

## A Hegel-Marx Debate

### About the Relation of the Individual and Society

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Charlotte Daub

genossedaub@hotmail.com

Mutual accusations of either incomprehension or bourgeois delusion have often kept Marxists and Hegelians from seriously considering the differences that the early Marx and Hegel had. This paper shall, on the contrary, take their claims about the relation of the individual and society as not reducible to their respective philosophical systems, but as a genuine debate which expresses tensions in the actual subject matter at hand. It might thus positively serve to conceptualize a society, in which the dialectical relation of the individual and society is adequately accommodated, or negatively show problems in Marx's concept of a species being, which still has much relevance in socialist thinking.

Starting out from Marx's critical observation that the individual lives a "double" life in the modern state, as a citizen and a private person (MEW1, 355), the paper shall first expound the notion of a human being that is social and individual (1). Then different realizations of this twofold being shall be discussed, namely the private being (2), the unity of the two aspects in the subject (3) and in the social individual (4). Lastly the Hegelian state shall be weighed against Marx's criticism (5).

#### 1. The double moment of modern individuals: particularity and generality

In a very similar wording to Marx's expression of the "double life", Hegel writes that individuals contain a "double moment" (§264). According to Hegel, the two moments are a "singularity that knows and wants itself as separate (für sich)" and a "generality that knows and wants the substantial". We can understand these two moments, suggests Hegel, if we realize that human beings are thinking, i.e. "spiritual natures" (§264). The general aspect can already be spotted when considering that the act of thinking necessarily involves certain generalities, as surely language, and even the very act of focussing on one object is necessarily general. More concretely, in the Philosophy of Right the subject has the form of a free will, which is a "particular form of thinking" (§4 Z), thinking as it realizes itself in the world. In the particular way it differs from the animal, namely as not only physically

existing, but also spiritually, the human being is only real in a community. Language, certain ways of deciding and comprehending the world can only evolve in communication with others and in a society that provides you with complex objects for your thought.<sup>1</sup> Objectively, others must notice your thoughts, the will you have expressed. Alone in the jungle, the human being would neither in his/her own thinking evolve to be fully human, nor would it exist as a thinking being at all, because no animal could notice that he/she did not only follow immediate instincts. Finally freedom and thinking imply one another. But individual freedom as self-determination can only be realized if it is not nature or chance which limits and determines the human being. Self-determination therefore requires man-made, general rules. But this rules cannot only be individual, because then the circumstances might limit or thwart their realization. The individual can thus only be free if it rationally approves of and identifies with a state, which thus becomes its own will. Like this it is “undetermined by an external other”.<sup>2</sup> If it was living alone, on the other hand, there would not be any structure that corresponded to its own reasoning, which it could therefore fully understand and endorse. What would happen to it would come about without its volition and it would be at the mercy of chance and nature.

The particular aspect of the individual is already hinted at in that thinking implies the faculty of knowing oneself as different from the world (cf. §11), in order to be able to make it your object of thought. Socially this faculty is the prerequisite, on the one hand, for subjective freedom, i.e. for doing something out of one’s particular interests, and on the other hand for the substantial freedom of recognizing the state and the rules one follows as rational. But even more importantly: Only this faculty of critique ensures that the state is or can become rational (cf. §138Z).

So far these two aspects only refer to the thinking of the individual, but for Hegel they must also have social reality. The identification with the state becomes real by the conscious participation of the individual in the state as a citizen. And the individual comes to experience its separateness from the social as a “private person” (§264), i.e. as a property owner, a moral thinker, a family member and a member of the civil society.

Marx can be read as agreeing with the idea that a human being must be general and particular (MEW40, 539), even though the particular for him seems to refer to the very physical and mental separateness of the real individual (MEW1, 370), while the general

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Taylor, Charles, 1975: Hegel, New York: Cambridge University Press, p. 380.

<sup>2</sup> Neuhouser, Frederick, 2000: Foundations of Hegel’s Social Theory. Actualizing Freedom, London: Harvard University Press, p. 144.

denotes, similar as in Hegel, the social faculty of the human being to “shape its reality” (MEW1, 379). Marx regards the communal life in the state as corresponding to the true human nature (cf. MEW1, 355), similarly Hegel conceives it as the “destination of the individual” (§258). Differences arise, however, where Hegel argues that also the aspect of particularity needs to have a separate social existence, namely in civil society. He then introduces the notion of the three estates, which maintain a close relation between the two social roles of the individual, the citizen and the private person. Marx argues however that these social roles split the individual and actually contradict one another: As a member of civil society, man has a particular religion and profession, is an atomistic egoist and “subjugated” by market forces (MEW1, 353ff, cit: 385), while at the same time being a citizen, i.e. “an equal participant in popular sovereignty” (MEW1, 354). Furthermore, the motivations and actions of the individual as a member of civil society contradict its behaviour and knowledge as a citizen.<sup>3</sup> As a citizen the individual knows that it is a social being, that society is man-made and participates in its organisation. As a private person in the market, on the contrary, it acts and thinks in the opposite manner, namely acts on its own and sees itself as unconnected to others and society, which then appears in the market forces as something alien having its own whims. In terms of form, Marx argues that the life as a citizen, even though it is communal and therefore corresponds to the true human nature, is unreal, unconnected to the individual, practical, everyday life. The individual is thus forced to spend in civil society an “untrue” existence, reduced to an atomistic, one-sided and “enslaved” being (MEW1, 355, 385). Marx therefore demands that the “real individual human being take the abstract citizen back into itself” (MEW1, 370), which is the unity of the social and the particular aspect of the individual in the very individual. Hegel on the contrary depicts the unity of the two moments on the one hand in the social member of the estates and on the other in the state as a whole.

## 2. The private individual

For Hegel it is important that the separate individual exists in the social world as private property owner and a member of civil society. It is primarily through private property that particularity is objectively real and can be subjectively experienced in civil society.

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Chitty, Andrew, 2006: Species-Being and Capital, Paper delivered to the Studies of Modern Capitalism Conference, Centre for Marxist Social Theory, Nanjing University, 9-10 November 2006, p. 6.

One part of the argument thus hinges on the question how an individual can be real. Hegel states that private property “supersedes the mere subjectivity of the personality” (§ 41 Z) and later emphasizes that, in order to exist in the social world, the individual’s actions must count for and not be remedied by others (§132). Reality for Hegel thus crucially implies recognition by others, both in the affirmative and in the cognitive sense.<sup>4</sup> Other humans must understand and respect the expression of your will, otherwise it remains a crazy fit that does not have meaning for anyone or is given a meaning you did not intend. Your particular acts fall under general legal categories, are recognized as something, purchase, murder, arson, and it is usually supposed that you also intended them to have this meaning (cf. §119f). This implies that in order to act freely as an individual you must act according to social conventions for expressing one’s will. This is necessary also because your action must be regarded as a legitimate small change you effected on the social world, otherwise it is soon done away with and does not exist for long (cf. § 132). For Hegel this implies that your action has to conform to what others have come to recognize as rational.

The private individual must thus exist as a property owner (and Hegel argues for everyone to have property)<sup>5</sup> and have a specific identity in his profession and family. “Man actualizes himself only in becoming something definite, i.e. something determined and particularized” (§207). Additionally, the particular actions of the individual must also be socially determinable, i.e. have commonly accepted forms.

What does Marx argue for then as against this conception? Interestingly, in the German Ideology, Marx points out that capitalism means progress for the individual, in so far as, at least in the private realm, the “personal individual” (MEW3,76) is discovered. It is mere chance, which specific work someone performs, even whether this individual is a worker or lumpen-proletarian or capitalist, and this may change in the course of a life time. The individual is therefore conscious that its personality does not coincide with the class; it is however only lived in the private, non-economic, non-political realm. The advent of the personal individual is a great step forward from feudalism, where particular persons regarded their estates and guilds as parts of their identities and stayed in them all their lives. They were, and are still as “class individuals” (MEW3, 74), only the “specification of a something general” (MEW3, 75f). What Marx seems to argue for then is the liberation of the individual from this false individuality, which actually only arises as the result of the

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<sup>4</sup> This double meaning is actually not attached to the German “anerkennen”, but to the verb “gelten”, which can be read as “to be taken to mean”.

<sup>5</sup> Avineri, Schlomo, 1972: Hegel’s Theory of the Modern State, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.137.

alienation of one human being from the other, and for a true individuality of a rich, manifold universal being. Instead of a levelling, his project is actually the liberation from an imposed reduction of human beings to mere functions of society or examples of social categories.

But, in a slightly unfair attack on Marx, one could ask: If everyone did everything, fished, farmed, criticized without being a fisher, farmer or critic (MEW3, 33), participated in an equal manner in the organisation of society (MEW1, 253) – what would their particularity then consist in? The human being might be defined as a person which none of its activities define socially, a particular to which no social categories apply, an unspeakable particular, which all individuals equally are – in the end: a general. The very particular taken to the extreme is general, thus claiming space for it is not giving it any. The individual can only be particularized socially, either by identifying him/her with the specific social function he/she performs, which would trigger Marx's critique of a limited individual as in the classes and estates, or by determining him/her socially in a so called private sphere, as a property owner etc. However, the particularity of universal beings cannot be meant by Marx to be a *contradictio in adjecto*, but must refer to a certain naturally particular way in which one human being is universal, i.e. relates consciously to the whole of society and unfolds its manifold abilities (cf. MEW40, 539). But is this enough for the particularity of one individual to really exist? This question might seem sophistic, as the fact that universals are needed to particularize a specific thing or person only applies to how we must necessarily think a particular, as opposed to how it is in itself, beyond our knowledge. However, as we are talking about thinking beings, how it is known by others and itself seems to coincide with how it exists. So to repeat the same question differently: Is this naturally particular way of working enough for the particularity of one individual to be expressed in language, noticed by the very individual and others and respected in society?

Hegel argues that a certain objectification of the individual will is a limitation (of the particularity of the subject), but also a liberation (of the particular will from an existence only in personal thoughts, which are not socially respected). Private property law, your occupation and family status confer rights to you and make your will objectively real, also against others. Maybe more importantly they ensure the subjective experience of one's particularity in civil society. This knowledge of one's separateness from society, however, is necessary for the critique of society, which ensures that the state becomes rational, as noted above. Marx seems to presuppose that the individual's knowledge of its difference, which he also regards as important (cf. MEW1, 253,284), does not require that the human

being experiences its individuality in a broad part of its life. Maybe it is just an intellectual act that is demanded of a thinking being that contributes to a social whole.

Marx's conception of an individual as a species-being thus seems to be problematic and Hegelian critique generally warranted in two respects: Firstly, it is questionable if in Marx's conception there are still individuals at all, at least in the form of a particular way of participating in society, as has been argued here. Secondly, the problem arises if and in how far the individual needs to experience socially its difference from others in order to be able to take a mental distance to society and criticize it.

### 3. The subjective relation of the two aspects of the individual

Even though Hegel could of course not address Marx's supposed position, he did consider how particular and communal aspects of the individual can be related purely within the individual. These considerations are located in the chapter on "morality", the realm of subjective thinking,<sup>6</sup> and in part explicitly refer to Kant's practical philosophy (cf. §135). In morality the individual already knows that it must act upon the general good to realize itself as a free will. The very fact that it wants to act already implies that it wants its actions to really exist, i.e. to be recognized and not remedied (§132). So here we have an individual that knows itself as different from the world, is particular, and is general, as it wants to realize a socially approved good in a law-like manner. But here the individual only subjectively reflects on how the world should be and what to do to realize it – without taking into account how the social world is. As Allan Wood puts it, "individual agency" is seen as "only accidentally related to the social forms within which it exists".<sup>7</sup> The individual can thus only formulate an "ought" over against the social world as it is, which can never be fully realized or acted upon precisely because it is only a very abstract idea of the good (cf. §134 Z). The problem for the individual seems to consist in the fact that it does not know what exactly it should do to realize the good (see also: §135). Our rational thinking can question everything that exists and can show that it is not absolutely valid. Therefore thinking as such cannot have a given content, a fixed basis on which to construct

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<sup>6</sup> Schnädelbach notes that „Moralität“ has to be understood in the sense of „le moral“, “the spiritual, intellectual as such”, as opposed to „le physique“. See: Schnädelbach, Herbert, 2000: Hegels praktische Philosophie. Ein Kommentar der Texte in der Reihenfolge ihrer Entstehung, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, p. 219.

<sup>7</sup> Wood, Allan W., 1997: Hegel's Critique of Morality, in: Siep, Ludwig (ed): Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts. Klassiker Auslegen, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 147-166, here: p. 153.

something positive (cf. §138Z). Thought becomes only determinate if it engages with the world, which gives it content.

The interesting question now is whether and in how far this criticism can also be applied to Marx's proposition to unite the real, practical individual with the conscious, social being. In one sense the species-being is juxtaposed to the will in morality. The latter does not act upon the world, does not produce, not relate to others in a real social world, but only abstractly in its own thinking. It is thus purely theoretical, unreal and abstract. On the contrary, as Andrew Chitty explains, Marx's species-being can be regarded as a "concrete universality" since "each individual realizes that universality 'in his individual labour and individual relations'".<sup>8</sup> Concreteness thus seems to denote a practical, lived unity of particularity and universality in the very individual. It can however be argued that in one respect both, the will in morality and species-being, are abstract, in a Hegelian sense. In both cases the individual is not socially determined, neither its particularity nor its particular duty to society. It can merely be stated that "the individual produces consciously in accordance with others", but what exactly this particular individual should do is not determined in the social structure. However, it could be claimed that, as such an "imperative" already contains a clear reference to real other beings, that the content of the participation could thus be determined in common decision-making. But Hegel rejects such an ad hoc creation of social structures as totally abstract, because neither the historical and cultural constitution of this people nor the real differences of particular groups are taken into account, and the intellectual efforts that have already been put into the existing system are disregarded (cf. §§258,274,279,303). Hegel must therefore be thought to have rejected Marx's concept of the species-being.

#### 4. A social unity of the two aspects of the individual

For Hegel, in the higher form of ethical life, the particular and communal aspect of the individual are given concrete social content in civil society and the state (cf. §§207,308). Now the individuals can concretely live both aspects in the social reality, but exactly because of that they are also in tension and create contradictions, as Marx notes. Hegel's system tackles this problem mainly by attributing to a particular group of persons a particular form of participation in public life, which is closely related to their private

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<sup>8</sup> Chitty, Andrew, 2006: Species-Being and Capital, Paper delivered to the Studies of Modern Capitalism Conference, Centre for Marxist Social Theory, Nanjing University, 9-10 November 2006, p.6.

experience of the social. The three forms of social participation are the estates: The immediate or agricultural class is personally represented in the legislative body, as agricultural property is often handed down according to a link of birth, is thus connected to this very particular natural person and members of this estate mainly experience the social personally in family relations (§305f). The members of the reflective or business estate experiences themselves in the market as separate from other individuals and the general market development, but they come to identify with corporations, associations of shared economic interests, and are therefore represented by delegates, who belong to the same economic group (§308). The universal class, civil servants, work for the state mostly in executive functions (§303) and identify fully with it, while knowing it and its ends.

Hegel's doctrine of the estates is difficult and ambivalent, because on the one hand every human being is supposed to partake in the family, civil society and the state,<sup>9</sup> but each estate is mainly identified with one of these spheres.<sup>10</sup> The general idea however seems to be that each (male) individual is particular and communal, but this particularity and the participation take different forms for different men. What Hegel is sketching in the estates is thus a particular universal being – which, as a basic idea, is ultimately the same as what Marx constructs as the “particular species-being” (MEW40, 539). Both conceptualize a universal being, which means, from the view point of the individual, the identification with the common will, but in order to continue being an individual at all it must have a specific way of identifying with the social that is particular to it.

For Hegel, estates and the corporations “mediate” between “the people which is resolved into individuals” and the government (§302). In them the individual “comes into existence for the state” (§301). The estates make the individual real as a social being, in that different individuals objectively participate differently in, and subjectively identify with, the social whole. Interestingly, while human beings in civil society are legally equal, as they all at least should be property owners, but may arbitrarily determine different contents of this legal form, in the state the legal statuses are different, while the content, i.e. the ends people strive for, is the same, namely the welfare of the whole state.

Marx's most important criticism is that, in the estate, human beings are like “an animal that coincides immediately with its determination” (MEW1, 285). In the Economic-Philosophical manuscripts, Marx defines species-life as opposed to this animal life: “The

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Neuhaus, Frederick, 2000: Foundations of Hegel's Social Theory. Actualizing Freedom, London: Harvard University Press, pp.140-144.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Taylor, Charles, 1975: Hegel, New York: Cambridge University Press, p.434.

human being makes its life activity the object of its will and consciousness.” (MEW40, 516) In other words: the human being must know itself as different from its social role (and the state as a whole), which it can then make the object of its approval or critique. Is this prerequisite then missing in the estates? Hegel expounds in the preface that the structure of the state must be grasped by, and justify its existence to, “free thinking”.<sup>11</sup> The philosophical reader of his book thus must be able to understand the state, become conscious of the rational structure of the social whole.

But where is this full and possibly critical consciousness of the state located within the state, or how can it impinge on the latter? In civil society, the market and its developments, i.e. the social in this sphere, are not consciously intended effects of individual actions, but only come about as “blind necessity”.<sup>12</sup> The individual does not see its connection to the social outcome and does not have any other but egoistic motivations. Therefore there is no relation to the social which could be the basis for its critique. In the state, the citizen identifies with the welfare of the whole state in patriotism (§268) and also the estates do not seem to enable a critical stance towards the social: For the members of the first estate, their natural, biological existence is identical to their social role. They thus lack any mental distance. The second estate identifies with its interest group and does arguably not even genuinely engage with the social whole. The civil servant identifies reflectively with the state. Marx therefore also remarks that this is the only real estate and should be held by everybody (MEW1, 253,284). Nevertheless, the universal estate must take its administrative duties to be mandatory and unquestionable, as this is necessary for a smooth functioning of the state. At least in office, this estate is therefore also incapable of critique. This identification is not accidental, because only in this way do the different moments of the estate become real, namely in the behaviour of groups of individuals. They serve to “bring about what already is”,<sup>13</sup> keep the social structure existing by their individual actions. One is therefore necessarily in “immediate identity with one’s social self”.<sup>14</sup>

The lack of critical reflection can be partly remedied if one assumes that critique, and even a fundamental questioning of the whole structure of society, is still possible in the realm of morality, and the experiences of ethical life can be seen as a basis for this reflective

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<sup>11</sup> Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, 1970: *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, p.14.

<sup>12</sup> Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, 1970: *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften III*, Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, p.328, §532.

<sup>13</sup> Taylor, Charles, 1975: *Hegel*, New York: Cambridge University Press, p. 376.

<sup>14</sup> Wood, Alan W., 1997: *Hegel’s Critique of Morality*, in: Siep, Ludwig (ed): *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts. Klassiker Auslegen*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 147-166, here p.154.

faculty.<sup>15</sup> Hegel recognizes the importance of critique “where what counts as the right and the good in reality and customs (Sitte) cannot satisfy the better will” (§138). The concrete existence of a society is not necessarily rational and therefore real in the Hegelian sense, i.e. going to continue to exist and not going to be reformed (see: preface, §§ 57Z, 270). Even the modern state is not entirely rational, though Hegel thinks that its basic structure is (§258Z). What is however problematic is that, in morality, the subject is supposed not to be able to act in a constructive manner, as shown above. It is therefore questionable how exactly the criticism would feed back into the system, or in a less cybernetic formulation, how the individual could turn its general critical thoughts into specific points for a social reform and then act upon them in the modern state. But how then can it be guaranteed that the state does not become irrational? In a slightly polemical criticism of Hegel, he could be said, after having institutionalized all moments of reflection, to have forgotten to give constructive critique its social realm and reality.

As one solution to this problem Marx demands that Hegel’s estates should be more particular, relating to the specific economic activity of everyone (cf. MEW1, 284,285) – although he also remarks that they should be less particular, in that everyone participates in the same way (MEW1, 253,284). Nevertheless, his insight seems to be correct: Hegel’s particular universal being is not particular enough; it identifies with its function in society and can therefore not reflect critically on its social role and the state. That the real, particular individual is not actually present in Hegel’s state thus entails a problem especially for the social, the state. The argument for the individual’s social reality (in the estates) now turns out to be simultaneously an argument against an assured maintenance of a rational social whole.

## 5. The state

Marx’s criticism of Hegel’s state could be read as an opposition to the spiritual nature of the state, which consists in and can be fully grasped by human thinking. One could arrive at this conclusion because Marx contrasts the state with the “material life” of human beings (MEW1, 354) and criticizes citizenship for being only “an imaginary membership in an imagined sovereignty” (MEW1, 355). While the state consists in conventions that are only

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Neuhauser, Frederick, 2000: *Foundations of Hegel’s Social Theory. Actualizing Freedom*, London: Harvard University Press, p. 123. also: Wood, Alan W., 1997: *Hegel’s Critique of Morality*, in: Siep, Ludwig (ed): *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts. Klassiker Auslegen*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 147-166, here p. 154

real if the individuals act upon them, civil society on the contrary produces physical objects that have an existence independent of men. One could thus happily attribute their difference to the commonplace that Marx is a materialist and Hegel an idealist.

Reading more carefully, however, one can notice that Marx does grant consciousness and thought an important place in his counterconcept to Hegel. For Marx, life in civil society is real, i.e. individual praxis, but not true, because it lacks a conscious relation of the individual to its essence as a social being and therefore to other humans (MEW40, 515f.). Citizenship is true, because it consists in some form of consciousness of one's social nature, but it is not real, i.e. not lived in the individual's everyday, mainly productive life. What Marx calls for is thus a unity of theory and practice, of consciousness and individual activity.<sup>16</sup>

The difference between the two conceptions is thus not one between material reality and ideal thinking. Both agree that civil society and the political state practically only have reality if individuals act upon given conventions, but can also be granted a certain objective reality as they historically precede, and factually immensely exceed, the individual's possible actions. The main object of Marx's critique is rather the following: The totality of the moments embodied in the estates and the social spheres, which is essentially the "structure of reason itself"<sup>17</sup> or, to say the same, the full "realization of freedom" (§257) is only realized in the state as a whole, not in any particular individual. As human beings are thinking, i.e. "spiritual natures" (§264) and therefore also essentially free (cf. §4), and reason as such can, in the end, only exist with someone reasoning, Marx concludes quite correctly that in Hegel's state the full human essence exists only in the form of the community, the state (cf. §154+Z).<sup>18</sup>

Hegel's state is a self-determining and self-knowing social entity (cf. §270). Thus consciousness is also important, but it is located at the level of the social, not the individual in the state. The estates embody and give real existence to the different moments of reflection of the state as a subject. The first moment is an immediate unity with oneself, which means here: of the social with the individuals, which are its part. The individual does not distinguish itself from the community. Working for it, participating in it comes naturally

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<sup>16</sup> In other words: He demands to overcome capitalism, which precisely consists in isolated individuals who do not organize consciously their individual productions as one social process and therefore are dominated by it in the form of alien market forces (cf. MEW1, 370)

<sup>17</sup> Neuhausser, Frederick, 2000: Foundations of Hegel's Social Theory, Actualizing Freedom, London: Harvard University Press p. 134.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. for this interpretation: Taylor, Charles, 1975: Hegel, New York: Cambridge University Press, p.378, p. 434.

to the individual person, without thinking about it. One could say the social already exists (an sich), but is not conscious of itself. The second moment is difference. Here, in morality and civil society, the individual knows that it is individual and that society is separate from it. You could also say, inversely, that the social becomes apparent, “aware of itself”, as not identical to the individuals that constitute it. The third moment is a mediated unity. Here the individual realizes that the state corresponds to what its own reason shows it to be rational and that it can only be a fully human being in the state. The state, on the other hand, has the subject as its principle, allows for subjective freedom of the individual and is structured just as a self-determining, thinking subject. To conceive the state as a subject is thus equivalent to saying that the unity of the particular and the general, of the individual and the social should itself be a social unity, i.e. located in the state. Individual and society coincide in that the one identifies with, and participates in the law-making of this self-determining society and the latter has the subject as its aim and structure.

Marx, on the contrary, claims that the particular person must know itself as social and society as man-made and incorporate this consciousness into its particular action. The “true state” is then a community in which every individual considers and organizes with others the social effects of its particular action (cf. MEW1, 253, 284). Marx’s dissatisfaction with the idea that the community could be where individual and social is united seems to hinge on the problem of alienation: For him the state is not real because this conscious social organization is not incorporated into the everyday life of the individual. How, then, can it be ensured that the state is not, or does not turn into, something particular itself, something different over against the individual (cf. MEW40, 538)? In *Philosophy of Right*, war has the important function of keeping the different aspects of the state together (§324), even though Hegel mostly sees the danger in individuals not any more identifying with the state not vice versa. But this conception of a rationality of the state that is beyond the individual thinking, at least of the human as a political participant in the state, seems to be prone to becoming irrational. It is still in individual reasoning where in the end the judgment about rationality or irrationality can only be located.<sup>19</sup>

The problem of Hegel’s state and estates thus consists in that the member of the estates is not subjectively capable of making the state an object of its critique and that this state is

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<sup>19</sup> This argument stems from Adorno, even though he uses it to criticize Hegel’s philosophy of history. See in: Adorno, Theodor W., 2006: *Zur Lehre von der Geschichte und von der Freiheit*, Frankfurt a.M: Suhrkamp, p.165.

objectively a reflective unity which is beyond the consciousness of any particular individual.

## Conclusion

Regarding the relation of the individual and society it can tentatively be noted that each of the two thinkers seem to be stronger precisely on the aspect they do not focus on. While Marx argues for a new individuality, his argument is actually strongest when exposing the problems of, and intimating alternatives to, the Hegelian state. Hegel, on the contrary, focussing on the social whole, is particularly convincing where he indicates at least the basic requirements for the individual to exist at all.

In terms of content, we have come to at least one contradictory result: On the one hand for the individual to be individual at all, and to take a critical distance to society, it must be socially particularized at least as a particular universal being, a person that participates in a socially defined, specific manner in society. On the other hand however the social particularization of the individuals in the three different estates turned out to be uncritical, as the human beings identify totally with their social role. The two extreme cases thus have the same result, as in Marx's absolutely rich individual every social determination is rejected and therefore the individual comes to be unreachable for any determination, a universal over against the social. In Hegel's estates the individual positively identifies with its social role and therefore loses its particularity in the social, becomes unable for individual thought and critical consciousness. Hegel ensures the existence of an individual and the knowledge of its difference via the bourgeois society, which however leads to the split of the human being and implies the political impotence of the private individual. Criticizing Hegel's estates, Marx demands that the individual must be conscious of its difference to its social role, but at the same time he asks for a closer link between specific form of participation and the real person, which seems to point to the annihilation of the difference.

The interesting question is of course whether the tensions in the subject matter that become apparent in this paper can find a "Aufhebung" or rather are indissoluble, which would then have to be explained in a negative dialectical manner. Also the latter possibility does not imply that socialism cannot be realized. Rather, as for example Adorno seems to implicitly argue, it requires of socialism to account for the remaining tension between the individual and society and not to force a unity by repressing one moment in favour of the other.

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