



# Hegel and the Problem of Affluence

**ABSTRACT:** *It is widely known that Hegel's Philosophy of Right recognizes poverty as one of the central problems of modern civil society. What is much less well known, however, is that Hegel sees yet another structural problem at the opposite side of the economic spectrum: a problem of affluence. Indeed, as I show in this essay, Hegel's text contains a detailed—yet sometimes overlooked—discussion of the detrimental psychological and sociological effects of great wealth and how to counter them. By bringing this discussion to the fore, we get a more complete picture of Hegel's theory of civil society (and of some of its central concepts, such as 'the rabble') and shed light on an aspect of Hegel's social philosophy that speaks to problems we face today.*

**KEYWORDS:** Hegel, poverty, affluence, civil society

## Introduction

It is widely known that Hegel's lectures on the *Philosophy of Right* recognize *poverty* as one of the central structural problems of modern civil society (see Avineri 2003; Wood 1990; Hardimon 1994: 236–50). Indeed, Hegel thinks that the modern market economy has poverty as one of its necessary side-effects and, because of this, gives rise not only to individual 'misery (*Elend*)' (Hegel 1986: §185<sup>1</sup>), but also, at least among the disenfranchised, to a deep dissatisfaction with the current economic and social order—a dissatisfaction which Hegel even describes as a form of hate and resentment (Hegel 1986: §244 + Z). Given his overall endorsement of the modern market economy, Hegel therefore works hard to show—as has been frequently discussed in the literature (see, for example, Schülein 2017; Herzog 2015)—that the problem of poverty can somehow be contained or at least ameliorated from within such a market-based economic system and without conceding its central principles.

But while commentators are certainly justified in directing attention to the problem of poverty (which Hegel seems to think is the most serious and urgent problem in modern civil society; see, for example Hegel 1986: §244Z), poverty is

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<sup>1</sup> All translations of Hegel from the German are my own, although I have profited from consulting H. S. Nisbet's translation of the *Philosophy of Right*. All citations are by page number except those to *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, which are cited by paragraph number (using the German paragraph symbol §) and, where they feature, Hegel's remarks (*Anmerkungen*) are indicated by 'A', his additions (*Zusätze*) are indicated by 'Z', and his handwritten notes are indicated by 'N'.



not the *only* significant problem of modern civil society. In fact, as I show in this essay, Hegel sees another significant structural problem of modern civil society at the *opposite end of the economic spectrum*—a problem surrounding the affluent and wealthy (that is, those who have much more than they require to satisfy their basic needs). This is most clearly expressed in Hegel’s 1819/1820 lectures, when the text, in a somewhat surprising formulation, announces that ‘[b]oth of these sides, poverty and affluence, represent the scourge (*Verderben*) of civil society’ (Hegel 1983b: 196, my emphasis).

Indeed, if we read Hegel’s lectures with only this particular issue in mind, we can find a detailed, yet sometimes overlooked, discussion of the detrimental psychological and sociological effects of affluence and of the challenges that these effects pose to the social order—a discussion that, despite clear shortcomings, can be shown to still have some relevance today. Hegel argues that affluence has the tendency to undermine the personal development of wealthy individuals, to corrupt their interpersonal relationships and to corrode the impartiality of the social institutions that surround them (such as law enforcement or the courts). Most interestingly and importantly, Hegel argues that affluence creates the counterintuitive tendency for affluent individuals to feel *disenfranchised and victimized* by society—which leads them to perceive all social demands made on them (such as taxes) as unjustified incursions into their personal freedom.

Moreover, just as he does with the problem of poverty, Hegel explicitly thinks through ways in which this problem of affluence might be ameliorated or contained from within a market-based economic system. The key, Hegel thinks, lies not in abolishing affluence itself or the possibility of it—for example, by confiscating private property or making wealth accumulation virtually impossible—but rather in finding social means that separate affluence from its detrimental personal, interpersonal, and social effects. Indeed, Hegel thinks that institutions that reform the self of wealthy social members play a crucial role to this effect, as they forestall the detrimental consequences of affluence at a psychological and formative level.

## 1. Hegel’s Description of the Problem of Affluence

Hegel holds the—I take it uncontroversial—view that the modern market economy will make some of its participants affluent, that is, it will provide them with much more material resources than they require to satisfy their basic needs. But why does Hegel think this is a problem? Why is it not, rather, a feature of the modern economy that we should embrace? Hegel’s answer comes in four parts, each one pointing out a problematic effect of this affluence.

The first part of Hegel’s argument consists in the thought that affluence, in the long run, has the tendency to undermine the *individual freedom of the affluent person themselves and of their descendants*, that is, it has the tendency to corrupt their capacity to realize their individual ends (Hegel 1983b: 196). The underlying argument here is this: As is well known among scholars of his practical philosophy, Hegel is committed to the thought that it is only *through labor* that

individuals<sup>2</sup> attain several general skills that are necessary for their individual freedom (see, for example, Neuhouser 2000: 158–60). Indeed, throughout his lectures, Hegel argues that it is only by submitting ourselves to ‘hard work’ (Hegel 1986: §187 + A, 197) that we come to acquire and maintain crucial general skills (such as strategic planning or good work ethics) that we need in order to realize our ends in the world—and without which, hence, we would not be fully free. Hegel therefore insists that labor is liberation for the subject (Hegel 1986: §187A) and that whoever does not submit herself or himself to labor—as unpleasant as it might initially appear—does not receive the adequate *Bildung* to transform the world in accordance with their own will.

But affluent individuals, Hegel thinks, will be tempted to *withdraw from the labor force* or to never even enter it, assuming they have already grown up wealthy. After all, in most cases, he argues, social members subject themselves to the unpleasant task of labor in order to be in a financial and material position to satisfy their needs (for example, Hegel 1986: §238 + A). But once this material motive is no longer present, or was never present in the first place, they will be strongly inclined to stop laboring and live off the wealth that they already have. Hegel expresses this line of thought when he, in various parts of his lectures, describes individuals whose wealth inclines them to content themselves with the status of ‘mere consumers (*blosse Konsumenten*)’ and who are therefore ‘not productive, do not acquire means for others, have these means, but do not generate them (*haben diese Mittel, bringen aber keine hervor*)’ (Hegel 1974: vol. 4, 499). Affluence, to put it from a different perspective, breaks the otherwise tight nexus between labor and consumption—between ‘producing and consuming (*Produzieren und Consumiren [sic]*)’ (Hegel 1974: vol 3, 618)—propelling individuals to avoid the working world. (Hegel here, of course, anticipates in some way the idea of a wealthy ‘leisure class’, as later prominently developed in Veblen [1889]).

But if labor is indeed essential for *Bildung* toward individual freedom, then this avoidance of labor turns out to be self-undermining. Especially for those individuals who never entered the workforce, and who are never able to reap the formative benefits of labor, affluence turns into a roadblock for the development of their capacities for freedom. In fact, Hegel makes this case by implicitly comparing the situation of the affluent individual, who avoids labor, with the situation of the ‘master’ in his famous Master-Slave dialectic (Hegel 1983b: 196) (For a helpful analysis of the passage in the *Phenomenology*, see Frederick Neuhouser [2009]). Just like the master, the rich person considers himself above labor and chooses to enjoy the work of others (namely of the slave) instead of laboring himself (Hegel 1983b: 196). But this endeavor backfires: even though it

<sup>2</sup> Here, and elsewhere in the essay, I am speaking as if Hegel conceives of participants in the professional world as men and women equally. This, of course, is not entirely accurate. Hegel holds the view (now understood as misogynistic and classist) that, at least for the most part, a woman’s sphere is the home and that men will populate the professional world (Hegel 1986: §171). This is particularly damning, precisely *because* of the argument discussed above: after all, if participation in the working world is crucial for proper self-development, denying women this participation is—by Hegel’s own lights—a way of cutting them off from this opportunity for personal growth. I thank an anonymous referee for prompting me to highlight this connection more clearly.

initially appears as if the master (and, respectively, the rich person) has found additional liberation by giving up on work, his freedom is ultimately undermined, since the lack of labor erodes the subjective capacities of the master, leaving the slave—and not the master—to represent the ‘realization of freedom (*Verwirklichung der Freiheit*)’ (Hegel 1983b: 196.).

The second part of Hegel’s argument focuses not on the affluent person themselves, but on the *interpersonal effects* of affluence. The idea here is that affluence inclines the wealthy to see those around them as ‘lesser’ beings—that is, as having fewer rights and privileges than they themselves have. The thought on which Hegel relies is that wealthy individuals are tempted to perceive the *inequality in wealth and power* that exists between them and others as an *inequality in terms of rights and privileges*—that is, they are tempted to think that because others have fewer material resources and less influence, they are also entitled to fewer rights and to less respect. In the student notes to Hegel’s lectures, this point is put in the following way: rich individuals will be, at least to a certain degree, tempted to ‘see themselves as no longer obliged to respect the rights of others (*von dem Respekt der Rechte anderer entbunden*)’ (Hegel 2005: 222) because of the fundamental material asymmetry that exists between them. Indeed, Hegel continues, ‘[o]ne can also call it a depravity (*Verdorbenheit*), that the rich person thinks that everything is allowed for him’ (Hegel 2005: 223).

And that seeing others as lesser beings, in turn, gives rise to a whole host of problematic consequences is obvious. After all, if I come to see others in this way, it is only a small step to also *treat others* in this way, i.e. to subject them to various violations of their individual rights. What Hegel is foreseeing, in other words, are cases where individuals are tempted not only to hold a corrupted conception of their own ethical status vis-à-vis others but also to *enact* that conception in ways that violates the rights of other subjects.

The third part of Hegel’s description of the problem of affluence, then, moves the focus from the personal and the interpersonal consequences of affluence to the way it affects the *relationship between the affluent and the social order* as a whole. Specifically, it consists in the thought that affluence tempts the wealthy to see public institutions as unjustified constraints on their personal freedom—and, consequently, to refuse adequate participation in them. Hegel’s precise line of argumentation here is this: affluence, in the first instance, has the tendency to give social members a mistaken *sense of self-sufficiency*—that is, a sense that, ultimately, they do not need the social institutions which they inhabit. Hegel articulates this point by saying that wealth tempts the affluent to develop a deluded sense of ‘pride (*Hochmut*)’ (Hegel 1986: §253A)—or, in other words, that it tempts them to conceive of themselves as a kind of ‘power (*Macht*)’ (Hegel 2005: 222, Hegel 1983b: 196) that does not need social institutions to flourish.

But this strong sense of self-sufficiency, Hegel thinks, motivates the wealthy to perceive contributions to social institutions (such as taxes, respect for the ordinances of the courts) as unnecessary and superfluous. Furthermore, if the social institutions *demand* these contributions (for example, through the actions of the police), these demands come to be perceived as unjustified incursions into the personal freedom of the wealthy individual—which leads the affluent, over

time, to develop a kind of resentment and even hate against the social order. To put this thought in a more Hegelian manner: affluence has the tendency to lead social members to a sense of self-sufficiency, which then, in turn, gives them the feeling of ‘a violation of their particularity (*Verletzen ihrer Besonderheit*)’ on the part of the social institutions making demands on them (Hegel 1986: §184Z). This sense of having been wronged then gives rise to an ‘inner indignation (*innere Empörung*)’ (Hegel 2005: 222) and to a ‘feeling of rightlessness (*Gefühl der Rechtlosigkeit*)’ (Hegel 2005: 222), which leads them to refuse to play their part in the social institutions that they live in.

That the affluent are tempted to see themselves as victims in society and that this draws them away from social cooperation is an unusual thought, and it is important not to miss its specificity. Hegel is not merely saying, somewhat generically, that the affluent are tempted to refuse participation in the social order and to reject its demands (for example, for selfish reasons). He is saying, more specifically and more interestingly, that they are structurally tempted to see themselves as *victims* of society, and that it is this sense of violation (this ‘inner indignation’ (Hegel 2005: 222) and ‘feeling of rightlessness’ (Hegel 2005: 222)) that draws them away from social cooperation. The driving force behind their rejection of social demands, if they yield to this temptation, hence, is—on the Hegelian picture—not a mere selfish consciousness that those demands are impractical or inopportune, but a righteous resentment against these demands.

It is *this* specific idea that Hegel also means to express when he writes, in a somewhat surprising turn of his argument, that affluence tempts rich individuals to become members of ‘the rabble (*der Pöbel*)’ (Hegel 1983b: 196–97, Hegel 2005: 222–23, see also Hegel 1986: §244Z). After all: for Hegel, the ‘rabble’ is *not* merely a group of people who have come to generally dislike society and refuse to play their part in it: it is a group of people who see society with a kind of (self-)righteous anger and who refuse participation due to their grievances (Hegel 2005: 223).

Indeed, it is precisely this specific dimension that leads commentators to think of the rabble as primarily, or even exclusively (see, for example, Knowles 2002: 289, 291–92), composed of poor people. After all: it is very easy to see how poverty and economic disenfranchisement can give rise to a (in many cases legitimate) feeling of ‘having been wronged’ and a resultant refusal to play a part in a society. But Hegel, to stress this once more, is quite clear that ‘inner indignation’ (Hegel 2005: 222) and the ‘feeling of rightlessness’ (Hegel 2005: 222) are not only characteristic of the poor rabble, but rather that this general mentality ‘happens as much on the side of affluence, as it does on the side of poverty (*steht auf der Seite des Reichthums ebensogut . . . als auf der Seite der Armut*)’ (Hegel 2005: 222).<sup>3</sup> In that way, Hegel’s idea of the ‘rich rabble (*reicher Pöbel*)’ (Hegel 1983b: 196–97, Hegel 2005: 222) is meant to make the point that affluence, too, can tempt individuals to have a type of quasi-moral outrage against society which, in turn, leads to a refusal to play one’s part in the social order. (It is this element of self-righteous outrage that even those commentators who discuss the rich rabble

<sup>3</sup> Thanks to an anonymous referee for pressing me on this point.

[for example, Hardimon 1994: 238n8; Ruda 2011: 50–51; Ellmers 2017: 88] regularly miss, thereby depriving Hegel's account of one of its most characteristic features.).

Now, of course, this is *not* to say that there are not also important differences between rich and poor 'rabble': the most important of which, as already alluded above, is that the moral outrage of the poor is often indeed legitimate (as it arises from genuine instances of disenfranchisement), whereas that is not necessarily the case on the other side of the economic spectrum (as here the inner indignation is, as we have seen, connected to a sense of 'pride (*Hochmut*)' (Hegel 1986: §253A))—and, indeed, it is probably this difference that gives Hegel philosophical reason to generally foreground the poor rabble in his discussion of these matters. Yet these differences should not lead us to overlook the doubly dialectical proposal Hegel is making here: namely that affluence tempts rich individuals to seeing themselves as victims (even though they are powerful), and that this sense of victimization leads, in this particular respect, to a kind of 'inner kinship' with those at the very other end of the economic spectrum (even though there are significant differences in economic interest, lifestyle, and the like).

In the fourth and final part of Hegel's analysis of the problem of affluence, he turns attention from how affluence affects the *relationship* of wealthy social members to public institutions to how this affluence affects the workings of *public institutions themselves*. The argument here is that affluence has the tendency to corrupt the impartiality that should be characteristic of certain public institutions, such as law enforcement (Hegel 1986: §230–49) or courts (1986: §219–29). Hegel's argument is this: even though these institutions are committed to the ideal of impartiality (or 'universal' treatment, as Hegel prefers to put it) they are still administered by particular people, with particular needs, desires, and loyalties (1986: §294 + A, §296).

And such administrators are, of course, not completely immune to the power affluent social members exert over both material resources and people (Hegel 2005: 222). This power can manifest itself directly, e.g. in the form of bribes (Hegel's laconic remark that, for the rich person, 'everything looks purchasable (*käuflich*)' (Hegel 1983b: 196) certainly raises this possibility)—but it does not even have to do so. That a public official working for the 'administration of justice' (Hegel 1986: §219–29) or for the 'police' (Hegel 1986: §230–49) knows what a certain affluent individual *is in principle capable of* may be enough to guarantee special treatment out of sorts with the putative impartial status of these institutions. Indeed, to put it in more Hegelian language, it can sometimes be the mere possibility of influence on the particular desires of a public official that makes them assert their particularity over the universal purpose which they are appointed to serve (Hegel 1986: §294A).

That Hegel is worried about the possibility of such 'misuse of power on the part of the official bodies and their officials' (Hegel 1986: §295) is also evident from the fact that his recommendations for the selection of public officials not only place the greatest emphasis on their impartial perspective (1986: §296), but also urge the public to specifically assure the *financial and material independence* of their respective officials (1986: §294A). Indeed, Hegel writes that the state needs to

guarantee, as far as possible, the ‘satisfaction of particular needs’ (1986: §294A) of its officials, in order to make them less vulnerable to abuses such as the ones sketched here. After all, it is through material independence that the public official will be less likely to ‘seek the satisfaction [of his needs] at the expense of his official activities and duty’ (1986: §294A), which affirms, indirectly, the kind of influence that affluence can exert on the impartial workings of political administration.

To summarize the argument: Hegel thinks that affluence tempts the wealthy to undermine their own freedom (part 1), to disrespect others (part 2), to develop a noxious relationship to the surrounding social order (part 3) and a noxious influence *on* the social order itself (part 4). As I have shown, the most surprising contention here is Hegel’s doubly dialectical proposal that affluence tempts the wealthy to feel ‘rightless’ (even though they are powerful) and that this feeling of rightlessness can lead them to a kind of ‘inner kinship’ with those who are actually economically disenfranchised (even though those social members live a very different kind of life and have very different economic or social interests).

I offer two more observations to reveal the full complexity of Hegel’s argument. First, on the modal status of Hegel’s claims: Hegel does merely argue, as we have seen, that affluence has a strong tendency to cause the kind of problems he describes—not that it does so *necessarily*. Just as poverty does not necessitate, but only creates a strong tendency towards different forms of corruption (Hegel 1986: §244Z), so does affluence, as one might infer. That there are, for example, some affluent social members who do *not* cease to work, who do *not* shed respect for the rights of others and who do *not* come to see themselves as victims of the public order, is therefore not a problem for the type of argument that Hegel is developing. Even if there are some individuals able to withstand its seductive power, affluence, or so one could say with Hegel, is a corrupting social force.

Second, on the textual status of Hegel’s claims: It is noteworthy that, even though the problem of affluence is a consistent concern throughout all of the student notes on Hegel’s lectures from 1817 to 1822, Hegel seems to be toning this topic down in the published version of his lectures from 1821. Here, as we have also seen above, the problem of affluence is mentioned and discussed in various places (especially Hegel 1986: §253A, §245, §243, §195 + Z), but is not *as* explicit and *as* prominent as it is in the student manuscripts from his lectures. The explanation for this is not too difficult: as has often been observed, the published version of the *Philosophy of Right* is much more careful than some of the lecture notes in terms of how critical it is towards those who are powerful in society (such as Henrich 1983b: 18–22). Hegel, in his printed word, seems to have been worried about generating too much controversy on concrete issues of social policy—and his discussion of the problem of affluence perfectly fits this pattern. While Hegel was comfortable explaining the potential problems of affluence in front of his students (before and after 1821), he was less comfortable discussing it directly in print.

## 2. Hegel’s Proposed Solution to the Problem of Affluence

Of course, despite his perceptive analysis of some of the problems of the modern market economy, Hegel is, overall, one of its theoretical defenders. Indeed, Hegel

holds the view that the modern market economy is superior to alternative models of economic organization (Hegel 1986: §185A) and one of the elements that contributes to the rationality of the modern social world (Hegel 1986: §185A). And while his optimism regarding the market does not go quite as far as it does such as in Adam Smith, whom he often cites in his lectures (for example, Hegel 1986: §189A, Hegel 1983a: 118, Hegel 1983b: 158; for an analysis of these passages see Waszek 1985; Henderson and Davis 1991; Herzog 2013; Heisenberg 2018), his basic commitment to the value of the market economy nevertheless puts pressure on Hegel to explain how the problem of affluence—as he himself describes it—can be solved or at least somehow ameliorated without giving up completely on the basic principles of this modern economic system.

Hegel is essentially in the same position as he is vis-à-vis the much more well-known ‘problem of poverty’: just as he does in the case of this problem on the other side of the economic spectrum, Hegel needs to show how this challenge can be overcome on the societal level without giving up a basic commitment to a system of exchange and production that is driven by self-interest and regulated to a significant degree by supply and demand. After all, if Hegel can show that such a solution is available, then the generation of affluence (and, respectively, of poverty) will no longer appear to be an obstacle to the embrace of the market economy—and will, hence, clear the way for our rational reconciliation to this economic system.

But what is Hegel’s solution to the problem of affluence? First, Hegel thinks that the problem of affluence will be kept in check, at least to a certain degree, by *external constraints* (such as taxes and tariffs) that slow down the accumulation of wealth in individual social members, thereby eliminating the material preconditions for the problem of affluence to arise. Indeed, Hegel’s discussion of the market economy in the *Philosophy of Right* opens with a reminder of the necessity of paying taxes, even though they might be perceived as burdensome and arduous (Hegel 1986: §184Z, see also §236Z)—and it does not seem far-fetched to link this endorsement of taxes with his attempts to contain the problem of affluence, as he himself describes it. Hegel himself argues that this particular way of dealing with the problem of affluence has been around since antiquity. He says, for example, that in ancient Athens ‘the law-givers tried to forestall the improper accumulation of wealth (*unangemessene Vergrößerung des Reichthums*)’ by making it such that ‘the richest person had to pay the public festivities (*Schauspiele*) for the demos’ and by putting into place various constraints on big ‘inheritances (*Erbschaften*)’ (Hegel 1983a: 122, see also 199). That way, wealth was constrained and ‘its amassment limited’ (1983a: 122), thereby providing some relief vis-à-vis the problem of affluence.

However, Hegel is committed to the thought that limiting the accumulation of wealth through external constraints is *not* the most important means of dealing with the problem of affluence. This is because, most importantly, he seems to think that such measures, if they were to take center stage, would dampen the ambition and competition that are constitutive of the market economy (Hegel 1986: §236 + Z, §185A). If it is only higher taxes and somewhat punitive public measures awaiting me once I start being economically successful, Hegel thinks,



there is clearly less of a motivation to even *want* to become economically successful in the first place. Yet, if I am no longer driven to become economically successful, one significant driving force of the modern market economy has disappeared: our particular self-interest will no longer have the opportunity to ‘develop and express itself *in all directions*’ (Hegel 1986: §184, my emphasis), but instead will be stifled, which weakens the self-interest-driven ‘motor’ of innovation and production that is at the heart of the modern economic system.

As I have shown above, moreover, Hegel thinks that economic success tempts individuals to perceive taxes and other redistributive measures as injurious to their personal freedom, such that they warrant ‘inner indignation’ and a ‘feeling of rightlessness’ (Hegel 2005: 222). Against this background, however, it seems plausible to think that, on Hegel’s view, relying *too much* on taxes and such external limits in addressing the problem of affluence might ultimately be a counterproductive thing to do:<sup>4</sup> for even if such measures might indeed ameliorate *some* problems arising from affluence (by preventing economic inequality to rise to astronomic heights), those ‘victories’ might come at the cost of further inflaming the ‘inner indignation’ on part of those social members who remain economically more successful.

Given this, Hegel argues that the first means of addressing the problem of affluence (external limitations) needs to always be accompanied by a second one he deems more important: the presence of public institutions that *reform the self* of affluent social members, such that they are less liable to give into the temptations that come with having great wealth (See also Herzog 2015). To put this differently: Hegel’s solution to the problem of affluence turns on the idea that introducing external limits to capital accumulation should only play a subordinate role in solving this problem, whereas the main role needs to be played by institutions that bring forth an *internal transformation* in wealthy social members. The institutions, more specifically speaking, that Hegel tasks with bringing about this internal transformation are the *corporations*: the associations that Hegel thinks bring together different members of a profession into one social whole (Hegel 1986: §255). On Hegel’s view, it is here that individuals regularly meet others who exercise the same type of labor as them, bond over a shared sense of pride in their respective work (Hegel 1986: §253), take care of one another in cases of great need (Hegel 1986: §252) and, importantly, work together to represent their shared professional interest towards the state and the public as a whole (Hegel 1986: §256). (For an overview over the different functions of the corporation see Ellmers and Herrmann [2017] and the discussion in Ellmers [2015]).

It is *here*, finally, that Hegel locates what, for him, is the central response to the problem of affluence. Here is Hegel, as quoted in the Ringier notes from his lectures in 1819/1820: ‘The scourge of affluence (*das Verderben des Reichthums*) is taken care of by the corporation. Within their bounds, the rich person is no longer just for himself. Firstly, he has to think that he owes his profits to the community; he will not be as proud of what he has. Moreover, he will have duties to care for the corporation’ (Hegel 2000: 152–53, see also Hegel 1986: §253A). But how

<sup>4</sup> I thank an anonymous referee for this suggestion.

exactly is this supposed to work? How, more precisely speaking, will the corporations be able to effect an internal transformation in their affluent members, making them less liable to the temptations of affluence? The central idea here seems to be that the corporations exercise a formative influence on the identities of its members in several ways. Most immediately, they foster an *identification with one's particular profession or type of work* (Hegel 1986: §253). Hegel's argument is that by participating in a whole community centered on a profession (such as a bakery, brewery, butchery), individuals of all stripes build up a kind of 'professional pride (*Standesehre*)' (Hegel 1986: §253A) around the profession itself and around what it does—thereby making it less likely that affluent individuals simply abandon this work and the formative benefits that it entails. To put this point in another, equally Hegelian way: corporations foster an attitude in its members on which their profession is not a mere means to material income, but rather an integral component of their sense of self (Hegel 1986: §255 + A) which, along with the *Bildung* that it bestows, will not be discarded once the motivation to gain material income loses its pull.

Secondly, Hegel thinks that the corporation fosters an *identification with the other members of one's profession*. The idea here is this: By cooperating with other members of one's profession within both the inner business of the corporation (Hegel 1986: §252 + A) and its external representation toward the state and other corporations (Hegel 1986: §252), members will be habituated into seeing themselves in precisely those individuals, with whom they are, qua being in the same profession, in closest economic competition. This strong sense of identification, then, tamps down the tendency to let this competition escalate into unjust treatment or violations of right or to accept and solicit unequal treatment by public institutions—even *if* affluence and economic success tempts a social member to engage in these forms of behavior. A successful baker who truly sees himself in the struggling baker across the street, or so the thought goes, will be less liable to the illusion that his economic success also entitles him to a higher moral status and to preferred treatment by the public order. As Hegel himself is quoted as saying in the lecture notes from 1821/1822: 'The rich person is a member of the corporation and only counts as such. He is guided back to equality with his fellows (*zur Gleichheit zurückgeführt seiner Genossen*), and to occupying the same standpoint as the others' (Hegel 2005: 231).

Thirdly, and finally, Hegel thinks that corporations lead social members *to identify with the corporation as an institution* (Hegel 1986: §254). The idea here is that working together in the social whole of the corporation does not merely foster an identification with the other members of the corporation individually, but also leads social members into identifying with the collective agency of the corporation as a whole. Seeing themselves as members of a collective, rather than merely as self-standing individuals, social members will be less tempted to attribute their economic success only to themselves (their ingenuity, talents or whatever), but rather will acknowledge the substantial role that *others* play in their success—in particular, the substantial role that the corporate collective and its 'conscious activity for a shared aim' (Hegel 1986: §254) plays in creating conditions for the economic success of each individual member.

But this acknowledgment tamps down precisely the false ‘pride’ (Hegel 1986: §253) that made individuals think they can ‘do it alone’, such that any social demand on behalf of others is an unwarranted encroachment on their personal freedom (which as we have seen, gives rise to the ‘rabbelization’ of the affluent). As Hegel himself puts it in the passage I alluded to above: ‘Within their bounds [that is, the bounds of the corporation], the rich person is no longer just for himself. . . . [H]e has to think that *he owes his profits to the community*; he will not be as proud of what he has’ (Hegel 2000: 152–53, see Hegel 1986: §253A).

Stepping back a bit, it seems, then, that Hegel’s solution to the problem of affluence can be summarized thus: While he allocates a certain subordinate significance to external constraints on wealth accumulation (Hegel’s first means of addressing affluence), he locates the core of his solution in an internal transformation effected by the corporations (the second means of addressing affluence). By reforming the self of social members in different ways—fostering identification with the particular profession, with other individuals and with the corporative collective—corporations, or so Hegel thinks, counteract at least *some* of the temptations of affluence, thereby creating a psychological shield against its detrimental social force.

Now, of course, this Hegelian attempt to solve the problem of affluence immediately seems to invite many objections, once we start thinking it through from a contemporary perspective. What about, for example, wealthy social members who have ceased to work and are no longer members of any corporation? More generally, why should we be confident that the formative force of the corporations will overpower the temptations of affluence? Could certain ‘wealthy’ corporations—such as the professional associations of bankers or lawyers—themselves become liable to the pathologies of affluence? I take up these kinds of questions below in evaluating the contemporary relevance of Hegel’s discussion of affluence.

### 3. Conclusion: Hegel and Us

It is virtually impossible to read Hegel’s discussion of affluence without thinking about how and in what way Hegel’s whole discussion of affluence applies today, in *our* social world. After all, we still live in societies that are marked not only by widespread poverty but also by instances of great, sometimes even staggering, wealth—which has led some to describe the present as a time of ‘plutonomy’ (Streeck 2014: 59). Does Hegel’s view, then, still hold valuable insights for us today?

If we narrowly focus only on Hegel’s *solution* to the problem of affluence, the answer probably has to be ‘no’. The shortcomings of this solution—which places such significant weight on the ‘corporations’—are just too obvious and too multitudinous. Most immediately, Hegel’s proposed solution leaves unexplained what society is supposed to do with social members who have *grown up* in wealth, and who have therefore neither become members of any determinate profession nor of any corporation.<sup>5</sup> This problem seems specifically pressing, since

<sup>5</sup> I thank an anonymous reviewer for pressing me on this point.

Hegel's own analysis of the problem of affluence explicitly suggested that growing up in wealth will incline social members to avoid labor altogether—which also seems to render them beyond the grasp of any corporative transformation Hegel stakes his solution to the problem of affluence on.

And even when it comes to wealthy social members who *are* members of a corporation, we might wonder whether Hegel really says enough about how the workings of the corporation will be able to *overpower* the temptations of affluence. This is an especially salient problem because Hegel's discussion of the corporations—even though they evidently play such an important role for his theory of civil society—is notoriously short and indeterminate in a lot of places. The reader never learns, for example, exactly how these corporations are precisely supposed to be organized internally, what kind of legal status they are supposed to have and how a system of corporations is supposed to keep up with the continuing evolution of the many professions (and the constant generation of new ones). Indeed, one might say that there is a curious theoretical asymmetry in Hegel's lectures between the great ethical significance that he intends to attribute to these corporations and the relatively small space that is actually devoted to their discussion: of the seventy-six paragraphs devoted to civil society, only seven have the corporation as their explicit topic.

Moreover, it remains unclear how Hegel means to rule out the possibility that the problem of affluence starts to affect the corporation *itself*.<sup>6</sup> It seems, for example, perfectly possible that a corporation (such as that of lawyers or bankers) has a majority of affluent members and, hence, as a *collective agent* comes to be itself liable to some of the temptations of affluence, such as the temptation to think that other corporations are less valuable or to the idea that the public order puts unjustified constraints on its activity. On such a picture, it seems that the corporations might, under certain circumstances, amplify the problem of affluence, rather than mitigate it: they might themselves fall prey to the ethical corruption that Hegel thinks great wealth can cause, thereby fortifying its detrimental social and political effect.

Yet the shortcomings of Hegel's own solution to the problem of affluence should not lead us to discount Hegel's discussion of affluence completely. This is because, even though his solution to the problem of affluence might be problematic, his *description* of this problem—his view of how exactly affluence comes to be problematic on a social level—continues to be interesting and relevant, even today. After all, Hegel's view here seems rather original: one would not ordinarily think that affluence generates the temptation to feel *rightless or victimized*, nor that this feeling of rightlessness should be central to understanding the social problems affluence causes. But Hegel disagrees. As I have shown, it is one of the central ideas in Hegel's description of the problem of affluence that a sense of victimization can arise from great wealth, and that this sense of victimization can be one of the most socially threatening aspects of affluence.

Indeed, Hegel proposes that this sense of victimization can even lead to an unexpected 'inner kinship' between the affluent and the economically

<sup>6</sup> I thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this possibility to me.

disenfranchised: despite their divergent economic interests, their different styles of life, and so on, rich and poor individuals might come to be unified in their sense of being wronged by the society of which they are part. Indeed, by suggesting that rich and poor members can become different parts of the *same* rabble, Hegel certainly evokes the specter of a *cooperation or political alliance* between those who feel aggrieved on both sides of the economic spectrum: a cooperation that ‘unites’ both extremes of the economic divide, despite their significant differences and mutual antipathies, and leads them to attack the norms, practices and standards of civil society *from both sides*.

Indeed, only a cursory glance at contemporary reality shows that Hegel might indeed be onto something: as Wolfgang Streeck has argued in another context, there does indeed seem to be a surprising degree of dissatisfaction with current civil society *on both sides* of the economic spectrum (Streeck 2014: 44)—a dissatisfaction that, anecdotally at least, seems to have something to do with the feeling of being victimized (Perkins [2014] here is an illustration). And even the proposal of a kind of ‘inner kinship’ between those sides seems to be born out in a certain way: otherwise it would be hard to explain why, as contemporary political events, such as those in Italy or the United States, have shown, some of the wealthiest individuals in the country have managed to make themselves ‘relatable’ to those at the opposite end of the economic spectrum despite their complete divergence in lifestyle, economic interests, and lived reality.

Now, of course, what I have said here is certainly *not* enough to establish Hegel’s description as true. But it is enough to give us a strong *prima facie* reason to subject Hegel’s analysis of affluence in society to further scrutiny, utilizing the means of modern social science that Hegel simply did not have at his disposal—thereby tapping into the resurgent interest in affluence as a topic of the empirical social sciences. (See, for example, Sherman 2017; Mead and Stupy 2014). Hence, while Hegel might not be able to present a satisfying *solution* to the problem of affluence, his discussion of this problem can, even today, guide our own understanding and study of the problem itself. Hegel’s discussion of wealth in society, therefore, serves as a reminder of the intellectual wealth of Hegel’s social thought.

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