

Race and Racism in Hegel – An Analysis

Sandra Bonetto

Abstract

Many of Hegel's critics have argued that the philosopher provided a basis for modern racism and established a role for race in history by correlating a hierarchy of civilisations to a hierarchy of races, notably in the *Encyclopaedia* and the *History of Philosophy*. Following a detailed analysis of Hegel's comments on race and racial diversity, I maintain that these allegations can not be supported.

There is no effective struggle against racism once one creates a false image of it, for then anti-racism becomes a mirror image of the racist myth. Pierre-Andre Taguieff (1984: 71-72)

Many of Hegel's critics, from Popper to Bernasconi, have argued that the philosopher provided a basis for modern racism and established a role for race in history by correlating a hierarchy of civilisations to a hierarchy of races, notably in the *Encyclopaedia* and the *History of Philosophy*. Hegel has thus frequently been labelled a 'racist'.

Popper, for instance, sees in Hegel the founder of German racialism and discerns a close connection between Hegel and racist Nazism, arguing effectively, as Kaufmann puts it, that "the Nazis got their racism from Hegel" (Kaufmann, W., 1996: 102). As far as Popper is concerned, "Hegel + Haeckel is the formula for modern racism" (Popper, K., 1950: 252).¹ Bernasconi regards Hegel as "a precursor of the mid-nineteenth century tendency to construct philosophies of history organised around the concept of race, such as we find in Robert Knox and Gobineau" (Bernasconi, R., 2003). Knox believed that 'race is everything', so that literature, science, art — in a word, civilization — depends on it. Similarly, Gobineau, who is

often regarded as the ‘father of modern racism’, used anthropology, linguistics and history to formulate a theory in which race virtually explained everything in the human experience. The decisive events of history, he argued in his *Essay on the Inequality of Human Races* (1854), are determined by the ‘iron law of race’, so that human destiny is decreed by nature and expressed in race. Gobineau also favoured racial purity, suggesting that there should be no crossbreeding between races in order to maintain survival. By linking Hegel’s name with that of Knox and Gobineau, Bernasconi clearly implies that the philosopher was responsible for contributing to a distorted perception of race and thus helped to make racism more respectable.

The present study seeks to investigate the accuracy of these claims by means of a detailed analysis concerning Hegel’s comments on race and racial diversity.

1. Hegel on Race and Racial Diversity

In his *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel discusses race and racial diversity (*Rassenverschiedenheit*) under the heading of ‘Anthropology’, which treats of the mind in union with the body — it “starts from mind which is still in the grip of Nature and connected with its corporeity, mind which is not as yet in communion with itself, not yet free” — and more particularly under the heading ‘The Natural’ or ‘Physical Soul’ (Enc.III, §391). Anthropology, then, deals with the merely immediate consciousness still imprisoned in natural bonds. Hegel then addresses the racial diversity within the human race or species (*des Menschengeschlechts*) in relation to physical and spiritual or mental differences (Enc.III §391, Addition). While Hegel employs the concept of race in the anthropological sense as a classification of (large)

human populations, primarily on the basis of physical characteristics, it remains to be seen whether he elaborates causal relationships between biological and cultural attributes, and thus whether his history of philosophy is organised around the concept of race in a taxonomic sense, i.e. for the purpose of establishing a hierarchy of races as a means of assigning inferiority to some races (as biological units) and superiority to others. Simply having a concept of race does not a racist make, nor does the attempt to account for racial differences. Neither does the rejection of the concept of race necessarily imply anti-racism. Bernasconi himself notes, for instance, that Herder explicitly rejected the concept, arguing that “there are neither four nor five races, nor are there exclusive varieties on earth”, yet this did not stop him

from citing Camper’s studies on the angle of the head which places the head of Africans and Kalmucks closer to apes than Europeans, and which allegedly was nature’s means of discriminating the varieties of creation as they approximate to the most perfect form of beauty in human beings (Bernasconi, R., 2001: 28).

Moreover, negative value judgements concerning various cultures or cultural practices, however ill-informed and arrogant we might find them today, do not automatically amount to racism. For racism, as far as I understand it, is motivated by an unreasonable or irrational hatred and/or fear of the ‘other’ *qua* ‘other’, coupled with the desire either to dominate, discriminate against or exclude that ‘other’ (e.g. by favouring the establishment of laws or social practices to this end). In other words, racism is different from ethnocentrism. As D’Souza notes, “racism, unlike ethnocentrism, is not a universal phenomenon. Only a few human groups have deemed themselves superior because of the contents of their gonads” (D’Souza, D., 1995: 27). All groups and peoples experience the inherent belief that the world

revolves around them, that they are ‘civilised’ and other societies are ‘barbarian’. For example, the Chinese character for the word ‘China’ is represented by a world with a central axis — in short, the world revolves around China. Racism, on the other hand, “is an ideology of intellectual and moral superiority based upon biological characteristics of race ... racism typically entails a willingness to discriminate based on a perceived hierarchy of superior and inferior races” (Ibid.). In other words, racism implies that one race is biologically superior to another, coupled with the translation of biological superiority into intellectual and moral superiority, generally motivated by the desire for domination, exclusion and/or exploitation.

Nevertheless, as McCarney notes, the “obnoxious and shocking” character of Hegel’s aspersions on non-European peoples, with their residue of “cultural prejudice, complacency, and arrogance” (McCarney, 2000: 142; cf.151), must be acknowledged. Whether or not they make Hegel a racist or a precursor of theories of history based on a hierarchy of races remains to be seen. As McCarney suggests, “reading Hegel simply via selected paragraphs from his *Philosophy of History*, as an arrogant rejection of everything that is not Western and European, may itself do more harm than good” (Ibid.). What is required is a more sharply differentiating insight into a) Hegel’s concept of race, and b) his concept of ‘spiritual development’ or ‘progress’.

Race, understood by Hegel as the “immediate soul” not yet separated from its “natural mode”, is “subordinate to the concept of spirit, thought and freedom”. Racial differences are

qualities because they belong to the natural soul, the mere Being of Spirit (*dem bloßen Sein des Geistes*); but the concept (*der Begriff*) of Spirit, thought and freedom, is higher than mere Being, and the actual concept is closer to rationality precisely because it is not qualitatively determined... These differences do not therefore affect rationality itself, but rather the mode of its objectivity, and do not establish an original difference with regard to freedom and right among the so-called races (BS, Werke XI, p.531; my translation).

In Hegelian usage *Rasse/Geschlecht* (race) may be regarded as cognate with *Nation* insofar as it denotes a group of individuals that are descendants of the same family, house, or tribe, united by common ancestry or blood relationship. However, *Rasse* is used in an additional, broader sense to denote a large human population. Hegel employs the concept of race — adopted from contemporary anthropology — primarily as a means of classifying human populations into a few groups on the basis of their visible characteristics, thus limiting the criteria to such traits as skin pigmentation, colour and form of hair, shape of head, stature, and so forth. The term *Rasse*, in this sense, signifies a particular (large) human population in its sheer natural mode, when considered in terms of its external or physical characteristics or physiognomic appearance. Racial differences *qua* differences concerning the merely ‘natural soul’, according to Hegel, are determined by the geographic part of the world a people inhabits, that is, by external factors, notably locality, climate and terrain. Thus, while there is only one human species (*Gattung* or *Menschengattung*),² there are natural differences between various populations within the species determined by geographical factors. The concept of race is employed to distinguish them in terms of these differences, which are said to be fixed, due to unchanging natural circumstances. Geography and climate, locality and terrain also partially determine the ‘national character’ or common mentality of a people:

The unchangeableness of climate, of the whole character of the country in which a nation has its permanent abode, contributes to the unchangeableness of the national character. A desert, proximity to the sea or remoteness from it, all these circumstances can have an influence on the national character (Enc. III, §394, Addition).

Hegel was undoubtedly influenced by Montesquieu's *Esprit des Lois*, in which, as Plamenatz points out,

you will find a great deal ... about how the quality of the soil, the abundance or scarcity of water, the distribution of mountains, rivers and plains, the nearness or distance of the sea, the presence or absence of good natural harbours, affect the ways in which men live (Plamenatz, J., 1963: 5).

Montesquieu argued further, "the laws have a lot to do with the manner in which different people procure their subsistence" (as cited in *Ibid.*). And how people procure their subsistence "has as much to do with geography as with climate" (*Ibid.*, 6). But, Montesquieu maintained, geography and climate are not part of the social process — they merely constitute an unchanging physical environment. In other words, since geography and climate do not change, they can not determine the course of social change. Hegel, as we shall see later, makes a similar point in relation to 'spiritual progress'.

According to Hegel, racial differences (*Rassenverschiedenheiten*) are 'natural differences' insofar as they are determined by natural factors.

According to the concrete differences of the terrestrial globe, the general planetary life of the nature-governed mind specializes itself and breaks up into the several nature-governed minds, which, on the whole, give expression to the nature of the geographical continents and constitute the diversities of race (Enc. III, §393).

The difference between the races of mankind (*Menschenrassen*) is still a natural difference, that is, a difference that, in the first instance, concerns the natural soul. As such, the difference is connected with the geographical difference of those parts of the world where human beings are together in masses (i.e. the continents, Enc. III §383, Addition).

Because the “nature spirit has the diversity of the earth as immediate differentiation within it”, Hegel argues, it “dissolves into particular spirits of nature, which wholly express the nature of the geographic parts of the world and constitute racial diversity” (Enc.III, Ibid.). In short, “spirit in nature” — the “object treated by Anthropology” — “falls asunder into the general differences of the races of mankind (*Menschenrassen*)” (Ibid.). Thus, Hegel states, “the first stage in anthropology is the qualitatively determined soul which is tied to natural forms (racial differences, for example, belong here)”. And racial differences are the “differences of the universal mind in Nature as determined by the Notion” or Idea (Enc. III, §394, Addition).

Hegel notes that contemporary physiology distinguishes between the Caucasian, the Ethiopian, the Mongolian, and the American races, and that the physical or external differences between them are shown mainly in the formation of the skull and face:

The formation of the skull is defined by a horizontal and vertical line, the former running from the outer ear-ducts to the root of the nose, the latter from the frontal bone to the upper jawbone. It is by the angle formed by these two lines that the head of the animals is distinguished from the human head; in animals this angle is extremely acute. Another important factor, noted by Blumenbach, concerns the greater or less prominence of the cheekbones. The arching and width of the forehead is also a determining factor (Enc. III, §393, Addition).

It is important to note, however, that Hegel vigorously and consistently rejects and condemns explanations of human behaviour, ability and intelligence based on

external, physical appearances. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel had ridiculed physiognomy and phrenology (or crainoscopy), and in the *Encyclopaedia* he explicitly opposes these pseudo-sciences — popularised during the latter half of the 18th century by Lavater (1741-1801) and Gall (1758-1828), together with his pupil Spurzheim (1776-1832), respectively — which claimed to be able to explain human behaviour through what Hegel regards as ‘exterior and accidental’ details, such as the characteristics of the body or the form of the head.

To try to raise physiognomy and crainoscopy (phrenology) to the rank of science was ... one of the vainest fancies, still vainer than a *signatura rerum*, which supposed the shape of a plant to afford indication of its medicinal virtue (Enc. III, §411).

While anatomists like Cuvier believed, for instance, that the physiognomic appearance of the Negroes “approaches that of the beasts” (Cuvier, G., 1812: 105), Hegel makes the point that all human beings, on their “purely physical side”, are not “greatly different from the ape” (Enc. III, §411, Addition). What distinguishes man from ape is rather “the mind- or spirit- pervaded aspect” of his body, i.e. the head, which is the “true seat of the mental or spiritual” (Enc.III, § 411, Addition). But this, in turn, does not translate into phrenological or other pseudo-scientific beliefs concerning differences in skull shapes and sizes vis-à-vis mental abilities. Indeed, in relation to phrenology, Hegel asserts, “it must be regarded as a thorough denial of reason to give out a skull-bone as the actual existence of conscious life...” (PhM, 365). In other words, a skull-bone tells us nothing about the mind and intelligence of an individual human being:

When ... a man is told, “You (your inner being) are so and so, because your skull-bone is so constituted”, this means nothing else than that we regard a bone as the man’s reality. To retort upon such a statement with a box on the ear ... removes primarily the “soft” parts of his head from their apparent dignity and position, and proves merely that these are not the true inherent nature, are not the reality of mind; the retort here would, properly speaking, have to go the length of breaking the skull of the person who makes a statement like that, in order to demonstrate to him in a manner as palpable as his own wisdom that a bone is nothing of an inherent nature at all for a man, still less his true reality (PhM, 365).

Unlike many early nineteenth century anatomists, notably Camper, Soemmering and Cuvier, Hegel did not regard cranial capacity as a marker of racial or cultural hierarchy. Again, attempts by these anatomists to demonstrate that Africans (the Ethiopian race), on the basis of the shape of their skull, are closer to the apes than to human beings, do not conform to Hegel’s belief that we can know nothing of the ‘inner being’ of a man on the basis of his skull bone. There is, in short, no ‘cruel law’, which seems to have condemned to an eternal inferiority the races of ‘depressed and compressed skulls’, as Cuvier believed. Rather, “the skull-bone by itself is such an indifferent object, such an innocent thing, that there is nothing else to be seen in it or thought about it directly as it is, except simply the fact of its being a skull” (PhM, 365).

In relation to physiognomy, Hegel basically defends the view that we can not judge a book by its cover – “there is no art to find the mind’s construction in the face”.³ It is worth quoting Hegel at length on this point:

Every man has a physiognomic appearance, appears at first sight as a pleasant or unpleasant, strong or weak, personality. According to this appearance one instinctively forms a first, general impression about others. However, it is easy to be mistaken in this, since this externality, characterised mainly by immediacy, does not perfectly correspond to mind or spirit but only in a greater or less degree. Consequently, an unfavourable, like a favourable, exterior can conceal a personality different from what that exterior might at first lead one to expect. The biblical saying: Beware of those whom God has marked, is, therefore, often misused; and a judgement based on physiognomic expression has accordingly only the value of an immediate judgement, which can just as well be untrue as true.⁴ For this reason, the exaggerated regard formerly shown to physiognomy about which Lavater created such a stir and which, it was said, promised to be profitable in the highest degree, for the much vaunted knowledge of human nature, has rightly been dropped. Man is known much less by his outward appearance than by his deeds. Language itself is exposed to the fate of serving just as much to conceal as to reveal human thought (Enc. III, §411, Addition).

While racists typically claim that differences of culture, status, and power concerning a variety of groups of common ancestry are due “mainly to immutable genetic factors and not to environmental or historical circumstances” (D’Souza, D., 1995: 27), Hegel maintains that racial diversity is due to geographical circumstances as well as historical, cultural or spiritual developments. Whereas natural or environmental circumstances are ‘given’ or ‘fixed’ external determinants (they are also accidental insofar as no one can choose into which natural environment he/she is born), spiritual circumstances, while partly influenced by nature, are made or created by individuals and peoples. “The general consciousness of man includes two distinct provinces, that of nature and that of the spirit. The province of the spirit is created by man himself...” (LPWH 44). Hegel emphasises, for instance, that “world history is rooted in the soil of the spirit, not in that of nature” (LPWH 46, Addition) - *Weltgeschichte* is primarily and essentially the product of human thoughts and deeds, not of nature, and hence not

of race. There is no ‘iron law of race’ that determines cultural and spiritual progress as far as Hegel is concerned.

In the *Encyclopaedia*, we are told that racial diversity

descends into specialities, that may be termed local minds (*Lokalgeister*) — shown in the outward modes of life and occupation, bodily structure and disposition, but still more in the inner tendency and capacity of the intellectual and moral character of the several peoples (Enc. III, §394).

The different ‘local minds’ are not longer determined merely by physical or natural factors, but rather by intellectual and moral ones. These ‘local minds’ are ‘national minds’ insofar as they designate various families or tribes (nation in the sense of *natio*), and so constitute naturally determined ethical units. Race is no longer an appropriate term to use to describe the latter, since they represent the initial transition from ‘mere nations’, naturally united through descent, to peoples that are united through a common spirit or *Volksgeist*, the product of a peoples concrete arrangements in the realms of religion, tradition, customs, and the like. A people, then, derives its (moral, intellectual, and eventually political) character — its spirit or *Geist* — from its own deeds, “for the deeds represent the end it pursues” (LPWH 55).

The spiritual differences between various peoples, according to Hegel, partly corresponds to the concrete geographical differences of the continental landmasses they inhabit, but more importantly and significantly to their progress in adopting the ‘consciousness of freedom’ and actualising it in concrete socio-political institutions. As noted earlier, Hegel believes that extreme natural conditions are not conducive to

spiritual development, so that the torrid and cold regions of the globe do not provide a good basis for spiritual advancement — they do not make a fertile soil for freedom to take root — as its inhabitants are primarily concerned with their immediate survival in harsh environments.

In the extreme zones man cannot come to free movement; cold and heat are here too powerful to allow Spirit to build up a world for itself. Aristotle said long ago, ‘when pressing needs are satisfied, man turns to the general and more elevated’. But in the extreme zones such pressure may be said never to cease, never to be warded off; men are constantly impelled to direct attention to nature, to the lowing rays of the sun, and the icy frost. The true theatre of history is therefore the temperate zone; or rather, its northern half, because the earth there presents itself in a continental form, and has a broad breast, as the Greeks say (LPWH 14).

Based on this view concerning climate and terrain, Hegel argues that the true theatre of world history is the ‘temperate zone’ since humans inhabiting this part of the globe do not have to content with the vagaries of nature to the same extent as their fellow humans in the torrid and cold regions. They are free from nature to a greater extent and thus liberated to a greater degree to engage in contemplation and reflection. So, it is for this reason that the consciousness of freedom — the essence and absolute end and aim of Spirit — shows greater development in the temperate zone, according to Hegel.

Nature, in contrast to spirit, is a quantitative element whose power must not be so great as to render it omnipotent in its own right. Extreme conditions are not conducive to spiritual development. Aristotle has long since observed that man turns to universal and more exalted things only after his basic needs have been satisfied. But neither the torrid nor the frigid zone permits him to move freely, or to acquire sufficient resources to allow him to participate in higher spiritual interests. He is kept in too insensible a state; he is oppressed by nature, and consequently cannot divorce himself from it, although this is the primary condition of higher spiritual culture. The power of the elements is too great for man to escape from his struggle with them,

or to become strong enough to assert his spiritual freedom against the power of nature (LPWH 155).

These natural forces, as McCarney rightly notes, are “too powerful for human beings in general — for white Europeans no less than for black Africans” (McCarney, J., 2003). This implies that, as soon as man steps outside an unduly harsh natural environment, spiritual advancement becomes possible, as is evidenced, for instance, by those black Africans who have done so and become skilled workers, clergymen and doctors, who have led rebellions in South America, or those former slaves who have established a state (*einen Staat*) ‘on Christian principles’ in Haiti.

Hegel’s basic point is this: the more liberated from nature and the natural condition (*Naturzustand*), the greater will be man’s spiritual progress. Once a man’s basic needs are met, his mind is liberated to contemplate what is ‘higher’. The greater the ‘consciousness of freedom’, as manifest in concrete socio-political institutions and practices, the less dependant on or influenced by nature a people is said to be. Again, the influence of Montesquieu is apparent, for he argued that, the further a people are from nature, or, in other words, the more elaborate and sophisticated their institutions and methods of work and thought, the less these institutions and methods can be explained as effects of climate and geography (Plamenatz, J., 1963: 7). The measure of progress for Hegel is, therefore, freedom and its concrete appearance in the world, and this necessarily implies, firstly, freedom from nature. For life in the ‘state of nature’ is not the proper life for man as far as Hegel is concerned. Indeed, freedom, in the Hegelian sense, is not attainable in such a natural condition.

2. 'Africa proper' and Anti-Semitism

While Popper makes unsupportable claims concerning Hegel's connection with Nazi racism, which was mainly, but not exclusively, directed against the Jews, Bernasconi focuses on Hegel's comments on black Africans in his attempt to convince us of his contribution to modern racist tendencies in the construction of philosophies of history. I will now consider both of the above allegations in turn.

While it is certainly possible to criticise Hegel's lack of knowledge about various aspects of African culture and even accuse him of exaggerating certain sources in accordance with his own perspective concerning world-historical development, I believe it is very difficult to argue that his position is based on a biased form of racism or intolerance. The 'freedom-centric' Hegel criticises "Africa proper" — "the land South of the Sahara desert" — in the *History of Philosophy*, not because he regards black Africans inhabiting this part of the world as racially (i.e. biologically or genetically) inferior, but because of his strong opposition to practices that run counter to freedom — the essence of humanity — notably tyranny, despotism, slavery, cannibalism, and polygamy.⁵ Hegel saw in Sub-Saharan Africa a society where the concept of 'state' as a form or incarnation of human freedom in a set of institutions had not yet appeared. In other words, the idea that 'man as such is free' had not penetrated the consciousness of Africans in his day (with the exception of those who had been in contact with Europeans and Muslims, or who had left 'Africa proper'). Hegel nowhere suggests that Negroes are biologically an inferior race to whites, or that they should be 'dominated like animals'. Indeed, he explicitly condemns the enslavement of Negroes in his day:

Reason must maintain that the slavery of the Negroes is a wholly unjust institution, one which contradicts true justice, both human and divine, and which is to be rejected.⁶

There is no room for slavery in the modern state: “in rational states, slavery no longer exists” (LPWH 184).

When Hegel asserts that “a man counts because he is a man” in his *Rechtsphilosophie*, he is referring to human beings as such, so that the concept of *Mensch* necessarily includes the Negroes. The concept of *Mensch* sublates all particular determinations, without, however, negating them. Unlike some 19th century religious leaders who supported slavery and who had accepted the ‘scientific’ explanation that identified Negroes as an animal and not a human species, Hegel nowhere implies support for such a view. Indeed, in the *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel explicitly opposes those who sought to declare and, indeed, prove the natural intellectual superiority of one *Menschengattung* (race) over another, so that some may be “dominated like animals” (Enc. III, §393).

Hegel clearly stresses the relationship of the ‘African consciousness’ with its geographical situation. The African mentality is still imprisoned in nature — the demands of living in a harsh natural environment are such that consciousness has not been able to free itself sufficiently from nature to make spiritual progress. This might be regarded as an arrogant understanding on Hegel’s part, but it does not amount to racism, as there is no suggestion that the Negroes of Africa proper are forever condemned to congenital inferiority and, on that basis, to worthlessness. They are, on

Hegel's analysis, still in the grip of nature, so that, in the 'interior of Africa, the consciousness of its inhabitants has *not yet* reached an awareness of any substantial and objective existence" (LPWH 176-7; my emphasis). The Africans "have *not yet* attained this recognition of the universal; their nature is *as yet* compressed within itself; and what we call religion, the state, that which exists in and for itself and possesses absolute validity — all this is *not yet* present to them" (LPWH 117; my emphases).

However, Hegel mentions the fact that many Negroes — notably those who have left Africa proper or have been in contact with other peoples — have become skilled "workers and tradesmen, and even clergymen and doctors". He mentions one such doctor by name, "the black physician Dr. Kingera, who first acquainted the Europeans with quinine" (LPWH 165). This clearly indicates that Hegel did not believe that there were innate, permanent biological or genetic, and by inference immutable intellectual differences between the so-called races forever fixed and not amenable to e.g. education and 'spiritual advancement'. Instead, Hegel asserts that the Negroes "can not be denied a capacity for education", and points out that

not only have they, here and there, adopted Christianity with the greatest gratitude and spoken movingly of the freedom they have acquired through Christianity after a long spiritual servitude, but in Haiti they have even formed a State on Christian principles (Enc. III, 393).

This, it seems to me, refutes Bernasconi's claim that, for Hegel, only certain races — notably the Caucasian race — "produce peoples" (Bernasconi, R., 2003) and consequently states that figure as historical subjects. The Haitian state founded by

African Negroes (who were former slaves) qua *Staat* belongs to history proper. The various African national groups — i.e. tribes or tribal kingdoms — do not, because they are not states, and in history, as understood by Hegel, “we have to do with individuals that are peoples, with totalities that are states”, and not with naturally determined peoples, tribes, descent or kinship groups, families or nations (in the sense of *natio*). Indeed, Hegel also mentions various peoples belonging to the Caucasian race that, in his day, no longer constituted *Völker als Staaten* — e.g. Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, and thus, for the time being, had not ‘historical role’ in their own right. (Ceylon is given as another example of a ‘stateless people’ (*ein staatenloses Volk*)). So, when Bernasconi refers to the “textual evidence that Hegel uses race as a category to exclude all but Caucasians from being historical subjects in the full sense”, he might want to revisit some of the textual evidence omitted in his analysis. Indeed, Germany itself (insofar as one can refer to ‘Germany’ at all), as we are told in *Die Verfassung Deutschlands*, was “no longer a state” after the fall of the Holy Roman Empire in 1806, i.e. not a historical subject at that time, as opposed to such “actual realms” as Prussia and Bavaria. Even if we accuse Hegel of Eurocentrism, this does not amount to racism, no more than the Sinocentrism of the Chinese, who believed the world revolves around China and regarded themselves as culturally superior, is racist.

While Hegel maintains, in the *Encyclopaedia*, that it is in the ‘Caucasian race’ that

Mind first attains to absolute unity with itself. Here for the first time mind enters into complete opposition to the life of Nature, apprehends itself in its absolute self-dependence, wrests itself free from the fluctuation between one extreme and the other, achieves self-determination, self-development, and, in doing so, creates world-history (Enc. III, §393, Addition),

it is precisely in its movement away from nature — achieving “complete opposition to the life of nature” — that the peoples inhabiting the temporal zone of the globe create world-history, which is ‘rooted in the soil of the spirit’. It is clear that *spiritual* development and not biological or genetic determinations are important here.

Moreover, in designating the Greeks and Romans, who were a “conflux of the most various nations”, including members of the ‘Ethiopian race’ (i.e. black Africans), and also the Jews and Germanic peoples as world-historical, Hegel does evidently not use the category of race in the manner suggested by Bernasconi. What makes people historical, in a general sense, is its transition from a) *Nation* to *Volk*, and b) from *Volk* to *Staat*, i.e. its becoming a *Volk als Staat* (PR §331):

In its existence as a nation (*Volk*) the substantial aim is to be a state and preserve itself as such. A nation with no state formation (a *mere nation*) has strictly speaking no history – like the nations which existed before the rise of states and others which still exist in a condition of savagery (Enc. III, §549).

What makes a people world historical is determined by its effect on other peoples in terms of instituting a universal principle. Thus, a nation

is only world historical in so far as its fundamental element and basic aim have embodied a universal principle; only then is its spirit capable of producing an ethical and political organisation. If nations are impelled merely by desires, their deeds are lost without trace (as with all fanaticism), and no enduring achievement remains. Or the only traces they leave are ruin and destruction (LPWH 145).

In Hegel’s day, the peoples of ‘Africa proper’ have had little or no effect on people outside themselves, whereas e.g. the Greeks, Romans and the Jews had such an effect disproportionate to their numbers. And these peoples are characterised not by racial

homogeneity, but heterogeneity, so that members of different races actually contributed to the advancement of universal principles and so to world history. Hegel's critique focuses therefore also on the idea that the Africans, at least in 'Africa proper', have remained isolated from other peoples due to their geographical situation. "Africa has remained cut off from all contact with the rest of the world... Its isolation is not just a result of its tropical nature, but an *essential consequence* of its geographic character" (LPWH 174; my emphasis). One characteristic of world-historical peoples, however, is contact and mixture with other peoples, and hence, as noted above, not racial homogeneity or racial purity, but heterogeneity. Taking the example of ancient Greece, Hegel declares that it is simply "superficial folly" to believe that the "beautiful and truly free life" of the Greek *Volksgeist* could have arisen from "the simple development of race (*Geschlecht*) keeping within the limits of blood relationship and friendship" (VPG, Werke XII, p. 278). Rather, the Greeks, like all world-historical peoples, are a "conflux of the most various nations" (*Zusammenfluss der verschiedensten Nationen*; VPG, Werke XII, p. 278). Racial heterogeneity, then, is more likely to lead to progress vis-à-vis the consciousness of freedom than racial homogeneity. The Negroes in 'Africa proper', having kept within the "limits of blood relationship and friendship", have not attained to a higher consciousness of freedom, whereas those who have either mixed or been in contact with other peoples or who have left 'Africa proper' have frequently done so. Hegel thus rejects the notion of 'racial purity' either as a fact or as a desirable state of affairs. This is in stark contrast to many of his contemporaries – it is clearly at odds with Gobineau's belief in racial purity. While almost all anthropologists in the 19th century (and, indeed, in the early 20th century) regarded miscegenation as an element of degeneracy with reference to

anthropological distinctions between the races, Hegel does not share this point of view, but instead regards a mixing of different so-called races as a positive development vis-à-vis progress in the consciousness of freedom.

It might also be noted that Hegel is clearly concerned to include rather than exclude Africa in his considerations on history, despite the fact that Africa proper stands only “*an der Schwelle der Weltgeschichte*” (on the doorstep of world-history). But why include Africa at all only to exclude it from world-history? Bernasconi believes that this inclusion was necessary to furnish Hegel with a ‘zero point’ to anchor his philosophy of history, which he believes is constructed hierarchically on the basis of race. But Hegel, as noted above, does not make *Rasse* or *Geschlecht*, but *Geist* and its progressive realisation of freedom in the world the basis of his *Geschichtsphilosophie*. Clearly, he did believe that this progress was less advanced in Africa, Asia and America than in Europe, but this has nothing to do with race. We are thus left with a ‘hierarchy of freedom’ and Hegel’s philosophical arguments concerning its gradual progress and concrete appearance in a series of external forms qua *Völker* and *Staaten*. These arguments can be refuted and rejected on philosophical grounds, but they do not make Hegel a racist; nor do they make him an advocate of a ‘racial’ view of history.

Hegel *does* include some relevant historical knowledge and other information about Africa, which represents a serious advance over many of his successors. Thus, we can at least find in his works references to “Ashanti”, “Jagas” or “Jakas”, “Fula”, “Mandingo”, “Dahomey” and “Eyio”. Such references are rare occurrences in the

writings of subsequent philosophers of history. Hegel himself repeatedly tells us that much remains to be learned about the African continent and its inhabitants. There is, it seems to me, a lot of room left by Hegel himself for adjusting his own views on the basis of new evidence.

With regard to Popper's allegation regarding Hegel's anti-Semitism, it is clear from textual evidence that the philosopher consistently rejected the view that the Jews were a 'foreign people' or 'race' or that they should be excluded either from public life or from political participation in the state. Hegel's advocacy of Jewish emancipation (and ridicule of those who opposed it) need to be examined here in order to emphasise that racism is essentially incompatible with Hegel's philosophy of history as well as with his political *Weltanschauung*.

While Hegel assessed various aspects of Judaism negatively, especially in his early theological essays (just as he assessed various aspects of 'Africa proper' negatively), his attitude is never one of racial hatred or religious, cultural and political intolerance. Unlike Fries, he nowhere demands that "the Jewish religion ... ought not to be tolerated", or that Jewry should be "extirpated root and branch" (Fries, J.F., 1818: 18). On the contrary, the modern state is necessarily characterised by diversity of opinions, manners, and beliefs. Moreover, Hegel's Christian Judeo-criticism, like his Protestant (i.e. Lutheran) critique of Catholicism, did not prevent him from speaking out against the unjust treatment of Jews and Catholics where he saw it. With regard to the latter, as Pinkard points out, he was

obviously outraged at the treatment of Catholics in Ireland; even his view that Catholicism itself was incompatible with a modern rational constitution did not blind him to what he took to be the obvious injustice of the treatment of the Irish (Pinkard, T., 2000: 502).

When Hegel saw himself confronted with a groundswell of popular opinion against Jewish emancipation, he spoke out in favour of emancipation; at a time when Fries and Savigny emphasised the ‘alienness’ (*Fremdartigkeit*) of the Jews, Hegel stressed that “they are, above all, human beings (*Menschen*)” (PR §270; Addition), as well as fellow citizens with equal civil and political rights. Indeed, he explicitly rejects the emphasis on the Jews as “*ein fremdes Volk*” — a foreign people — and, therefore, as un-German (*undeutsch*).

In the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel supports equal civil rights for Jews as a rational imperative of the modern state (§270; Hegel’s Notes). By contrast, Hegel’s contemporary Fries — the ‘ultra liberal’ — had argued against Jewish emancipation and called for the “rooting out root and branch” of Jewry (*Judentum*) in Germany, “since of all societies and states, secret or public, it is plainly the most dangerous to the state” (Fries, J.F., 1818: 18). Indeed, Fries argued that Jews should once again be made to wear “a special mark on their clothing” to set them visibly apart from the rest of the (German) population. As Bossierée wrote to Goethe (9 October 1817; see B.II, 418), Fries had thrown himself not only into “*Teutonismus*” (teutonsim), but also “*Judenhaß*” (hatred of the Jews). Fries, of course, claimed to be misunderstood: he did not hate the Jews, he said, but only wanted to “reform Jewishness” (*das Judentum*). According to Pinkard, Fries maintained that “he had not spoken of hatred for the Jews themselves, nor of depriving Jews of their rights, but had spoken out only

“against Jewishness as a degenerate social formation in the life of the German people.” However, Pinkard continues,

people like Hegel and his friends were not taken in by Fries’s distinction between only hating Jewishness and not hating Jews, and this was finally the last straw for Hegel with Fries... as far as Hegel was concerned, Fries had now come to stand for the worst elements of the new German movement... (Pinkard, T., 2000: 397).

And Hegel was by no means alone in his negative assessment of Fries. As his friend Boisserée wrote to Goethe about Fries (October 9, 1817):

since things have gone badly for him in philosophy, he has thrown himself into astronomy for ladies, after that into a makeshift physics, and now finally into teutonism and hatred of the Jews, all of this just to earn his keep.

For Hegel, it would be simply irrational to deny Jews equal rights of citizenship — i.e. full legal equality with the non-Jewish population — because it would not only make the ideas of freedom of conscience and worship, and “careers open to talent” (which he supports) meaningless, but paradoxically preserve (*erhalten*)

the isolation with which they [the Jews] have been reproached, and this would rightly have remained in isolation with which they have been reproached, and this would rightly have brought blame (*Schuld*) and reproach upon the state which excluded them; for the state would thereby have failed to recognise its own principle as an objective institution with a power of its own...While the demand for the exclusion of the Jews claimed to be based on the highest right, it has proved in practice to be the height of folly, whereas the way the governments have acted has proved wise and honourable (PR §270, Addition).

Hegel undoubtedly has Fries in mind when he points to the illogicality attached to the demand for the exclusion of the Jews on the basis that they are exclusive. According to Fries (1818: 3),

The Jews can become subjects to our government, but as Jews they can never become citizens of our people, for as Jews they want to be a distinct people, and so they necessarily separate themselves from our German national community (*von unserer deutschnationalen Gemeinschaft*).

Fries, like Savigny, conceived of the Jews — as did the Nazis — as community aliens (*Gemeinschaftsfremde*; also: *Volksfremde*, by which the Nazis meant *Blutsfremde* — blood aliens). Yet, he opposed their emancipation, which alone would ensure the end of their alleged exclusiveness. This, of course, implies that they can really never be part of “our German national community” (*unsere deutschnationale Gemeinschaft*). Hegel, however, believes that

In our day the tie between members of a state in respect of manners, education, language, may be rather loose or even non-existent. Identity in these matters, once the foundation of a people’s union, is now to be reckoned amongst the ancients whose character does not hinder a mass from constituting a public authority... Thus dissimilarity in culture and manners is a necessary product as well as a necessary condition of the stability of modern states (FS, Werke I, 447-8).¹

Hegel argues further that

The granting of civil rights gives those who receive them a self-awareness as recognised legal (*rechtliche*) persons in civil society, and it is from this root, infinite and free from all other influences, that the desired assimilation in terms of attitude and disposition arises (PR §270 Addition).

This does not mean that the Jews should relinquish their faith. As Pinkard notes,

¹ As cited by Shlomo Avineri, “Hook’s Hegel”, in Kaufmann, Walter (ed.), *Hegel’s Political Philosophy*, p. 74.

Hegel ... openly declared ... that to be true to themselves, modern states were rationally compelled to grant full emancipation to Jews, and not to make this emancipation conditional on their conversion to Christianity (Pinkard, T., 2000: 534).

Hegel's idea of Jewish emancipation — unlike that of Fichte — does not imply that in order to become citizens of the modern state the Jews should give up their Jewishness. This is not what Hegel has in mind: like all other citizens, the Jews as citizens should simply identify with the state of which they are members in terms of 'attitude and disposition', not by means of religious conversion. As far as Hegel is concerned, Jews are to be regarded as citizens of the Jewish faith (*Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens*), and, as such, are subject to civil laws. And civil laws, the young Hegel wrote,

Affect every citizen's security of person and property, and this has nothing at all to do with his religious opinions. Thus, whatever his faith, it is the state's duty to protect his rights as a citizen... (ETW 22).

Hegel thus stands on the side of religious toleration and Jewish emancipation. He also criticised the exaggerated emphasis on Jews being an alien people, nation, or race (*ein fremdes Volk; eine fremde Nation; eine fremdartige Rasse*), or a corporate political group, rather than a particular religious party (*eine besondere Religionspartei*) — which was bandied about in the anti-Semitic literature of the day (see PR §270; Hegel's Addition). The Jews, as far as the state is concerned, are another 'religious party', like the Mennonites, Quakers and Anabaptists, which should be tolerated and granted equal civil rights, even if they refuse — on religious grounds — to perform "formal duties", such as military service, which the Jews, of course, did not. As Wood notes, "Hegel here refers to Chancellor Hardenberg's 'Edict Concerning the Civil Relations of the Jews' (11 March, 1812), which declared that Jews were to enjoy

full equality of civil and political rights in Prussia” (Wood, A., 1995, 459). What the anti-emancipationists seem to forget, Hegel asserts further, is that the Jews are above all *Menschen*, not some “neutral, abstract quality” (PR §270, Hegel’s Note). And “*der Mensch*”, Hegel argued in his *Encyclopaedia*,

is implicitly rational; herein lies the possibility of equal justice for all men and the futility of a rigid distinction between races which have rights and those which have none (Enc. III, §393).

In forgetting this fact — i.e. that Jews are human beings — Fries and his followers implicitly deny their universal or common humanity. Hegel, on the other hand, emphasised that

the nature of a human being consists precisely in the fact that he is essentially universal in character, not an abstraction of the moment and a single fragment of knowledge (PR §132).

Indeed, in viewing the Jews as nothing more than an “abstract, neutral quality”, men like Fries are conveniently enabled to project all sorts of imagined and irrational determinations onto the Jews, and, consequently, to accuse and condemn them *a priori* for whatever they want to accuse them of and condemn them for, unmediated by proofs. For Hegel, this kind of abstraction amounts to “a delusion powered by suspicion” — i.e. the worst kind of fanaticism, which inevitably ends (as during the Middle Ages, “during the sway of the Roman Emperors, and under Robespierre’s Reign of Terror”) — in “frightful barbarity” (PH 427). This fanaticism, as Hegel defines it in the *Philosophy of Right*, “wills only what is abstract, not what is articulated, so whenever differences emerge, it finds them incompatible and cancels them” (PR § 5).

Considering Hegel's actual attitude towards the Jews, we can conclude that Popper's arguments are without foundation.

Concluding Remarks

This study attempted to assess the validity and accuracy of the claim that Hegel was a racist or that he contributed to a distorted perception of race. Having explored his concept of race and racial diversity, we must conclude that this allegation can not be supported. While we need not agree with Hegel's conception of history as the progressive development of freedom in the world, reaching its (temporary) apex in the European consciousness, a racist interpretation thereof is, in my opinion, invalid. I've attempted to demonstrate that Hegel opposed much of the anthropological and physiological 'wisdom' of his day concerning the concepts of race and racial diversity.

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NOTES

¹ It is interesting to note, however, that the National Socialists themselves had little or not time for Hegel. Hitler explicitly condemns the philosopher in his Table Talks of 1940, and the Nazis “regretted” that Hegel did not recognise “the Jewish question” as a problem of race and did not accentuate the “natural side” of the “people” better. See W. Schönfeld, *Die Geschichte der Rechtswissenschaft im Spiegel der Metaphysik* (Stuttgart: 1943), p. 510; K. Larenz, “Die Bedeutung der völkischen Sitte in Hegels Staatsphilosophie”, *Zeitschrift für gesammte Staatswissenschaft* 98, no. 1 (1938), p. 135.

² *Gattung* denotes the human species in a spiritual sense, as well as in the technical parlance of biological classification. Humanity, according to Hegel, is a genus — *the genus*

³ Shakespeare, William, *Macbeth*, Act I, Scene IV.

⁴ Consider the “curse of Ham”, *Genesis* 9:18-27; this is here clearly rejected by Hegel.

⁵ Hegel rejects polygamy because he regards monogamous marriage as “one of the absolute principles on which the ethical life of a community is based” (PR §167). Moreover, “the woman must come into her right just as much as the man. Where [there is] polygamy, [there is] slavery of women” (VPR 1, 301).

⁶ Hegel, G.W. F., ‘Prefactory Lectures on the Philosophy of Law’, trans. Alan S. Brudner, *Clio*, vol. 8, no. 1 (1978), p. 68.

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Sandra Bonetto is an Irish philosopher teaching a number of philosophy courses, including ethics and political philosophy, to adult learners at University College Dublin and Dublin City University.

Email: sandrabo138@hotmail.com