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# Exploring the Metaphysics of Hegel's Racism: The Teleology of the 'Concept' and the Taxonomy of Races

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## Abstract

This article interprets Hegel's hierarchical theory of race as an application of his general views about the metaphysics of classification and explanation. We begin by offering a reconstruction of Hegel's hierarchical theory of race based on the critical edition of relevant lecture transcripts: we argue that Hegel's position on race is appropriately classified as racist, that it postulates innate mental deficits of some races, and that it turns racism from an anthropological into a metaphysical doctrine by claiming that the division of humankind into races (at least in the Old World) is not a brute fact, but follows a 'higher necessity'. We then summarize our interpretation of the relevant metaphysical background to this theory. On our reading, Hegel postulates an essentialist form of explanation that explains given kinds as stages in a teleological, non-temporal process through which the nature of a superordinate kind is realized. We argue that Hegel's views about a hierarchical and necessary division of humankind into races are an application of this model to the case of human diversity, motivated by explanatory considerations and subject to confirmation bias. By way of conclusion, we address two possible attempts to 'save' Hegelian philosophy from its racist baggage.

Hegel has often been criticized for subscribing to racist views. Several authors have investigated the nature of those views and discussed to what extent they are integral to his system (e.g., Neugebauer 1990; Moellendorf 1992; Bernasconi 1998, 2000, 2003; Hoffheimer 2001; Purtschert 2010; de Laurentiis 2021; Sanguinetti 2021). Others have tried to defend his philosophy against charges of racism (McCarney 2000; Bonetto 2006). In this article, we first argue that Hegel's system contains views that are appropriately classified as racist (section I), including—*pace* McCarney and Bonetto—the notion that some races have innate mental deficits (section II). We then point to a hitherto largely neglected feature of Hegel's theory

of race: namely, the claim that a hierarchical division of humankind into races (at least in the Old World) is not just a contingent matter of fact but a metaphysical truth that follows a ‘higher necessity’ (section III). On this basis, we examine how Hegel’s racism connects to Hegel’s more general metaphysical views. In our reading (section IV), Hegel holds that at least some parts of reality are amenable to an essentialist form of explanation that accounts not only for the features of individual entities based on the nature of the kind they belong to (‘first-order essentialism’) but also for the existence and characteristics of given kinds based on the nature of superordinate kinds (‘higher-order essentialism’). Given kinds become understandable, on this approach, as stages in a teleological, non-temporal process through which the nature of the superordinate kind is realized. We interpret Hegel’s hierarchical theory of race as an application of this model (section V), showing how this allows sense to be made of Hegel’s claims about the necessity of racial hierarchy and the fact that Hegel, in some passages, describes all human beings as equal. We conclude by examining two strategies for ‘saving’ Hegelian philosophy from its racist baggage (section VI).

Studying Hegel’s claims about race in their theoretical context—in our case, his metaphysics—allows us to understand better the nature, motivations and functions of those claims and thus also to challenge popular apologetic strategies. Hegel’s claims about race are often downplayed as mere personal opinions or passively absorbed prejudices. By contrast, we hope to show in our discussion that they constitute a relatively well-developed theoretical position which is original in several ways. This position serves systematic functions at the intersection between metaphysics, anthropology, psychology and history. It is closely integrated with the rest of Hegel’s system, including parts that are often considered progressive and insightful. Rather than being just casual stereotypical remarks, Hegel’s claims on race amount, in our reading, to an active theoretical intervention that follows determinate philosophical motivations in the context of an ongoing debate in which other options were available (some authors with whom Hegel was familiar rejected claims about the intellectual inferiority of other races—e.g., Blumenbach, cf. de Laurentiis (2021: 89f.)—and even the very legitimacy of the notion of race: Herder (*IPGM*: 257f.)).<sup>1</sup>

Before starting, we need to spend a few words on the textual situation. In the writings he published himself, Hegel only briefly touches upon race, namely in §393 of the *Encyclopedia*. There, he introduces the notion of a ‘racial diversity’ (*Rassenverschiedenheit*), constituted by the ‘natural spirits’ (*Naturgeister*) that correspond to the continents. When lecturing on the Philosophy of Subjective Spirit in 1822, 1825 and 1827, Hegel presented detailed accounts of human races (*Menschenrassen*). His draft for a monograph on Subjective Spirit contains the beginning of a similarly detailed discussion (*SE I*: 224–27). In addition, Hegel comments upon the psychological, social and cultural characteristics of races in his lectures on

the Philosophy of History, Philosophy of Religion, Philosophy of Right and History of Philosophy from the Berlin period. Pace Buck-Morss (2000: 857), who sees racism in Hegel's philosophy as a late 'retreat' from his earlier 'radical politics', the notion of superior and inferior human populations corresponding to different continents can be found as early as the Jena fragments of 1803–04 and 1805–06 (*JS I*: 139<sup>3</sup>: native Americans as 'a purely childish people'; *JS III*: 113<sup>12–17</sup>: 'childish nature' as the character of the Americas; the Old World divided into three continents with the following characters: 1. 'dumb spirit that does not enter into consciousness', 'wild devastation of humankind'; 2. 'excess, the middle that wildly gives birth from within itself'; 3. 'consciousness; the rational part of the Earth').

It is sometimes suggested that the transcripts of Hegel's lectures on race are not a *bona fide* source for his views as they are neither written nor authorized by Hegel himself.<sup>2</sup> Of course, less weight can be put on the precise wording of lecture transcripts, but this does not *per se* turn the transcripts into unreliable or negligible sources. To begin with, lecturing was not a mere side-activity for Hegel where he could loosely toy around with ideas. Instead, both the *Encyclopedia* and the *Philosophy of Right* are written as compendia for his lectures. At the very beginning of the preface to the first edition of the *Encyclopedia*, Hegel states that this book is motivated by the 'need to provide my listeners with a guide to my philosophical lectures' and that the term *Grundriss* in its subtitle indicates the intention to 'reserve the details for the oral presentation' (*Enz.*: 5/23). Thus, Hegel himself pointed to his lectures as the authoritative source regarding 'the details' of his system (at least in those parts not covered by separate publications).<sup>3</sup> Indeed, it is entirely standard to use lecture texts as a source for Hegel's views on art, religion, history and the history of philosophy. To apply different standards when it comes to race would be arbitrary.

Moreover, we are now in a much better philological situation than scholars just a few years ago. Previous discussions of racism in Hegel's thought had to rely mostly on the opaque compilations of students' transcripts and Hegel's manuscripts that are offered by the 'additions' in the *Encyclopedia*, and Gans', Karl Hegel's, Lasson's, Hoffmeister's and Moldenhauer and Michel's editions of the Lectures on the Philosophy of History.<sup>4</sup> But in the last years, numerous student transcripts of relevant lectures have been critically edited in the Academy edition of Hegel's works, including transcripts from different semesters on the same topic and often different transcripts of one and the same lecture course. There are strong convergences between the discussions of race in these different transcripts (cf. Stone 2020: 20f.), indicating that the transcripts provide reliable accounts of what Hegel said during his lectures and that Hegel made a sustained attempt to develop a theory of race as part of his system.

Therefore, we submit that the critically edited lecture transcripts can and should be used as an important and fairly reliable source for studying Hegel's

views on race. They also largely obliterate the need to draw on oral additions and the earlier, uncritical editions of the lecture courses with their far worse philological standing. Caution is required in so far as it is important to check both for corroboration between different transcripts and connections or tensions with other parts of the system. In the following, we flag cases in which a thought is found only once in Hegel's lectures. Pace de Laurentiis (2021: 74), the views on race expressed in the transcripts are, in our interpretation, coherent and well-integrated with the rest of Hegel's system.

## I. Racism in Hegel's philosophy

'Racism' is a contested concept, and racism is a multi-faceted phenomenon.<sup>5</sup> Since attempts to settle on one particular definition of racism risk downplaying or making invisible closely related phenomena, we propose a set of jointly *sufficient* conditions as the basis for discussion. We think that these conditions capture a widespread usage of the term 'racism' but are compatible with the existence of other forms of racism (more on this in section VI). According to this proposal, a given theory is racist *if* (but not *only* if) it claims that:

- (a) humanity is divided into different racial groups, which are characterized by morphological and/or anatomical, and possibly also psychological and/or cultural traits;
- (b) the characteristic traits of racial groups are themselves inherited, or inherited traits play an essential role in their explanation;
- (c) some racial groups are superior to others regarding one or more qualities that are important in human life.

Conditions (a) and (b) are meant to capture the idea that there are races,<sup>6</sup> and condition (c) the idea that there is a ranking or hierarchy of races.<sup>7</sup> Historically, various dimensions of evaluation have been used for this ranking, corresponding to different variants of racism. Dimensions that have been especially important and that we take to yield, if applied to condition (c) and combined with (a) and (b), theories that can uncontroversially be counted as racist, include:

- (1) intellectual ability;
- (2) capacity for morally/politically good conduct;
- (3) capacity for advanced cultural achievements; and
- (4) legal/moral status (e.g., different moral worth; entitlement to moral/legal rights).

(Such dimensions of evaluation can, but need not, be thought of as mutually independent. For example, differences regarding (4) have often been postulated as consequences of alleged differences in one or more of the other dimensions, drawing

on relevant background assumptions about criteria for moral status and rights,<sup>8</sup> while other theories claim that races intrinsically differ in moral worth.<sup>9</sup>

There is plenty of textual evidence for Hegel subscribing, at least in his later thought, to versions of claims (a) and (c)—in the rest of this section, we will cite some of it. Sceptics have focused on condition (b), arguing that for Hegel, racial characteristics are explained by geography, not inheritance. We address whether claim (b), too, can be found in Hegel's work in the next section.

In his lectures, Hegel divides humanity (a single species, cf. *SG* [1822, *Hotbo*]: 25.1: 34) into five races: 'Negroes' (or 'Africans', or 'Ethiopians'); 'Asians' (or 'Mongolians'); 'Caucasians'—which are split into two sub-races: 'Western Asians' (*vorderasiatisch*), and 'Europeans'; 'Malayans' (i.e., Austronesian people), and 'Americans' (*SG* [1822, *Hotbo*]: 25.1: 35<sup>3-5</sup>, *SG* [1825, *Griesheim*]: 25.1: 232<sup>10-15</sup>). He claims that these races have characteristic bodily traits—besides skin colour, Hegel is especially interested in Blumenbach's and Camper's work on the form of the skull, suggesting even that 'the osteological has a relation to the spiritual': *SG*[1827/8, *Stolzberg*]: 25.2: 610<sup>5</sup>—as well as characteristic 'spiritual' (*geistige*) features (*SG* [1822, *Hotbo*]: 25.1: 35<sup>24</sup>; *SG* [1827/8, *Stolzberg*]: 92/25.2: 613) (cf. Hoffheimer 2001). This much already shows that Hegel subscribes to the above claim (a). That Hegel also endorses claim (c) becomes abundantly clear in his descriptions of the 'spiritual' characteristics of races. In particular, he treats Africans and Americans as inferior to other races, especially Europeans, in all dimensions (1)–(4) (on the following, cf. also Hoffheimer 2001; Sanguinetti 2021: 57–68):

(ad 1) *Intellectual ability*: Africans are 'in the state of dullness, of pure remaining-within-themselves, which does not proceed to difference, to thought'; they are 'thoughtless' (*SG* [1825, *Griesheim*]: 25.1: 234<sup>26</sup>). While they are susceptible to education from the outside, they lack the 'inner drive' for development (*SG* [1822, *Hotbo*]: 25.1: 35<sup>26f.</sup>), and 'the universal does not raise in their heads, they receive everything from the outside' (*SG* [1822, *Hotbo*]: 25.1: 35<sup>36f.</sup>). Indigenous Americans, for example, in Brazil, are 'dull, obtuse' (*SG* [1825, *Griesheim*]: 25.1: 233<sup>10</sup>); in this part of the world, 'spiritual development is something retarded, subordinate' (*SG* [1822, *Hotbo*]: 25.1: 34<sup>16</sup>). The mental abilities of Europeans are characterized by the 'genuinely spiritual' (*SG* [1822, *Hotbo*]: 25.1: 37<sup>23</sup>), 'grasping the individual in itself' (*SG* [1822, *Hotbo*]: 25.1: 37<sup>26</sup>), the 'self-confidence of reason which grasps and transforms everything' (*SG* [1822, *Hotbo*]: 25.1: 37<sup>32f.</sup>), 'thirst for knowledge' (*SG* [1822, *Hotbo*]: 25.1: 37<sup>36f.</sup>).

(ad 2) *Moral and political character*: Being thoughtless, Africans do not subordinate their actions to a shared 'universal purpose' (*SG* [1825, *Griesheim*]: 25.1: 234<sup>25</sup>); they are a 'children's nation' (*SG* [1822, *Hotbo*]: 25.1: 35<sup>25</sup>), living in a state of 'sensual caprice' (*W* [1824/5, *Kehler*]: 27.2: 522<sup>17</sup>). They suffer from 'the greatest lack of consciousness of personality' (*SG* [1822, *Hotbo*]: 25.1: 35<sup>35</sup>); in Africa, 'man

does not have genuine respect for himself and for others', for Africans fail to appreciate the 'absolute value that humans have in themselves' (*W* [1824/5, *Kebler*]: 27.2: 520<sup>26f.</sup>), which leads to cannibalism and mutual enslavement (*W* [1824/5, *Kebler*]: 27.2: 521f.). A lack of 'ethical sentiments' (*sittliche Empfindungen*) even towards family members (*W* [1830/1, *Karl Hegel*]: 27.4: 1226<sup>15f.</sup>) creates a condition that is 'almost worse' (*W* [1830/1, *Karl Hegel*]: 27.4: 1226<sup>12f.</sup>) than in the colonial Americas: parents sell their children as slaves, and vice versa (*W* [1830/1, *Karl Hegel*]: 27.4: 1226<sup>17f.</sup>). Indigenous South Americans 'live only for the moment, like animals' (*SG* [1825, *Griesbeim*]: 25.1: 233<sup>27-29</sup>). They engage in 'activity, order, provision for the future etc., only if they are instructed to do so' (*SG* [1825, *Griesbeim*]: 25.1: 233<sup>29</sup>-234<sup>2</sup>)—this applies even to sexual intercourse (*SG* [1825, *Griesbeim*]: 25.1: 234<sup>3f.</sup>). Last but not least, only Asians and Caucasians have been participating in the development of a consciousness of freedom and freedom-enabling institutions, and hence in world history (e.g., *W* [1824/5, *Kebler*]: 27.2: 512f., 526, 538; *W* [1830/31, *Karl Hegel*]: 27.4: 1230). By contrast, African States are 'in the intermediary condition between the state of nature and the transition to a more developed state'—a condition of 'greatest despotism and cruelty' (*SG* [1822, *Hotbo*]: 25.1: 35<sup>32-34</sup>). Hegel is eager to assert that the new republics in both South and North America were built by people of (at least partially) European descent (e.g., *W* [1826/7, *Garczyński*]: 27.3: 823<sup>18-21</sup>, *W* [1830/1, *Karl Hegel*]: 27.4: 1207<sup>9f.</sup>, cf. Hoffheimer 2001: n.35), and he suggests the Haitian revolution was made possible by the beneficial influence of the colonizers: while it shows that the 'possibility of human freedom' is 'present' in Africans, 'they are not able themselves [*es liegt nicht in ihnen*] to overcome their naturalness' (*SG* [1822, *Hotbo*]: 25.1: 36<sup>3-5</sup>).

(ad 3) *Cultural capacity*: Africans lack cultural development; they are 'still what they have been two thousand years ago' (*SG* [1827/8, *Stolzenberg*]: 25.2: 611<sup>10f.</sup>); they 'have not proceeded to diremption, Understanding, thought, science, lawfulness' (*SG* [1827/8, *Stolzenberg*]: 25.2: 611<sup>12f.</sup>). Rather than grasping universal contents, their religions fetishize natural objects (*SG* [1822, *Hotbo*]: 25.1: 36<sup>1-3</sup>). Even the 'significant' (*W* [1822/3, *Hotbo*]: 27.1: 79<sup>3</sup>) cultures of the Aztecs and Incas suffer from the 'physically and mentally feeble' character (*W* [1824/5, *Kebler*]: 27.2: 509<sup>22f.</sup>) that distinguishes the Americas in general<sup>10</sup>; those cultures were 'entirely external' (*ganz äußerliche*) and practised 'idolatry' (*W* [1830/1, *Karl Hegel*]: 27.4: 1204<sup>22</sup>). In Hegel's view, such religious deficits also affect artistic and philosophical activity: Hegel holds that 'proper, concrete, true philosophy' has been possible 'only among Greeks and Christians' (*W* [1822/3, *Hagenbach*]: 27.1: 73<sup>36</sup>) because their religions acknowledge a unity between the divine and the human (*W* [1822/3, *Hotbo*]: 188/27.1: 73). For analogue reasons, only Greeks and (European) Christians have developed genuine, i.e., *beautiful art* (as opposed to sublime art: *W* [1822/3, *Hotbo*]: 188/27.1: 73).

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(ad 4) *Moral/legal capacity and rights*: In various places, Hegel expresses at least partial support for regimes of race-based oppression. Thus, he ascribes a positive role to the 'paternal regiment' (*SG* [1825, *Griesheim*]: 25.1: 233<sup>21</sup>) of Jesuit missionaries (who dictate every detail in the lives of adult native Americans: *SG* [1825, *Griesheim*]: 25.1: 233f.)—and even to colonial slavery, which, on Hegel's view, is needed to enable Africans to live in freedom, and therefore should be abolished only gradually (cf. also Hoffheimer 1993; Buck-Morss 2000: 859; Bernasconi 2003; Long Chu 2018; Stone 2020):

On the one hand, one can [...] reject slavery as illegitimate; on the other hand, one can recognize it as grades of discipline [*Stufen der Zucht*]. (*SG* [1822, *Hotbo*]: 25.1: 115<sup>20f.</sup>; cf. *W* [1822/3, *Hotbo*]: 27.1: 197/85)

Slavery is in and for itself wrong [*unrecht*], for the essence of human beings is freedom, but they first have to become mature for it and while the Europeans acknowledge that slavery is indeed [*durchaus*] wrong, they would act equally unjustly if they would immediately bestow freedom upon the negro slaves: as the French did at the time of the French Revolution; the horrible consequences became immediately manifest; quite rightly [*mit Recht*], the Europeans proceed slowly with the manumission of negroes <, the taming of their natural disposition [*Naturell*] has to precede their real freedom>. (*W* [1830/31, *Karl Hegel*]: 27.4: 1229<sup>18</sup>–30<sup>2</sup>, part in <>: *W* [1830/31, *Wichern*]: 27.4: 1230<sup>22f.</sup>; cf. *R* [1821/2, *anonymous (Kiel)*]: 26.2: 662<sup>28–35</sup>; *PhR*: §57R, 86–88)

In other passages, however, Hegel seems to argue that race lacks normative relevance (see Houlgate 2005: 175f.), discarding the debate between monogenists and polygenists as philosophically irrelevant:

Regarding it [sc. racial difference/*Rassenverschiedenheit*], one can ask: whether the various races originate from one *couple* or have different origins. This question is not a philosophical one, but only a historical one, without philosophical interest. Humans are humans; descent [*Abstammung*] does not matter for their concept. However, it was thought that there had always been a difference of rationality [*Vernünftigkeit*]<sup>11</sup> and hence a difference of rights. Humans are rational, on this view, animals not, therefore humans reign over them, and likewise there are thought to be subordinate human races. But humans are



thinking, and hence equal. (*SG* [1822, *Hotho*]: 25.1: 33<sup>4</sup>–34<sup>5</sup>; cf. *SG* [1825, *Griesbeim*]: 25.1: 236; *PbR*: §209R, 240)

It is possible to ascribe a consistent position to Hegel if we keep in mind that, to have any kind of ‘actuality’, in Hegel’s terms, rights have to be *instituted* in a form of ethical life, in particular, that of the modern State. This presupposes a long historical development which creates the preconditions for life in a modern State (*PbR*: §§273f., 308–12)—including appropriate institutions and practices, but also preconditions on the side of subjects, such as a capacity for self-control, respect for general norms, and an adequate understanding of property, personhood and freedom (*PbR*: §260, 282). Unlike other racists of his time—such as Christoph Meiners in his 1790 essay *Über die Natur der afrikanischen Neger und die davon abhängende Befreyung, oder Einschränkung der Schwarzen* (*On the Nature of the African Negroes, and the Subsequent Liberation or Containment of Blacks*)—Hegel does maintain that in a rational State, all adult citizens, regardless of their descent, should be granted equal rights (*PbR*: §209R, 240). But from Hegel’s views about the deficits of non-European races, it follows that they do not yet fulfil the demanding preconditions for participation in a modern State. Instead, they need to be prepared for a life in freedom through oppressive measures such as paternalism and slavery. So in terms of what is due to people in the present, Hegel subscribes, in this reading, to a hierarchical view that excludes countless human beings from full-blown moral and legal status (cf. Stone 2020: 254f.; de Laurentiis 2021: 76).

## II. The role of inheritance in Hegel’s theory of race

Hegel not only claims that ‘racial diversity’ corresponds to the different ‘natural spirits’ of the continents, he also repeatedly postulates an impact of geographic factors on racial characteristics, often via culture. For example, he suggests that the Mediterranean promotes, while Africa’s coastal mountains, deserts and plateaus impede, cultural exchange and hence development (*W* [1824/5, *Kebler*]: 27.2: 516f., 27.2: 530). Some commentators have pointed to such claims to argue that Hegel’s hierarchical theory of race is not *racist*. In this view, the hierarchy is not due to inherited but geographic and cultural features—i.e., these commentators deny that Hegel subscribes to our above condition (b). For instance, Joseph McCarney (2000) attributes to him ‘a species of geographical materialism’ that need not ‘assume any inherent natural, and, hence, any racial, inadequacy’ (2000: 144). And Sandra Bonetto bases her defence of Hegel on the claim (for which she cites, curiously, the now notorious right-wing icon Dinesh D’Souza) that ‘racism implies that one race is *biologically* superior to another, coupled with the translation of *biological* superiority into intellectual and moral superiority’ (Bonetto 2006: 38, our emphasis).



As mentioned in section I, we take the conditions (a)–(c) (remember: jointly sufficient, not necessary conditions) to define only *one* influential notion of racism. We will argue in section VI that non-biological hierarchical views of race are morally not less problematic than biological ones; Hegel's theory should be classified as racist also if it is read as non-biological. But we also think that Hegel should count as advocating a racist theory *even* by the lights of the narrow, biological understanding of racism that authors like Bonetto and McCarney adopt to defend Hegel.

If for Hegel, mental traits of races were *not* inherited, he would have to assume that human beings across the world are born with the same average mental abilities. There would be only individual differences in that respect and no differences between racial groups. Hence, individuals of non-European descent who receive a European education should, on average, reach the same level of mental performance. Does Hegel think so?

An interesting test case is provided by the colonial Americas (cf. Hoffheimer 2001: 38). There, both indigenous Americans and Africans were exposed to European cultures (cf. *SG* [1825, *Griesheim*]: 25.1: 232), including education (through evangelization: cf. *W* [1830/31, *Karl Hegel*]: 27.4: 1206). Nevertheless, Hegel claims that indigenous Americans 'could not receive the higher culture [*das Höbere*] of the Europeans' (*SG* [1827/8, *Walter*]: 25.2: 611<sup>24f</sup>); because of their 'weakness and stupor [*Stumpfsinn*]' (*W* [1826/7, *Hube*]: 27.3: 823<sup>4</sup>), the missionaries 'have not been able to bring any drives and excitation into them' (*W* [1830/31, *Karl Hegel*]: 27.4: 1206<sup>17f</sup>). By contrast, Hegel thinks that the South American 'creoles'—i.e., 'descendants of Europeans with European blood' (*W* [1830/31, *Heimann*]: 27.4: 1206<sup>29</sup>, 'a mixture of European and American or African blood', *W* [1826/7, *Garczyński*]: 27.3: 823<sup>21</sup>)—reach 'the higher feeling of self, the upward-striving to autonomy, independence' (*W* [1824/5, *Kebler*]: 27.2: 510<sup>8f</sup>). This has even enabled them to create autonomous 'South-American States' (*W* [1826/7, *Garczyński*]: 27.3: 823<sup>18</sup>) where the creoles 'set the tone' (*W* [1824/5, *Kebler*]: 27.2: 510<sup>10</sup>). In other words: indigenous Americans suffer from an *innate* mental weakness that is not amenable to European education. But as soon as *miscegenation* with Europeans occurs, modern subjectivity, the consciousness of freedom and State life become possible also in the geographic conditions of South America, thanks to 'European blood'.

Hegel's account of the colonial Americas thus directly contradicts the non-biological reading of his account of race, and we conclude that he considers at least some crucial mental characteristics of races to be inherited. His theory combines hereditary and geographic explanations of racial traits, treating races as *bio-cultural* kinds. If this position seems puzzling to contemporary eyes, we need to keep in mind that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century theories of race did not operate with a clear-cut nature/culture-distinction, partly because of the prominence of (proto-)Lamarckian views in that period (Bernasconi 2010). The following passage

from a lecture on the Philosophy of Subjective Spirit suggests that Hegel, too, sympathized with such a view (at least in 1825—as far as we can tell, this is the only passage of this kind):

[C]ertain tastes, peculiarities have always been transmitted, this is on the one hand a natural disposition [*Naturanlage*], on the other hand the result of determinate circumstances [*bestimmter Verhältnisse*], and it can easily happen that something like this becomes completely fixed. We can imagine that in children who belong to a European people, a certain alertness is already present as compared to children of a savage tribe, so that one assures that a child from an educated [*gebildeten*] people with a natural disposition [*Naturrell*] that is adequate to the educated condition, if it is moved to a savage tribe, excels among them and proves its natural disposition [*sein Naturrell geltend macht*]. (*SG [1825, Griesheim]*: 25.1: 244<sup>21</sup>–45<sup>3</sup>)

The contrast with a ‘natural disposition’ strongly suggests that the notion of traits which are ‘the result of determinate circumstances’ refers to *acquired* traits—the ‘determinate circumstances’ would then be environmental factors, such as the social and cultural environment in which a person grows up. Against this background, the proposal that such traits can become ‘completely fixed’ seems to mean that such acquired traits can be transmitted not only through tradition but also through inheritance. This is thought to hold not only for personal preferences (‘tastes, peculiarities’) but also for cultural achievements (‘educated people’). Moreover, the passage explicitly links the issue to the racial contrast between a ‘European’ people and a non-European ‘savage tribe’ and differential mental capacities.

Hence, the following way of spelling out the integration of hereditary and geographic influences on race was available to Hegel: geographic conditions can be more or less favourable to cultural development; abilities that are acquired through cultural development by one generation can be transmitted through inheritance to the next; this results in innate mental abilities (a ‘natural disposition that is adequate to the educated condition’, as the above passage puts it) that will themselves constrain or support further cultural development, which will itself leave its traces on hereditary features, and so on. The result is a causal loop that links nature and nurture together. Notice that this picture leaves open whether this loop brings about the ‘spiritual’ differences between races in the first place or whether it merely deepens differences that existed all along. Indeed, Hegel’s comments on the monogenism/polygenism debate show that he takes the issue of ‘original’ racial differences to be outside of the scope of philosophy (*SG [1825, Griesheim]*: 25.1: 236).<sup>12</sup>

But how does the bio-cultural conception of race that we have ascribed to Hegel relate to the egalitarian-sounding claims that Hegel also makes about the monogenism/polygenism debate—such as the one quoted above: ‘Humans are humans, descent does not matter for their concept. [...] [H]umans are thinking, and hence equal’ (*SG* [1822, *Hotbo*]: 25.1: 33<sup>37</sup>–34<sup>5</sup>)? Since, for Hegel, the ‘concept’ of humankind is precisely defined by thought (e.g., *Enz*: §2, 28f.), this and similar passages may seem to suggest that for Hegel, all human beings are born equally endowed with thought; so if there are racial differences in mental abilities, it could seem that they have to be *always* a matter of environmental influences, not of inheritance. One may therefore get the impression that Hegel was wavering between contradictory views: while he draws on a partly biological conception of race in *some* contexts (his discussion of the colonial Americas), he may seem to reject that conception in other passages.

In our view, this conclusion is not necessary: a proper understanding of the metaphysical assumptions behind notions like that of the ‘concept’ of humankind allows us to resolve this apparent contradiction. We will present this solution in section V, after our reconstruction of the necessary metaphysical background.

### III. The modal force of Hegel's racism

Hegel's hierarchical theory of race is characterized by an additional element that so far has been largely neglected by commentators.<sup>13</sup> At several places in his lectures on the Philosophy of Subjective Spirit and of History, Hegel claims that, at least in the Old World, the division into races (and continents) is not merely contingent but follows an inner logic or necessity. Thus, he claims: ‘The Old World consists of 3 parts, recognized by the sense for nature<sup>14</sup> of the ancients, there is a higher necessity in this [...]’ (*W* [1822/3, *Hotbo*]: 27.1: 81<sup>14–16</sup>; cf. *SG* [1825, *Griesheim*]: 25.1: 231); and shortly afterwards, he explains that the ‘character of spirit [*Character des Geistes*]’ of the continents in the Old World ‘differs [...] in similar fashion’ (*W* [1822/3, *Hotbo*]: 196/26.1: 83). Elsewhere, Hegel points out that the American race does not ‘properly enter into’ the ‘totality’ constituted by the African, Asian and Caucasian races. Therefore, he includes only these last three races (the primary races in Blumenbach's taxonomy) in his account of the ‘main principles of the races’ (*SG* [1822, *Hotbo*]: 25.1: 38<sup>11–13</sup>). When concluding this account, he remarks: ‘These general differences are essential differences’ (*SG* [1822, *Hotbo*]: 25.1: 38<sup>26f.</sup>).

By interpreting the racial (and geographic) division of the Old World as ‘essential’ and subject to a ‘higher necessity’, Hegel indicates that these divisions are something that his philosophical system can make sense of (cf. *Enz*: §12, 39f.)—as opposed to those contingent empirical details that are beyond

philosophical grasp, such as, e.g., the differences between the various taxa of plants and animals. Hegel thus turns racism from an anthropological into a metaphysical doctrine. But what exactly does that metaphysical account of race look like? Why does Hegel think the division of races in the Old World is necessary?

Hegel himself gives an important clue when he explains that the ‘essential differences’ of races relate to the ‘differences of the Concept’ (*SG* [1822, *Hotho*]: 25.1: 38<sup>26–28</sup>). The ‘Concept’ is a logical and metaphysical structure that Hegel defines as a unity of three moments—universality, particularity and individuality—and that plays a basic role in his general metaphysics. We, therefore, have to see Hegel’s claims about the necessity of racial differences in the context of his metaphysics of the Concept. We propose to do this in the following sections, starting with a summary of our interpretation of the relevant background in Hegel’s metaphysics in the next section.

#### IV. Metaphysical background

In our preferred reading of Hegel’s metaphysics, he treats the structure of the Concept—the unity of universality, particularity and individuality—as a basic structure that articulates both reality and thought. Our cognitive endeavours ultimately aim at understanding or ‘comprehension’ (*Begreifen*), and we really understand something if we can explain it in a way that employs the structure of the Concept (Stern 1990; Kreines 2015; Knappik 2016). Such an explanation must make an *individual* thing or phenomenon intelligible as an instance of a relevant ‘objective concept’ (*WdL*: 16/21: 14; cf. de Vries 1991), which can be understood along Aristotelian lines as a universal that is real if it is instantiated. In contemporary terms, accounts that really afford comprehension are *essentialist* explanations, which allow us to understand the explanandum based on the nature of the involved entities (Ellis 2001). Where successful, such explanations, Hegel thinks, really grasp aspects of the metaphysical structure of reality—there really are universal essences that account for the features of individual objects and ground causal powers and laws of nature.

Crucially, Hegel’s version differs from many traditional versions of essentialism. The objective concepts or kinds that Hegel postulates include substance kinds, such as biological species, but also kinds of other kinds of entities, such as properties, abilities and processes (Knappik 2016: 763). Also, Hegel operates with a rather flexible notion of a kind or objective concept that requires neither clear-cut boundaries between kinds nor essences constituted by exclusively intrinsic properties (Knappik 2016: 781). Since Hegel seems to flirt with a Lamarckian view of inheritance (cf. section II), we assume that the essences of his kinds are not *per se* eternal and necessary. Instead, they can be understood as stable clusters of

features that mutually support and explain each other, thus constituting a 'spiritual bond' that holds together the various aspects of an object or phenomenon (*Enz*: §449A, 183; cf. *N* [1819/20, *Ringier*]: 24.1: 133; *WdL*: 388/11: 293). In all these respects, Hegel's approach is similar to Richard Boyd's heterodox form of essentialism, which identifies essences with 'homeostatic property clusters' (e.g., Boyd 1999).<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, Hegel often describes the structure of the Concept as a process of self-determination. This process starts from a condition of immediacy (universality) and, from there, goes through a development (particularity and individuality) that aims at explicitness and mediation, unfolding and realizing what was only implicit in universality. Indeed, he characterizes the Concept also in teleological terms, writing that in instances of the structure of the Concept, the various features or 'determinations' are held together by a common goal (*WdL*: 388/11: 293, cf. *Enz*: §179, 253). Hegel seems to understand the essences that articulate organic nature and spirit as teleological essences that come with a kind-specific standard. This standard guides the reality and activity of the instance (e.g., an individual organism) and can be realized more or less adequately in that instance (de Vries 1991).

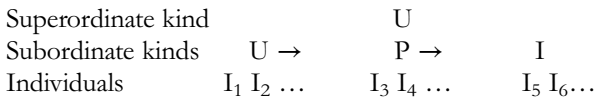
So far, we have been focusing on the most straightforward application of the structure of the Concept. Here, the moment of universality corresponds to a kind, e.g., a biological species; the moment of individuality to an instance of the kind, e.g., an individual organism; and the moment of particularity to the properties that the individual instance has in virtue of its kind-membership. In this case, the nature of the kind allows us to understand why the individual instance has its determinate properties. We will call this form of essentialism *first-order essentialism*.

But in addition, Hegel also applies the framework of essentialist explanations to relations *between* kinds—in what we call his *higher-order essentialism*. Here, the moment of universality corresponds to a *higher-level kind*, the moment of particularity to a *lower-level kind*, and the moment of individuality once again to a concrete instance. Where the framework is applied this way, it becomes understandable both why the individual instance has determinate features and why the higher-level kind is divided into such-and-such lower-level kinds. Hegel provides a general account of this form of division in the section on the Disjunctive Judgment in the *Logic*. There, Hegel argues that a division has the form of a genuine Disjunctive Judgment only if 'the species have as such the determination differentiating them as a principle within the nature of the genus' (*WdL*: 580/12: 82). In other words, it must be possible to explain the generic nature and the specific differences of the lower taxa based on the higher taxon. Hegel also refers to this form of division as displaying the 'necessity of the Concept' (*WdL*: 578/12: 80): rather than

being a brute fact, the division is made intelligible and (metaphysically) necessary by the nature of the superordinate kind.

We think that this particular type of taxonomic hierarchy is of fundamental significance for Hegel’s *Realphilosophie*. We can understand the hierarchical system of concepts presented there as an attempt to capture the basic kinds that articulate reality (as opposed to less basic kinds, such as biological species, which are imbued with contingency and discovered by empirical sciences; cf. *Enz*: §368, 415), and to make them intelligible in terms of necessary subdivisions of superordinate kinds: the Absolute Idea as world-kind (cf. de Vries 1991) gets divided into Nature and Spirit, which themselves are further divided into more concrete kinds (Mechanism, Chemism, Organic Nature; Subjective Spirit, Objective Spirit, Absolute Spirit), etc. In line with Hegel’s view that philosophy should uncover *necessary* connections (*Enz*: §9, 37), we think all these divisions are meant to be necessary divisions that take the form of Disjunctive Judgment.

To understand how exactly Hegel can explain a division into subordinate kinds based on the superordinate kind, it is important to see that he, as part of his higher-order essentialism, applies the structure of the Concept at yet a *third* level: the *mutual relation of co-ordinate kinds*. Thus, in his discussion of the Disjunctive Judgment, he points out: ‘But when the genus is a concrete, essentially *determined* universality, then, as simple determinateness, it is the unity of the *moments of the Concept*—moments that, only sublated in that simplicity, have their real difference in the species’ (*WdL*: 580/12: 82). So in the relevant cases, the nature of the higher kind displays an internal dialectical complexity: it has different aspects that correspond to the moments of the Concept, and the subordinate kinds are explicit realizations of those different aspects. Schematically, we can illustrate the resulting understanding of Disjunctive Judgment as follows (‘U’ stands for universality, ‘P’ for particularity and ‘I’ for individuality; the arrows at the level of subordinate kinds stand for the logical development that Hegel locates at that level):



Importantly, this view entails that a goal-directed process also takes place horizontally, among the subordinate kinds. Just as Hegel explains particular properties of an individual organism as steps in the process of achieving the standard that is specific for the relevant kind, he seems to assume that in cases with the structure of Disjunctive Judgment, co-ordinate kinds can be understood as steps in a (not necessarily temporal) process that leads from simpler, less adequate to fuller manifestations of the superordinate kind.

For illustration, consider Hegel’s threefold division of life in the Philosophy of Nature. The first subordinate kind corresponds to the moment of universality

(*Enz*: §337, 273), characterized by immediacy—while life is essentially process and mediation (*Enz*: §338, 277). This first kind of life is therefore opposed to life: a form of ‘life as non-living’ (*Leben als nicht leben*) (*N* [1819/20, *Ringier*]: 24.1: 133<sup>24</sup>), which Hegel identifies with the ‘geological organism’ of the Earth. For Hegel, the Earth has gone through a form of growth and development (*Enz*: §339, 278) that has brought about a structure of organism-like complexity and order, which, however, lacks organic functioning—it is ‘lying dead’ (*Enz*: §340, 285f.). By contrast, the other two forms of life, corresponding to particularity (plant life) and individuality (animal life) (*Enz*: §337, 273), are *living* forms of life. But full-blown *individuality* is only reached in the animal organism with its abilities for sentience and self-movement and the tight functional interdependence of all parts. Plant-life occupies the intermediary position of particularity because plants are *living* organisms but lack proper individuality. They are not sentient or self-moving and have a looser form of organization that does not allow for clear-cut individuation of organisms (e.g., *Enz*: §343, 303). Thus, the nature of life is progressively realized through the three sub-kinds of life. This process is goal-directed but not *per se* temporal. While Hegel acknowledges that the Earth predates plant and animal life, he seems to assume that both plant and animal species originated simultaneously (*N* [1821/22, *Uexküll*]: 24.1: 425<sup>4–6</sup>).

Does Hegel’s higher-order essentialism entail that the division into subordinate kinds can be *logically deduced* from an account of the superordinate kind? Yes and no—again, the example of life is apt to illustrate this point. While Hegel’s dialectical account of life as such does entail that there has to be, e.g., an initial ‘non-living’ form of life, it does not logically follow that this non-living life consists in the ‘geological organism’. To justify the latter view, we must *combine dialectical speculation with empirical elements* (cf. *Enz*: §9, 37). In our understanding, Hegel conceives of this combination in *explanatory* terms (in line with his overall conception of cognition as ‘comprehension’, see above). There are different ways in which a priori truths, such as:

- (5) Life falls into a non-living, a partially mediated and a fully mediated subtype
  - can be connected to empirical reality, for example
- (6) Life falls into geological, plant and animal life
- vs
- (7) Life falls into microorganic, plant and animal life.

Among such possibilities, the one that yields the overall theory with the highest explanatory power ought to be adopted. In this example, (6) is justified for Hegel because adopting it allows him to explain (he thinks) geological processes, the emergence of organic life etc., whereas adopting (7) would not get him



these explanatory advantages (and microorganisms can be accommodated as simple forms of plant or animal life).

To conclude our reconstruction of Hegel's higher-order essentialism, it is worth pointing out that this view directly violates two rules of classification in the Aristotelian tradition: that the specific difference of a species must come from outside the genus it belongs to (*Topics* 144<sup>a</sup>31–144<sup>b</sup>3), and that elements of an essentially ordered series, e.g., a teleological progression (as in the case of the three parts of the soul: *De anima* 414<sup>b</sup>20–32), do not fall under a common kind, and hence do not allow for a common definition (Lloyd 1962). (Apparently, both rules go back to attempts in the Old Academy to avoid the regress problem posed by the argument of the Third Man: since Platonic forms ground their instances, forms and instances belong to an ordered series, and their difference does not come from outside the form—it is in the nature of the form to ground instances. The above regimentation obliterates the need to postulate a common kind for the form and instances, thus blocking the regress: Owen 1979.) When authors like Linnaeus or Meiners postulated a *hierarchical* division of the human species into varieties or races, this was still consistent with the Aristotelian rules. They took the hierarchy to be an accidental fact. By contrast, Hegel's higher-order essentialism amounts to a *revisionary* account of classification that allows for divisions, the specific differences of which are based on the very nature of the superordinate taxon and for a necessary teleological progression among the co-ordinate taxa. (Hegel does agree with Aristotle's rejection of a common genus or definition for the parts of the soul: *GPh* [1819, *anonymous*]: 30.1: 109<sup>1–3</sup>; *GPh* [1820/21, *Häring*]: 30.1: 350<sup>15–20</sup>; *GPh* [1823/4, *Hotbo*]: 30.2: 610<sup>26–29</sup>—but presumably because for him, the soul is an instance of the 'higher', teleological form of taxonomy, rather than a case beyond the grasp of taxonomy as on Aristotle's view.)

## V. Hegel's racism as application of his higher-order essentialism

The form of racism that we identified in Hegel's mature system in sections I–III is an application of Hegel's higher-order essentialism: the necessary hierarchy of races (at least those in the Old World) amounts to a non-temporal, goal-directed process among coordinate taxa that corresponds to the moments of the Concept, and that is based on an internal complexity in the nature of the superordinate taxon. Consider, to begin with, the way Hegel himself uses the moments of the Concept to structure his account of the races in the Old World. The sensuous and uncontrolled character that Hegel ascribes to Africans (e.g., *SG* [1822, *Hotbo*]: 25.1: 35; *SG* [1825, *Griesheim*]: 25.2: 234; *SG* [1827/8, *Stolzenberg*]: 91/25.2: 611; *W* [1824/5, *Kehler*]: 27.2: 525) amounts to a form of immediacy

corresponding to the moment of universality: Hegel claims that this ‘race [is] the entanglement in nature[,] the immediate concrete nature of spirit’ (*SG* [1822, *Hotbo*]: 25.1: 36<sup>18f</sup>). Asians are characterized by ‘difference’ (*SG* [1822, *Hotbo*]: 25.1: 36<sup>19</sup>), corresponding to particularity: here, humans begin to liberate themselves from nature and grasp the contents of thought, although in ways that remain caught in nature (e.g., because they treat animals as divine: *SG* [1822, *Hotbo*]: 25.1: 36). Finally, Europeans reach full-blown liberation, grasp of universal contents, and individual development and freedom, corresponding to the moment of individuality.

In the 1825 lectures on the Philosophy of Subjective Spirit, Hegel chooses a somewhat different exposition, focusing on subjects’ relation to individual (here: immediate) versus universal (here: mediated) contents (*SG* [1825, *Griesheim*]: 25.1: 234f.). Like spirit’s relation to nature, however, the subject’s relation to individual versus universal contents is a crucial dimension of *thought*. So in both cases, Hegel uses thought, the nature of humankind (e.g., *Enz*: §2, 28f.), as organizing principle of his account of the races. Now, thought consists, for Hegel, like life, in various forms of *mediation*: in thought, we process and transform sensory contents and produce and engage with logically complex contents (judgments, inferences) (*Enz*: §§21f., 54, 56). It follows that, just as there is an initial, immediate and therefore *non-living* form of life, there is also an initial, immediate and therefore *non-thinking* form of thought, which in the subsequent forms of thought is replaced by more adequate, mediated realizations of thought.

We suggest that this notion of *non-thinking thought* is at the core of Hegel’s brutally degrading account of Africans and Americans. The ability for thought that they possess qua human beings seems to be only a *minimal* capacity for Hegel—a capacity of *being taught by others* (viz., European colonizers) how to think, akin to the capacity for speech (cf. again Hegel’s comment on the Haitian revolution at *SG* [1822, *Hotbo*]: 25.1: 36<sup>4f</sup>: ‘they are not able themselves to overcome their naturalness’, and his notion of Africans as being ‘highly educable from without’ (*von außen sehr bildsam*), *SG* [1822, *Hotbo*]: 25.1: 35<sup>26</sup>). By contrast, Hegel sees the Asian and Caucasian races as manifestations of humankind that possess increasingly autonomous and developed abilities for thought, culminating in the European variant of the Caucasian race.

Thus interpreting Hegel’s views on race as an application of his higher-order essentialism has significant exegetical advantages. First, the interpretation allows making sense of Hegel’s extravagant claim, identified in section III above, that the hierarchy of races in the Old World is a matter of necessity. This claim can now be seen as a consequence of the fact that Hegel’s higher-order essentialism postulates necessary subdivisions of kinds, which together form teleologically ordered series through which the natures of superordinate kinds are realized. In our reading, Hegel holds that the mental characteristics of the various races (in

the Old World<sup>16</sup>) constitute precisely those different manifestations of thought that *must* exist in order for the nature of the superordinate kind, thought (and hence, humankind and spirit), to be realized.

(Hegel accounts for the continents, too, in terms of his higher-order essentialism, as goal-directed series of sub-kinds realizing the ‘universal planetary life of natural spirit’ (*Enz*: §393, 39): in Africa, the ‘massive formation’ (*gediegener Zusammenhang*) of the high plateaus surrounded by coastal mountains (*W* [1822/3, *Hotbo*]: 195/27.1: 82) is a geographic manifestation of universality, the first moment of the Concept with its immediacy, homogeneity and lack of connection to otherness; Asia corresponds to particularity, where the unity of universality is broken up, and difference emerges (cf. *WdL*: 534/12: 37): rivers and streams create ‘breaks and gaps’ in the high plateaus, huge valleys and plains (*W* [1822/3, *Hotbo*]: 195/27.1: 82); and Europe reaches a complete balance and mediation (corresponding to individuality) between these first two characters, with a variegated geography including mountains, hills and smaller rivers (*W* [1822/3, *Hotbo*]: 195/27.1: 83). Since the morphological characteristics of those continents contribute to shaping racial differences (cf. section II), racial hierarchy is necessitated by the nature of *two* phenomena alike: first, thought, with its necessary realization through race-specific mental abilities; second, ‘natural spirit’, with its necessary realization through continents. In the context of Hegel’s teleological views on spirit, this double necessity might be understood in the sense that the geographic characteristics of the continents are part of the mechanisms that ensure that the nature of spirit/thought with its internal complexity gets realized in this world.)

Second, we can now also resolve the puzzle from the end of section II: how could Hegel claim innate mental differences between races and, at the same time, state that all humans share thought as their common nature? These two claims no longer conflict with each other once it is acknowledged that thought comes, for Hegel, necessarily in different forms, ranging from a mere capacity for education by others to fully developed and autonomous forms. In this sense, human difference (race-specific mental abilities, where descent *does* matter) and equality (thought as common human nature, where descent *does not* matter) are two sides of the same coin for Hegel—the common nature requires those differences for its realization.

Notice also how this contrasts starkly with common accounts of the origins of racial differences in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such as descent from different first couples (polygenism) or environmental influence after migrations (an account adopted by some monogenists like Blumenbach). It is an important consequence of the interpretation here proposed that, for Hegel, the question about the ultimate historical origins of racial difference cannot be answered by philosophy. What his philosophy offers, instead, is an account of the *metaphysical* basis of such difference, namely the nature of thought.

However, it is also important to realize that Hegel's hierarchical theory of race, while being an *instance* of a higher-order essentialist explanation, does not logically *follow* from Hegel's general metaphysical views. First, higher-order essentialism merely holds that *some* kind-divisions can be understood based on higher kinds. It does not per se entail that this also applies to humankind. Second, higher-order essentialism can be applied to humankind other than by postulating races. Different sub-types of thought may also be realized by subsequent stages in ontogenetic or phylogenetic development of humans or by the kinds of mental abilities that the same individual can possess and that Hegel goes on to examine in the further course of the Philosophy of Subjective Spirit. So what reasons may have led Hegel to (1) apply higher-order essentialism to the case of humankind and (2) do so in a way that yields a hierarchical theory of race?

As to (1), humankind is the species that realizes spirit, which is for Hegel, together with nature, one of the two main dimensions of reality. Given the views on explanation that we ascribed to Hegel above, his project of explaining (human) spirit in all its complexity requires him to postulate subdivisions of spirit or humankind into *some* kind of lower-level concepts (leaving open whether these concepts pick out sub-types of humans, or just different aspects of the mind, society etc.).

But this leaves us with (2)—why races? Hegel himself seems to supply a missing premise that bears on this question when he claims in the Philosophy of History that there is necessarily a dimension of *nature* to spirit, with the result that different aspects of spirit are manifested not as aspects of one and the same whole (e.g., an individual as bearer of different mental abilities), but as separate entities that 'stand alongside each other indifferently in space' (*W* [1822/3, *Hotho*]: 156/27.1: 34f., cf. *W* [1824/5, *Kebler*]: 27.2: 507). Hegel focuses here on national spirits, but the point is naturally read as also applying to the level of races (which he defines as 'natural spirits'). This suggests that for Hegel, the subdivision of spirit or humankind into lower-level kinds has to take (also) the form of races because they correspond to a *natural* side of spirit, an ahistorical existence of juxtaposed elements. This additional premise is itself an application of his higher-order essentialism: spirit needs to realize itself in a succession of dimensions that start with a *non-spiritual* form of spirit—i.e., a natural form of spirit, which consists in the division of humankind into races and ethnicities.

But this still does not *necessitate* a theory of race, for the ahistorical juxtaposition of human sub-types could also take other forms. For instance, it could be restricted to the *individual* differences that Hegel addresses in *Enz*: §395 (talent, temper, dispositions etc.). Instead, we think that the account we gave in the last section of how Hegel connects a priori truths about kinds to empirical reality applies here, too: by applying his essentialism to humankind in terms of a hierarchical theory of race, Hegel becomes able to fit into his explanatory framework a significant

amount of (actual or fabricated) empirical data about geographical, anatomic, psychological, social, religious and philosophical differences across the globe. In particular, as *bio-cultural* kinds, Hegelian races are apt to establish explanatory connections between geography, human morphology, psychology, culture and history. And the *teleological* ordering of races, with Europeans as *telos* of the realization of humankind, perfectly fits Hegel's teleological understanding of social, cultural and political processes as developments that have their *telos* in modern Europe.

It bears emphasizing, though, that things could seem to Hegel to fit each other so nicely only because he uncritically relied on and produced new, Eurocentric patterns of (d)evaluating the cultural achievements in literature, art, religion, philosophy etc., rather than taking more egalitarian approaches seriously as they were pushed in Hegel's own time by authors like Herder and Wilhelm von Humboldt. Moreover, he selectively gave credit to denigrating reports about American and African populations while not taking seriously critiques of such reports as put forward by authors like Herder, Forster and Blumenbach. His account of Africans and Americans is thus subject to *confirmation bias*. In the face of contradictory and contested evidence, he selectively attends to those pieces of evidence that fit with his background commitments and are amenable to his explanatory framework while explaining away,<sup>17</sup> bracketing or choosing not to further inquire into all other evidence. We can find one striking illustration in the handwritten lecture notes in Hegel's copy of the 1817 *Encyclopedia*. In connection with the notion of 'racial diversity', Hegel excerpts some passages from Herder's *Ideas for a Philosophy of the History of Humankind* regarding characteristics of various human groups and their geographical context (*GW* 13: 263–65). But in the very same parts of Herder's book, Hegel also could find statements of Herder's critique of European colonialism (*IPGM*: 244f., 247f.), racist stereotypes (*IPGM*: 246f.),<sup>18</sup> and the very concept of race (*IPGM*: 257f.). Those parts of Herder's discussion are not reflected in Hegel's notes, nor are they, to our knowledge, considered elsewhere in his texts.

## VI. Saving Hegelianism?

By way of conclusion, we address two possible reactions, on behalf of Hegel and Hegelian thought, to the argument in this paper.

1. In section II, we considered attempts to defend Hegel on the grounds that he explains racial characteristics in terms of geography, not inheritance. While we argued against this interpretation, it is possible to imagine a modified Hegelian system, from which the assumption of innate mental and social characteristics of races is subtracted (see Kirkland 2018). Would such an approach allow for letting Hegel off the hook of racism?

To answer this, it is instructive to examine why Hegel's defenders put so much weight on the issue of hereditary versus geographic explanations. For instance, McCarney takes Hegel's view of sub-Saharan Africans to be 'incompatible with the view that biology is *destiny*, a *fate that ineluctably attends* a people and is *indelibly* inscribed in every individual son and daughter of it' (2000: 143, our emphasis). In the same vein, Bonetto asserts that Hegel's view of sub-Saharan Africa 'does not amount to racism, as there is no suggestion that the Negroes [sic] of Africa proper [sic] are *forever condemned* to congenital inferiority and, on that basis, to worthlessness' (Bonetto 2006: 49, our emphasis; cf. 2006: 45). These quotes point to an important underlying assumption: What makes racism, as opposed to mere cultural chauvinism, so problematic is its *modal import*. On this assumption, racism essentially involves a *biological determinism* that denies members of 'inferior' races the ability to change their alleged race-specific traits. By contrast, a view on which the mental or cultural inferiority of non-Europeans is due to geographic factors is not guilty of this specific wrong of racism (so the argument goes), as it leaves open the possibility that they eventually catch up with the Europeans.

But this view of racism is problematic both as a defence of Hegel and in its own right. For one thing, Hegel's higher-order essentialism does not modally discriminate between biological and spiritual (here: social or cultural) kinds. For instance, he thinks that the estates—which are social kinds, if anything is—'are specifically determined in accordance with the Concept' (*PbR*: §202, 234; cf. §302, 342), such that their division follows the very same 'higher necessity' as does the division among human races. For another, the above view is fallacious. From a trait's being biological alone, it does not follow that it is unchangeable—as we saw in section II, Hegel seems to agree. Conversely, from a trait's being due to environmental influence alone, it does not follow that it is more easily changeable than a biological trait. Again, Hegel seems to agree: For instance, in his account of the estates, Hegel argues that the causal interaction of various market mechanisms (*PbR*: §201, 234) leads to educational inequalities that *reinforce* innate individual differences, and produce 'inequalities in the resources and skills of individuals' as a 'necessary consequence' (*PbR*: §200, 233). Hence, the processes of *Bildung* in civil society make inequalities *less* mutable than they would otherwise be—our station is more fateful than our biology.

The above underlying assumption should therefore be abandoned. As a result, however, it is no longer clear why subtracting the biological dimension from Hegel's ranking of races should be of any help when it comes to the problem of racism. Many theorists of racism have argued that demarcations along non-biological lines, e.g., in terms of cultural or religious groups (such as Christians versus Jews and Muslims), often have played a theoretical role that is functionally equivalent to biological notions of race, for instance, in so far they have likewise served to legitimate discrimination, conquest, and genocide. Thus, theories that

postulate a ranking between such groups should be conceptualized as forms of racism, too (e.g., Fanon 1994 [1956]; Memmi 1999 [1982]; Balibar and Wallerstein 1991; Blum 2020). Indeed, Hegel's claim that an 'absolute right of the Idea' (*PfR*: §350, 376) legitimates the colonial rule of 'civilized nations' over 'less advanced' ones (*PfR*: §351, 376) is logically independent of whether the difference between both is explained in terms of inherited features or not. Hence, such pro-colonialist normative implications remain firmly in place even if the biological dimension is removed from Hegel's ranking of races.

2. There is a long tradition among readers of Hegel aiming to extricate the progressive elements of his philosophy from those deemed problematic—a tradition that is perhaps most prominently exemplified by Marx's aim to discover the 'rational kernel within the mystical shell' (*K*: 103/27) of Hegel's dialectic. While readers in this tradition may concede that more than a cosmetic intervention is needed to 'save Hegel from himself' (cf. Stone 2020), they could take our argument to point to a straightforward solution. If Hegelian racism must indeed be understood in the context of higher-order essentialism, it could seem to follow that this racism poses no problem to contemporary appropriations of Hegel, simply because higher-order essentialism does not seem any longer a viable metaphysical position anyway.

But this conclusion would be hasty. We argued above that Hegel's hierarchical theory of race is not a deductive consequence of Hegel's metaphysics but instead supported (in Hegel's eyes) by explanatory considerations. In this reading, Hegel's higher-order essentialism is but one of various interlocked elements designed to fit and support each other—as theoretical elements that allow, if taken together, to make more sense of things than if none or only some of them are adopted. It is possible to argue that this package also includes seemingly innocuous elements of Hegel's philosophy dear to contemporary progressive neo-Hegelians.

For example, we have already seen how Hegel's—philosophically intriguing—view that life in modern States, together with the legal and moral rights that are instituted in such States, is possible only as a result of complex historical developments of social practices and forms of self-understanding, opens the door for arguments to the effect that in some parts of the world, people have not reached the requisite stage of development to fulfil those preconditions (cf. also Stone 2020). Consequently, there is also no right that could protect them against colonization (including slavery and missionary paternalism), and colonization can be justified to the extent that it induces the preconditions for rights among the colonized.

Another case in point is the master-slave dialectic in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. We saw earlier that Hegel ascribes an educating function to slavery in so far as it 'disciplines' people who otherwise lack self-control. This claim is part of a later discussion of the master-slave dialectic (*SG* [1822, *Hotbo*]: 25.1: 114f.), and it is directly based on an element that is essential to the master-slave dialectic already in



its 1807 version: the notion that the servant's forced labour enables him to control his immediate desires. Similarly, it is well-known that the relationship between lord and servant, as presented in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, results from a struggle for life and death in which the subject that eventually becomes the servant gives in out of fear for his life. This element, too, will later serve Hegel as the basis for an argument in favour of slavery—namely, that enslaved people implicitly consented to enslavement: '[W]hen a human is a slave, it is their will; for they do not need it; they can kill themselves' (R [1822/3, *Hotho*]: 26.2: 822<sup>30</sup>–23<sup>1</sup>; cf. *SG* [1822, *Hotho*]: 25.1: 114). Against the background of such later texts, the master-slave dialectic of 1807 appears in a very ambiguous light—namely, among other things, as preparing the ground for a partially apologetic account of a form of oppression justified as much by the cowardice and bigotry of the servant as by the spiritual advantages it supposedly confers on him. (And if it is suggested that all these disturbing sides enter Hegel's thought only after 1807, we would ask to keep in mind the passages from the Jena period cited in our introduction.)

All this is not to say that there is no progressive potential in Hegel's thought or no viable ways of 'saving Hegel from himself'. Rather, we take those examples to illustrate how Hegel's racism is systematically entangled with various other parts of his thought, including those that are particularly dear to us. Rejecting Hegel's theory of race and his higher-order essentialism may have only limited effect when it comes to 'saving Hegel', as long as we have not fully understood those entanglements.<sup>19</sup>

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### Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Abbreviations used:

*De anima* = Aristotle, *On the Soul*. In *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. J. Barnes, vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

*Enz.* = Hegel, [Prefaces and §§1–244:] *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline. Part I: Science of Logic*, trans. K. Brinkmann & D. Dahlstrom

- (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); [§§245–376:] *Philosophy of Nature*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon, 2004); [§§377–577:] *Philosophy of Mind*, trans. W. Wallace & A. V. Miller, revised by M. Inwood (Oxford: Clarendon, 2010), amended/*Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse (1830)*. *GW*, vol. 20.
- Gph* = Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*. *GW*, vol. 30.
- GW* = Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Nordrhein-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften und Künste (Hamburg: Meiner, 1968ff.).
- IPGM* = Herder, *Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit. Erster und zweiter Theil*. In *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. B. Suphan, vol. 13 (Hildesheim: Olms, 1967).
- JS I* = Hegel, *Jenaer Systementwürfe I*. *GW*, vol. 6.
- JS III* = Hegel, *Jenaer Systementwürfe III*. *GW*, vol. 8.
- K* = Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy*. Volume One, trans. B. Fowkes (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976)/*Das Kapital. Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*. Erster Band (Berlin: Dietz, 1962).
- N* = Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Natur*. *GW*, vol. 24.
- PbR* = Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. A. W. Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, amended)/*Naturrecht und Staatswissenschaft im Grundrisse. Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*. *GW*, vol. 14.
- R* = Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie des Rechts*. *GW*, vol. 26.
- SE I* = Hegel, *Schriften und Entwürfe I (1817–1825)*. *GW*, vol. 15.
- SG* = Hegel, [translation available only for 1827/8 lectures, transcript Erdmann:] *Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit 1827–8*, trans. R. Williams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)/*Vorlesungen über die Philosophie des Subjektiven Geistes*. *GW*, vol. 25.
- Topics* = Aristotle, *Topics*. In *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. J. Barnes, vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press).
- W* = Hegel, [translation available only for 1822/3 lectures, transcripts Griesheim/Hotho:] *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History. Vol. 1: Manuscripts of the Introduction and the Lectures of 1822–3*, trans. R. Brown & P. Hodgson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011; amended)/*Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte*. *GW*, vol. 27.
- WdL* = Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. G. di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)/*Wissenschaft der Logik*. *GW*, vol. 11, 12, 21.
- Abbreviations are followed by paragraph number and page number in the translation, or, where no paragraph numbers are available, by page numbers in the translation and in the German original. In the case of *WdL*, the page number from *GW* is preceded by the volume number. For lecture transcripts, the year and author of the transcript are indicated in [] after the abbreviation, and the reference to the German original is by volume and page number from *GW*. For direct quotes from lecture transcripts for which no published translation is available, we indicate the

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line numbers in superscript after the page number, e.g., *SG* [1822, *Hotbø*]: 25.1: 35<sup>3–5</sup>.

Where no published translations are referred to, translations are ours.

<sup>2</sup> Cf., e.g., de Laurentiis (2021: 74, 77) and Kuch (2013: 196) for relevant remarks, and Rojek (2017: 36, 43) for scepticism about the use of lecture transcripts in interpretations of Hegel's philosophy more generally.

<sup>3</sup> Hence, Rojek's (2017: 36) contention that what Hegel *said* is irrelevant to a systematic reconstruction of Hegel's thought is problematic even by Hegel's own lights.

<sup>4</sup> On the shortcomings of these editions, cf. Rojek (2017: 11–30).

<sup>5</sup> Cf., e.g., Bonilla-Silva (1997); Harris (1998); Urquidez (2020). Some authors even claim that there is no single concept of racism, e.g., Blum (2004); Headley (2000); Taylor (2004).

<sup>6</sup> Hence, (a) and (b) together roughly correspond to the view that Appiah (1990)—in an analysis that is particularly relevant as it approaches racism in terms of its theoretical content—calls 'racialism'.

<sup>7</sup> That this element plays a central role in common usage of the term 'racism' is suggested by definitions and characterizations of racism that have been adopted by international organizations; cf., e.g., UNESCO (1978: article 2.2).

<sup>8</sup> Together with (a) and (b), this corresponds to the view that Appiah (1990) calls 'extrinsic racism'.

<sup>9</sup> Together with (a) and (b), this corresponds to the view that Appiah (1990) calls 'intrinsic racism'.

<sup>10</sup> On this topos, cf. the brilliant study by Gerbi (1973 [1955]). Cf. also Hoffheimer (2001).

<sup>11</sup> Hegel seems to understand the position that he is summarizing and rejecting here in the sense of a complete lack of reason in some human races (as is, on Hegel's view, the case with animals), as opposed to gradual differences between human beings that are all to some degree or other endowed with reason (the latter kind of differences is postulated by Hegel also shortly after this passage).

<sup>12</sup> However, when he rejects in one lecture the hypothesis of an original 'universal human' (*N* [1821/2, *anonymous* (2)]: 24.1: 424<sup>31f.</sup>), this may be taken to express some inclination towards the view that there always have been racial differences.

<sup>13</sup> Moellendorf (1992: 248) notes that for Hegel, racial differences follow a rational necessity, but he does not inquire into what considerations may support this idea in Hegel's view.

<sup>14</sup> *GW* has 'Natursein', but this should be amended into 'Natarsinn', cf. *SG* [1825, *Griesheim*]: 25.1: 232.

<sup>15</sup> Pace Maragat (forthcoming), and following the usage of Boyd (1999) and others, we think that Hegel's position is nevertheless usefully characterized as 'essentialism' because it ascribes the natures of kinds a crucial explanatory function, and thus goes beyond other views in the vicinity such as realism about kinds.

<sup>16</sup> For Hegel, the 'American' and 'Malayan' races may be additional sub-kinds that are *not* necessitated by the nature of mankind; cf. his comments on 'exhaustive' divisions at *WdL*: 716/12: 218. They may, however, be necessitated by the geographic division into Old and New World,

which Hegel at some places presents as necessary or ‘essential’, too (*W* [1822/3, *Hotbø*]: 92/27.1: 78<sup>14</sup>, *W* [1824/5, *Kehler*]: 27.2: 509<sup>13f</sup>).

<sup>17</sup> For example, Hegel accommodates reports about the intellectual and professional achievements of some persons of African descent by interpreting them in terms of a capacity for assimilation (e.g., *SG* [1825, *Griesheim*]: 25.1: 233<sup>16f</sup>: such individuals ‘show themselves to be skilful in acquiring European knowledge’), and using them to further denigrate indigenous Americans who, on his account, lack even that capacity (*SG* [1825, *Griesheim*]: 25.1: 233).

<sup>18</sup> Although Herder is not free from such stereotypes, either: cf. *IPGM*: 236, 248f., 250.

<sup>19</sup> We are grateful to the journal’s anonymous reviewers for their careful comments on earlier versions of this paper.

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