culture* [*Bildung*] in this sphere,—*formal culture* [*Bildung*] in general” (EM §525). Given its linguistic context, it is difficult to imagine Hegel claiming that such a habit counts as material or concrete *Bildung*.

However, Hegel invokes more than simple linguistic similarity in his justification of *Bildung*'s formality, although his articulation of this reasoning is somewhat disjointed. We can see his argument most clearly by contrasting *Bildung*'s actualization of “*formal freedom*” (PR §187) with the state's actualization “*concrete freedom*”:

Concrete freedom requires that personal individuality and its particular interests should reach their full *development* and gain *recognition of their right* for itself (within the system of the family and of civil society), and also that they should, on the one hand, *pass over* of their own accord into the interest of the universal, and on the other, knowingly and willingly acknowledge this universal interest even as their own *substantial spirit*, and *actively pursue it* as their *ultimate end*. (PR §260)

In this passage introducing the internal constitution of the state, Hegel emphasizes that concrete freedom involves not only the full development of personal individuality and realized interests (presumably the result of *Bildung*), but also (1) the taking of a voluntary and active concern for the universal interest and (2) the knowing of this universal interest as an essential part of one's own ethical subjectivity. That is, what concrete freedom requires beyond civil society's formal freedom is the explicit and conscious concomitance of the individual and the general will,

⁷⁵ Gjesdal, “*Bildung*,” 698. See also the translator's note to PR §187R.

which, while requiring the processes of *Bildung* as a part, is not reducible to its processes alone.⁷⁶ *Bildung* is formal, then, because the universal that it raises the market-subject to does not require that she “[act] in conscious awareness of this end” (PR §260). *Bildung*, in other words, fully develops the “principle of subjective freedom” (PR §316A) but fails to explicitize this ethical subjectivity as a self-consciously grounded in the state—what we may call for the sake of dialectical symmetry its failure to develop the ‘principle of objective freedom’.

That the source of *Bildung*'s formality lies in its lack of the kind of “*substantial unity*” realized only by the state has several implications for its significance in Hegel's theory of labor and civil society. First, echoing his prior discussion of the formal universality of the reflective will (PR §21), Hegel claims that *Bildung* involves the universalization of natural and immediate need into the *form* of thought, the *form* of universality, and the *form* of the understanding (PR §217R). Second, *Bildung* is the becoming-objective of this reflective will: “it is through this work of education that the subjective will attains *objectivity* even within itself” (PR §187R). Third and as a result of these two points, *Bildung* involves the ethical recuperation of self-externalization and self-alienation inherent not just in nature or the immediate will but in all human activity whatsoever (“for in their actions, human beings are necessarily involved in externality” [PR §119A]). The goal of *Bildung* is to sublimate this externality “in which spirit is immersed” so that “spirit is *at home* and *with itself* in this *externality* as such,” thus simultaneously preserving and transcending externality within the modern ethical subject. Thus Hegel writes that “the *ethical* is a subjective disposition”—i.e., the result of the processes of

⁷⁶ For Hegel, particularity can only preserve itself through its ascent to universality: “This form of universality to which particularity has worked its way upwards and cultivated itself, i.e., the form of the understanding, ensures at the same time that particularity becomes the genuine being-for-itself of individuality; and, since it is from particularity that universality receives both the content which fills it and its infinite self-determination, particularity is itself present in ethical life as free subjectivity which as infinite being-for-itself” (PR §187R).

Bildung—“but of that right which has being in itself”—i.e., a disposition given objective existence *within* an ethical state (PR §141R). Fourth, *Bildung* as the cultivation of formal universality, requires the adherence to and recognition of universal principles. By giving a *Dasein* or existence to the concept of right, *Bildung* ensures that right is “*universally recognized, known, and willed*, and, in which, through the mediation of this quality of being known and willed, it has validity and objective actuality” (PR §209). Finally, as a corollary of *Bildung*’s revelation of the universality and existence of right, Hegel notes (and implicitly affirms civil society’s affinity with liberalism) that the *Bürger* of civil society is treated as a “*universal person*,” i.e., in abstraction from their particular identity: “It is part of education [*Bildung*]... that I am apprehended as a *universal person*, in which all are identical. *A human being counts as such because he is a human being*, not because he is a Jew, Catholic, Protestant, German, Italian, etc.” (PR §209R). In sum, *Bildung*’s formality plays many roles in the unfolding of civil society and thus is essential for explicating its central role as well as its ethical limitations in Hegel’s social theory.

Both of these two larger features of *Bildung* as it is developed in the context of modern civil society—viz., that practical *Bildung*’s universality is both unconscious and formal—expose a subjective deficiency in civil society. It is for this reason that Hegel characterizes civil society as the moment of *loss* in ethical life, in which ethical subjectivity loses a part of its ethicality: civil society is the “system of ethical life, lost in its extremes” of particularity and universality (PR §184), it “affords a spectacle of extravagance and misery as well as of the physical and ethical corruption common to both,” (PR §185) and it “particularizes itself abstractly into many *persons*... which, in independent freedom and as *particulars*, are for themselves... [and] it thus initially loses its ethical determination” (EM §523). The key to understanding civil society’s

ethical loss is that this loss is the result of the specific kind of *Bildung* (one of formal universality) generated through its reciprocity of needs and labor and that, as a result, this deficient *Bildung* is ultimately the consequence of the processes of abstract labor. While this universality marks an important ethical achievement in this sphere, it is also the site of its deficiency. *Bildung*, in other words, is not just the descriptive source of ethical subjectivity, but is also the normative juncture at which civil society is ethically evaluated, the rubric under which civil society can be shown to be both entirely necessary and utterly insufficient for the actualization of social freedom.

These remarks provide a sketch of Hegel's theory of *Bildung* as it pertains to his mature political thought at the most general level. However, it is no coincidence that Hegel provides his most thorough discussion of *Bildung* in the *Philosophy of Right* within his development of civil society and the system of needs. As our above exegesis already indicates, Hegel explicitly connects labor and *Bildung*; *Bildung*'s liberation is always a matter of "hard work" (PR §187) and labor always develops a particular shape of subjectivity. Ultimately, we must read labor as contributing in a privileged way to the cultivation ethical subjectivity.⁷⁷ More specifically, modern civil society requires that individuals obtain a *practical education* (*praktische Bildung*), through which they learn to act "in a universal way and make themselves *links* in the chain of this continuum" (PR §187) thereby enabling them to mesh with the "arbitrary wills of others" (PR §197). Hegel glosses this idea of a practical education as the acquisition of a special *habit*: "the habit of being occupied" (PR §197).

⁷⁷ Consistent with my thesis but drawing from a different text, Avineri writes that, for Hegel, "labour is the universal link among men, 'labour is the universal interaction and education [*Bildung*] of man... a recognition which is mutual, or the highest individuality'. In labour, man becomes 'a universal for the other, but so does the other'" (Avineri, *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State*, 89, citing Hegel, *Schriften zur Politik und Rechtsphilosophie*, ed. Georg Lasson [Felix Meiner, 1913], 430 and 428).

4.3 Habit, Second Nature, and Practical Education

It is because of this entanglement with practical education that Hegel's concept of habit is closely related to his concepts of labor and *Bildung*.⁷⁸ While the category of habit (EM §§409–10) is officially developed under the heading of subjective spirit (EM §§387–482), falling within the sections on anthropology (EM §§388–412), and thus substantially precedes the sections on objective spirit (EM §§483–552), habit plays a central role in Hegel's account of the “*bodiliness*” and subject-forming aspects of practical *Bildung* (i.e., “the subjective substantiality of this *bodiliness*”), and, as a consequence, is essential to his account of the ethicality of labor (EM §409). The general formula of habit is the becoming-immediate of a universal determination of the will—its “being-together-with-one's-own-self” or its “untroubled being-together-with-itself in all the particularity of its content” (EM §410A). Habit describes the subject's double process of denaturalization (that it “makes itself into an abstract universal being”⁷⁹) and renaturalization (that it “reduces the particularity of feelings... to a determination that just *is*”⁸⁰) (EM §410).⁸¹ This intensely dialectical nature of habit is celebrated by Hegel, which he admits as “one of the most difficult determinations” of the *Philosophy of Spirit* (EM §410R).⁸² Nonetheless, Hegel

⁷⁸ For a detailed account of the centrality of Hegel's concept of habit in his conception of human subjectivity see Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*, trans. Lisabeth Doring (Routledge, 2005), 21–76 and passim. A more concise account of habit's role in the *Philosophy of Right* can be found in Frank Ruda, *Hegel's Rabble*, 75–99.

⁷⁹ See also EM §410R: “Habit diminishes this sensation [of thinking], by making the natural determination into an immediacy of the soul.”

⁸⁰ See also EM §410R: “Habit is the determinacy of feeling (as well as of intelligence, will, etc., in so far as they belong to self-feeling) made into something that is nature, mechanical.”

⁸¹ “That the soul thus makes itself into abstract universal being, and reduces the particularity of feelings (of consciousness too) to a determination in it that just *is*, is *habit*” (EM §410).

⁸² See, for example, Hegel's conclusion to the addition of the final section on habit in which he highlights its specifically dialectic nature: “Thus we see, consequently, that in habit our consciousness is at the same time present in the matter-in-hand, interested in it, yet conversely absent from it, indifferent towards it; that our self just as much appropriates the matter-in-hand as, on the contrary, it withdraws from it, that the soul on the one hand completely penetrates into its expressions and on the other hand deserts them, thus giving them the shape of something mechanical, of a merely natural effect” (EM §410A).

utilizes this notion of habit in the *Philosophy of Right* to importantly theorize the embodied form of subject-formation produced through civil society's mediation of social need by the process of labor (practical education) as well as the immediacy of spiritually-produced freedom achieved in ethical life (second nature).

Hegel develops habit in the *Encyclopaedia* through three moments: hardening, indifference towards satisfaction, and dexterity. By the time habit is developed in the form of dexterity, "bodiliness is then rendered pervious, made into an instrument, in such a way that as soon as the representation is in me (e.g. a sequence of musical notes), the physical body too, unresistingly and fluently, has expressed it correctly" (EM §410R). Dexterity or the "production of habit" is obtained by the individual through "practice," understood as the repetition of the "self-incorporation of the particularity of bodiliness of the determinations of feeling into [one's] being" (EM §410). As a consequence of her habituated dexterity, the individual becomes liberated from her absorption in sensation or the matter-at-hand, moving within them and "without sensation or consciousness," and thus becomes open to other simultaneous activities, and this openness constitutes one aspect of the individual's freedom in habit (EM §410).⁸³ The second aspect of habit's contribution to subjective freedom is its appropriation of the individual's natural mode of existence, which, in habit, is "reduced to *his* mere being" (EM §410R). Moreover, Hegel makes it clear that habit applies not just to bodily activity such as the human being's upright posture or the act of seeing, but also to thinking itself (he uses the example of writing), and goes so far as to say that "habit is the most essential feature of the existence of all

⁸³ "In this way the soul has the content in possession, and contains it in such a way that in such determinations it is not actually sentient, it does not stand in relationship to them by distinguishing itself from them, *nor is it absorbed in them*, but it has them in itself *and moves in them*, without sensation or consciousness. The soul is free of them, in so far as it is not interested in or occupied with them; while it exists in these forms as its possessions, it is at the same time *open to other activity and occupations*, in the sphere of sensation and the mind's consciousness in general" (EM §410, emphasis mine).

mental life in the individual subject” since it concretizes immediacy not merely “as abstract inwardness, cut off from action and actuality,” but rather in the subject’s “very being,” thereby translating thought into existence within the individual (EM §410). However, the subject of habit is in other respects made *unfree*. For one, habit takes on what Hegel calls a “*relative*” form which, as in the case of bad habits, can, depending on their content, oppose the actualization of freedom.⁸⁴ Second, habits, by becoming in some sense part of the individual’s natural existence, also entail a kind of irreversible desensitization or indifference to that which one is habituated and so reduces one’s capacity to react freely. Nevertheless, in the final analysis it is the liberating aspects of habit which predominate in the anthropological and social contexts: “the essential determination is the liberation from sensation that man gains through habit” (EM §410R).

It is because of this relative formality that habit recapitulates the same formal universality—what Hegel in this context also calls “abstract universality” or the “universality of reflection”—that we saw in *Bildung* and in labor (EM §410). Habit, as “the truth of the particular,” produces a subjectivity that becomes “a simple relation of ideality to itself, formal universality” and such that it is in habit in which the subject’s self-feeling is “posited as this universality... that *is for itself*” (EM §409). In virtue of being for-itself, habit’s universality is indifferent to the specific determinations of the feelings and drives which constitute self-feeling: “this universality is not the content-packed truth of the determinate sensations, desires, etc., for their content does not yet come into consideration here” (EM §409). Also like *Bildung*, habit’s universality is *unconscious* since its “sublation... of the particularity of bodiliness... is the

⁸⁴ “In habit man’s mode of existence is natural, and for that reason he is unfree in it; but he is free in so far as the natural determinacy of sensation is by habit reduced to *his* mere being, he is no longer different from it, is indifferent to it, and so no longer interested, engaged, or dependent with respect to it. This unfreedom in habit is partly just *formal*, pertaining only to the being of the soul; partly only *relative*, in so far as it really arises only in the case of *bad* habits, or in so far as a habit is opposed by another purpose” (EM §410R).

entirely pure intuition, unconscious, but the foundation of consciousness” (EM §409R). While habit is essential for the operation of thought, it is itself never the explicit object or result of conceptual cognition; habit is only ever the object or result of practical activity, in which it will always remain unconscious.

Associated with habit is the notion of a second nature, which appears in the *Philosophy of Right* as an ethical imperative, demanding that we distance ourselves from our immediate, ‘first’ nature, and that we produce within ourselves a “second nature” (PR §4; cf PR §151 and PR §268A).⁸⁵ While the category of second nature is underdeveloped in the *Philosophy of Right*, in the *Encyclopedia* Hegel clarifies its ethical role by explicitly *identifying* it with habit:

Habit has rightly been called a second nature: *nature*, because it is an immediate being of the soul, a *second* nature, because it is an immediacy *posited* by the soul, incorporating and moulding the bodiliness that pertains to the determinations of feeling as such and to the determinacies of representation and of the will in so far as they are embodied. (EM §410)

Habit *is* second nature because it evokes both immediacy (nature) and self-positeness (secondness), where this self-positing is the will’s reforming of its own bodiliness and the embodiment of its own determinations. Hegel is aware of the standard problem with the idea of second nature, which often leaves in lingering ambiguity the implied ‘first nature’ which it supersedes. Hegel characterizes this first nature as one in which an individual is determined purely by natural immediacy, with no intervention by thought, spirit, or cognition when he writes:

Habit is not an *immediate, first* nature, dominated by the individuality of sensations. It is rather a *second* nature *posited* by soul. But all the same it is still a *nature*, something *posited* that assumes the shape of *immediacy*, an *ideality* of

⁸⁵ Giorgio Cesarale, “Hegel’s Notion of Abstract Labor,” 97.

beings that is itself still burdened with the form of *being*, consequently something not corresponding to free mind, something merely *anthropological*. (EM §410A)

In this passage, Hegel directly accepts the paradox of second nature by insisting that habit both is and is not nature. As we saw in habit's simultaneous affirmation of freedom and unfreedom, second nature refers to both the supersession of the tyranny of sensation and the sphere of immediacy or the "form of *being*" (liberation from the merely anthropological). Second nature thus designates a certain kind of freedom that is unconscious, embodied, obtainable only through activity, thereby opening an individual to more complex and properly spiritual tasks.

Habit's emergence as second nature is crucial for understanding Hegel's insistence on the subjective immediacy of ethical life, that is, the seeming peculiarity that in ethical life "self-conscious freedom becomes *nature*" (EM §513) such that this denaturalized/renaturalized freedom is actualized "without reflective choice" (EM §514).⁸⁶ Genuine ethical life must always exist in the shape of a habituated and self-produced immediacy, and it is in this form (as opposed to that of a purely reflective kind) that Hegel privileges in his account of ethical life's actualization of freedom: "the system of right is the realm of actualized freedom, the world of spirit produced from within itself as a second nature" (PR §4). Hegel reiterates this point later, writing that "the *habit* of the ethical appears as a *second nature* which takes the place of the original and purely natural will and is the all-pervading soul, significance, and actuality of individual existence (PR §151).

The ethical centrality of this peculiar mediated immediacy that is habit/second nature arises most prominently in Hegel's defense of patriotism as the "political disposition" most appropriate for, and grounded on the truth of, the state:

⁸⁶ Hegel also characterizes the realization of ethical life as second nature as the unity of the concept of the will with its existence as an individual will: "Ethical life is the unity of the will in its concept and the will of the individual" (PR §33A).

The political *disposition*, i.e. *patriotism* in general, is certainly based on truth and volition which has become *habitual*. This disposition is in general... the consciousness that my substantial and particular interest is preserved and contained in the interest and end of an other (in this case, the state), and... as a result, this other immediately ceases to be an other for me, and in my consciousness of this, I am free. (PR §268)

Membership in an ethical state is, on its own, not enough for securing freedom; nor is a merely reflective acknowledgement of the state's universality. I am subjectively free only by means of having a particular habit, patriotism, which must be grounded on the truth, i.e., the objectively existing state. This political disposition requires not only that I cognitively recognize my particular interests as realized only within that of the universal, not based on the truth of this realization alone, but in which this recognition is embodied and cultivated through practical activity and labor as an immediate ethical nature or life, the outcome of which is practical *Bildung*.

Returning to the notion of practical education, we will recall that the practical *Bildung* acquired through labor in civil society manifests itself in the individual's "habit of abstraction" (EM §525), "*habit of being occupied*" (PR §197), or "habit of right in general, of the ethical" (EM §410R). This habit has the form of universality, on the one hand, and "the content of freedom," on the other (EM §410R).

Hegel distinguishes the practical education obtained in civil society from "*theoretical education*," which "involves not only a variety of representations and items of knowledge, but also an ability to form such representations and pass from one to the other in a rapid and versatile manner, to grasp complex and general relations, etc."—in other words, theoretical education encompasses all the usual aims of traditional education: an individual's capacity to think critically, draw on a broad body of knowledge, and communicate with others (and hence theoretical education "also includes language") (PR §197). While Hegel is not explicit on this

point, he likely assumes that theoretical education is the concern of the standard institutions we often refer to by the word education (primary and secondary education, and so on).

Practical education, on the other hand, is the institutional concern and product of civil society. Rather than cultivating the intellect's understanding, practical education produces the habit of being active or, as Ruda puts it, the habit of having habits:⁸⁷

Practical education through work consists in the self-perpetuating need and habit of being occupied in one way or another, in the limitation of one's activity to suit both the nature of the material in question and, in particular, the arbitrary will of others, and in a habit, acquired through this discipline, of objective activity and universally applicable skills. (PR §197)

Practical education is not the formation of any and all habits, however, but the habits that have the kind of objectivity gained through the mediating processes of the system of needs, i.e., the habit of practical education must be one of contributing to the satisfaction of the needs of others, it must be socially necessary. As Hegel states in the addition, practical education entails both a degree of objective success in one's manipulating the material in question as well as a subjective lack of resistance, for example, in the arbitrary will of others, in achieving one's ends: "A worker can be described as skilled if he produces the thing as it ought to be, and if, in his subjective actions, he encounters no resistance to the end he is pursuing" (PR §197). This skill requirement can only be satisfied through *specialization* in one sphere of labor, so, in turn, practical education also requires that everyone join an estate: "the individual attains actuality only by entering into *existence* in general, and hence into *determinate particularity*; he must accordingly limit himself *exclusively* to one of the *particular* spheres of need" (PR §207). Thus, while civil society's contribution to the actualization of freedom demands that everyone obtain practical *Bildung*, a habit of having habits, the exact content of this *Bildung* is both limited by the

⁸⁷ Ruda, *Hegel's Rabble*, 107.

requirement that these habits satisfy the social needs of others but otherwise indeterminate, differing depending upon the estate that the individual belongs to, since the estates are differentiated according to “their corresponding means, varieties of work, modes of satisfaction, variety of labor, and theoretical and practical education” (PR §201; cf. EM §527).

One key implication of this conception of practical *Bildung* is that while *all* labor and all human activity produce habits and contribute to the construction of one’s second nature (hence the possibility of bad habits and their characterization as *relative* and *formal* universities), not all of these habits are adequate to the concept of true ethical life or, in other words, are normatively desirable from the perspective of the actualization of social freedom. While Hegel clearly theorizes a plurality of such ethical subjectivities in the diversity of his three estates—indeed, a necessary and immanent plurality and differentiation given that any “organic whole” must be “composed of different elements” (PR §200R)—the habituated second nature produced by the *Bürger*’s labor must fall within a relatively narrow range if it is to be ethical: she must satisfy the needs of others in a socially necessary way through labor, she must acquire skill in manipulating her object, she must habituate herself to and therefore embody herself in this active labor, and she must, by doing all of this, come to unconsciously reconcile her own particular interests and volition with those of the universal, society writ large.⁸⁸ To fail at any one of these tasks is to fail at actualizing practical *Bildung* and thus also to construct a deficiency in the center of social freedom itself, which, by way of Hegel’s logic of actuality, requires not the mere existence of practical *Bildung* but its actualization through its unification of universality and particularity.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ It is precisely the coterminance of the principle of subjectivity or the interests of the individuals with the collective interests of the state that ensure its strength and stability (PR §265A).

⁸⁹ Hegel makes this argument with the ethical evaluation of an empirical state, but it can also be made analogously for any constituent aspect of this totality. If we take up any given empirical state, then it may very well be, as Hegel puts it, a “bad state” which is *purely finite* or existent (*Existenz*) as opposed to an

To summarize, we can say that civil society contributes to ethicality or the actualization of social freedom through its development of practical *Bildung* or habitual ethical subjectivity, and that this practical *Bildung* is in turn the subjective result of civil society's labor, which, in contrast to other kinds of labor throughout Hegel's writings, "links selfishness with the universal" (PR §201A). It is for this reason that Anders Bartonek is correct in pointing out that civil society's labor in its educational role simultaneously transcends and preserves its function as an economic category and is the true locus of Hegel's ethical concerns about labor in the *Philosophy of Right*. Hegel's philosophy of labour, Bartonek writes, is one of a "cultivating *Bildung*" as a "theory of the human self as a product of its labour," and thus necessarily "is a form of labour that transcends the mere economic scope of labour."⁹⁰ It is precisely labor's subject-forming powers, theorized by Hegel through habit and *Bildung*, that justifies the central importance of labor in the system of needs and in ethical life in general and that provides some rough criteria for distinguishing between those ethical subjectivities adequate to ethical living (and thus too the labor processes responsible for them) from those which do not.

ethical state which is "infinite within itself" or actual (PR §270A). "Actuality is always the unity and particularity, the resolution of universality into particularity; the latter then appears to be self-sufficient, although it is sustained and supported only by the whole. If this unity is not present, nothing can be *actual*, even if it may be assumed to have *existence*. A bad state is one which merely exists... but it has no actuality" (PR §270A). Thus, like the bad state, a bad *Bildung* would not be the inexistence of education but rather an education which fails to unify universality and particularity and thus is not an actualized education (and consequently does not contribute to the actualization of freedom).

⁹⁰ Bartonek, "Labour Against Capitalism?," 117.

5 THE PROBLEM OF ABSTRACT LABOR AND THE SOLUTION OF MACHINE AUTOMATION

So far, we have seen how labor, as the source of the *Bürger's* practical *Bildung* and habitual second nature, is the central locus of civil society's ethicality. We have also seen how *abstract* labor characterizes a specific labor processes associated with modern factory production, and that this process leads to the deadening of the laborer's ethical subjectivity as opposed to its development. However, two questions still linger unaddressed. First, exactly *how* is abstract labor responsible for the deadening of the laborer in a way that is so problematic for practical *Bildung*? What about the mechanistic labor makes it so deadening, so antithetical to ethical subject-formation? Second, how does Hegel's purposed solution—the use of machines to automate abstract labor and thus eliminate its necessity—actually solve the problem of *Abstumpfung* given, on the hand, the ethical requirement of laboring for the actualization of one's freedom, and, on the other hand, the various impasses he identifies for any intervention into the autonomous sphere of civil society? In asking these two questions, we must now shift our focus away from Hegel's description of the functioning of civil society to the more evaluative and normative dimensions of this aspect of his social theory.

5.1 The Problem of Abstract Labor: The *Abstumpfung* of the Laborer

Let us turn to our first question: what are, and what are the sources of, the deadening effects on subject-formation produced by mechanized abstract labor found in modern factories, according to Hegel? Although this question appears to be straightforward one, and despite having many of its central theoretical elements in place in his conceptual development of *Bildung* and habit, Hegel does not deliver an explicit connection of these deadening effects with industrial labor within the text of the *Philosophy of Right*—such an account must be

reconstructed. Although it is tempting to see a statement of these damages in Hegel's discussions of poverty and the rabble (PR §§241–246), we ought to resist such a reading. The problem with allowing Hegel's general remarks about poverty and the rabble to stand in as a discussion of abstract labor's *Abstumpfung* is that Hegel rigorously distinguishes between these three groups, i.e., between the poor, the rabble, and the industrial workforce. What Hegel says about the rebellious disposition of the unemployed and indignant rabble, for example, does not apply to the poor or to the factory workers (as it is precisely this anti-ethical subjective attitude that uniquely identifies the rabble). Likewise, not all of the employed poor will find themselves occupied in abstract factory labor, such as the peasantry. And, finally, Hegel is aware that *some* factory workers are paid quite well, putting them squarely outside the realm of poverty.⁹¹ Thus, when Hegel writes that some of those involved in "particular work" are cut off from the full freedom offered by modern civil society, he is not directly addressing the deadening produced by abstract labor:

When the activity of civil society is unrestricted, it is occupied internally with *expanding its population and industry*. – On the one hand... the *accumulation of wealth increases*. ... But on the other hand, the *specialization and limitation* of particular work also increase, as do likewise the *dependence and want* of the class [*Klasse*] which is tied to such work; this in turn leads to an inability to feel and enjoy the wider freedoms, and particularly the spiritual advantages, of civil society. (PR §243)⁹²

⁹¹ For example, in his 1817–1818 Heidelberg lectures Hegel explicitly mentions England as a country in which some factory laborers are well-paid and thus not members of the poor: "A factory can thrive in a country where there is great poverty and people have to make do with little; but in England the cost of labor is exceedingly high, and yet the factories prosper" (Hegel, *Lectures on Natural Right and Political Science: The First Philosophy of Right*, trans. J. Michael Stewart and Peter C. Hodgson [University of California Press, 1995], 177)

⁹² "When civil society is in a state of unimpeded activity, it is engaged in expanding internally in population and industry. [...] The other side is the subdivision and restriction of particular work. This results in the *dependence and distress* of the class [*Klasse*] tied to work of that sort, and these again entail

Looking carefully at the problems emphasized in this passage, we see that none of them are quite the same as the deadening subjectivity induced by abstract labor. My inability to participate in the “wider freedoms” and “spiritual advantages” of civil society is not due to the specific character of my labor activity *per se*, of its “*specialization and limitation*” itself. Rather, its real cause is my complete dependence on wage labor⁹³ and my economic impoverishment resulting from the large-scale social organization of labor and the distribution of its output.⁹⁴ Hegel’s use *Klasse* instead of *Stand* to describe these workers signifies that he is here describing abstract labor as such as not merely divided labor, and so this dependence-distress is concerns only the former. The quality of my labor itself has yet to come into play; we must look elsewhere for an account of abstract labor’s contribution to *Abstumpfung*.

Given Hegel offers no explicit account of the origin and meaning of the abstract laborer’s deadening, my contention is that we can reconstruct it by firstly looking at Hegel’s remarks on *Abstumpfung* in his early Jena manuscripts and his later lectures on the *Philosophy of Right* and secondly by reviewing his critique of the mechanistic view of the state which provides an analogy to his less explicit critique of mechanized labor. These two sources show us that *Abstumpfung*, for Hegel, is simply what happens when the laborer fails to acquire practical *Bildung*, and has its origin in her inability to participate in the labor process as a differentiated organ within a rationally ordered whole.

the inability to feel and enjoy the broader freedoms and especially the spiritual benefits of civil society” (Houlgate and Knox, *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, 220f).

⁹³ Marx would later theorize this dependency as the formal subsumption of labor under capital (Marx, *Capital*, 645f, 1019–1038, cf. also the chapters on primitive accumulation, 873–931).

⁹⁴ Houlgate and Knox’s translation more explicitly constructs the causal chain that I am asserting here. They make it clear that the dependence and poverty of the workers “entail” their inability to enjoy the spiritual benefits of civil society.

Already in his early Jena writings, Hegel is centrally concerned with the subjective effects of modern manufacturing on the emerging laboring *Klasse*.⁹⁵ In the Jena manuscript of 1803–1804, Hegel writes of the “vengeance” of abstract labor, noting that this new form of labor invokes a dialectic inversion of the Promethean subjugation of nature through labor. Through the technologically mediated consummation of humanity’s domination over nature, the laborer now finds himself in a world in which “the more he takes from nature, the more he subjugates it” through modern techniques of production, “the baser he becomes himself.”⁹⁶ In this kind of industrialized factory labor, Hegel continues, “the human being becomes more and more machine-like, dull, spiritless” to the point that “the spiritual element, the self-conscious plenitude of life, becomes empty activity.” Hegel makes much the same point in his 1805–1806 Jena manuscript, where he writes that in the factory “man’s labor itself becomes entirely mechanical... but the more abstract [his labor] becomes, the more he himself is mere abstract activity.”⁹⁷ The factory laborer loses part of his “rich comprehension,” and instead “his dull work limits him to one point.”⁹⁸ Thus, with the advent of abstract labor, the 1803–1804 manuscript concludes:

⁹⁵ Throughout all of his writings, Hegel reserves the modern term *Klasse* solely for this new demographic of urban laborers rather than his usual *Stand* for discussing the estates. Only the estates receive official representation within the state’s political constitution (Avineri, *Hegel’s Theory of the Modern State*, 149n49).

⁹⁶ Hegel, *Jenenser Realphilosophie* I (1803–1804), ed. J. Hoffmeister (Felix Meiner Verlag, 1930), 237, quoted and translated in PR 444n1. A complete English translation of this manuscript has been published under the title “First Philosophy of Spirit: Part III of the System of Speculative Philosophy 1803–1804” in Hegel, *System of Ethical Life and First Philosophy of Spirit*, trans. H. S. Harris and T.M. Knox (State University of New York Press, 1979), 247.

⁹⁷ Hegel, *Hegel and the Human Spirit*, 121

⁹⁸ Hegel, *Jenenser Realphilosophie* [1805–1806], ed. J. Hoffmeister [Felix Meiner Verlag, 1969], 232, quoted and translated in PR 444n1). This manuscript has been translated as “Hegel and the Human Spirit” in Hegel, *Hegel and the Human Spirit*, trans. Leo Rauch (Wayne State University Press, 1983), 139.

Work thus becomes absolutely more and more dead, it becomes machine-labor, the individual's own skill becomes infinitely limited, and the consciousness of the factory worker is degraded to the utmost level of dullness."⁹⁹

Moreover, in his earliest known social-theoretic writings from 1802, Hegel writes that "deadening" of labor occurs when it becomes "more mechanical, because variety is excluded from it and so it becomes itself something more universal, more foreign to [the living] whole."¹⁰⁰ Lastly, in the 1805–06 manuscript Hegel even recognizes the essential precarity and thus latent poverty of the factory worker:

In the individual's skill is the possibility of sustaining his existence. This is subject to all the tangled and complex contingency in the [social] whole. Thus a vast number of people are condemned to a labor that is totally stupefying, unhealthy and unsafe—in workshops, factories, mines, etc.—shrinking their skills. And entire branches of industry, which supported a large class of people, go dry all at once because of [changes in] fashion or a fall in prices due to inventions in other countries, etc.—and this huge population is throw into helpless poverty.¹⁰¹

In these various passages from his Jena period, Hegel states, consistently with his theory of *Bildung*, that abstract labor is responsible for forming a specific kind of laborer-subject, namely one whose life has been deadened through repetitive labor, whose practical activity has become empty, and whose integration within the organic whole has been irrevocably lost. Insofar as the abstract laborer is involved in machine-like labor, she herself becomes "baser" and "dull," and her self-conception "degraded" and "one-sided." In addition, the abstract laborer cannot be held responsible for her own deadening, as her lot is not chosen but the blind result of a complex web

⁹⁹ Hegel, *Jenenser Realphilosophie I (First Philosophy of Spirit)*, 323f, quoted and translated in Avineri, *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State*, 93.

¹⁰⁰ Hegel, *System of Ethical Life*, 117f, bracketed text is the translator's.

¹⁰¹ Hegel, *Hegel and the Human Spirit*, 139f.

of contingencies, both on the subjective side of her natural proclivities, upbringing, and course of life as well as on the objective side of world-market's volatility.¹⁰²

These themes of subjective depravity as a result of abstract labor are repeated in Hegel's later lectures on the *Philosophy of Right* in Heidelberg and Berlin. In the former, Hegel writes that "a factory presents a sad picture of the deadening of human beings" and, most importantly, paints this deadening as a broad degeneracy of their ethical subjectivity: "which is also why on Sundays factory workers lose no time in spending and squandering their entirely weekly wages."¹⁰³ Much is the same in his many lectures on the *Philosophy of Right* in Berlin, where Hegel can be found claiming, for example, that "the more developed the division of labor is, the more spiritless and dull it becomes" (VPR I, 31) and "that through the perfection of labor, [labor] dulls the workers... it is only the work of the understanding which is thus cultivated, modified" (VPR IV, 503).¹⁰⁵ Thus, throughout the entirety of Hegel's social and political thought (although certainly less explicit in the *Philosophy of Right*) lies the central insight that the tendency toward abstract labor in modern civil society leads to the deadening of the very subject-formation that it is supposed to bring about; its essential contribution to free and ethical living turns out to be, for factory workers at least, its generation of unfreedom. The abstract laborer does not cultivate herself through her labor, but rather becomes narrow-sighted, spiritless, and deadened, unable to conceive of herself as a properly ethical agent.

These various remarks on *Abstumpfung* are, however, just that—remarks. They still bear the mark of their original purpose as lecture notes, and, as such, have yet to be systematically connected by Hegel with the rest of his social theory. They state clearly that factory labor

¹⁰² See also Hegel's characterization of labor as requiring "continual strict dominancy and taming like a wild beast" (Hegel, *First Philosophy of Spirit*, 249).

¹⁰³ Lectures on Natural Right and Political Science, p. 177

¹⁰⁵ Quoted and translated in Waszek, "The Division of Labor," 72n126.

deadens the worker, and that this deadening is a truncation of the laborer's *Bildung*. However, they leave open the question of *why* this labor is deadening, and thus falsely make Hegel's criticism of factory labor appear similar to something like alienation critique. The issue with abstract factory labor is *not* that it is divided labor, i.e., that it requires worker specialization and limitation in one's activity and, as a consequence of this, separates the laborer from the final product and the circumstances of its use and produces inequalities of pay, activity, recognition, and so on. If this were so, then it would be nearly the whole of civil society that found itself undertaking empty and machine-like activity. Instead, the key to the difference between socially necessary divided labor and anti-ethical abstract factory labor as such is the latter's character as machine-like and mechanistic, which is not at all a necessity in the general division of labor and is conceptually distinct from the laborer's alienation. But we get no account of mechanism in the *Philosophy of Right*, not even a reference to its development as a category in the logic. However, we *do* get some remarks on mechanistic approaches to the state, and how these differ from Hegel's organismic approach, which, once pieced together and then juxtaposed with his lecture comments on *Abstumpfung* and his theory of *Bildung*, provide a sufficient understanding of mechanism for explicating abstract labor's deadening of the worker.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ For a book-length treatment of the role of mechanism in Hegel's social theory, see Nathan Ross, *On Mechanism in Hegel's Social and Political Philosophy* (Routledge, 2008), see also Sally Sedgwick, "The State as Organism: The Metaphysical Basis of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 39, no. S1 (2001): 171–88 and Michael Quante, "'Organic Unity': Its Loose and Analogical and Its Strict and Systematic Sense in Hegel's Philosophy," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 39, no. S1 (2001): 189–95. While Ross argues that civil society realizes the category of absolute mechanism, not teleology, both Quante and Sedgwick agree that the state is in some sense an organic unity (i.e., has an internal teleology), despite disagreeing among themselves about the systematicity of this notion. However, all three agree that the state is unified as a "'rational whole,' a system of objects that is able to sustain itself through its own conceptual self-determination" and it is this feature of self-determination which I seek to contrast with mechanistic labor (Ross, *On Mechanism*, 127).

There are few views of the state that Hegel criticizes more vehemently than the that which conceives of the state as a mechanism *solely* for preserving private self-interests, enforcing abstract rights, and protecting private property (PR xvi). In the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel characterizes the mechanistic conception of the state as:

That representation of the state according to which its sole determination is to protect and secure the life, property, and arbitrary will of everyone, in so far as the latter does not infringe the life, property, and arbitrary will of others; in this view, the state is merely an arrangement dictated by necessity. (PR §270R, translation modified)

While the mechanistic state's protection of formal liberties is an important aspect of the ethical state, the mechanistic conception of the state mistakes civil society as the ethical state as such, and it likewise mistakes formal freedom as substantial freedom. It places "beyond the state" the sort of actualized freedom that is supposed to be realized by the intersubjective social collective—"the higher spiritual element of what is true in and for itself"—and thus the concept of the state becomes "completely deprived of its proper ethical character" (PR §270R). Such is the state conceived as an external mechanism for the preservation of private property. But "the state is an organism"—not a machine—Hegel asserts (PR §269A). The intelligibility of all of Hegel's theory of the modern state depends upon this distinction, but for our purposes it suffices to focus on the two important junctures in the *Philosophy of Right* where Hegel explicitly contrasts the mechanistic state from the organic and rational one: first, in specifying the intimate relationship between the state and the political disposition of its citizenry and, second, in defending his view of the division of political powers across the governmental branches of the executive, the legislature, and the monarchy (what Hegel calls the "internal constitution" of the state).

As we have seen, patriotism or political disposition is the subjective correlate of the state's objective institutions and refers to a specific kind of habit in which "in the normal conditions and circumstances of life, [one] habitually knows that the community is the substantial basis and end [of oneself]" (PR §268R). This habit, I have argued, is the combined result of the practical *Bildung* obtained by laboring in civil society and the theoretical *Bildung* acquired through traditional education. Since an essential component of this habit is the integration of my own particular interests and subjective freedom within the universal interests and actuality of the state, it provides a particularly colorful example of the kind of organically unified totality that is missing in abstract factory labor.

In his long remark contrasting the state from the church, Hegel notes that both of these institutions, in a certain sense, contain "doctrine" insofar as each requires the codification of "whatever it recognizes as valid" into the "form of *thought* as law" (PR §270R). Moreover, Hegel continues, these two doctrines can, and often do, come into conflict with one another, since, on the one hand, the doctrine of the church cannot be a merely "internal matter" of conscience—as if it were completely independent of the material and ethical concerns of the state—because this internal matter of conscience "is in fact an *expression*... of a content which is intimately connected, or even directly concerned, with ethical principles and the laws of the state" (PR §270R). On the other hand, the state, understood as an organism and *not* a machine, must concern itself with the subjective disposition of its *citoyens*:

Since the state is not a mechanism but the rational life of self-conscious freedom and the system of the ethical world, the *disposition*, and so also the consciousness of this disposition in *principles*, is an essential moment in the actual state. (PR §270R)

Thus, the church and the state *both* make claims on the internal subjectivity of their constituents and these claims may collide. (While Hegel does not mention civil society in this context—he

instead considers the possibility of an independent scientific community colliding with the state—we could also say the same about its status as an independent social institution and its exclusive claim to molding the subjectivity of the *Bürger*.) Of course, for Hegel, the state must triumph in this conflict as it is only through it that ethicality is actualized.¹⁰⁸ However, what is more important for our purposes is to see that it is precisely the state’s sensitivity to and responsibility for developing the ethical disposition of its citizens that makes it count as “not a mechanism.” Moreover, this disposition is, crucially, *self-conscious* and grounded in intelligible and rationally organized principles. The rational state’s incorporation of its members’ subjectivities in its own actuality starkly contrasts it from the state *qua* mechanism that remains external and indifferent to these subjective inner-workings, concerned only with the protection of the formal liberties of all, which in actuality reduces to the substantial freedom of the few.¹⁰⁹

We find a similar characterization of mechanism in Hegel’s discussion of the division of political powers, although by quite a different path. In this context, Hegel insists that the separation of political power among the executive, legislative, and monarchical branches of government cannot be one of competing interests and competition, i.e., it cannot be based on the model of civil society. Such a differentiation without explicit interconnection and unity is unfit for the rational state:

¹⁰⁸ Further on in the remark Hegel reminds us that the *Philosophy of Right* has already “established the truth [of the proposition] that spirit, as free and rational, is inherently ethical, that the true Idea is *actual* rationality, and that it is this rationality which exists as the state” (PR §270R).

¹⁰⁹ Hegel associates the mechanistic view of the state with the English and harbors no illusions that these protections serve the substantial freedom of the many: “Take the case of *England* which, because private persons have a predominate participation in state affairs, has been regarded as having the freest of all constitutions. Experience shows that this country—as compared with the other culturally advanced states of Europe—is the most backward in civil and criminal legislation, in the right and the freedom of property, in arrangements for art and science, etc., and that objective freedom i.e. rational right, is rather *sacrificed* to formal right and to particular private interest” (EM §544R).

The constitution is rational in so far as the state *differentiates* and determines its activity within itself *in accordance with the nature of the concept*. It does so in such a way that *each* of the *powers* in question is in itself the *totality*, since each contains the other moments and has them active within it, and since all of them, as expressions of the differentiation of the concept, remain wholly within its ideality and constitute nothing but a *single individual* whole. (PR §272).¹¹⁰

Since the very notion of a state requires that its constitutive powers work in unity with and for each other, the mechanistic state does not, strictly speaking, exist. If state politics become nothing more than “means of coercion” for individual or group private interests, then the state has already dissolved:

there would no longer be any government, only parties, and the only remedy for it would be the domination and suppression of one party by the other. To represent organization of the state as a mere intellectual constitution, i.e., as the mechanism of a balance of powers external to each other in their interior, goes against the fundamental Idea of what a state is. (EM §544R)

For Hegel, such a dissolution of the state through mechanization is realized in history by the despotic feudal monarchies, which, by striving for power and committing acts of violence, present not a sequence of ethical states but a “succession of rebellions” (PR §286R). The violence and instability of the medieval *polis*, Hegel argues, is the result of its mechanical separation, as opposed to organic differentiation-integration, of political power:

The reason for this is that, in conditions such as these, the division of political business is purely mechanical, with its different parts distributed among vassals, pashas, etc., so that the difference [between these elements] is not one of determination and form, but merely of greater or lesser power. Thus, each part maintains *itself alone*, and in so doing, it promotes only itself and not the others along with it, and has within itself the complete set of moments which it requires for independence and self-sufficiency. In an organic relationship, the units in question are not parts but members, and each maintains the others while fulfilling

¹¹⁰ See also PR §286: “Each member [of the whole], in maintaining itself independently, thereby also maintains the others in their own distinct character within the rational organism.”

its own function; the substantial end and product of each is to maintain the *other* members while simultaneously maintaining itself. (PR §286R)¹¹¹

Following Hegel's contrast in this passage between organic relation and mechanical division, we can say that in the former the well-being of each component part is preserved in the functioning of the whole despite its specialization: success or failure in the wider *telos* is reflected in each, and no component can be left to degrade or perish—it is the tide that really lifts all boats. As a result of this unity, there is a fluid reciprocity between each element despite their specialization. Moreover, since each is “in itself the totality,” all of the components participate *both* in the determining of the organism's ends as well as an instrument in its proper functioning.

Although Hegel's critique of the mechanistic conception of the state has no direct bearing on abstract labor *per se*, it provides a helpful analogy for explaining the way in which abstract factory labor deadens the worker. If we combine these insights with those of Hegel's lectures and our previous treatment of his theory of *Bildung*, we arrive at a reconstruction of what is wrong with abstract labor, and, more importantly, an idea of the forms of labor which would avoid these pitfalls. Putting the issue negatively, we can say that abstract factory labor deadens the laborer because: through the labor process, the laborers are sacrificed, not preserved; the laborers do not participate in ends-setting, only the holders of capital do (and even they are subject to the profit motive); the laborers are not conscious of the rational principles which organize their activity; the laborers do not acquire security in their social station or stability in their financial situation; there is no guarantee that their labor is actually socially necessary; and, finally, the laborers are not integrated into the universality of the state, they exist as mere accidents of it, since their work has stifled their physical and intellectual capacities and so too their substantial freedom.

¹¹¹ See also PR §300A: “The representation of the so-called independence of powers contains the basic error that the powers should be independent yet mutually limiting. If they are independent, however, the unity of the state, which is the supreme requirement, is destroyed.” (PR §300A, see also §301A).

5.2 Hegel's Solution to the Problem of Abstract Labor: Machine Automation

Nearly all of Hegel's discussions of the deadening caused by abstract labor are immediately followed by the consolation that the very principles governing civil society which give rise to this regrettable process of mechanical labor also tend towards its dissolution through machine automation.¹¹⁴ In his Jena writings, for example, we find Hegel claiming that

this deadening of mechanical labor directly implies the possibility of cutting oneself off from it altogether; for the labor here is wholly quantitative without variety, and since its subsumption in intelligence is self-cancelling, something absolutely external, a thing, can then be used owing to its self-sameness both in respect of its labor and its movement. It is only a question of finding for it an equally dead principle of movement, a self-differentiating power of nature like the movement of water, wind, stream, etc., and the tool passes over into the *machine*.¹¹⁵

And again in 1805–1806:

Man's labor itself becomes entirely mechanical... and consequently he is in a position to withdraw himself from labor and to substitute for his own activity that of an external nature. He needs more 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 and Human Spirit, 121)

The redemptive character of machine automation is even more emphasized in his 1806–1807

Heidelberg lectures:

A factory presents a sad picture of the deadening of human beings... But once factory work has reached a certain degree of perfection, of simplification, mechanical human labor can be replaced by the work of machines, and this is what usually comes about in factories. In this way, through the consummation of this mechanical progress, human freedom is restored... Human beings are

¹¹⁴ Waszek rightly notes that the idea of machine automation “re-occurs frequently in Hegel’s writings, both earlier and later” (Waszek, “The Division of Labor,” 73).

¹¹⁵ Hegel, *System of Ethical Life*, 117f.

accordingly first sacrificed, after which they emerge through the more highly mechanized conditions as free once more.¹¹⁶

The preparation of specific means calls for a particular aptitude and familiarity, and individuals must confine themselves to only one of these. This gives rise to the *division of labor*, as a result of which labor or work becomes less concrete in character, becomes abstract, homogeneous, and easier, so that a far greater quantity of products can be prepared in the same time. In the final stage of abstractness, the homogeneity of labor makes it mechanical, and it becomes possible to install machines in the place of people, replacing human motion by a principle of natural motion that is harnessed to secure uniformity and to promote human ends.¹¹⁷

Just as in the case of *Abstumpfung*, the corresponding claims about machine automation in Hegel's more mature political writings are less grandiose. The first comes from the last sentence of §198 in the *Philosophy of Right*: "The abstraction of production makes work increasingly *mechanical*, so that the human being is eventually able to step aside and let a *machine* take his place." The same idea is presented in an extended but similar way in the 1824/25 lectures, in which Hegel claims that the "further consequence" of the mechanization of labor "is that man can finally leave it to machines." His lecture claim is slightly stronger, as there the "perfection of labor" not only enables but *requires* automation that "in the end makes man superfluous," such that civil society tends towards the elimination of harmful abstract labor (VPR IV, 503f). Nonetheless, in all of his later presentations of machine automation, Hegel only hints at the redemptive capacity of machine automation and is perhaps less optimistic about the degree of its uptake in actually existing factories. What is constant throughout all presentations, though, is machine automation's privileged role as the solution to abstract labor.

¹¹⁶ Hegel, *Lectures on Natural Right and Political Science*, 117.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 175.

We can now turn to our second question: If Hegel understood the deadening effects of abstract labor so acutely, what kind of reconciliation do they receive in his mature theory of the state? An adequate answer to this kind of question has long puzzled commentators of the *Philosophy of Right*, who have often wondered whether Hegel adequately replies to the very threats to ethical life he identifies within civil society.¹¹⁸ The question of whether Hegel's hope for machine automation is consistent is a subset of this larger issue. Machine automation is Hegel's response to one particular threat of civil society: the deadening effect associated with abstract labor and the new kind of deformed subjectivity it produces. A successful reply to such critics would require as a component an adequate reconciliation of these two phenomena.

Part of Hegel's response to the subject-formation problems of abstract labor involves reference to the larger societal structures and institutions outside of the labor process itself. This is Hegel's *systematic* response, in which he leans on the regulative practices of the police and corporations and the recognitive and unifying practices of the state in order to remedy the ills produced by the system of needs. The general argumentative strategy is to admit that abstract labor opposes the actualization of freedom in the lives of workers *if* such labor is conceived only within the narrow sphere of the marketplace. However, the argument continues, looking out from the global and unified perspective of the state we recognize that abstract labor is in fact not merely a necessary evil but instead a constitutive element of our freedom in some way or another. Hegel's model for this kind of systematic is his defense of the state's engagement in war, involving the individual's sacrifice of security in life and property receives a "higher significance" recognizable only from *outside* the sphere of civil society—namely, from the more

¹¹⁸ For example, Wood argues that the corporations are Hegel's solution to poverty while Avineri argues that Hegel offers no solution to the problem of poverty (Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought*, 237–255; Avineri, *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State Modern State*, 109 and 143–154).

complete and universal perspective of the state (PR §324R). Analogously, by taking herself to be in the first instance a citizen of a rational state (as opposed to a satisfier of needs), the abstract factory laborer could come to see her dull labor as an acceptable political practice aligned with the realization of her substantial freedom.

Certainly, this kind of argumentation plays some role in Hegel's defense of labor in civil society. However, we ought to set aside the systematic response for reasons of consistency and charity. First and most significantly, if Hegel really thought larger societal structures were sufficient for the defense of abstract labor, then he would have had no need for mobilizing the solution of machine automation in the first place. Hegel's insistence across all his political writings on the replacement of living labor with machines as the solution to the problem of abstract labor makes it unlikely that he thought such a systematic response was sufficient in this case. Second, we may doubt the success of Hegel's systematic responses in general, particularly as he employs them in defense of the necessity of social ills (e.g., poverty, the rabble, unemployment, or war). In the case of *Abstumpfung*, such a response is even self-defeating, as the very educational processes of abstract labor foreclose the possibility of taking up this wider perspective. Thus, if Hegel's solution to the problems of abstract labor relies primarily on such systematicity, then, for most contemporary readers, it is unlikely to succeed.

We may also wonder whether Hegel's purposed solution of replacing abstract labor with machines is inconsistent with the fundamental role he gives labor in forming ethical subjectivity, *Bildung*. As labor is replaced by machines, the educational opportunities available through labor are, it seems, diminished in equal degree. However, this inconsistency hinges on interpreting Hegel as claiming that *all* labor in civil society cultivates well-formed subjectivity. In fact, and as we have seen, Hegel's underlying claim is simply that this is not true; not all labor cultivates

well-formed subjectivity, even in labor's rational reconstruction in thought. Through his concept of practical *Bildung*, Hegel has instead developed a loose set of criteria for identifying which kinds of labor fulfill the ethical promises of civil society. While these criteria are admittedly constructed partly out of his conception of ethical and free human living that finds its articulation throughout the entirety of the *Philosophy of Spirit*, they are also in many ways immanent to the principles of civil society and the system of needs themselves.

The kind of subject-formation brought about by abstract labor is, in fact, *opposed* to the kind of particularizing practical education Hegel's sees as the proper outcome for labor. Hegelian *Bildung* aims to generate the kind of "subjectivity" that "must be developed as a living whole" (PR §260A), meaning that each social position the subject occupies—mother, worker, consumer, citizen, daughter, property-owner, student, and so on—contributes to the ethical, 'truly human' formation of the subject as a whole. The normative and ethical role allotted to labor in civil society is to ensure that this "subjectivity is educated in its particularity" (PR §187), which the subject accomplishes through her actualization of her self-conception as a worker involved in a meaningful and socially productive labor process, a process in which the subject's required specialization does not prohibit her wider awareness of the rationality of the whole. So understood, Hegel is just correctly applying his own set of ethical criteria when he celebrates the inevitable replacement of spiritless, anti-ethical abstract labor with machines, as this opens up the possibility for these laborers to take part in the kinds of labor Hegel thinks ethically appropriate for all citizens of a modern state.

REFERENCES

- Adorno, Theodor W. *Hegel: Three Studies*. Translated by Shierry Weber Nichol森 and Jeremy J. Shapiro. MIT Press, 1999.
- Avineri, Shlomo. *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State*. Cambridge University Press, 1972.
- . “Labor, Alienation, and Social Classes in Hegel’s *Realphilosophie*.” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 1, no. 1 (1971), 96–119.
- . “The Discovery of Hegel’s Early Lectures on the Philosophy of Right.” *The Owl of Minerva* 16, no. 2 (1985): 199–208.
- Bartonek, Anders. “Labour Against Capitalism? Hegel’s Concept of Labour in Between Civil Society and the State.” *Culture Unbound: Journal of Current Cultural Research* 6, no. 1 (2014): 113–24.
- Berlin, Isaiah. *Liberty: Incorporating Four Essays on Liberty*. Edited by Henry Hardy and Ian Harris. Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Black, R. D. Collison. “Utility.” In *The New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics*, edited by Palgrave Macmillan, 1–6. Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2008.
- Blume, Lawrence E, and Steven N Durlauf. *The New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.
- Boer, Karin de. “Beyond Recognition? Critical Reflections on Honneth’s Reading of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right.” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 21, no. 4 (2013): 534–58.
- Boltanski, Luc, and Eve Chiapello. *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. Translated by Gregory Elliott. New updated edition. Verso, 2018.
- Buchwalter, Andrew, ed. *Hegel and Capitalism*. State University of New York Press, 2015.

- . “‘The Ethicality in Civil Society’: Bifurcation, Bildung and Hegel’s Supersession of the Aporias of Social Modernity.” In *Hegel’s Elements of the Philosophy of Right: A Critical Guide*, edited by David James, 116–36. Cambridge University Press, 2017.
- Busch, Hans-Christoph Schmidt Am. “Why Ethical Life Is Fragile: Rights, Markets and States in Hegel’s Philosophy of Right.” In *Hegel’s Elements of the Philosophy of Right: A Critical Guide*, edited by David James, 137–159. Cambridge University Press, 2017.
- Cesarale, Giorgio. “Hegel’s Notion of Abstract Labor in the Elements of the Philosophy of Right.” In *Hegel and Capitalism*, edited by Andrew Buchwalter, 87–100. State University of New York Press, 2015.
- Comay, Rebecca, and Frank Ruda. *The Dash—the Other Side of Absolute Knowing*. MIT Press, 2018.
- Di Giovanni, George, ed. *Essays on Hegel’s Logic*. State University of New York Press, 1990.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. “Hegel’s Dialectic of Self-Consciousness.” In *Hegel’s Dialectic: Five Hermeneutical Studies*, translated by P. Christopher Smith. Yale University Press, 1976.
- Gjesdal, Kristin. “Bildung.” In *The Oxford Handbook of German Philosophy in the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Michael N. Forster and Kristin Gjesdal. Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Graeber, David. *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory*. Simon & Schuster, 2018.
- Groenewegen, Peter. “Division of Labour.” In *The New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics*, edited by Palgrave Macmillan, 1–13. Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2008.
- Habermas, Jürgen. “Labor and Interaction: Remarks on Hegel’s Jena Philosophy of Mind.” In *Theory and Practice*, 1973.
- Hardt, Michael. “The Withering of Civil Society.” *Social Text*, no. 45 (1995): 27–44.
- Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri. *Empire*. Harvard University Press, 2003.

- . *Labor of Dionysus: A Critique of the State-Form*. University of Minnesota Press, 1994.
- Harris, H. S. *Hegel's Ladder*. Hackett, 1997.
- Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. Edited by Allen W. Wood. Translated by H. B. Nisbet. Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- . *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts oder Naturrecht und Staatswissenschaft im Grundrisse: mit Hegels eigenhändigen Notizen und den mündlichen Zusätzen*. Werke. Suhrkamp, 1970.
- . *Hegel and the Human Spirit: A Translation of the Jena Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit (1805-6) with Commentary*. Translated by Leo Rauch. Wayne State University Press, 1983.
- . *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*. Translated by M. J. Inwood, Arnold V. Miller, and William Wallace. Oxford University Press, 2010.
- . *Hegel's Preface to the Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by Yirmiyahu Yovel. Princeton University Press, 2005.
- . *Lectures on Natural Right and Political Science: The First Philosophy of Right: Heidelberg, 1817-1818, with Additions from the Lectures of 1818-1819*. Translated by J. Michael Stewart and Peter C. Hodgson. The Hegel Lectures Series. Oxford University Press, 2012.
- . *Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit 1827-8*. Translated by Robert R. Williams. Oxford University Press, 2007.
- . *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*. Translated by T. M. Knox and Stephen Houlgate. Oxford University Press, 2008.
- . *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by A. V. Miller. Oxford University Press, 2013.

- . *System of Ethical Life (1802/3) and First Philosophy of Spirit (Part III of the System of Speculative Philosophy 1803/4)*. Translated by H. S. Harris and T. M. Knox. State University of New York Press, 1979.
- . *Vorlesungen Über Rechtsphilosophie, 1818-1831*. Edited by Karl-Heinz Ilting. Vol. 1–4. Frommann-Holzboog, 1973.
- Hyppolite, Jean. *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by Samuel Cherniak and John Heckman. Northwestern University Press, 1979.
- Jaeggi, Rahel. *Alienation*. Translated by Frederick Neuhouser. Columbia University Press, 2016.
- James, David, ed. *Hegel's "Elements of the Philosophy of Right": A Critical Guide*, 2017.
- . "Practical Necessity and the 'Logic' of Civil Society." In *Hegel's Elements of the Philosophy of Right: A Critical Guide*, edited by David James, 177–96. Cambridge University Press, 2017.
- Jones, Gareth Stedman. "Hegel and the Economics of Civil Society." *Civil Society: History and Possibilities*, 2001, 105–30.
- Juchniewicz, Natalia. "The Possibility of Technology in the Philosophy of Hegel." *Hegel-Jahrbuch* 2014, no. 1 (2014).
- Kain, Philip J. "Hegel and the Failure of Civil Society." *The Owl of Minerva* 46, no. 1/2 (2014): 43–65.
- Kelly, Armstrong George. "Notes on Hegel's 'Lordship and Bondage.'" In *The Phenomenology of Spirit Reader: Critical and Interpretive Essays*, edited by Jon Stewart, 172–91. State University of New York Press, 1998.
- Kojève, Alexandre. *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by Raymond Queneau. Cornell University Press, 1980.

- Lukács, Georg. *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*. Translated by Anna Bostock. MIT Press, 1974.
- . *Young Hegel: Studies in the Relations between Dialectics and Economics*. Translated by Rodney Livingstone. MIT, 1977.
- Malabou, Catherine. *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality, and Dialectic*. Routledge, 2005.
- Marx, Karl. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. Translated by Ben Fowkes. Penguin classics, 1981.
- . *Critique of Hegel's "Philosophy of Right."* Edited by Joseph J O'Malley. Translated by Annette Jolin. Cambridge University Press, 1972.
- . *Early Writings*. Translated by Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton. Penguin classics, 1992.
- . *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*. Translated by Martin Nicolaus. Penguin classics, 1993.
- Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative*. University of Minnesota Press, 2002.
- Neuhouser, Frederick. *Foundations of Hegel's Social Theory: Actualizing Freedom*. Harvard University Press, 2000.
- Nicolacopoulos, Toula, and George Vassilacopoulos. *The Disjunctive Logic of the World: Thinking Global Civil Society with Hegel*. re.press, 2013.
- Pinkard, Terry. *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason*. Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Quante, Michael. "'Organic Unity': Its Loose and Analogical and Its Strict and Systematic Sense in Hegel's Philosophy." *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 39, no. S1 (2001): 189–95.

- Redding, Paul. "The Role of Work within the Processes of Recognition in Hegel's Idealism." In *New Philosophies of Labour: Work and the Social Bond*, edited by Nicholas Smith and Jean-Philippe Deranty. Brill, 2012.
- Ritter, Joachim Friedrich. *Hegel and the French Revolution: Essays on the Philosophy of Right*. Translated by Richard Dien Winfield. MIT Press, 1984.
- Ross, Nathan. *On Mechanism in Hegel's Social and Political Philosophy*. Routledge, 2013.
- Ruda, Frank. *Hegel's Rabble: An Investigation into Hegel's Philosophy of Right*. Continuum, 2011.
- . "That Which Makes Itself: Hegel, Rabble and Consequences." In *Hegel's Elements of the Philosophy of Right: A Critical Guide*, edited by David James, 160–76. Cambridge University Press, 2017.
- Sedgwick, Sally. "The State as Organism: The Metaphysical Basis of Hegel's Philosophy of Right." *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 39, no. S1 (2001): 171–88.
- Sørensen, Asger. "Not Work, but Alienation and Education: Bildung in Hegel's Phenomenology." *Hegel-Studien* 49 (2015): 57–88.
- Stern, Robert. *The Routledge Guidebook to Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*. Routledge, 2013.
- Stewart, Jon. *The Unity of Hegel's "Phenomenology of Spirit": A Systematic Interpretation*. Northwestern University Press, 2011.
- Taylor, Charles. *Hegel*. Cambridge University Press, 1977.
- Waszek, Norbert. "The Division of Labor: From the Scottish Enlightenment to Hegel." *The Owl of Minerva* 15, no. 1 (1983): 51–75.
- . *The Scottish Enlightenment and Hegel's Account of "Civil Society."* 120. Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1988.

Whitt, Matt S. “The Problem of Poverty and the Limits of Freedom in Hegel’s Theory of the Ethical State.” *Political Theory* 41, no. 2 (2013): 257–84.

Wood, Allen. “Hegel on Education.” In *Philosophers on Education: New Historical Perspectives*, edited by Amélie Rorty, 300–317. Routledge, 1998.

———. *Hegel’s Ethical Thought*. Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Yeomans, Christopher. “Perspectives without Privileges: The Estates in Hegel’s Political Philosophy.” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 55, no. 3 (2017): 469–90.

Zambrana, Rocío. *Hegel’s Theory of Intelligibility*. The University of Chicago Press, 2015.