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Hegel and White Freedom

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Abstract

Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* are notorious for their racist portrayal of Africa. Few scholars, however, have considered their racism to be significant for Hegel's practical philosophy. This is largely because colonialism and Black enslavement appear to conflict with the idea of universal freedom at the heart of Hegel's practical philosophy. In my paper, I argue against this view and defend the claim that Hegel's idea of freedom is linked to white identity. It therefore grounds his racist comments in the *Philosophy of History* rather than opposing them. In order to show that Hegel's idea of freedom is linked to white identity, I trace its connections with the Western idea of property. My suggestion is that Hegel conceptualizes freedom as appropriation, thereby linking freedom to property and white identity. I conclude that Hegel's idea of freedom is an idea of white freedom and thus not an 'impartial criterion' for social critique.

Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* are notorious for their racist portrayal of Africa. They depict the Black African population as uncivilized and immoral, exclude them from history and present their enslavement as a means of education.¹ However, few scholars have considered the racism of the *Philosophy of History* to be significant for Hegel's practical philosophy, for two main reasons. First, Hegel's authorship of the text is unclear. The *Philosophy of History* was published only after Hegel's death and is based on heavily edited student notes of a series of lectures he gave between 1822 and 1831 in Berlin. Second, the justification of colonialism and Black enslavement appears to conflict with the core principle of Hegel's practical philosophy, which is the idea of universal freedom. Underpinning this line of argument is the view that universal freedom necessarily opposes oppressive practices such as colonialism and enslavement, and is thus an 'impartial criterion' (Parekh 2009: 111) for social critique.²

In my paper, I argue against this view and defend the claim that Hegel's practical philosophy grounds his anti-Black racism in the *Philosophy of History* by linking freedom to white identity.³ Historians have long demonstrated that in modernity



‘slavery and freedom, white and black, are joined at the hip’ (Huggins as quoted in Levine 1996: 168).⁴ White moderns rarely perceived universal freedom and Black enslavement as conceptual opposites and even justified Black enslavement on the grounds of universal freedom. Tyler Stovall (2021) attributes this to the fact that modern philosophers and political theorists conceptualized freedom primarily to emancipate white people while conceding to them the right to enslave Black people. According to Stovall, they reconciled universal freedom and Black enslavement by associating freedom with whiteness. To emphasize the racial basis of such an idea of freedom, Stovall calls it ‘white freedom’ (Stovall 2021: 6).

Hegel’s idea of freedom in the *Philosophy of History* appears to be such an idea of white freedom. While Hegel credits white Europeans with the realization that all are free, he presents European colonialism and Black enslavement as means to emancipate Black Africans towards universal freedom. His argument depends upon an idea of freedom that bears significant resemblance to his conception of freedom in the *Philosophy of Right*. This gives us reason to suspect that the racism of the *Philosophy of History* might be fundamentally entwined with Hegel’s theory of freedom. My aim here is to follow this suspicion and show that Hegel’s idea of freedom in the *Philosophy of Right* is racialized. More specifically, I argue that it commits him to the view that pre-colonial Africa was utterly unfree and that European colonization and the transatlantic slave trade led to progress of the consciousness of freedom in Africa.

To defend the claim that Hegel’s idea of freedom is an idea of white freedom, I trace its links with the concept of property. My suggestion is that Hegel conceptualizes freedom in the *Philosophy of Right* as appropriation, thereby linking freedom not only to the institution of property, but also to white identity. While scholars, such as Brenna Bhandar, have shown that the modern idea of property is inextricably linked to European colonialism, they usually refer only to Hobbes’s and Locke’s theories of property, not Hegel’s.⁵ Others, such as Jeremy Waldron, have argued for a strong connection between freedom and property in Hegel’s theory but have not yet identified this connection as problematic.⁶ My paper aims to link these two debates by showing that Hegel’s conception of freedom as appropriation provides a justificatory basis for his anti-Black racism in the *Philosophy of History*.⁷

The paper proceeds as follows. First, I recapitulate Hegel’s racist remarks about Africa in the *Philosophy of History*. Second, I argue that Hegel links freedom and property in the *Philosophy of Right* by conceptualizing freedom as appropriation. Following my reconstruction, I argue that the realization of Hegelian freedom hinges on the institutional framework of a property regime. Third, I relate my interpretation to whiteness and the portrayal of Africa in the *Philosophy of History*. Here, I argue that Hegel’s conception of freedom commits him to the view that Africa was utterly unfree before colonization and that European colonialism was justified. To

show that Hegel's idea of freedom legitimates the transatlantic slave trade as a process of education, I turn to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. After briefly summarizing the *Phenomenology's* account of lordship and bondage, I argue that Hegel's idea of freedom treats the transatlantic slave trade as a necessary phase in Africa's development towards freedom. I conclude that Hegel's idea of freedom is inextricably bound to whiteness. It therefore legitimizes colonial violence rather than opposing it.

I. White freedom and black enslavement in the *Philosophy of History*

In the *Philosophy of History*, Hegel sets out to prove that human history is a rational process geared toward the realization of universal freedom. He argues that freedom constitutes the innermost drive of humanity and essential nature of human Spirit. However, this drive is not always conscious. In prehistorical times, Hegel recounts, freedom existed only as an 'unconscious instinct' and a hidden 'germ of infinite possibility' (*PH*: 72).⁸ Accordingly, the process of history 'begins with its general aim [...] only in an *implicit* form' and is oriented towards 'rendering this unconscious impulse a conscious one' (*PH*: 39). Hegel goes on to define history as the 'progress of the consciousness of freedom' (*PH*: 33). His suggestion is that, over time, humanity increasingly realized its drive for freedom 'in the phenomena of the World's existence' (*PH*: 24). In order to show that this is the case, he gathers empirical material on different cultures and traces the development of the idea of universal freedom in each case.

On the basis of this material, Hegel claims that the progression of freedom has historically moved westward. It had commenced in the East, with the idea that one is free, and eventually culminated in the Western idea of universal freedom (*PH*: 33). Once the principle of universal freedom is conscious, Hegel contends, history is a matter of translating the idea of freedom 'into the domain of objectivity' (*PH*: 41). That is, societies must base and ground their institutions and social structures on the idea of universal freedom and organize themselves in a way that all individuals can actualize their essential freedom (*PH*: 32). According to the text, this is 'a problem whose solution and application require a severe and lengthened process of culture' (*PH*: 32). Such a process of culture hinges on the political order of the state. Hegel refers to the state as 'the external manifestation' and 'embodiment of rational freedom, realizing and recognizing itself in an objective form' (*PH*: 32). Although he acknowledges that not every state is fully rational and free, he nevertheless attributes the realization of universal freedom to the state, claiming that historical change 'indissolubly attaches itself' to the state and that the successive phases of freedom 'manifest themselves in it as distinct political *principles*' (*PH*: 32). Conversely, Hegel designates every diverging political order as

belonging to the ‘ante-historical period’ (*PH*: 75)—the phase of human history where the idea of freedom is still unconscious. What Hegel considers a state clearly leans on the Western European concept of the state. Consequently, the *Philosophy of History* presents the Western European state as the universal aim and purpose of human history while treating every other political order ‘as necessarily falling behind that of Europe itself’ (Althaus 2000: 175).

Within this Eurocentric paradigm,⁹ Africa’s role is to illustrate the great unfreedom and immorality of the ‘ante-historical period’. Its portrayal is intended to support the claim that freedom is only possible within the state. While Hegel equates the state in the *Philosophy of History* with freedom and progress, he characterizes ‘Africa proper’—by which he means Africa south of the Sahara—as devoid of any freedom and historical development whatsoever. He refers to Africa as ‘the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature’ (*PH*: 117). Ostensibly, Africa ‘has no movement or development to exhibit’ (*PH*: 117). Therefore, it is ‘no historical part of the world’ and has to be presented ‘only as on the threshold of the World’s History’ (*PH*: 117).

Hegel attributes Africa’s alleged lack of development primarily to its geographical conditions. He suggests that because Africa’s climate is extreme, nature is ‘too powerful to allow Spirit to build up a world for *itself*’ (*PH*: 97). Faced with such powerful nature, the African population is ‘constantly impelled to direct attention to nature’ (*PH*: 97). It is preoccupied with the satisfaction of basic needs and is thus unable to engage in ‘more elevated’ activities such as the development of free consciousness. Consequently, for Hegel, the African ‘exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state’ (*PH*: 111).¹⁰ He has not yet reached the ‘distinction between himself as an individual and the universality of his essential being’ and still remains in his ‘uniform, undeveloped oneness’ (*PH*: 111). Furthermore, without free consciousness, he has ‘no respect for himself’ (*PH*: 112). It ‘does not occur to [him] to expect from others what we are enabled to claim’ (*PH*: 114). He regards tyranny ‘as no wrong’ and looks upon cannibalism ‘as quite customary and proper’ (*PH*: 114). Finally, he lacks any moral sense of the injustice of slavery (*PH*: 114). Hegel infers that the African character is defined by ‘want of self-control’ (*PH*: 116), its historical standpoint being one of ‘mere sensuous volition with energy of will’ (*PH*: 114). On this sensuous volition, there is ‘absolutely no bond, no restraint’ (*PH*: 114). No universal principle other than ‘arbitrary subjective choice’ can be recognized in Africa and, as a result, African communities can only be united by ‘external force’ (*PH*: 114).¹¹

Hegel concludes that although Africans are enslaved by Western Europeans, ‘their lot in their own land is even worse’ (*PH*: 114). Without a free consciousness, there exists in Africa ‘a slavery quite as absolute [...], for it is the essential principle of slavery, that man has not yet attained a consciousness of his freedom, and consequently sinks down to a mere Thing—an object of no value’ (*PH*: 114).

According to Hegel, such a condition is incapable of any development or culture (*PH*: 114). He even goes so far as to argue that the transatlantic slave trade ultimately improved living conditions in Africa. Not only could it not worsen what was already an utterly unfree condition, but it actually raised awareness for the injustice of slavery and educated Black Africans towards free consciousness (*PH*: 116). For Hegel, therefore, the situation in Africa not only illustrates the great unfreedom and injustice of the ‘ante-historical period’, but also demonstrates the emancipatory effect of slavery within the Western European state:

The doctrine which we deduce from this condition of slavery among the [African people], and which constitutes the only side of the question that has an interest for our inquiry, is that which we deduce from the Idea: viz., that the “Natural condition” itself is one of absolute and thorough injustice—contravention of the Right and Just. Every intermediate grade between this and the realization of a rational State retains—as might be expected—elements and aspects of injustice [...]. But thus existing in a State, slavery is itself a phase of advance from the merely isolated sensual existence—a phase of education—a mode of becoming participant in a higher morality and the culture connected with it. (*PH*: 116–17)

While Hegel acknowledges that every stage of history contains ‘elements and aspects of injustice’ (*PH*: 116), he claims that these elements of injustice are themselves part of the historical progression towards freedom when they occur within the state. Thus, even though he refers to slavery as ‘in and for itself injustice’, he nevertheless regards the transatlantic slave trade as a relevant phase in Africa’s development towards freedom (*PH*: 117). For this reason, Hegel ultimately advises against the sudden termination of the transatlantic slave trade and advocates for its gradual abolition instead (*PH*: 117).

II. Hegelian freedom as appropriation

In the *Philosophy of History*, Hegel clearly links freedom with whiteness and opposes it to Blackness. While he credits white Europeans with the realization that all are free and associates the political order of the Western state with freedom and progress, he denies Black African people any freedom and historical development whatsoever. The opposition between freedom and Blackness becomes most apparent in Hegel’s evaluation of slavery: While Hegel bases his argument that Black Africans lack consciousness of freedom on an alleged lack of consciousness of the injustice of slavery, he presents the transatlantic slave trade—the systematic

enslavement of Black Africans by white Europeans—as education towards freedom. In what follows, I argue that this opposition of freedom to Blackness is consistent with Hegel’s theory of freedom in the *Philosophy of Right*. I begin by explaining the problem which Hegel is interested in solving with his conception of freedom. Drawing on work by Thomas Khurana and Christoph Menke, I argue that Hegel aims to facilitate the realization of Kantian autonomy within the state. Second, I interpret Hegel’s conception of freedom as appropriation. Here I argue that the state can only facilitate the realization of Hegelian freedom if it is organized as a property regime. In the third part of the paper, I connect my interpretation to Hegel’s portrayal of Africa in the *Philosophy of History*.

In his preface to the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel refers to the book as an ‘attempt to comprehend and portray the state as an inherently rational entity’ (PR: 21/17–18). In other words, he aims to demonstrate that the state and its institutions are normatively justified. Importantly, Hegel is not interested in the practical construction of a utopian or ideal state but wants to demonstrate ‘how the state, as the ethical universe, should be recognized’ (PR: 21/17–18). More specifically, he wants to convey that the state presupposes the realization of freedom and is the only political order in which universal freedom assumes an objective reality (PR: §§257–58).

According to Khurana and Menke, Hegel thus takes up Rousseau’s and Kant’s reflections on autonomy (Khurana 2017: 277–78; Menke 2018: 22–26). For freedom, understood as autonomy, does not entail the absence of laws, but accordance with a particular kind of law—the one that we give ourselves *voluntarily*. While the modern idea of autonomy is usually attributed to Rousseau, Khurana and Menke argue that Hegel bases his idea of freedom primarily on Kant’s conception of autonomy. Whereas for Rousseau, autonomy means self-legislation, Kant understands autonomy as free will giving itself its *own* law. Accordingly, Kant’s idea of autonomy does not only refer to a specific mode of legislation, but also to a specific kind of law. This is the law according to which free will is internally structured. Kant calls it the law of reason.¹² As the law of reason emanates from the will itself, it does not in any way restrict the freedom of the will but rather constitutes it (Menke 2018: 22–26). For Kant, then, autonomy is not just self-legislation, but self-realization: Only by acting in accordance with the law of reason does the will actualize its essential freedom. As a result, Kantian autonomy is more radical than any previous idea of freedom. For it allows the will to be completely independent while acting in accordance with the moral law (Taylor 1979: 5).¹³

As Khurana and Menke argue, Kant’s radical idea of freedom as autonomy provides the basis of Hegel’s idea of freedom in the *Philosophy of Right*. However, for Hegel, the problem with Kant’s particular conception of autonomy is that it opposes freedom against external nature. While Kant defines the free law as the inner structure of the rational will, nature is essentially different from the rational

will and governed by causal laws. Accordingly, it confronts the will as a sphere of unfreedom, which can only ever approximate the freedom of the will and never be a sphere of radical freedom itself. The same is true of the state and its institutions, as they too are external to a free will. Khurana argues that Kant tries to reconcile the opposition of freedom and nature by showing that—and how—morality is realized as a form of second nature (Khurana 2017: 198f.). However, according to Khurana, Kant does not consistently carry out his reflections. Following his theory, therefore, freedom and nature can only come together at the end of an infinite process (Khurana 2017: 289–90). This is unacceptable to Hegel, as it would mean that in reality, radical freedom is a mere formality and an unattainable ideal.

In what follows I argue that Hegel aims to reconcile the opposition of freedom and external nature in the *Philosophy of Right* by conceptualizing freedom as appropriation. For Hegel, as for Kant, the idea of freedom corresponds primarily to the internal structure of free will. This structure has three elements, according to Hegel, the first of which is the will's 'pure indeterminacy' (PR: §5). Hegel argues that in its immediate form, the will is 'the pure reflection into itself' (PR: §5). As this pure reflection, the will is capable of dissolving 'every limitation, every content whether present immediately through nature, through needs, desires, and drives, or given and determined in some other way' (PR: §5). Thus, the freedom of the will consists primarily in the 'absolute possibility' to abstract from every determination 'in which I find myself or which I have posited in myself' (PR: § 5R). In other words, it consists in being purely indeterminate.

Conceptualized as 'pure indeterminacy', however, freedom is completely negative. As a result, it can only be realized through destruction or dissolution (PR: § 5R). Hegel calls this kind of freedom 'the freedom of the void' (PR: § 5R). In order to assume a positive existence in the world, the idea of freedom must become determinate and concrete. Thus, the second element of Hegelian freedom is 'the transition from undifferentiated indeterminacy to differentiation, determination, and the positing of a determinacy as a content and object' (PR: §6). Initially, this positing of a determinacy conflicts with the idea of freedom as 'pure indeterminacy'. In order to express the freedom of the will, rather than limiting it, the will must therefore transform the determinacy of the object into an expression of its 'pure indeterminacy'. According to Hegel, the will achieves this by constantly dissolving and re-positing the determinacy of the object, or by appropriating the determinacy of the object and making it its *own*. Through this act of appropriation, the will translates its 'subjective end into objectivity, while at the same time remaining *with itself* in this objectivity' (PR: §28). It thereby gives its radical freedom a determinate form and reconciles the initial opposition of its indeterminacy and determinacy. Accordingly, the third element of Hegelian freedom is the appropriation of determinacy.

The will can most completely appropriate the determinacy of the object in self-consciousness. By making itself the object of its own reflection, the will is both the activity and the object of its own thinking. It is *'the free will that wills the free will'* (PR: §27). This kind of doubling enables the will to look at itself in objective form and recognize its 'pure indeterminacy' in the object. Gaining consciousness of its freedom in this way, the will becomes *'for itself what it is in itself'* (PR: §10)—it becomes itself the very determinacy which it constantly dissolves and re-positing in order to actualize its freedom. Consequently, in self-consciousness, the will demonstrates that it is dependent on nothing other than itself for the realization of its freedom. For Hegel, then, it is in self-consciousness that the will actualizes its true infinity and independence (PR: §22).

Conceptualized as pure self-consciousness, however, the freedom of the will still has no phenomenal existence in the world (PR: §35). In order to become real and recognizable to others, the will must also give itself 'an external sphere of freedom' (PR: §41). That is, it must perform the same appropriative movement as self-consciousness in relation to nature. For Hegel, as for Kant, nature is in itself unfree (PR: §49R). It is external and determinate and thus 'immediately different' from free will (PR: §41). The transformation of external nature into a sphere of radical freedom requires the will to transform it into the natural side of its 'pure indeterminacy'. According to Hegel, the will achieves this by placing itself into external things and giving their matter a completely new determinate form (PR: §44, §52). In other words, it gives itself an external sphere of freedom by continuously transforming and appropriating the matter of singular natural things.

For Hegel, acts of appropriation differ substantially from acts of taking possession (PR: §52A). Hegel takes possession to be an external relation to the thing where the thing always 'retains an external aspect' (PR: §52A). Through the act of taking possession the will can subjugate the thing only to a certain degree. The thing, with its particular material properties, is still subject to the laws of nature and maintains some kind of resistance to free will. In appropriation, this resistance is to be overcome. According to Hegel, appropriation is 'completed by free will' (PR: §52A). In this relation, the thing does 'not retain any distinct property for itself' (PR: §52A). Instead, it is 'the empty abstraction of a matter without attributes' which 'thought must get the better of' (PR: §52A).¹⁴ Thus, the concept of appropriation does not refer to just any idea of ownership or possessive relation with nature, but to the abstract idea of free will's mastery over nature.¹⁵

This particular idea of ownership attains an objective existence in the Western European concept of property. For Hegel, therefore, having property is only rational (PR: §49). He refers to property as 'the first existence' of freedom (PR: §45) and calls it a natural 'drive' of free will (PR: §19R). Moreover, as the will appropriates singular external things by placing itself in them, Hegel considers property to be essentially private property (PR: §46). He does not exclude the

possibility of communal property altogether, but argues that communal property consists of, and can be reduced to, private shares.

In order to facilitate the realization of freedom through appropriation, the state must meet several criteria. First, it must assign and enforce individual property rights. If freedom can only be actualized through the appropriation of singular external things, a person must have ‘the right to place [their] will in any thing’ (PR: §44). Thus, the realization of freedom requires ‘the absolute right of appropriation which human beings have over all things’ (PR: §44). Hegel goes on to define the legal person as ‘the will’s self-conscious [...] and simple reference to itself’ (PR: §35), that is, as free self-consciousness. In consequence, property is not only ‘the first existence’ of a person’s freedom, but also of their legal status. This is why Hegel claims that legal persons exist for each other ‘only as owners of property’ (PR: §40).¹⁶

Second, the state must anchor the idea of freedom as appropriation in its social structures and institutions. As Hegel argues, appropriation and taking possession differ mainly in terms of abstractness. Only as an abstract relation to the thing can appropriation be ‘completed by free will’. However, if appropriation differs from taking possession in being abstract, the difference between appropriation and taking possession must itself be abstract—while still being perceivable in its abstractness. That is, people must be able to recognize acts of appropriation and distinguish them from acts of taking possession without appropriation being an external or phenomenal relation to a thing. As a result, the state can only facilitate the realization of freedom as appropriation by embedding the abstract idea of appropriation as free will’s mastery over nature in its social structures and institutions.

Third, in order to transform nature into a sphere of freedom, the state must subjugate it under a new law entirely. As individuals can only place their will into singular external things, they are incapable of transforming nature as such into a sphere of freedom. In order to achieve such a transformation, the state must release nature from its causal laws and subject it to the rational law of the free will. This subjugation entails the proprietization of nature—the division of nature into singular external things that can be appropriated by individuals.¹⁷

Finally, in order to facilitate the individual realization of freedom, the state must educate, or cultivate, its members towards consciousness of their freedom as appropriation. According to Hegel, the immediate will is only free in itself. That is, it has yet to realize its freedom vis-à-vis the object. To be able to recognize its freedom in the object, the will must come out of itself and give its freedom a determinate form. As the will does not do this immediately, the realization of freedom must be stimulated from outside. In other words, the realization of freedom as appropriation hinges on institutions and social structures that educate, or

cultivate, people towards coming out of themselves and giving their freedom a determinate form through appropriation.

As this education, or enculturation, is meant to raise consciousness for the idea of freedom, it primarily consists in the *unconscious* habituation towards appropriating nature.¹⁸ Furthermore, as the appropriation of nature is a concrete act that must be performed through a concrete body, the unconscious habituation towards appropriating nature consists primarily in taking possession of one's immediate body (*PR*: §47). Like every other natural entity, the body is in itself unfree and only becomes 'spirit's willing organ and soul-inspired instrument' when the will takes possession of it (*PR*: §48).¹⁹ In order to take possession of the body, the will 'must eliminate the immediacy and individuality in which spirit is immersed' (*PR*: §187R). That is, it must not only develop an understanding of itself as purely indeterminate, but also as radically different from the natural body. Hegel refers to this process as an 'internal division' of the self and 'the hard work of opposing mere subjectivity of conduct' (*PR*: §187R). Consequently, the cultivation towards free consciousness first appears as a violent compulsion to discipline one's natural self and subject it to the rational will. Only in retrospect and within an institutional framework that anchors the idea of property as the 'first existence' of freedom do individuals construe this compulsion as education towards freedom.²⁰

In conclusion, for Hegel, individuals first posit their concept as free human beings by taking possession of their body and transforming their self-relation into a relation of appropriation:

The human being, in his immediate existence in himself, is a natural entity, external to his concept; it is only through the development of his own body and spirit, essentially by means of his self-consciousness comprehending itself as free, that he takes possession of himself and becomes his own property as distinct from that of others. Or to put it the other way round, this taking possession of oneself consists also in translating into actuality what one is in terms of one's concept (as possibility, capacity, or predisposition). (*PR*: §57)

Moreover, Hegel claims that 'for others, I am essentially a free entity within my body *while* I am in immediate possession of it' (*PR*: §48; my emphasis). Because self-possession translates the concept of freedom into actuality, it is also what makes slavery unjust within Hegel's framework. Without self-possession, human beings have yet to actualize their concept as free beings. Therefore, they have yet to establish the fundamental opposition of their concept and their enslavement. Consequently, for Hegel, the injustice of slavery depends on institutions and social structures that cultivate human beings towards self-possession (see *PR*: §57R).

Such an education, or cultivation, requires property not just as an institution, but as a mode of social organization. That is, the idea of property as free will's mastery over nature must reflect all kinds of social relations, habits of thought, and cultural practices in the state. It is only when laws of property operate in such an all-encompassing way, that human beings come to transform themselves into self-possessive individuals and associate this mode of subjectivity with freedom. Accordingly, Nichols writes that 'property is not a reified thing but a cluster of social and historical practices' (Nichols 2020: 130).²¹ While it may be theoretically possible for a state to grant and enforce individual property rights and propertize nature without being organized around the idea of property as free will's mastery over nature, such a state would not educate, or cultivate, its members towards consciousness of their freedom as appropriation. The realization of Hegelian freedom thus requires property not just as an institution, but also as a mode of social organization.²²

When the state is organized in such a way that it meets all of these criteria—grants and enforces individual property rights, anchors the idea of appropriation in its institutions, subjects nature to the law of appropriation, and cultivates individuals towards self-possession—it can be referred to as a property regime.²³ Organized as a property regime, the state mirrors the appropriative movement of self-consciousness: It actualizes the abstract idea of freedom by appropriating the concreteness of individuals and turning it into the concreteness of universal free Spirit. Furthermore, it reproduces itself through a continuous dialectical movement by cultivating its members towards recognizing its structures and institutions as a prerequisite of their freedom and deliberately reproducing them. As a result, its members do not need to be coerced into obeying its laws by external force but follow them voluntarily.²⁴

While the realization of Hegelian freedom in this sense presupposes the institutional framework of the property regime, such a framework is not the only prerequisite for universal freedom in the Hegelian sense. Throughout the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel's idea of freedom becomes much richer and more complex than I have presented it here, such that its realization also requires, among other things, contract laws, a police force and a constitution.²⁵ However, Hegel never fully overturns the idea of freedom as appropriation, thereby making it the basis for all later stages of freedom. In my view, then, the state can only facilitate the realization of Hegelian freedom if it is organized as a property regime.

III. Freedom as appropriation as 'white freedom'

According to Nichols, '[u]nderstanding property as a mode of social organization is the first step in grasping its possibilities as a tool of domination' (Nichols 2020:

130). During European colonialism, the almost universal justification for classifying indigenous populations as premodern was based on a lack of property and corresponding forms of cultivation (Bhandar 2018: 4). The colony was not just an example to which the concept of property applied, 'but a context out of which it arose' (Nichols 2020: 13; see also Bhandar 2018: 3). Grounding legal ownership in the idea of free will's mastery over nature allowed Western states to establish a social and institutional framework that could be extended to the colonies in a way that simultaneously negated indigenous claims to ownership and transferred the title of ownership to Western Europeans (Nichols 2020: 8). As a result, colonial dispossession effectively merged propertization and theft into one movement (Nichols 2020: 8). Paradoxically, Western states did not deny indigenous claims of ownership altogether but based their devaluation and dispossession on recognition of the fact that these claims were based on different concepts of 'ownership' and personhood (Nichols 2020: 116–17). Measured against the Western ideal, these concepts appeared primitive and unfree, which, in turn, justified their violent negation. The difference was not (just) that indigenous populations were organized around communal, rather than private property laws—in fact, some concepts of communal property may be in line with the idea of free will's mastery over nature—but that they resisted the logic of Western property altogether.²⁶ On this basis, Bhandar argues that modern property law is itself a form of colonial domination (Bhandar 2018: 5).

By linking freedom to property, Hegel's theory of freedom reproduces precisely this narrative. As the institutional framework of the property regime is a precondition for freedom in the Hegelian sense, Hegel presents the Western property regime as the only social order where freedom has an objective reality. Pre-colonial indigenous populations, on the other hand, such as the indigenous population of South Africa, appear as lacking any necessary institutions and social structures for the realization of freedom. Without the institutional framework of the property regime, they do not assign and enforce individual property rights, anchor the idea of property as free will's mastery over nature in their institutions and social structures, and individuate nature into singular appropriable things. Therefore, they do not enable individuals to realize their freedom in relation to nature. Furthermore, they do not cultivate their members towards self-possession. As a result, their members remain in their 'undeveloped unity' (*PH*: 111) and lack any consciousness of their freedom, rights and value as human beings. They have not yet realized their concept as free human beings and have not yet established the injustice of their enslavement. Moreover, they do not recognize the laws of the state as a prerequisite of their freedom and look upon these laws as an external restriction of their volition. Therefore, they do not follow the laws of the state voluntarily and must be coerced into obeying them by external force.

Consequently, Hegel's theory of freedom in the *Philosophy of Right* orders freedom and unfreedom along the colour line, just as the *Philosophy of History* does.²⁷ In so far as it equates the institutional and social framework of the property regime with freedom and progress, it simultaneously denies Black Africans any freedom and historical development whatsoever. According to Achille Mbembe, this is 'the archetype of what would become the colonial mode of speaking about Africa' (Mbembe 2001: 175). This mode of speaking is itself a form of colonial violence. For in reality, indigenous land was full of histories and traditions which, in the face of colonialism, lost all their positive meaning. From the standpoint of the African, the colony did not represent a territory of freedom and progress but one 'where the conqueror overrides the natives' rights and seeks to give untrammelled rein to pride against them' (Mbembe 2001: 183). Mbembe goes on to define colonization as a 'two-faceted movement of destroying and creating': It created life and institutions by destroying everything that had previously constituted Black life (Mbembe 2001: 189). Hegel's theory of freedom reiterates this 'two-faceted movement'. It portrays Black Africans as wild and uneducated, who can only attain free consciousness by abandoning everything that constituted their lives before colonization. As a result, progress in the Hegelian sense is tantamount to Black people completely abandoning their own culture and assimilating into a culture that justified their oppression in the first place. In conclusion, while Hegel does not deny Black Africans the potential to attain free consciousness, his theory nevertheless reinforces a racist paradigm.

In order to show that Hegel's theory of freedom also commits him to the view that the transatlantic slave trade was a relevant phase in Africa's development towards freedom, I must take a step back and revisit Hegel's discussion of slavery in the *Philosophy of Right*. Here, Hegel argues that slavery is neither absolutely justified nor absolutely contrary to right. He calls the legitimacy of slavery a 'false appearance' (PR: §57R) and asserts that 'the point of the free will, with which right and the science of right begin, is already beyond that false point of view whereby the human being [is] capable of enslavement' (PR: §57R). However, as free consciousness hinges on the institutional framework of the property regime, Hegel's theory allows for the justification of slavery wherever there is no such framework. Moreover, he claims that in such a case, slavery is not only 'valid', but even 'necessary', and occupies 'the transitional phase between natural human existence and the truly ethical condition' (PR: §57A).

Hegel suggests that in order to make sense of this claim we must turn to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. More precisely, he implies that the struggle of recognition, by leading to a relationship of lordship and bondage, stimulates the movement by which consciousness comes to recognize its freedom and establishes the injustice of slavery. In what follows, therefore, I briefly revisit Hegel's account of lordship and bondage in the *Phenomenology*.

According to the *Phenomenology*, consciousness can only realize its true essence through an encounter with another consciousness, which in turn recognizes itself in the first (*PbG*: 111/127). Hegel's point is that consciousness can only grasp the universality of its being by recognizing itself in another being of the same kind who mirrors this activity. The transition from consciousness to self-consciousness begins with two consciousnesses which are not yet aware of their essential sameness. They each set out with the assumption that they are themselves simply because they are not the other, thus characterizing the other only negatively, as inessential to their being (*PbG*: 113/129). Because they can only gain certainty of such self-conception by completely negating the other and its determinateness, a 'life-and-death struggle' (*PbG*: 113–14/130) emerges. In the course of their confrontation, both consciousnesses realize that they are in some way bound to determinate being. But they do so in two different ways. One consciousness understands that it is in mortal danger and, out of fear for its life, submits itself to the other. Fearing for its life, it was not able to abstract from its determinate being and had to re-conceptualize itself as 'consciousness in the form of thinghood' (*PbG*: 115/132). The other consciousness is convinced that by having shown mercy to the first, it has successfully proven its power over determinate being. It continues to believe that it is bound to determinate being in a merely negative way, now only mediated through the first.

Their struggle thus passes into a relation of lordship and bondage. In this relation, the second consciousness represents the 'essential' or free consciousness: the lord. The lord relates to the other and its thinghood both immediately and 'mediately to each through the other' (*PbG*: 115/132). He does not have to deal with thinghood directly and can purely enjoy it, while the other negates it by working upon it for him. The bondsman in turn is so indistinguishably fused with determinate being that he cannot completely negate thinghood without thereby negating himself. As a result, his negation consists in transforming, or re-determining thinghood, in other words: in appropriating it for the lord (*PbG*: 116/133). Both lord and bondsman recognize the lord's doing as the essential doing of self-consciousness (*PbG*: 116/133). But this recognition is 'one-sided and unequal' (*PbG*: 116/133). For 'recognition proper', both lord and bondsman must do to themselves what they each do to the other (*PbG*: 116/133). Therefore, the development towards true self-consciousness is not yet complete.

As the lord achieves full recognition within the relation, all further development must go through the bondsman.²⁸ Being subject to the lord, the bondsman is not yet aware of his freedom. However, he has already actualized his freedom unconsciously. In facing death, he dissolved all determinations which concerned his being and determined them anew (*PbG*: 117/134). Furthermore, through the object's transformation, the bondsman continuously actualizes his freedom in relation to nature (*PbG*: 117/134). As he only redetermines thinghood and

does not negate it completely, his ‘negative relation to the object becomes its *form* and something *permanent*’ (*PbG*: 117/134). Accordingly, the bondsman can look upon the negated object and recognize his power over its determinate being. By contemplating the transformed object, the bondsman understands that the lord can only relate to the object in a negative way because he, the bondsman, negates it for him. This brings the bondsman to the conclusion that the lord’s freedom is actualized through the bondsman’s own work. Being conscious of the lord’s dependency on him, the bondsman loses his fear which has kept him in his submission. The bondsman understands that as long as his work is essential to the lord’s freedom, the latter cannot negate the bondsman without also negating himself (*PbG*: 118/135). Moreover, the bondsman realizes that by embodying both parts of the relation—lord *and* bondsman—he will be freer and more independent than the lord ever was. It is therefore through his work on the object that the bondsman realizes his freedom and ‘becomes conscious of what he truly is’. (*PbG*: 118/135).

According to Jean Hyppolite, the lesson of Hegel’s account of lordship and bondage ‘consists essentially in showing that the truth of the master reveals that he is the slave, and that the slave is revealed to be the master of the master’ (quoted as in Cole 2004: 579). However, at no point in the dialectic does the bondsman become the master’s master. The bondsman emancipates himself from the lord by beginning to work under his *own* command, that is, by becoming his *own* master. The emancipated bondsman embodies both ‘pure consciousness’ and ‘consciousness in the form of thinghood’. He forms the ‘middle term’ (*PbG*: 113/130) of the two extremes as which the two consciousnesses initially appeared. Therefore, the lesson of Hegel’s account of lordship and bondage consists in showing that the bondsman achieves radical freedom by *internalizing* the social relation of lordship and bondage and turning it into his self-relation.²⁹ Moreover, it consists in showing that radical freedom is actualized by continually redetermining the object, or appropriating it.³⁰

According to Hegel, bondage must meet three criteria in order to educate people towards free consciousness. First, the two consciousnesses facing each other must each represent opposing moments of self-consciousness. One must be regarded as pure indeterminacy and the other as inessential, unfree consciousness in the form of thinghood. Second, the bondsman must have already actualized his freedom unconsciously by completely redetermining his self-conception in the face of death.³¹ Third, their relation must mirror the inner structure of self-consciousness: The bondsman must appropriate nature for the lord as the lord’s property in order to actualize the lord’s freedom.

Not all kinds of social domination and bondage meet these criteria. Pre-colonial African ‘slavery’,³² for example, did not degrade the enslaved to the status of unfree chattel, but conceded rights to them (Diagne 1976: 24).

Therefore, it did not break down the ‘middle term’ of free self-consciousness into its two extremes and establish, on the social level, the relation which for Hegel signifies the general movement of freedom. As a result, pre-colonial African ‘slavery’ could not have stimulated the development of free self-consciousness and was just another sign of Africa’s alleged lack of freedom and right.³³

The transatlantic slave trade, on the other hand, does meet all of Hegel’s criteria for bondage to be educative. According to Mbembe, European colonizers produced two opposing shapes of consciousness. While giving European consciousness the ontological condition of the ‘I’, they conceptualized Black African consciousness only negatively, as the ‘non-I’ (Mbembe 2001: 190).³⁴ In the colony, these different ontological statuses were both linked to property. To be free meant having individual property rights. Simultaneously, most Black people were unfree and the property of someone else. Accordingly, white people were free by virtue of the fact that they were able to assert property rights over Black people. Orlando Patterson argues that the decisive factor in this relation was not so much that Black people were degraded to chattel, but that they ‘could not claim or exercise direct powers of property; all such claims had to be made through the master’ (Patterson 1982: 28).³⁵ From the standpoint of Hegel’s theory, then, the transatlantic slave trade forced onto individuals the inner structure of free consciousness and split the ‘middle term’ that is self-consciousness into its two extremes.

Furthermore, Patterson contends that ‘Slavery, for the slave, was truly a “trial by death”’ (Patterson 1982: 100). Fearing for his life, the enslaved had to submit himself to the master’s way of seeing him and fully re-conceptualize himself as consciousness in the form of thinghood. In the words of Frederick Douglass: ‘Personality swallowed up in the sordid idea of property! Manhood lost in chattelhood! [...] Our destiny was to be fixed for life, and we had no more voice in the decision of the question than the oxen and cows that stood chewing at the haymow’ (cited after Davis 1971: 8). Building on Douglass’s autobiography, Angela Davis argues that the enslaved had to live his life ‘within the limits of the white man’s definition of the Black man. Forced to live as if he were a fixture, the slave’s perception of the world is inverted’ (cited after Davis 1971: 8).³⁶ In case the enslaved refused to submit to the colonizers’ conception, it was the slave breaker’s job ‘to tame impudent slaves, slaves who refuse to accept for themselves the definition which society has imposed on them’ (Davis 1971: 19). Thus, colonization violently forced a new self-image on Black people, to which they had to conform in order to survive.

According to Babacar Camara, the whole purpose of the transatlantic slave trade was ‘to provide plantations, mines, and factories with a forced and free labor’ (Camara 2005: 87). The institution of slavery aimed at the appropriation of colonized land and the production of goods that could be sold on the world market. On the grounds of Hegel’s theory, then, one could argue that the Black

enslaved actualized the freedom and independence of the white master by appropriating nature for him. Furthermore, in their relation, the master achieved full recognition as the free, essential consciousness (Patterson 1982: 99).³⁷ The master was free not only because he did not need to work on nature directly, but also because he had total power over the enslaved.³⁸ However, according to Patterson, the very totality of his power also made the master dependent on the enslaved (Patterson 1982: 173). From the standpoint of the master, the slave might not have been a *person* of value, but he was ‘a thing of value—perhaps the only thing over which the master had true power’ (Patterson 1982: 173). The master regarded the enslaved as ‘the ultimate human tool’ whose sole purpose was to serve him. In order to keep the slave in his submission, he ‘could use various combinations of punishments and rewards’ (Patterson 1982: 205). However, a ‘dead slave, or one incapacitated by brutalization’ was entirely useless for the master (Patterson 1982: 205). Therefore, it was in the master’s own interest to ‘search for the best balance between reward and punishment’ (Patterson 1982: 205).³⁹

Patterson argues that if the enslaved survived the ‘trial by death’ he emerged out of it ‘as a person afire with the knowledge of and the need for dignity and honour’ (Patterson 1982: 100). That is to say, the enslaved kept his desire for recognition even after submitting himself to the master. Frederick Douglass’s autobiography is arguably the most famous testimony to this. In her *Lectures on Liberation*, Davis revisits Douglass’s struggle for emancipation and connects it with Hegel’s account of lordship and bondage. She specifically focuses on Douglass’s struggle with the slave breaker Covey, which Douglass saw as a turning point in his life as a slave. When Covey one day tries to beat Douglass, Douglass ‘instinctively, unconsciously’ begins to fight back:

The fighting madness had come upon me, and I found my strong fingers firmly attached to the throat of the tyrant, as heedless of consequences, at that very moment, as if we stood as equals before the law. The very color of the man was forgotten. (Davis 1971: 23)

Forgetting about Covey’s whiteness and his power over him, Douglass loses his fear of Covey and begins to defend himself. Covey, unable to cope with this act of resistance, ‘trembles and calls for help’ (Davis 1971: 23). On Davis’s account, Covey’s inability to react stems from the fact that Douglass’s act of open resistance challenges Covey’s very identity: ‘He is no longer the recognized master, the slave no longer recognizes himself as a slave’ (Davis 1971: 23). After this incident, Covey never tries to whip Douglass again. It was thus by losing fear of Covey that Douglass emancipated himself from Covey’s domination.

In sum, the transatlantic slave trade meets all of Hegel’s criteria for bondage to be emancipatory. First, without the institutional framework of the property

regime one could argue that slavery had not yet become an injustice in Africa and was still 'valid'. Second, master and slave each represented opposing moments of self-consciousness. European colonizers forced upon individuals the inner structure of free self-consciousness and split the 'middle term' that is self-consciousness into its two extremes.⁴⁰ Third, the enslaved had to redetermine themselves as consciousness in the form of thinghood. In doing so, they unconsciously actualized Hegel's idea of freedom. Finally, by appropriating nature for the master, the enslaved continually actualized the master's freedom and independence in relation to nature. As a result, the transatlantic slave trade meets all of Hegel's criteria for bondage to be emancipatory.⁴¹ Therefore, Hegel's theory allows for the justification of the transatlantic slave trade as a relevant phase in Africa's development towards freedom.⁴²

Portraying enslavement as a means to educate Black people towards free consciousness is problematic in itself. On this basis, Hegel's theory of freedom could be used to defend the transatlantic slave trade and argue against its abolition.⁴³ More importantly, however, emancipation through internalizing the social relation of colonial slavery does not lead to the abolition of colonial power structures. Such an idea of emancipation is based on the reduction of Blackness to nothingness and perpetuates the degradation of Black people and culture to an unfree state of nature. By internalizing the possessive relation of master and slave, the enslaved is striving for the exact kind of freedom that denied him his freedom in the first place. Accordingly, Frantz Fanon argues that emancipation from colonialism is not achieved through assimilation to the Western idea of freedom. Commenting on the process of emancipation in former French colonies, Fanon writes that the Black man 'is a slave who has been allowed to assume the attitude of a master. [...] From time to time he has fought for Liberty and Justice, but these were always *white* liberty and *white* justice; that is, values secreted by his masters' (Fanon 2008: 171–72; my emphasis). As the enslaved is incapable of becoming independent of the master's idea of him by striving for the master's freedom, his struggle for such an idea of freedom is doomed to failure. For Fanon, then, emancipation from colonialism can only be achieved by struggling for a completely different kind of freedom.

In conclusion, Hegel's conception of freedom links freedom with whiteness and opposes it to Blackness. In so far as it binds the realization of freedom to the institutional framework of the Western property regime, it effectively denies the indigenous population of South Africa any freedom and historical development whatsoever. Moreover, the idea of freedom as appropriation commits Hegel to the view that European colonization and the transatlantic slave trade were relevant phases in Africa's development towards freedom. Finally, as Hegel's conception of freedom preserves the social power dynamic of colonial slavery in the idea of

liberation itself, it will not lead to true emancipation for Black people. Hegel's concept of freedom can therefore rightly be said to represent an idea of white freedom.

Not all conceptions of freedom are racialized in such a way. Davis, for example, discusses Douglass's emancipation from slavery without ever presenting Douglass's enslavement as a relevant stage in his development towards freedom. As a result, Davis's conception of freedom appears to be very different from Hegel's. Whereas Hegel bases the justification of colonial slavery on the idea that Black Africans were completely unfree before colonization, Davis refers to slavery as the, most extreme form of alienation' (Davis 1971: 8). In doing so, she seems to endorse the view that Black people were free before their enslavement.⁴⁴

Conclusion

My aim in this paper was to defend the claim that Hegel's conception of freedom is racialized. More specifically, I argued that Hegel's conception of freedom in the *Philosophy of Right* grounds his racist portrayal of Africa in the *Philosophy of History*, rather than opposing it. I began by revisiting Hegel's anti-Black comments in the *Philosophy of History*. Second, I interpreted freedom in the *Philosophy of Right* as appropriation and argued that the realization of such an idea of freedom hinges on the institutional and social framework of a property regime. Third, I connected my interpretation to the justification of European colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade. Here, I argued that by linking freedom with property, Hegel's theory of freedom reproduces the same narrative with which Western Europeans historically legitimized their dispossession of colonized land and people. As Hegel's theory presents the property regime as the only social order where freedom assumes an objective reality, it effectively denies the Black population of Africa any freedom and historical development whatsoever. Moreover, it legitimizes the transatlantic slave trade on the grounds of an apparent lack of consciousness for the injustice of slavery, while presenting it as a valid means to educate Black Africans towards universal freedom. As a result, Hegel's conception of freedom not only does not oppose the historical degradation of Black people, but even commits him to the view that European colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade were relevant phases in the historical development towards universal freedom. This is not to say that Hegel intentionally conceptualized universal freedom in such a way to exclude Black Africans from the idea of freedom. Hegel may not have been aware of this connection, even though his remarks and additions to the *Philosophy of Right* suggest that he was. My point, however, is that by linking freedom to property, Hegel's idea of freedom has problematic implications with regards to European colonialism and Black enslavement. As such, it is not an 'impartial

criterion' for social critique. Nevertheless, it proves useful by demonstrating how modern freedom and racism are entwined.

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Notes

¹ For early works on the matter, see Keita 1974; Gilman 1980; Neugebauer 1989; Hoffheimer 1993; Dussel 1993; Kuykendall 1993; Kimmerle 1993; Verharen 1997; Bernasconi 1998.

² For this line of argument see Houlgate 2009; Pradella 2014; Pinkard 2017.

³ I focus here on Hegel's comments on Africa. For Hegel's view on the genocide of the indigenous population of North America, see Hoffheimer 2001.

⁴ See also Morgan 1975; Oakes 1990; Foner 1994.

⁵ See Harris 1993; Andreasson 2006; Bhandar 2018. A notable exception is Loick 2023. For the connection of property and colonialism, see also Nichols 2020.

⁶ See Waldron 1990. Waldron even echoes the colonial view that there is no indigenous right to land. See Waldron 2003: 57. Other relevant works on Hegel's theory of property include Benhabib 1977; Ryan 1984; Patten 1990; Peperzak 2001; Ritter 2009: 101–23.

⁷ Alison Stone (2020) also argues that Hegel's idea of freedom is linked to colonialism, but does not build her argument on the connection between freedom and property as I do in this paper.

⁸ Abbreviations used:

PH = Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (Kitchener: Batoche Books, 2001).

PbG = Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977)/*Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Hamburg: Meiner, 2011).

PR = Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Rights*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991)/*Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (Hamburg: Meiner, 2013).

⁹ The Eurocentrism of Hegel's *Philosophy of History* is undisputed. However, scholars differ as to the extent to which this poses a problem. Following Walsh (1971), the Eurocentrism of the *Philosophy of History* simply concerns perspective. Houlgate advances a similar view by claiming: 'Where it is clear that one civilization's self-understanding is more advanced—more free—than that of another, then we should not be afraid to say so. This involves no doctrine of "cultural imperialism" or "racial superiority"' (Houlgate 2009: 22). In contrast, Tibebe (2011) argues that the Eurocentrism of the *Philosophy of History* has violent racist implications.

¹⁰ Following Hegel, I use the male form. I am sceptical as to whether Hegel's theory can be applied to all genders without any modifications.

¹¹ The portrayal of Africa in the *Philosophy of History* is based primarily on travel literature. According to Robert Bernasconi (1998), Hegel not only relied on the most racist accounts of Africa that existed in his time, but distorted them even further.

¹² Korsgaard describes this in more detail. See Korsgaard 1996: 98–100.

¹³ For more on the history of the idea of autonomy see Schneewind 1998.

¹⁴ Patten writes that in property, individuals realize 'the supremacy of their will vis-à-vis the object' (1990: 148).

¹⁵ In contrast, Menke (2018) interprets appropriation in the very general sense of identifying with the social world and actively participating in its transformation. For the historical difference between possession and property, see also Angehrn 1989.

¹⁶ According to Hegel, the legal person is not necessarily an individual human being. It can also be a family, as in Hegel's view the family has one common will.

¹⁷ For more on the topic of propertization, see Siegrist 2006.

¹⁸ Andreja Novakovic argues that scholars have often overlooked this unconscious part of second nature in Hegel's theory of ethical life (Novakovic 2017: 4).

¹⁹ In relation to the body, Hegel does not speak of appropriation but only uses the term 'taking possession' (PR: §48, §57).

²⁰ According to Isaiah Berlin, this is true for all positive conceptions of freedom (Berlin 2002: 194–95). Fichte, for example, claims that 'compulsion is itself a kind of education, namely education towards recognizing morality' (1965: 574) and argues that education generally works in such a way that 'you will later recognize the reasons for what I am doing now' (1965: 576).

²¹ For a useful overview of this conception of property, see Macpherson 1962: 1–9.

²² Pinkard refers to Hegelian freedom as a 'social achievement with a very complex history behind it whose realization also requires an equally complex institutional and practical background' (Pinkard 2012: 68).

²³ Such a link of freedom and property is not particular to Hegel's theory. However, few people have made this claim with regards to Hegel. While Patten (1990) and Waldron (1990) are notable exceptions, they refer to property only as an institution and not a mode of social organization.

²⁴ For a detailed account of Hegel's theory of the modern state, see Avineri 1972.

²⁵ As Hegel somewhat restricts property rights in later parts of the *Philosophy of Right*, Neuhausser (2000) argues that, following Hegel, property allows only for a very deficient kind of freedom. However, I hope to have shown that this does not change the fact that property is still a necessary condition for freedom in the Hegelian sense.

²⁶ African indigenous land tenure, for example, was not a concept of communal 'ownership' in the strict sense, but consisted in a number of various individual and communal claims (see Okoth-Ogenda 2008).

²⁷ The term "colour line" was first introduced by Frederick Douglass and later popularized by W.E.B. Du Bois. See Douglass 1881 and Du Bois 1968.

²⁸ Kojève calls this the master's existential impasse.

²⁹ I follow Kelly 1996 with this reading. That ‘lordship and bondage’ is both a social relation and a metaphor for the free mind is not particular to Hegel. According to Abrams, many philosophers of the early nineteenth century describe the free mind in terms of domination and servitude (Abrams 1971: 356–72). Kelly argues that Kojève neglects the psychological dimension of lordship and bondage which is why his reading is ultimately one-dimensional (see Smith 1992 for a similar critique of Kojève’s reading).

³⁰ Andrew Cole (2004) has previously emphasized the possessive logic of lordship and bondage. However, he argues that Hegel’s account only refers to feudal property relations. In my view, some historical forms of slavery are based on a similar possessive logic and can also be analysed through Hegel’s account of lordship and bondage.

³¹ According to Kojève, risking one’s life is necessary for emancipation through bondage (Kojève 1969: 7). However, following my reading, it is not the *risk* of life that leads to the actualization of freedom, but *fear* for one’s life. This is important with regard to slavery, as not all slaves risked their lives, but still, out of fear for their lives, redetermined themselves as consciousness in the form of thinghood. I also disagree with Patterson that the slave becomes ‘acutely conscious of both life and freedom’ in the face of death (Patterson 1982: 98). In my view, the slave’s fear for his life only leads to an *unconscious* actualization of freedom.

³² According to Finley, pre-colonial African ‘slavery’ differs substantially from the Western idea of slavery. For this reason the term is not quite appropriate in this context (Finley 1980: 69–70).

³³ On these grounds, Krell (2000) argues that for Hegel, pre-colonial African ‘slavery’ is ‘absolute slavery’ while colonial slavery is ‘relative slavery’. On Hegel’s different treatment of pre-colonial African ‘slavery’ and the transatlantic slave trade see also Long Chu 2018.

³⁴ For a critique of Mbembe’s account of lordship and bondage, see Tembo 2020.

³⁵ According to Patterson, this separation into free owners and unfree property is characteristic of all slave-owning societies. He writes that the master always ‘had almost exclusive ownership claims and powers over the person, labour, property and offspring of his slaves. The fundamental characteristic of slavery was the fact that the slave could not be an owner: He or she was essentially a propertyless person. From this fundamental disability, both legally and socioeconomically, flowed all the other manifold disabilities of the slave’ (Patterson 1982: 182). Sometimes, however, slaves were granted a peculium which ‘can be defined as the master’s investment in a partial and temporary ability of his slave to possess and enjoy a certain set of goods’ (Patterson 1982: 182).

³⁶ According to Gilroy, ‘[t]he physical struggle [from slavery] is also the occasion on which a liberatory definition of masculinity is produced’ (Gilroy 1993: 63). Thus, my analysis, too, stays within the male point of view.

³⁷ According to Patterson, ‘the master could and usually did achieve the recognition he needed from other free persons, including other masters’ (Patterson 1982: 99). This leads Patterson to ‘disagree totally with [Kojève’s] view that slavery created an existential impasse for the master’ (Patterson 1982: 99). However, as I have shown, the master is at an existential impasse precisely *because* he achieves full recognition in the relation and does not need to develop his self-conception any further.

³⁸ The total lack of power on the side of the slave leads to the slave having no social existence outside of his master. Patterson thus defines the slave as a socially dead person (Patterson 1982: 5).

³⁹ I disagree with Mbembe's parallelization of colonial slavery and hunting. While hunting aims at killing the animal, it is crucial for the relation of master and slave that the master is dependent on the slave's submission and cannot kill him without thereby negating his own freedom.

⁴⁰ Camara argues that Hegel's portrayal of colonial slavery is wrong because colonial slavery did not lead to more, but less freedom and rights for the enslaved: 'The majority of sources agree on the total opposite of Hegel's theses. Slaves in Africa—and this without any value judgment—were, more than anywhere else, integrated into social life' (Camara 2005: 87). However, for Hegel, it is precisely this total lack of freedom and rights that ultimately leads to the bondsman's emancipation.

⁴¹ As Hegel concedes the enslaved the right to emancipate themselves from slavery, Wood argues that Hegel does not in any way justify slavery (Wood 1990: 98). However, as I have shown, Hegel grounds the injustice of slavery in self-possession and thus allows for the justification of slavery in the case where there is no cultivation towards self-possession (see Davies 2007 for a similar argument).

⁴² Although Hegel's account of lordship and bondage can be used to justify colonial slavery, I do not think that Hegel necessarily thought of colonial slavery when he wrote it, as is suggested by Susan Buck-Morss (2000). According to Ottmann (1981) and Davis (1971), Ancient Greek Slavery is another case that can be mapped onto Hegel's account of lordship and bondage.

⁴³ Prominent examples are the St Louis Hegelians (see Jaarte 2024) and Mississippi Representative L.Q.C. Lamar (see Hoffheimer 1993).

⁴⁴ As alienation seems to presuppose some kind of freedom, this understanding of slavery appears to be in tension with Davis's assertion that the Black experience allows us to conceive of freedom as a 'struggle' rather than a 'given principle' (Davis 1971: 4).

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