In Defense of Hegelian Reconciliation

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Like Plato and Aristotle, Hegel was a teleological thinker, his dialectic a spiral charge upwards towards growth and progress (Hegel *GW* 12:154). Like Aristotle, Hegel also situated his social project on the descriptive claim that humans are inherently social animals (Aristotle 1253a; Heim 149-162). Unlike Aristotle, but like the social contract theorists, Hegel emphasized the importance of a rational will in solving the problem of social authority (*PhR* §29). And like both Aristotle and social contract theorists like Locke and Rousseau, Hegel held that freedom was the key value in a social life (Hinton). The foregoing components help formulate what I take to be the centerpiece of Hegel's science of society—his doctrine of reconciliation. In this paper, I argue that Hegel's doctrine of reconciliation not only stands up to scrutiny, but is well worthy of critical respect. To support this thesis, I take up two tasks. In the following section, I present a sketch of Hegel's social project, drawing on Neuhouser and Hardimon. My exposition lays out both Hegel's aim and method in his account of modern society. Next, in §III, I consider some objections and replies to bolster Hegel's position, which I present as both defensible and compelling.

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I. Exposition

First, it is important to note that Hegel does not distinguish between social science and social philosophy. Rather, Hegel's science of society presents an account of social ontology that is—although empirically grounded in its approach—not reliant on the natural sciences to provide objectivity. For Hegel, empirical science and normativity are bound up in the same holistic theoretical goal, which is to provide an account of modern society such that its constituents are able to be *reconciled* with their social reality (*PhR* §22). As I take it, this ideal of reconciliation is the centerpiece of Hegel's science of society, which is founded on a kind of idealism that is not primarily concerned with Marxist materialist explanations of social mechanisms, nor with ethically directing society towards any kind of normative claims. Rather, what Hegel is after in his social project is a deeper form of "comprehending what is" that transcends the kinds of basic explanations with which causality and natural science provide us (*PhR* §21; Neuhouser 282). For Hegel, the only way we can become reconciled to our social world is by unifying normativity with empirical science, essence with existence, and outward with inward. Hegel calls the fruits of this unification "actuality" (*Wirklichkeit*) (*EL* §142). Reconciliation involves comprehending actuality, such that we are better able to develop self-knowledge, foster social understanding, and at once allow the modern self to feel truly at home in its social world (*PhR* §21).

Hegelian reconciliation fastens itself upon one problem in particular: alienation. Hegel takes it that many (but not necessarily all) people are *alienated* from modernity; that is, they are split, or estranged, from modern social institutions which either fail to meet their needs, are unavailable to them, are indifferent to them, or are actively harmful to them. Resolving alienation through reconciliation is the central concern of Hegel's social philosophy. I agree with Hardimon that it is in this explicit sense that Hegelian reconciliation takes a point of departure from other social philosophies that *implicitly* have similar ideals, i.e., that social institutions are worthy of allegiance (Hardimon 166). Behind Hegelian reconciliation is a much richer understanding of affirmation. Namely, being alienated and overcoming such alienation through understanding (and thereafter becoming a practical moral agent in light of such understanding) is precisely what makes Hegelian reconciliation—feeling at home in one's social world—possible. In this way, Hegelian reconciliation might be construed both as a process and as a state (Hardimon 180). But before we examine exactly how Hegel responds to the challenge of modern alienation, it is first necessary to explicate the sort of comprehension he takes to be characteristic of reconciliation. As Neuhouser understands

it, such comprehension springs from reason (*Vernunft*) (Neuhouser 282). Paying homage to the Enlightenment, Hegel aims to see society as an "inherently rational entity" and, as such, as something which is inherently good and worthy of affirmation (*PhR* §21). Such a synthetic connection between morality and rationality implies that, on the whole, Hegel's science of society is itself normative (Neuhouser 282). We *ought* to become reconciled with modernity, which is intrinsically good. This goodness, however, is simultaneously descriptive, since its existence is metaphysically and conceptually prior to any of our judgments about it. For Hegel, goodness is already inherent in the social order, and thus ought to be the object of our *affirmation*, not our prescription.

This affirmative attitude is crucial for understanding how we might, through Hegel's idea of comprehension, become reconciled with the social reality we have created for ourselves. We still need to dig deeper, however, if we are to get at the heart of the task of Hegel's social project. Here, it might be helpful to introduce a crucial distinction: that between essential and accidental features. *Essential features* are properties of an object which it must have in order to be itself. *Accidental features* are properties of an object which it happens to have, but could lack (Atkins and Ishii). In Hegel's framework, we can see that what is actual, i.e., what is comprehended through reason, is what is essential. For example, behind the accidental feature of poverty is the inherently good, rational structure of modernity—that which, for Hegel, is essential. So, we might say that Hegelian reconciliation involves affirming the real, or the essential, as good. For Hegel, what is most essentially worth affirming in the modern social world is an ideal rational ethical order, which consists of three main social institutions: (1) *the family*—the most basic institution, which revolves around mutual love and permanent, equal social commitment, (2) *civil society*—the market economy, in which we not only realize our own interests, but form social identities as members of distinctive professions, and (3) *the state*—the most important social sphere, in which we give and receive democratic justice (Hinton). All three of these social institutions are necessary for a good, well-functioning society. They constitute Hegel's unique conception of modernity, and show how the normative self-conceptions of its constituents are essentially unified in an underlying rational structure. Hegel has a special term for when this structure harmoniously engenders freedom: *Sittlichkeit*, or "Ethical Life."

To better understand Hegel's account of modern society, and to continue to bring his project of reconciliation into sharper focus, let us now shift our focus to Hegel's conception of freedom. I mentioned in the introduction that, like both Aristotle and the social contract theorists, Hegel takes freedom to be the crucial value in a social life. Broadly construed,

Hegelian freedom embraces (1) *self-determination* (*Selbstbestimmung*), i.e., freedom of interference in action from alien or external causes, and (2) *bei sich selbst-sein*, i.e., the condition of being deeply "with oneself" (*EPG* §382). Like Kant's conception of autonomy, the first feature of Hegelian freedom, self-determination, emphasizes rationality. Hegel takes a point of departure from Kant, however, in framing self-determination as a kind of self-limitation—a composite process of self-appropriation (universality), specification of content (particularity), and effectiveness (individuality) which unites the determination of the will's two moments, i.e., its universal pure activity and its actualized ends (Yeomans 195; *PhR* §7). The second feature of Hegelian freedom, *bei sich selbst-sein*, is a condition that refers to self-identity and self-consciousness. For Hegel, it denotes an ideal of the self being with itself, both in spatial and temporal contact, after becoming its own end. The condition of the possibility of this end is intersubjectivity—the self's relation to an Other, whose Otherness is overcome to dialectically actualize a unified condition. Thus, this component of Hegelian freedom is perhaps best understood in the way that Wood conceives of it: as a kind of *bei sich selbst sein in einem andern*, or as a "being with oneself in another" (Wood 45).

But how exactly does Hegelian freedom manifest in the modern social world? In what sorts of ways can we aim to pursue and affirm it? Neuhouser distinguishes between three particular kinds of freedom which Hegelian practical philosophy (*Realphilosophie*) affirms and which exhibit the broader ideals of Hegel's concept of freedom: (1) *personal freedom*, (2) *moral freedom*, and (3) *social freedom*. As I take it, personal freedom most directly involves normative questions about the kinds of desires that we decide to act on, and how these questions impact our ability to set ends for ourselves. As such, personal freedom deals with how our wills resolve themselves through rational consideration, and is the very manifestation of modern sociality being conducive to its constituents' self-determination. Moral freedom most directly involves the kinds of principles and ethical values that we project onto institutions. For Hegel, the paradigmatic case of moral freedom is Kant's autonomous agent, who determines herself freely via normative principles that spring from the categorical imperative—i.e., the moral law within her, as she understands it through her own reason (Neuhouser 290). For Hegel, ideally satisfying moral freedom thus means that social institutions accurately and honestly reflect standards and norms that their constituents are able to freely acknowledge as good via the moral law within *themselves*. Put another way, it means that social institutions are morally affirmed via the self-legislation of the governed. Social freedom most directly involves the universal will of the people (Hinton). That is, it ideally involves the sort of

citizenship in which personal and moral freedom are already affirmed, and where each citizen possesses the democratic right to play a role in shaping the modern social institutions that make up their society. Importantly, however, we must acknowledge that Hegel's approach is dialectical and self-critical. For Hegel, philosophy develops dynamically through the identification and overcoming of contradictions. Thus, while rational harmony within and among social and political institutions is necessary for our ability to exercise freedom, these conditions are not fully practically realized or evident in modernity. Hegel affirms modernity as a home, but is at once sharply aware of the failures of its institutions. For Hegel, the paradigmatic case of social freedom was the ancient Greeks, insofar as the ancient Greeks viewed their relationship to the *polis* as something which was upheld entirely for its own sake, and which naturally became part of their practical identities through a concerted recognition of their fellow citizens. Social freedom is thus based on the freedom of the *polis* and the freedom of the individual being one and the same. Neuhouser takes it that all three of the foregoing kinds of freedom are essential to Hegel's concept of modernity, and concurrently work together to paint a picture of a rational social economy which balances both individual and collective interests (*PhR* §184Z).

Understanding Hegel's concept of freedom is crucial for laying out his dialectic vis-à-vis modern social ontology. As a teleological thinker, Hegel takes it that social life consists of an array of intelligible processes (Hinton). As I will sketch it, three primary stages make up Hegel's dialectic: (1) the starting point, which we might call *unnegated unity*, (2) the midpoint, which we might call *negated disunity*, and (3) the endpoint, which we might call *negated unity*. Importantly, the midpoint, i.e., negated disunity, is a step of alienation. Hegelian reconciliation crucially turns on this step. Without being estranged, Hegel does not think that we can become reconciled with our comprehension of modernity (Neuhouser 282). It is only by first being alienated—and by thereafter growing through such antagonism—that we are ultimately able to feel at home in our current social reality. Put another way, it is precisely through registering critical recognition to the evils and gross social shortcomings of modernity that we are able to antinomically affirm—and eventually become reconciled to—the underlying goodness of its rational structure. To better clarify what is under consideration, let us gloss some examples using the above model.

In *unnegated unity*, I take it that we experience freedom, but in a way that lacks richness, since this freedom is yet undisturbed. On a macro-governmental level, we might think here of something like the United States' constitution in its pre-amended infancy. On a more individual level, we might think of U.S. women in the 1950s and 60s who were

free in their social roles *prima facie*, e.g., they maintained certain basic civil liberties in the public sphere such as the right to vote, but felt deeply disillusioned by the discontents of their lived experiences in the workplace, the home, and other social spaces (Mackinnon 1989, 91). In the second stage of Hegel's dialectic—*negated disunity*—the undisturbed freedom of the previous stage is upset in a violent upheaval of the social order. On a macro level, we might think here of a dictator's sudden rise to power, their subsequent transformation of a state's governmental structures, and the fundamental threat that this rise to power might pose to the basic rights and civil liberties of the governed. On a more individual level, we might think—in keeping with our previous example—of the advent of what Catherine Mackinnon calls "consciousness raising" groups in the U.S. in the 1960s and 70s (84). These groups served as collaborative, emotionally supportive forums where many women were, for the first time, exposed to acknowledged feminism. Participants in these groups spoke of precipitating impulses for their involvement as "restrictions, conflicting demands, intolerable but necessarily tolerated work, [and] the accumulation of constant small irritations and indignities of everyday existence" (85). It was, in other words, a veridical confrontation with self-estrangement onset by the Otherness of an unjust social reality that catalyzed women to join consciousness raising feminist groups during this time. This transformative encounter with structural disorder ultimately led many women to pursue a new kind of positive progress.

This progress, I think, is exemplified in the final stage of Hegel's dialectic. Here, via a positive interaction with the negativity of the conflict brought on by *negated disunity*, an enriched state of negated unity comes to the fore as a double negation (*EL* §82). On the macro level, we might think here of the social fruits of a successful revolution against dictatorial power. On a more individual level—again in keeping with our current example— we might think of the graduates of consciousness raising groups who subsequently joined the burgeoning feminist movement in the U.S., widely engendering sentiments of critical openness and self-awareness to help illuminate a new, but fundamentally familiar, social reality worth affirming for other women (Mackinnon 96). Pace Hegel, this new state of relations necessarily rests on a precondition of antagonism, but at once depends on descriptive social goodness. Feminists *ought* to impassionately pursue the shattering of mummified social norms that relegate women and their lived experiences to subservience. The galvanizing power that fuels this normativity, however, is *already* latent in modern sociality; that is, it rests on an intrinsic human goodness which is already infused in the collective hermeneutical resources of the present. In this way, I take it that Hegel does not think the foregoing three dialectic stages are ontologically—or

even temporally—distinct in a fundamental sense. Rather, the stages are only conceptually distinct insofar as each stage "preserves" essential traces of the determination in those previous to it, driving progress forward (*PhG* §113). For Hegel, then, we might say that social history and social life constitute the unity of one, ongoing teleological process (Schwegler 2).

To wrap this section up, let us now more explicitly talk about the concept of reconciliation itself. Hegel's word for reconciliation, *Versöhnung*, entails a reasonable optimism—a holistic acceptance of what is, and the way things are in the present. Fundamentally, it entails an embrace of our modern social reality, which is, importantly, far from perfect. Hegelian reconciliation leaves no room for ruminating over what could have been, what might have happened otherwise, or what unfortunate possibilities might lie down the road. It means accepting and embracing things that are difficult, painful, and problematic. These things, like poverty, war, and the mistreatment of certain social groups are, for Hegel, *accidental* features of modernity. But just by their nonessentiality, they are not features we ought to disregard, minimize, or conceal. To realize reconciliation, we must first overcome alienation and exhibit resilience in the face of adversity. As an ideal, Hegelian reconciliation is a boldly normative affirmation of descriptive good. But it is also at once a sober embrace of our scarred and deeply ravaged social condition. In modernity, this is a sharp turn from a search for solutions in the external to a mindfulness of our ability to develop greater understanding in the inner. To help us strive towards the luminous ideal of reconciliation, Hegel's philosophical enterprise aims to furnish us with a richer understanding of ourselves, Others, and the sharedness of our common sociality. Importantly, Hegel's project is not, like the project of the Stoics, exclusive to inner virtue. Rather, it is crucially dependent on developing understanding, fostering a deeply reasoned ability to comprehend the actuality of social life, and critically incorporating such perception into our ongoing struggle against alienation. This alienation, however, is the very precondition of reconciliation. It is the condition of the possibility of feeling at home in a civilization that is, behind its gaping maw, already laced with the goodness of humanity.

II. Objections and Replies

There is no shortage of objections that have been raised in response to Hegel's position (Marx; Houlgate 99–128; Hoy 393–410). For the purposes of this paper, I will only address several of them. First, and perhaps most strikingly, the claim that alienation might be overcome through philosophical theory seems, *prima facie*, to be untenable. One might reasonably assert that

the sort of alienation with which Hegel is primarily concerned, e.g., being estranged from social institutions like the state or the family, can only be rectified through trackable empirical change. Perhaps structural power and material distribution not only have fundamental primacy over theory, but *priority* over it as well. That is, perhaps material distribution predetermines our ability to be reconciled at all. Proponents of this line of attack might adduce Marx's famous declaration that "philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it" (Tucker 145). Let us call this sort of worry the Materialist Objection. While I think that the Materialist Objection is a compelling and intuitive gripe with Hegel's doctrine, I will offer reason in the following to consider it misguided. This is because, on my view, Hegel's theory—like Aristotle's *praxis*—really aims at ultimate action. By aiming to show that modernity is inherently rational and good, Hegel is not aiming to ignore any of the daunting problems modernity presents. Rather, he is saying that such problems are *accidental*, not essential, to an ideal structure, i.e., one in which the health of the family, civil society, and the state effectively promotes personal, moral, and social freedom among citizens. The upshot of Hegel's idea here is that accidental features are ones which can be both improved and changed for the better. Of course, Hegel also crucially makes the assumption that many (but as I've mentioned, not necessarily *all*) people are alienated from modernity because they lack understanding—i.e., both self-understanding and requisite empirical understanding about their social reality (*PhR* Preface). This is why Hegel thinks that philosophical theory will help pave the way towards reconciliation. The question of whether or not Hegel's prescription of a lack of comprehension as what fuels modern alienation is tenable is an entirely different claim that I think the Materialist Objection vaguely grasps, but fails to explicitly acknowledge.

As I take it, however, even this underlying assumption reveals itself as well justified when we consider the unique time and place in which Hegel lived. Absolutist Prussia was one of the first countries in the world to institute a national, tax-funded primary education system (Paglayan 1243). This system enjoyed great structural and economic success, but ultimately alienated its constituents in the shadow of Frederick II's covert but well-documented agenda to morally and religiously indoctrinate Prussian youth in the hopes of non-despotically enforcing obedience under his rule (Paglayan 1246). Given this context, we can see clearly why Hegel thinks that a lack of understanding is the root of modern alienation. A product of his own social epoch, Hegel aptly observed that, even when people are materially well-supported, they often become afflicted by alienation with a deeper-cutting and more troublesome pathology—a transcendental infection of the proverbial soul that emanates from theoretical deficiency.

This deficiency, Hegel suggests, can only be contingently treated via a transformation of material infrastructure. Essential**, necessary** healing is another matter entirely—one which, according to Hegel, is the exclusive business of philosophical inquiry (*PhR* Preface). As Epicurus told us long ago, the "suffering of mankind...[is] the suffering of the soul," and the suffering of the soul is the object of the philosopher's medicine (Epicurus 221). Through philosophy, we can actualize the potentiality of intrinsic goodness latently stowed within modernity's rationally casted underbelly. We can holistically treat the most lasting and impactful damage onset by modern alienation. And we can understand that we are all essentially citizens, members of civil society, and constituents of a family whose home has already been well-constructed. Given these considerations, I think the charge of the Materialist Objection can be dampened.

Another grievance with Hegel's doctrine might be that it presumes reconciliation to always be possible, no matter the relevant social conditions (Hardimon 170). In response, I will offer two lines of thought. First, Hegel thinks that alienation is a necessary step in reconciliation. Without it, reconciliation cannot occur (*EL* §81). Understanding arises strictly under these conditions, since in the absence of conflict and adversity, there is no need for reconciliation at all. The Latin suffix *conciliare* means to "agree," and its prefix *re-* means "again" (OED). So to reconcile is not simply to agree, but to agree *again* because of something that has precipitated disagreement in the first place. Secondly, it is only in the modern world that Hegel takes reconciliation to be possible. Certain objective conditions in the teleological development of world history must first *make* the social world a home before we can hope to become reconciled to it. To clarify, let us consider how Hegel's dialectic maps onto Western history, as sketched by Michael Hardimon. First, Hegel *did* think that the social world of ancient Greece was a home (Hardimon 170). This was, after all, Hegel's paradigm case of social freedom. Ancient Greek society promoted individuality, as well as a strong sense of community. However, Hegel also took it that the social world of the ancient Greeks was "primitive" because it afforded citizens no room for an "exercise of conscience and critical reflection on [their] social roles and institutions" (Hardimon 170). Although Hegel did not explicitly acknowledge it, we can recognize today that ancient Greek society was also primitive because of its tolerance of slavery, subjugation of women, and violent punitive practices. Given these considerations, we can, in Hardimon's sketch, understand the time of the ancient Greeks as a period of *unnegated unity*.

Because of the primitive nature of the ancient Greek social world, Hegel thought that humanity then progressed into a stretch of deep historical alienation, i.e., a period of *negated disunity*. This period included,

most notably, the era of the Roman Empire and the Middle Ages. For Hegel, the Roman world was not a home because it lacked community, and the medieval world was not a home because it suppressed individuality (*PhR* §185R). Both periods exhibited large-scale alienation. Finally, we reach modernity, which I propose Hegel takes to be an ongoing historical period of *negated unity*. Although Hegel, like Marx, concedes that transformative social conditions must be met—perhaps by revolution—in order for reconciliation to occur, *modernity* is specifically what Hegel thinks is worth affirming (*PhR* §189-200). This is because Hegel takes it that modernity has already realized the objective conditions which might allow people to become reconciled to it via comprehension. Put differently, Hegel thinks that we can become reconciled to our social world only *because* we live in modernity—the end period to the teleological development of history, which, for Hegel, began in the 1700s with the French Revolution and the advent of modern democracy (Hardimon 171).

But is this really true? Did the modern social world definitively become a home after the French Revolution? According to some thinkers, the fact that this is even a question automatically confirms that modernity is not a home at all. Marx, for example, takes it that if it is not plainly obvious that we are at home in our social world, and if there is truly a need for a philosophical account like Hegel's to help us understand social life, then we cannot truly be at home (Marx 378-391). We are rather living in a broken society that is in grave need of material reshaping. A crucial feature of Hegel's social doctrine is that, contra Marx, it does not suppose modernity's homeliness to be a clear fact. Hegel acknowledges that, for good reason, modernity *appears* to be alien for many people, despite the fact that it really is a home (Hardimon 177). Poverty, war, illness, racism, sexism, and so on take on this appearance readily enough. But it is precisely because of this alien mirage, i.e., because many modern people *feel* estranged by social institutions, that we need philosophical theory. Not to change things, but to learn—to bring ourselves closer to the homes we have already built, and to expose the small but significant traces of human goodness that hide in the cracks of our modern hermeneutical horizon. In this way, I think Hegelian reconciliation is a kind of healing process—an open path towards a more compassionate understanding of Others, ourselves, and the fundamental nature of the social world we inhabit together.

To wrap up this section, I will tackle one final objection to Hegel's social doctrine. As a "social theodicy," Hegel's project defends a descriptive assumption of human good, although Hegel aims to show that this assumption is true, not that it is automatically given (Hardimon 177). For me, this is the most pressing worry with Hegel's position: how can one accept the *accidental* features of Hegel's account of modernity without

resigning to, or affirming evil? This is a concern that is more difficult to muster a convincing reply to. It is, in effect, a more narrow version of the problem of evil. Let us call it the Social Theodicy Objection. In response to the Social Theodicy Objection, Hegel himself appeals again to the crucial idea that alienation is inextricable from reconciliation. Something like war, for instance, is necessary to preserve the ethical health (*sittliche Gesundheit*) of the state because too much peace for too long creates "ethical stagnation" (*PhR* §324R; Hardimon 177). We cannot hope to learn, or to grow, if we do not first suffer. Hegel also thinks that there must be conflict to preserve individual interests and a plurality of social roles (*PhR* §333R). Reconciliation embraces these conflicts, tensions, and imperfections. But it also aims at an ideal in which there is an "interpenetrating unity of universality and individuality" that preserves a *structural* harmony which allows for the interests of the family, civil society, and citizens to be peacefully realized and affirmed (*PhR* §258R). This well-ordered structure makes it reasonable for members of the social world to not only accept, but to affirm it, as part of their own good. Unlike in Kant, this structural unity, along with all elements of Hegel's empirical understanding, is bound up with morality—with pure understanding. Through theory, helping people understand *how* their social world is a home is Hegel's primary task. Crucially, the structural element of Hegel's ideal sets happiness as something to strive towards, but not as an essential feature (Hardimon 187). Hegel's structural vision might then analytically connect to an *objective* component of happiness, while the rest depends on *subjectivity*. Hegel's project doesn't guarantee happiness, then, nor the prevention of evil (Hardimon 186). It merely recognizes the inherent human need—recall that Hegel agrees with Aristotle that humans are inherently social animals—to feel at home in our social world. This is why alienation is problematic, and why reconciliation is necessary.

I don't think that Hegel can provide a convincing answer to even this narrower problem of evil in the social world. And maybe he was wrong that the necessary, prerequisite social transformations, i.e., those found in the "modified form" of neoliberalism that emerged in the West post-French Revolution, have occurred to make modernity worthy of affirmation (*PhR* §200–208). However, Hegel *does* present an ideal—a standard that modern social institutions must meet. If institutions do not meet this standard, they are not worthy of affirmation. For Hegel, we still ought to take issue with things that are wrong. It is the underlying rational *structure* of modernity—subjected to the right conditions which make it work well—that Hegel claims is descriptively good, not its products or normative consequences. In this way, Hegel's ideal is, in an important sense, fundamental (Hardimon 192). We don't have to accept, resign, or affirm every single, particular thing which might be objectionable in order

for us to be reconciled. I say this to reiterate that, although I don't have a definitive answer for the Social Theodicy Objection, nor for some of the other good objections leveled at Hegel, his doctrine of reconciliation is still compelling and worthy of respectful examination. It ultimately provides a solid foundation for our human quest towards greater understanding, reason, resilience, freedom, vulnerability, and—perhaps above all—a sense of belonging.

III. Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that Hegel's doctrine of reconciliation is the centerpiece of his science of society, and that it not only stands up to scrutiny, but is well worthy of critical respect. Even where there are lingering tensions in this doctrine—for me, the most pronounced of these lie in Hegel's struggle to vindicate his theory as a "social theodicy"—I have given reason to treat Hegel's approach as nuanced, compassionate, and philosophically legitimate. In the first section of the paper, I laid out Hegel's doctrine to sketch both his aim and method in his account of modern society. In the next section, I considered some objections and replies to help bolster Hegel's position, which I have presented as both defensible and compelling. I think future treatments of Hegel's social project should aim to charitably address lingering questions about how Hegel squares his doctrine of reconciliation with social evil and its fundamental threat to the realization of the social and political conditions necessary for a healthy and harmonious rational ethical order. I hope that in giving my own treatment of Hegel's social project, drawing heavily on the work of Neuhouser and Hardimon I have—as in Hegel's spiral model of dialectics—inched a little closer back around to some of the same, fundamental human insights with which we have always, on some level, been acquainted. These insights, however, are only illuminated in light of a great struggle with their timeless power.

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