

Notes on Hegel's Conception of Reconciliation¹
Conference Paper
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Hegel claimed that the modern world is distinguished for having achieved reconciliation (*Versöhnung*) between the individual and the social-political structure in which she participates. I will limit myself here to the broadest outline of his account with a view towards discerning what may still be suggestive in it for residents of the contemporary world. This account itself will, I hope, provide a reason for making the concept of reconciliation the topic of a broader academic discussion. To the end of understanding Hegel's doctrine of reconciliation we begin with a series of three observations that are meant to define a framework for further investigation. The first provides a general characterization of Hegelian reconciliation; the second situates and clarifies reconciliation historically; the third discusses the question of the inner structure of reconciliation:

1. To begin, the most important thing to recognize is that reconciliation is not mere *resignation* to a reality one wished were otherwise. As Michael O. Hardimon explains², it is a kind of affirmation, both cognitive and affective, of the existing social-political order – but an affirmation that incorporates an understanding of that order's defects: its injustice, the suffering it produces, and the alienation it tends to foster. Specifically, reconciliation is the *opposite* of alienation, so excludes alienation and its

¹ I have used the following texts: G.W.F. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (Suhrkamp), 1970. Translations are from *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Alan White, tr., (Newburyport: Focus Publishing), 2002. References are to section numbers. R = the remark following the main paragraph. A = the additional remarks appended to the main paragraph and the remark. White's edition contains those added by Hegel's student Eduard Gans and some further passages that White has selected from the various lecture cycles that Hegel gave on his philosophy of right, or what he also gave the systematic title 'philosophy of objective spirit.'

² Michael O. Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy: The Project of Reconciliation*, New York: CUP, 1994, pp. 90-1.

typical experiences of homelessness and disorientation behind. This much stated, we must as yet recognize an additional technical element that remains somewhat muffled in Hardimon's very helpful account: reconciliation for Hegel must ultimately take the form of an agent's adopting her state and society as *an end of her will*.³ Whereas an alienated individual may be compelled – either directly through the threat of violence or by economic need – to perform actions that serve a social-political whole, the individual who has been reconciled does so willingly and with intermittent self-consciousness. Reconciliation for Hegel bears fruit in the form of a certain understanding of one's actions and the universal end they tend to promote, even in the pursuit of selfish, economic interests. From this line of reflection three summary conclusions may be drawn: first, reconciliation is essentially a category of action, so necessarily expresses itself in the performance of certain kinds of action and the non-performance of others. Second, reconciliation is in a manner comprehensive in that it orients human beings to an end to which potentially every action can be related, at least when taken from a certain point-of-view. Third, reconciliation for a modern individual will necessarily involve an insight into how her selfish need-oriented economic activity simultaneously serves a larger good.

2. Reconciliation is a social-political issue (rather than merely a theological or interpersonal one) where there is a conception of individual interests and rights developed enough that a desire can arise within individuals for the recognition of their individuality by the state or the community as such. The merely natural desire of the individual for self-preservation is not as yet enough for the issue to be established politically. What is required is a concept of the individual *qua particular individual* as a normative entity in

³ PhR, 152.

her own right and this, for Hegel, only enters decisively with the determination of the human being as essentially *free subjectivity*. For Hegel, the Greeks lacked this kind of subjectivity, while all peoples living in the historical stream flowing from Christianity have had it. Further, whereas Roman and medieval Christians were in some sense necessarily alienated from their states and societies, residents of the modern epoch are in the unique historical position of enjoying the possibility of genuine reconciliation.⁴

Let us draw these threads together and fill things out a bit: reconciliation expresses itself as a habitual way of taking the social-political structure in which one lives as an end of one's actions; and this occurs in a situation in which alienation is a genuine possibility. But to refer to the mere possibility of alienation in modern society is a gross understatement. Hegel understood that modern civil society *especially* tends to promote the alienation of its participants.⁵ The question naturally arises: How are we to understand one and the same epoch as both promoting alienation *and* uniquely determined to allow for the possibility of reconciliation? As has been indicated, the alienating features of modernity, especially through participation in the free market, are not to be dismissed or diminished, but frankly acknowledged by the agent who has reconciled herself to her social-political world. Reconciliation involves, in Hegel's words, a perception of the 'rose in the cross'⁶, i.e. the rationality present in the suffering that mars the existing social world.⁷ It is also obvious that the very structural features of modern society that tend to promote alienation at once set the individual on a path of reflection that can culminate the reconciled individual. Specifically, these features are

⁴ Cf. Hardimon, op. cit., 110-1.

⁵ I here follow Hardimon, op. cit., 121.

⁶ § 14.

⁷ We will see that the symbol for reason, the rose, only partially captures what is genuinely at stake for the prospects of genuine reconciliation.

social-economic atomization, the priority of means-end reasoning in relating to other human beings in the economic sphere, and what Hegel calls the ‘abstraction of modern labor – in particular for Hegel its dissection and multiplication into specialized tasks, but also, one may add, the essential impersonality of modern production oriented towards the needs of nameless consumers.’⁸

3. Let us turn to the question of reconciliation’s inner structure. Hegel’s account presupposes the thesis that real things – solar systems, living things, states, works of art, etc. – embody a ‘logical’ or categorial structure. The categorial structure of concrete reconciliation may be summarized with Hegel’s metaphor, ‘the interpenetration of universal and particular’⁹, in which the universal refers to a social-political structure and the particular refers to the individual. Taken generally, what Hegel wishes to describe is a relation between the individual and her social-political context in which the essential content of each is mutually affirming. Hegel conceives of the essential content of both the free individual and modern institutions *normatively* as a set of rights. Hence, we can draw a further conclusion concerning the nature of reconciliation: it presupposes an objective reciprocity in how particular and universal rights involve and reinforce one another. The question to ask now is, What is a right? Hegel defines a right very abstractly as the ‘any existence at all that is the existence of freewill.’¹⁰ What this abstract definition means becomes clear through the course of his argument: a right is a *general* mode of freedom that becomes normatively effectual through the mutual recognition of ethical individuals and institutions. Hence, rights and activity in

⁸ There is a very subtle and precise discussion of the various forms of alienation and universality in Michael Theunissen, ‘The Repressed Intersubjectivity in Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*’, in *Hegel and Legal Theory*, Drucilla Cornell, et al., ed., (New York: Routledge), 1991, 45-57.

⁹ § 258R.

¹⁰ § 29.

accordance with rights are the ways in which individuals and a social-political institutional structure actualize their *freedom* in the public space. So to say that reconciliation involves a positive reciprocal relation between individual rights and the rights of social and political institutions is to say that individual and collective *freedom* reciprocate. But this does not yet go far enough, as one must say that individual and collective freedom in an important sense *fulfill* one another. There is something about the nature of collective freedom that makes it possible for an agent to be *free* in the fullest sense, i.e., to *be* an agent in ways that leave no essential potentialities of agency unfulfilled.¹¹ By the same token, the status of modern individuals as bearers of rights makes possible a shared, collective freedom that is more complete than any previously achieved in history, including that of the Greeks. Such collective freedom is transmitted through generations of individuals who are born into it and leave it intact upon death.

The ability to conceive of one's own positive relation to one's state and society must somehow be grounded in the logical structure of reconciliation that is *fully* understood only by those who devote themselves to philosophy. The fact that the structure of reconciliation is only adequately grasped by those who devote considerable time to philosophy creates a particular problem for Hegel's account. The reason is that there is fairly clear textual evidence that Hegel believed that non-philosophers could be reconciled with their state and society. In particular, §148-152 of the *Philosophy of Right* describe the individual's relation to her institutional reality – what Hegel calls *Sittlichkeit* – varyingly as one of identity (147), as involving a consciousness of duties (148), as involving duties that liberate the individual from the subjective arbitrariness (149), as

¹¹ Robert Pippin has brought out the centrality of this part of Hegel's doctrine with great subtlety. See his essays on Hegel in *Idealism as Modernism*, (New York: CUP), 1997.

involving a conformity to duties that Hegel terms ‘rectitude’ (Rechtschaffenheit, 150), as a second nature that one may call an *ethos* or ‘universal way of acting’ (151), and as involving the knowledge of a universal as the subject’s motivating end (152). Fully achieved reconciliation on these descriptions would amount to a unity of written laws, extra-legal codes of institutional conduct, and the individuals who act within institutions and in accordance with law. Hegel’s concept of reconciliation does *not* necessarily incorporate the philosophical comprehension of their relation. This is not to say that for Hegel philosophical comprehension is not essential for human freedom achieved at its consummate level. It is only to say that one must distinguish this fuller form of human freedom from that achieved in actuality through social and political life as it proceeds independently of its philosophical comprehension. It is here opportune to point out that, for Hegel, the comprehension of social-political reconciliation both indicates what has been historically achieved and takes that achievement up into a higher mode of human fulfillment.¹²

The objective, logical structure of mutually affirming particularity and universality must be present for a genuine, as opposed to a spurious, subjective reconciliation. The latter for Hegel would have obtained for any residents of the Roman or medieval periods who sincerely believed in the justice of the basic principles and institutional arrangement of those societies, as each, in Hegel’s estimation, involved an objective restriction of individual freedoms and neither constituted an organic totality. A genuine subjective reconciliation for Hegel is based upon individuals being objectively

¹² Of course, an incidental effect of this theoretical comprehension is that subjective reconciliation may be made easier for a large number of persons. This, however, must fall outside of the *raison d’être* of Hegel’s argument, even if it *may* be so conceived as serving a social-political function – fully in accordance with the ‘comprehensiveness’ of the end of reconciliation mentioned above under point (1).

fulfilled in their potentiality for freedom through participating in social and political institutions, in particular, the modern nuclear family, civil society, and the state – Hegel’s three ‘ethical’ institutions. The object of philosophy in this connection is to make out the ideal normative social structure that has in fact gained enough of a foothold in the world to constitute a foundation for subjective reconciliation.

We have seen that it is important to recognize that for Hegel it is not sufficient to describe social institutions, after the fashion of classical liberalism, as mere instruments of individual freedom; rather, they must be conceived as in some way contributing to the very content of fulfilled individual freedom understood as the goal of the human as such.¹³ This provision of content must stand in a manner that is somehow conceptually distinct from the definite individual rights that as a set constitute one term to be reconciled with the universal rights of ethical institutions. This can be done if and only if what is being secured through the recognition of individual rights taken in abstraction from institutional rights¹⁴, is somehow *better* secured – realized at a higher level – through participation in certain kinds of institutions. This Hegel claims is the case. What social institutions provide is not an instrument of freedom, but a medium in which it is fulfilled. A different and fuller way of saying this is that while for the classical liberal the state is a necessary evil, for Hegel the state especially is a positive *ethical* institution, one that both *unifies* and *emancipates*. We do not get too far ahead of ourselves at this point

¹³ Freedom is a higher goal than happiness for Hegel. Happiness understood as a model of complete satisfaction is radically indeterminate; freedom, by contrast is entirely determinate and subsumes happiness as a subordinate end. Nonetheless, there is good reason to perceive a close relation between what Hegel calls freedom and what Aristotle called happiness. One may say that for Hegel being ethically fulfilled (i.e., being ‘happy’ for Aristotle) is a rational activity of self-consciousness (instead of ‘soul’) in accordance with rectitude (instead of ‘virtue’). See § 150.

¹⁴ This abstraction is carried out in ‘Abstract Right’ and ‘Morality.’

by noting that, clearly, Hegel has in mind some kind of modern republicanism with its attendant conceptions of the dignity of citizen participation.¹⁵

We will get a clearer overall picture of Hegel's position if we consider one reason why the instrumental view of the state is for him misguided. The instrumental view is put forward by classical liberalism and contemporary libertarianism. In Hegel's view, libertarianism succumbs to problem of actually thwarting the realization of individual freedom. This rests upon the fact that the libertarian's concept of individual freedom is *structurally* impoverished. An individual whose freedom expresses itself mainly in a chosen mode of life, projects, and decisions that are enacted without *any* explicit and authoritative guidance from institutions – their laws and defined roles – immediately succumbs to contingency. This is because any concrete choices made on an individual basis are not merely constrained by economic and circumstantial factors, but also express accidents of temperament, educational level, range and types of experience, mood, or momentary passion. Hegel is clear in holding that choices influenced in these ways form a necessary *component* in a fully worked out structure of freedom, but ultimately fall short of what is necessary for consummating that structure.¹⁶ The reason is simply that such decisions, while constituting real but limited kinds of self-determination, involve an element of arbitrariness that *simultaneously* qualifies them as instances of determination by something beyond the subject. The subject is not adequately free if either i) it *cannot*

¹⁵ This aspect of Hegel's argument is brought out in a thematically broad, but very stimulating essay by Charles Taylor: 'Hegel's Ambiguous Legacy for Modern Liberalism', in *Hegel and Legal Theory*, Drucilla Cornell, et al., ed., (New York: Routledge), 1991. Andrew Arato's essay, 'A Reconstruction of Hegel's Theory of Civil Society', pages 301-320 in the same volume, plays the participatory (what he calls 'societalist') side of Hegel's argument against what he calls, following the tradition of left-Hegelianism, its 'Etatistic' side. Taylor notes that Hegel distinguishes himself for pursuing this republican conception of the state in connection with the historical states of his day, whereas Rousseau's republican model constitutes a criterion by which the modern nation-state is condemned as irrecoverably corrupt.

¹⁶ § 124 + A.

subject the core principles of its conduct to an adequately conceived procedure of rational assessment or ii) it *can*, but those principles fail that assessment.¹⁷ Choices that involve an element of arbitrariness should not be suppressed or avoided, but an agent should ultimately be able to distinguish such limited modes of self-determination from others in which the principle of conduct is free of contingency. Two things for Hegel are true about these higher-order and more authoritative principles: first, they take concrete, even if necessarily imperfect, form in actual ethical institutions; second, by acting in accordance with them, an agent does not subordinate her conduct to either an abstract or a transcendent standard of reason, but acts on institutionally defined norms that enable her to ‘meet with her very own rationality.’¹⁸ The possibility of clarifying the idea of meeting with one’s own rationality by acting within ethical institutions is clearly crucial for the success or failure of Hegel’s argument. The second problem — that of exactly what kind of justification procedure Hegel had in mind — is also difficult. This is a particular problem because Hegel cannot adduce a Kantian or quasi-Kantian type of evaluation procedure without collapsing back into the defective sphere of morality, but he likewise cannot appeal to the fully worked out argument of the *Philosophy of Right* without laying down the condition that one must be a philosopher to be reconciled with one’s state and society.

This line of thought reveals two things. First, Hegel is concerned with more than just ways in which coercion and manipulation can limit freedom. Besides ways in which

¹⁷ Principles that would clearly fail this test for Hegel, at least in rights-based states, are ‘always act in a manner consistent with tradition’ (as tradition contains elements inconsistent with respect for freedom), and ‘act in ways that contribute to the radical overthrow of the present order’ (as the present order already embodies the core principles of a just society). A principle that would fail this test for Hegel everywhere is ‘always give priority to your passions.’

¹⁸ I am paraphrasing Pippin, *op. cit.*, 441.

the market, institutions, and agents can thwart, redirect, marginalize, or block an individual's pursuing her morally legitimate purposes, or even her having the capacity to conceive of some legitimate and choiceworthy purposes, there is also a silent way in which modern subjectivity can be seduced by an incomplete conception of freedom that leaves too much to contingency. Again, one may suggest that autonomy channeled and directed in the ways mentioned is all that is realistically available, but Hegel disagrees for both systematic and empirical reasons. Second, from an abstract standpoint one *can* affirm performing certain institutional roles, but here only for *deficient* reasons. The reasons for affirming one's participation in modern institutions must be drawn from a genuine understanding of the inherent rationality of the institutions themselves and how this rationality reflects into one's own agency and self, not as a limitation, but as an actualization of self-hood – an actualization that, in particular, does *not* leave some essentially felt part of the self yearning for a completely different social order or even world. Such reasons would be, as Robert Pippin has argued, straightaway motivating.¹⁹

To repeat, reconciliation depends upon some peculiar kind of cognitive relation to the institutional realities of the state in which one lives. Granted that historical reconciliation is a fact that the philosopher discovers, Hegel's account, if it is to be even plausible, must capture the relation between the individual and the objective logical structure of historical reconciliation in a manner that articulates a definite condition for grasping the rationality and agency-fulfilling capacity of modern institutions that is i) plausible, ii) within reach of most, many, or a representative segment of the population of a modern society and iii) does not constitute a relapse into a quasi-Kantian position that affirms the ultimate self-sufficiency of the agent in determining rational norms of

¹⁹ § 152.

conduct. While I cannot solve this particular problem in this essay, I can attempt a way of thinking about reconciliation that would ultimately depend upon a full solution to the problem of how individual rationality is *sufficient* to make its own essential contribution to this result.

So let me now state some of the elements that go into the reconciliation of particular and universal in the modern world. One key part of the answer is that individual rights are protected and promoted by modern institutions, just as the instrumental view of the state would have it. However, the relation is not to be conceived as an adversarial one in which legal recognition of individual rights is, or was in a revolutionary moment, coerced from the state by individuals possessed of pre-political natural rights, but one in which the ethical life *freely determines itself* to perform the function of protecting and promoting individual rights. Because the individual relates to institutions that recognize his rights and are charged with the duty of upholding them, she in a real way, meets with her own essence understood as an ordered set of rights that she acts on as a modern agent. There is a self-relationality built into the modern individual's relation to modern institutions, so that it is only through such a relation that she can rise to a knowledge of herself. Hegel seems to express this thought in part when he writes that modern subjects possess a right 'to be subjectively determined as free [which] is fulfilled when they belong to an ethical actuality, because their certainty that they are free has its truth in such an objectivity.'²⁰ The freedom that is fulfilled through participation in the objectivity of ethical life is effectively a conscious affirmation of the institutional and legal norms that constitute the structure of ethical life as such as such norms are known in relation to a subject's consciousness of her freedom. At this stage Hegel's

²⁰ § 153.

theory can *appear* to amount to an acknowledgement of the instrumental status of the state but with two additional qualifications: first, that relating to social and political institutions the agent is brought to self-consciousness; second, that living by the norms that must be upheld in order to maintain a free society make an additional and higher contribution to the freedom of the individual – the classical idea that freedom is a kind of self-mastery. It is likewise clear that the agency-constituting and emancipating functions of ethical institutions are of greater dignity than their instrumental functions. This is why they are *ethical* institutions.

This much takes us a certain distance, but in fact expresses only a part of the truth – and it is, so to speak, its lower half. One thing that is still needed is an account of how ethical life is not a formal structure that human beings confront as something simultaneously outside themselves and reflecting their own normative essence, but an integral, indeed the highest, form of their own consciousness (at least within the sphere of social and political relations). Otherwise put, it is insufficient for Hegel that institutions bring individuals to a consciousness of their individual rights as constitutive of modern agency; one must explain how the various substantial ways in which humans can conceive of themselves as belonging to a ‘we’ (as family members, professionals, and citizens) contribute to this freedom. It is here where the reconciliation between universal and particular is carried out at its highest level.

Before taking the argument further, I wish to bring out a Hegelian thesis concerning the metaphysics of subjectivity that makes his whole argument even possible. It is the thesis that modern subjectivity is conscious of itself as abstract particularity. This kind of consciousness, peculiar to modernity, both makes reconciliation an issue at

all and opens up the possibility for its realization. I have already said something about the first point, so I will here add some words about the second. Human self-consciousness is essentially free because it can abstract from everything that it may oppose to itself as an object. This includes not merely physical objects and other human beings, but a subject's own thoughts, drives, desires, and inclinations. For this reason human beings are in a position to dissociate themselves from natural self-centered drives in a manner that makes them open to adopting more universal purposes – especially purposes that entail the occasional or even uniform subordination of some natural drives. Humans of all natural beings alone are open to being free social beings. Thus they are open to taking on the ends of their families, various private and professional associations, their religions, and their political communities. Adopting these universal ends is the essential task of education (*Bildung*) and most generally of Spirit (*Geist*). This implies that for Hegel reconciliation is the central historical task of modernity.

Taking on such ends for human beings in the wide variety of concrete historical situations is a matter of being habituated to adopting those ends. This is as true of the Prussia of Hegel's day as it is of the United States today and ancient China. What distinguishes modern states is that they habituate their members not merely to the adoption of universal ends, but also to a *habit of reflection* whereby they take on an attitude of critical distance with respect to the institutions and practices of their societies. The openness that makes habituation possible may itself become an object of habituation. It is the habit and practice of reflection that positions modern individuals not merely to affirm the universal purposes of their societies, but to do so for objective reasons or at least from opinions that they have subjected to some kind of rational evaluation, however

incomplete this may be in the individual instance. Thus, the modern individual may take herself to be an agent contributing to the fulfillment of a genuinely universal, public purpose and, moreover, may take her participation in the advancement of this purpose to constitute part or even the most important part of her very substance. In the positive instance, this consciousness is reflected in what we call patriotism.²¹ Thus when thinking of herself as part of the ‘we’, the modern individual serves as the locus for the collective consciousness of a modern state. It is in this very consciousness that for Hegel the particular individual can find herself fulfilled – at least in the manner available within the sphere of human relations, granting that religion, art, and philosophy constitute higher modes of freedom. This fulfillment would involve her subordinating her individual rights to those of ethical institutions that freely protect and promote her rights. This is a necessary element in the realization of the reconciliation between particular and universal within one individual living out its historically concrete reality. We may connect it to an earlier thesis by observing that the subordination of one’s own right in particular to that of one’s state is correlated with subordinating one’s right-conforming activities to the right-conforming activities of the state. The reconciled individual does not qua reconciled individual subordinate her activities to state crimes, even if actual historical agents do support and carry out criminal, or at least evil, state actions. Further, the state takes up and protects individual rights. Subordination is not annulment.²²

²¹ § 268

²² I here add that *whether* a particular subject subordinates her rights and activities to those of the state has no bearing on the question of the state’s objectivity authority. This is not to say that state authority is independent of a representative number of individuals recognizing it. But here recognition does not confer authority, but stands as a condition of its actualization. Of course, a state that is not recognized in its authority by anyone or only by a small number of persons ceases to be a state.

Of course the possibility of Hegel's account proving convincing or even plausible turns upon his account of the rationality of modern institutions. And we have seen that the claim to rationality that can be made on their behalf may be exposed to extreme skepticism on account of the alienation and suffering fostered in particular by civil society, especially the free market, and by historically existing states when they are reduced to mere instruments of powerful economic interests. It is here that we may note how civil society, despite its central position in the sphere of ethical life is actually in its inception an *anti-ethical* institution.²³ The clearest formulation of this fact is that the individual seeking to satisfy her needs through economic activity subordinates the universal to the particular – which for Hegel is the very formula for moral evil. Hegel describes in detail the various kinds of abstract universality that develop in this sphere culminating in professional associations that he titles 'corporations.' These not only provide a remedy to victims of the contingencies of the market, but cultivate a sense of professional honor. We today might say that they cultivate a public service ethic. Hegel treats this as a developing, but restricted and inadequate, consciousness of the universal.

As for his theory of state, let it suffice to indicate that for Hegel a rational state is one that is genuinely universal in the sense of being based on rule-of-law and being composed of parts no one of which has subordinated any other to its will. It is marked by a differentiation of functions in an organic whole and the implicit presence of the whole in each part insofar as the whole is each part's end.²⁴ This is an extremely summary form

²³ This is emphasized by Arato, *op. cit.*

²⁴ § 272. A state in its concept is free of any fixed structural relationships that embody domination, whether of part by part, whole by part, or parts by the whole. Hence, while individual instances of economic dependence – a part dominating a part – will inevitably appear in civil society, one may argue that there is a state right to intervene on behalf on those dominated. Slavery is immediately ruled out. Tyrannies – the domination of the whole by a part – are obviously ruled out, as are all traditional political communities in which the whole dominates the parts by suppressing individual liberties.

of his theory of the state. Our interest now is solely with understanding how the consciousness of being a citizen of a particular state constitutes both a fulfillment of subjectivity and a reconciliation of the individual with her social political structure. The corporation here plays a key function for Hegel by mediating between the individual and the state by sending corporate representatives to public assembly to participate in a deliberative process concerning the public interest. In this manner, members of civil society are brought into a positive relation to the state, but one that is still somewhat external. Thus, a further development in the relation to the state should be noted. Parliamentary deliberations are subject to a publicity requirement, so perform the concrete educational function of enabling the individual to see and hear the universal public interest being ministered to.²⁵ It teaches her i) that there *is* a universal interest and ii) grants an overview of the economic forces that shape her life and which are a consequence of the fundamental principles she has adopted. Thus, it places her in the position to affirm the social and political whole as such and effectively to will its existence as fundamentally just.²⁶ This much goes a way towards explaining how and why an individual can adopt the social-political whole as an end of the will.

It can also perhaps help explain why adopting this end – and with that joining a collective identity – makes an individual into a full-fledged agent, i.e., a being with a capacity for self-determination that is not subjected to the limitation of contingency that for Hegel typifies merely ‘moral’ subjectivity. Two points may be made here. First, it is by gaining an insight into the social-political whole that an agent may knowingly accept the economic contingency that pervades the whole sphere of civil society. Here

²⁵ §§ 314-315; cf. 301+R, 319.

²⁶ This will take the concrete form of willing certain legislative proposals as remedies for existing defects. Reconciliation necessarily takes the form of reformist politics, a mean between quietism and revolution.

knowledge completes agency by transforming contingency into a feature that is now willed, not for its own sake, but as a consequence of other principles that are accepted as just. This negative condition is supplemented by a positive one. The subject gains *knowledge* of a genuine political universality and its status as a free, self-determining whole. The partial spectacle of the state provides the subject with an image of what she herself strives after: a more fully developed freedom. Again she sees herself in the social whole, but now in a manner that enables her not merely to will the universal, but to subordinate herself to it *in* willing it. At this level she does not merely encounter her own content in social and political institutions, but takes on the higher identity of the citizen who in Hegel's estimation has become a free and knowing vehicle for the collective consciousness of the community. In a way, the individual is fully free by assuming the collective consciousness of the highest mode of freedom. This must at this point remain an interpretive suggestion that awaits subsequent elaboration and defense.