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Hegel's Analysis of Colonialism and Its Roots in Scottish Political Economy

G. W. F. Hegel's account of colonies in the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1821) as a solution to the mass poverty generated in civil society has attracted the attention of contemporary commentators. In general, they convincingly demonstrate that Hegel's endorsement of colonialism undermines the self-sufficiency of civil society and illustrates his callousness toward non-European peoples. These interpretations of Hegel's advocacy of colonialism should be supplemented by an analysis which emphasizes his historical context, integrates his treatment of this theme into his other writings, and confronts the intellectual milieu out of which his ideas emerged. Moreover, Hegel's treatment of colonialism in the joint context of political economy and social disintegration reveals its intellectual origins. He partially inherited the ambivalence and inconsistency of his account from Sir James Steuart (1713-80) and Adam Ferguson (1723-1816), who grappled with three issues which pertain to Hegel's exposition: the repercussions of extraterritorial expansion for a commercial society and the social bonds unifying its citizens; the appropriate form of public intervention in a market economy when it deviates from the ideal of free competition and produces poverty; and the social implications of population increase when it outstrips economic growth. This essay contends that Hegel's colonization scheme addresses the immediate material needs of the impoverished and also integrates them, perhaps circuitously, into the web of reciprocal relationships in civil society.

Hegel envisages ethical life raised upon the edifice of modern commercial society. He also seeks to contain the destructive effects of unrestrained economic individualism and to "incline its members towards participation in the communal structures of life,"¹ such as the corporation, that inculcate social values, accord recognition, and mediate the individual's relations with the state. Like the civic humanist ideal, Hegel's system is "a fragile accomplishment that is prone to corruption and collapse because of the individualism, indifference and neglect of its citizens."² Colonies are designed by Hegel to instill a public-spirited disposition in the poor who are alienated, "objectively cut off from participation" in civil society. Although poverty is a structural feature of civil society, it is not ineliminable.³ Colonization represents a viable *political* solution within Hegel's framework, and an *economic* one as well: Hegel proposes to provide land, or private property, which allows the individual to master external reality and makes him aware of his capacities and impulses. This, in turn, provides membership in an estate, restores the "ethical objectivity"⁴ suspended during prolonged periods of unemployment, and sanctions membership in the intermediary institutions of civil society. In this manner, it integrates the individual into "a system of all-around interdependence" from which they were previously alienated. It also helps individuals to obtain the material subsistence that accords with the requirement that individuals meet their own needs as a result of autonomous effort and work. Simultaneously, however, colonies ease the macroeconomic crisis of civil society.

1. Gareth Stedman Jones, "Hegel and the Economics of Civil Society" in *Civil Society: History and Possibilities*, ed. Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnani (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), 114. The author is grateful for the helpful suggestions of an anonymous external specialist reader. He also appreciates the generous material support provided by both Trinity College and the Centre for History and Economics, Cambridge.

2. Alan Patten, *Hegel's Idea of Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999), 38; on republican virtue, see Andrew Buchwalter, "Hegel's Concept of Virtue," *Political Theory* 20 (1992): 548-83.

3. Michael O. Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy: The Project of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), 244-45.

4. G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), §207 Remark.

The argument will be presented in four sections. After summarizing the existing scholarly criticism, Hegel's argument for colonies in *Philosophy of Right* is recapitulated. I emphasize both the context of poverty and the subterranean tensions in the text, underscoring the centrality of political economy. The second part of the essay examines Hegel's reception and incorporation of political economy in its various intellectual contexts and then confronts Hegel's other writings on colonialism that enrich the appreciation of themes to which Hegel only alludes in *Philosophy of Right*. This interpretation is reinforced by examining two additional historical contexts. The tensions and inconsistencies of Hegel's account are attributable to the unresolved nature of the debate in Scottish political economy, particularly the thought of Ferguson and Steuart, whose possible influence is discussed in the fourth and final section of the essay.

Scholars depict Hegel's colonialism as a flawed solution to poverty for two reasons. First, it merely "displaces" and "duplicates" poverty in a "cruder and more brutal manner" in a new location, often accompanied by the "destruction of non-European peoples." Second, colonies are a belated, futile, and desultory attempt to repair the "fiber of civil society that has disintegrated."⁵ Shlomo Avineri maintains that Hegel's unsatisfactory examination demonstrated his "basic intellectual honesty," that he lacked a radical solution to poverty.⁶ Albert Hirschman, however, remains skeptical of Hegel's argumentative cogency, "the chain of unproven assertions and deductions" regarding colonialism. He is unconvinced that "increasing maldistribution of income" results in a "shortfall of consumption in relation to produc-

5. Tsenay Serequeberhan, "The Idea of Colonialism in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 29 (1989): 312; this essay will not address the substantial literature on Hegel's depiction of non-European peoples. According to Robert Bernasconi, colonialism is "the solution to the problem of how to include within the continuous history of the Caucasians the races that were otherwise excluded" in the *Philosophy of History*. See his "With What Must the Philosophy of World History Begin? On the Racial Basis of Hegel's Eurocentrism," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 22 (2000): 190; see also Joseph McCarney, *Hegel on History* (London: Routledge, 2000), 144. This essay is indebted to insights drawn from this important scholarly literature and strives only to supplement it.

6. Shlomo Avineri, *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1972), 154.

tion" which, in turn, logically instigates the search for external, undeveloped markets.⁷ Frederick Neuhouser contends that colonialism "constitutes a serious blow to Hegel's theoretical ambitions" because it insinuates civil society "is precisely not a stable and self-sufficient system but must instead rely on something outside of itself in order to achieve its ends."⁸ Few writers have issued sympathetic verdicts concerning Hegel's colonialism in *Philosophy of Right*. A. S. Walton maintains that colonization is a solution that only England had exploited fully, but insists that Hegel does not regard England as a "paradigm instance of how civil society should be organized." Similarly, Richard Bellamy observes that "if economic competition went unchecked then the only solution to overproduction would be the creation of new markets by colonization," but inserts the caveat that Hegel does not advocate uninhibited market activity.⁹ Walton's and Bellamy's orientation is appropriate for Hegel's ideas on colonialism developed from his encounter with Scottish political economy, a theme explored later in this essay.

Hegel analyzes colonialism in the context of his discussion of poverty, a condition in which individuals are "left with the needs" but "deprived of all the advantages of society," including education, healthcare, and "even the consolation of religion." Hegel's "universal authority" would address not only the "immediate deficiencies" of hunger, shelter, and

7. Albert O. Hirschman, "On Hegel, Imperialism, and Structural Stagnation" in *Essays in Trespassing: Economics to Politics and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981), 168.

8. Frederick Neuhouser, *Foundations of Hegel's Social Theory: Actualizing Freedom* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2000), 173-74; these arguments were anticipated by Robert Fatton who argues "the logic of imperialism implies that the resolution of the inherent problems plaguing civil society can be only temporary, since the conquest of new territories and new markets can only proceed *ad infinitum*," in "Hegel and the Riddle of Poverty: the Limits of Bourgeois Political Economy," *History of Political Economy* 18 (1986): 596.

9. A. S. Walton, "Economy, Utility, and Community in Hegel's Theory of Civil Society" in *The State and Civil Society: Studies in Hegel's Political Philosophy*, ed. Z. A. Pelczynski (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984), 254; Richard Bellamy, "Hegel and Liberalism" in *Rethinking Liberalism* (London: Pinter, 2000), 12; Ian Fraser offers a similar line of argument, insisting that Hegel never conceived of colonialism as a solution but was merely "observing and shedding light on" his contemporary society, in "Speculations on Poverty in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*," *The European Legacy* 1 (1997): 2060.

material requirements for the indigent, but also extirpate the deep-rooted "disposition to laziness, viciousness, and other vices" accompanying poverty.¹⁰ Hegel explicitly recognizes the "contingent character of almsgiving and charitable donation" and sought to alleviate publicly the "universal aspects of want" through "public poor houses, hospitals and street lighting." Hegel acknowledges, however, that the unmitigated functioning of the market mechanism, "occupied internally with expanding its population and its industry," would produce inexorably the "accumulation of wealth" and increased "specialization of labor" which "in turn leads to an inability to feel and enjoy wider freedoms, and particularly the spiritual advantages, of civil society" (§242, §242 Remark, §243). Hegel argues that a "rabble" forms when a "large mass of people" lose "that feeling of right, integrity, and honor which comes from supporting oneself by one's activity and work" as a result of failing to achieve a "certain standard of living." Since no absolute benchmark of subsistence or deprivation exists, it is "the disposition associated with poverty, by inward rebellion against the rich, against society, against government" that produces a rabble (§244, Add. G).

Hegel supports colonization as an alternative to other forms of relief. Wealth redistribution, permanent income subsidies, and public employment are inadequate remedies for one of two reasons: first, individuals require "the mediation of work" and "the feeling of self-sufficiency and honor" (§245) in order to enter into the complex web of social interdependence that forms the basis of modern ethical life (*sittlichkeit*); second, the economic predicament underpinning this social crisis, "overproduction and the lack of a proportionate number of consumers," precludes internal resolution because to employ displaced workers in production only would augment the surplus supply of unwanted goods. For this reason, civil society, conducted by the public authority, must "go beyond its own confines and look for consumers, and hence the means it requires for subsistence, in other nations which lack those means of which it has a surplus or which generally lag behind it in creativity" (§246). Indeed, Hegel portrays overseas trade as the attribute of "all

10. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §241.

great and enterprising nations" in which "creativity has flourished" whereas nontrading nations have "stagnated internally and sunk into the most appalling and miserable superstition" (§247 Remark). Colonization does not merely erase surplus products; it also has educative and ethical functions.

Fully developed civil society is driven to colonize by the pressures of burgeoning population, overproduction, and underconsumption. Colonization provides both a "new market and sphere of industrial activity" and what Hegel cryptically terms "a return to the family principle in a new country" for those relocated citizens (§248). It assumes two forms—sporadic and systematic—with the latter case initiated and regulated by the public authority to allay economic distress and provide new opportunity for poor members of society. He disparages contemporary German emigration as haphazard and useless to the mother country because it severs the link with the migrant who is "consequently of no service." By contrast, he approvingly cites Ancient Greek colonization for easing population pressure, producing new markets, and facilitating the citizen's undistracted attention to public affairs. Simultaneously, however, he lauds the former British and Spanish colonies whose independence is "of the greatest advantage to the mother state" (§248, Add. G). Hegel's attitude appears contradictory, simultaneously espousing colonization as a permanent panacea for poverty and as an ephemeral institution. His position is also ambiguous: it is uncertain whether inhabitants of the colonies will be integrated eventually into the communal structures of civil society. A sustained link may be inferred, presumably a trading relation with police oversight, but the sequence by which colonies evolve from the "family principle" to civil society remains vague. It is only by contrasting Hegel's position in 1821 with his other writings, examining their specific historical contexts, and tracing Hegel's link to Scottish political economy that a more coherent position emerges.

Hegel's notion of political economy came primarily from Scottish sources, which had a "wide and marked reception" in eighteenth-century Germany. While it may be "impossible to pin down specific points of this transmission," Hegel achieved competence in English by 1804 and purchased numerous English books in the 1790s during his Bern

period. More pertinently, Karl Rosencranz reports that Hegel devoted three months in 1799 to digesting Steuart's *Principles of Political Oeconomy* (1767) and composing a commentary that was subsequently lost.¹¹ It is manifestly odd, then, that Steuart's name goes unmentioned in *Philosophy of Right* when Adam Smith, Jean-Baptiste Say, and David Ricardo are cited.¹² There is less direct evidence that Hegel read Ferguson, though the percolation and diffusion of his ideas in German intellectual circles is generally accepted.¹³ Although Hegel certainly read *Wealth of Nations* and drew on it in other contexts, Smith's derisive depiction of colonial monopoly as a profligate burden on taxpayers and an impediment to industry bears no resemblance to Hegel's approbative account.¹⁴

Three additional intellectual contexts must be considered in appraising Hegel's advocacy of colonization: German economic thought, the French Revolution, and Romantic

11. Norbert Waszek, *The Scottish Enlightenment and Hegel's Account of "Civil Society"* (Dordrecht, Boston, and London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1988), 78, 108, 113, 115; as Waszek noted, Rosencranz asserts that "all of Hegel's reflections about the nature of civil society" derived from Steuart. Waszek argues that Hegel's took the idea of a threat to man's "wholeness" posed by the unchecked mechanism of modern exchange economy derived from both Steuart and F. Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1794).

12. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §189 Remark. N.B. Besides this reference, there is no textual evidence to support the claim that Hegel actually read Ricardo or Say; see Stedman Jones, "Hegel," 116 n.; there remains a good deal of research to be conducted concerning Hegel's sources which potentially could affect the interpretation offered in this essay.

13. Laurence Dickey notes that "scholars also have inferred from some of the excerpts in Hegel's *Tagebüch* that he had read Ferguson while a schoolboy at Stuttgart," in his *Hegel: Religion, Economics and Politics of Spirit 1770-1807* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987), 192. While Fania Oz-Salzberger rejects a direct link between Ferguson's and Hegel's philosophies of history, she states that Ferguson was elected as an external member of the Berlin Royal Academy of Sciences and Arts in 1793, mentions the acclaim of both Ferguson's *Essay* and *Institutes* by German journals, and cites the impact of Ferguson's ideas on Herder, Hamann, Novalis, Jakobi, and Mendelssohn, in her *Translating the Enlightenment: Scottish Civic Discourse in Eighteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1999), 255, 105, 130-33.

14. Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1976), 2: 590-610 passim. For Smith's influence on other aspects of Hegel's thought, see James P. Henderson and John B. Davis, "Adam Smith's Influence on Hegel's Philosophical Writings," *Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 13 (1991): 184-204.

political ideas impinged decisively on Hegel's reception of Scottish political economy. Steuart's treatise, for example, enjoyed greater prestige than Smith's until 1800 in Germany because Steuart's emphasis on exchange and reciprocity, rather than labor value, rendered his ideas compatible with the tenets of Cameralism.¹⁵ His insistence on a statesman to anticipate and correct instabilities also corresponded to the conventional function of the police (*polizei*) in Germany where the market was not treated as a self-regulating entity.¹⁶ Similarly, political economy appealed to Hegel because he was disillusioned, according to Ritter, with the "abstractness and fundamentally inadequate one-sidedness" of the political thought of the French Revolution and aspired to establish a social system on the "inductive (hermeneutical) theory of the already existing, historically constituted social reality."¹⁷ This predisposition, however, was counteracted by the German Romantics' hostility toward the consequences of commercial society, whose division of labor condemned individuals to mind-numbing routine, dehumanized them, and corroded communal attachment.¹⁸ His discussion of colonies bears the imprint of these competing streams of influence: a public authority must intervene to form a colony when economic trends collide dangerously and cause the bonds of social attachment to weaken.

More than the policy prescriptions of the political economists, Hegel was enamored of the extraction "from the endless multitude of details with which it is initially confronted the simple principle of things." He commended political economy for isolating the "laws underlying a mass of contingent occurrences." Pursuit of individual interest

15. Keith Tribe, *Governing Economy: The Reformation of German Economic Discourse 1750-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988), 133, 139.

16. Mark Neocleous, "Policing the System of Needs: Hegel, Political Economy, and the Police of the Market," *History of European Ideas* 24 (1998): 45; Dickey, *Hegel*, 197, 200.

17. Joachim Ritter, "Hegel and the French Revolution" in *Hegel and the French Revolution: Essays on the Philosophy of Right*, trans. R. D. Winfield (Cambridge: MIT P, 1982), 69.

18. Frederick C. Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution, and Romanticism: The Genesis of Modern German Political Thought 1790-1800* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992), 231-33 passim.

became, for Hegel, both transparent and predictable, opening up the possibility of rational interdependent relationships. Combined with the division of labor, Hegel imagined a system in which "subjective selfishness turns into a contribution towards the satisfaction of the needs of everyone else" and facilitates a higher form of freedom constructed on the basis of the autonomous pursuit of self-interest.¹⁹

Hegel's optimistic judgment of political economy's utility infuses his sanguine account of colonies in *Philosophy of Right*. In his other writings, however, he offered a more modest evaluation of their efficacy. Hegel emphatically repudiates the notion that poverty could be permanently eradicated solely by a public authority-sponsored scheme of mass colonization. In "On the English Reform Bill" (1831), he unequivocally disapproved of a "proposal to reduce the surplus numbers of poor by establishing colonies would have to remove at least one million inhabitants to have any chance of success. But how could this be effected?" Hegel pinpoints the impracticality of this scheme, but concedes that profound transformations were required to prevent the repetition of this miserable scenario because "the empty space thereby created would soon be filled in the same way as before if laws and circumstances remained otherwise unchanged."²⁰ Colonization cannot operate without constraint and only functions effectively as a safety valve amidst acute turmoil.

Furthermore, Hegel emphasizes different factors triggering colonialism. He initially emphasized population growth and chronic land scarcity, instead of overproduction-induced poverty, as an impetus for colonization. In his Heidelberg version of *Philosophy of Right* (1817-18), land scarcity causes an agrarian crisis which precludes "a specific mode of life" for surplus inhabitants and compels them to "earn a necessitous living at factory work without free independence

19. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §189 Remark and Adds. H, G, §199; Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before its Triumph* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997), 50-51; see also Mark R. Greer, "Individuality and the Economic Order in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*," *European Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 6 (1999): 566-68.

20. G. W. F. Hegel, "On the English Reform Bill," in Hegel, *Political Writings*, ed. Laurence Dickey, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), 248.

or else the state must see to it that they are given some cultivated land." The public authority facilitates colonization "where [the landless] can live in the same way as in the home country" and, reciprocally, colonists "forever remain citizens of their home country and are very useful to it." In a revealing verbal shift, Hegel refers to "emigration," instead of "sporadic" colonization, to signify the departure of a property-less peasantry who "become assimilated into other peoples since their own country does not care for them."²¹ The Heidelberg *Philosophy of Right* contains two critical themes omitted in the subsequent Berlin lectures. First, colonization alleviates rural land shortage precipitated by overpopulation, reflects an anti-industrial bias in its mediation of social dislocation, and suggests a more expansive and paternalistic police role in the consolidation of a colony. Second, public intervention allows specific segments to subsist according to the principle of civil society, but without the industrial "factory work" of commercial society. This theme emerges again in his later *Philosophy of History*.

Two related historical contexts clarify Hegel's intention. The first concerns demographic trends: in 1815, seventy percent of the Prussian population inhabited rural areas and the agrarian sector still predominated the economy. Industrialization had not yet transformed the society; there were still twice as many artisans as factory workers. Most crucially, population was steadily rising, doubling in Germany between 1815 and 1845, and reached an unsustainable level. Poor harvests in 1816 aggravated the situation and caused a sudden rise in food prices. This crisis encouraged thousands of Germans, primarily middle class rural-dwelling families, traveling as a unit, to emigrate, and the exodus cushioned the effects of rural pauperization. By ignoring the demographic context, certain scholars inaccurately depict Hegel's poor as an urban protoproletariat whereas Hegel originally described agricultural workers displaced by overpopulation and market shocks.²²

21. G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on Natural Right and Political Science: The First "Philosophy of Right" in Heidelberg 1817-1818*, trans. J. M. Stewart and P. R. Hodgson (Berkeley: U of California P, 1995), §120.

22. Brendan Simms, *The Struggle for Mastery in Germany, 1779-1850* (London: Macmillan P, 1998), 142-50 passim; James J. Sheehan, *German History 1770-1886* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1989), 461-63.

The second context concerns the hostile attitude toward colonies articulated by political economists between 1815 and 1821: J. B. Say's pamphlet *England and the English People* (1816), for example, indicates the baneful consequences of colonial monopoly and the benign effects of free trade, especially amidst an economic downturn. Say observed that it was "a fact admitted by everybody, that America independent is much more profitable to England than when it was a colony." He claimed that England realized no benefit from its colonies, such as India, chastising the "mad pretension" of governing "at a distance of 2, 3, or 6 thousand leagues." Say promised a "lucrative trade" would follow the liberalization of commerce and workers would be relieved of the taxes which have "rendered exorbitantly dear all the productions of [England's] soil and industry." Under these conditions, a diligent laborer's wages cannot guarantee subsistence, compelling a degrading reliance on charity among the working poor, and this situation could precipitate England's "rapid and retrograde steps towards barbarism." According to Say, colonies impair, instead of ameliorate, the condition of the poor and endanger the financial health of the entire state. Hegel's account of colonization, therefore, is unusually optimistic about its salutary effects in the contemporary intellectual context. Hegel's proposed colonies must involve settlement, not conquest, transplanting a segment of the population to an uncongested place where they are "granted the same rights as the inhabitants of the mother country" and can develop into viable trading partners. In this way, the dissent and expense that made colonies a burden is avoided. Similarly, Britain's rising trade with America after its independence spurred Hegel to depict colonies as a "new market and sphere of industrial activity."²³

In spite of its derogation of America's low "grade of civilization" and the "physically and psychically powerless" nature of its indigenous people, Hegel's account of European

23. Jean-Baptiste Say, *England and the English People*, 2d ed., trans. John Richter (London, 1816), 63, 64-65, 23, 25-26. I thank Professor Gareth Stedman Jones for making me aware of this important text. See his "National Bankruptcy and Social Revolution: European Observers on Britain, 1813-1844," *Centre for History and Economics Paper* (November 2001), esp. 14-18, 36; Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §248 and §248 Add. G.

colonialism in *The Philosophy of History* emphasizes the absence of brutal subjugation, the sheer availability of land, and its status as a historical phase of civil society. In his stark comparison with European modes of expansion, Hegel claimed that "South America was conquered, but North America colonized. The Spaniards took possession to govern it, and to become rich through occupying political offices, and by exactions."²⁴ Colonization does not consist in violent seizure of land; contrapuntally, it is a peaceful process of encroachment and tenure without forced dispossession. This contrast between a colony by settlement and a province by conquest is presaged in the *Philosophy of Right*: Hegel proclaims the legitimacy of rebellion for "the conquered people . . . [who] are not linked with their master in terms of the Idea."²⁵

More importantly, for Hegel, colonies represent an escape from the obstructive "burdens and imposts" of European society and a "sphere of action" to employ "independence of spirit" and "appliances and ingenuity . . . to realize some produce from the extensive and still virgin soil." Hegel also historicizes the process of colonization: civil society is not formed until "the direct increase of agriculturists is checked" and the colonists, "instead of pressing outwards to occupy the fields, press inwards upon each other—pursuing town occupations, and trading with their fellow citizens" and come to "require an organized state."²⁶

This comment has generated keen scholarly interest: José Ortega y Gasset interprets this passage to signify that history is a "function of population density" and that cultural evolution commences only when "humanity confronts a shortage of available territory." Similarly, Antonello Gerbi claims that vacant land delays "the

24. G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), 81-84 passim.

25. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §281, Add. G.

26. Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, 82, 86; Hegel's depiction of the Spaniards was not only the result of anti-Catholic prejudice, but arose from the conviction that they were "not yet sufficiently cultivated" for advanced constitutions (*Philosophy of Right* §274 Adds. H, G). M. J. Petry draws our attention to a passage Hegel marked down from the *Morning Chronicle* in 1825 that claimed Spain had "sunk into semi-barbarism" and are "weak, stupid, and tyrannical," in "Hegel and the *Morning Chronicle*," *Hegel-Studien* 11 (1976): 30.

formation of those internal tensions, those class conflicts and urban industrial agglomerations” of advanced commercial society. More recently, George Armstrong Kelly asserts that borderless societies lack the competition for scarce resources and tensions of communal living that require “the complex, mediating parts” of Hegelian civil society.²⁷ This passage has profound repercussions for Hegel’s account of colonialism: when Hegel describes “part of a [society’s] population with a return to the family principle” in *Philosophy of Right* (§248), he suggests a condition that the exigencies of civil society has “fragmented” and whose members must “behave towards each other as self-sufficient individuals.”²⁸ Since “the earth, the firm and *solid ground*, is a precondition of the principle of family life” (§247), colonization must signify the settlement and cultivation of land. Hegel’s *Philosophy of History* suggests that colonies provide a respite for individuals who cannot acclimate to the “burdens and imposts” of commercial society in the mother country and prefer, as phrased in the Heidelberg *Philosophy of Right*, to pursue a different “mode of life.” Significantly, Hegel refused to abandon these settlers—they retain an “extended link” to the universal through overseas commerce and “forever remain citizens.” Hegel recognizes the global nature of commerce renders borders less significant and colonialism is not an admission, as Avineri and Neuhouser claim, that civil society is unable to resolve its own contradictions.

Hegel’s awkward and uneven treatment of colonies could partially stem from the Scottish civic humanist uneasiness with territorial expansion in commercial societies. Adam Ferguson correlates the enlargement of a polity with the diminishment of civic awareness, contending that dispersed

27. José Ortega y Gasset, quoted in Luanne Buchanan and Michael H. Hoffheimer, “Hegel and America by José Ortega y Gasset,” *Clio* 25 (1995): 80; Antonello Gerbi, *The Dispute of the New World: The History of a Polemic, 1750-1900*, trans. Jeremy Moyle (Pittsburgh: U Pittsburgh P, 1972), 436; George Armstrong Kelly, “Hegel’s America” in *Hegel’s Retreat from Eleusis: Studies in Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1978), 188.

28. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, § 33 Add. H; see also Michael Hoffheimer’s important recent article “Hegel, Race and Genocide” *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 39 (2001): 35-62.

citizens "are disunited, and lose sight of their community" as "the greater part are thrown into a state of languor and obscurity, and suffer themselves to be governed at discretion." Conversely, however, high population density rendered citizens "profligate, licentious, seditious, and incapable of public affections."²⁹ Although war "tends to strengthen the bands of society" and promote "mutual attachment and courage,"³⁰ Ferguson argued that national enlargement attenuates the "common ties of society," leaving citizens with "no common affairs to transact, but those of trade" (208). Because inhabitants "cease to perceive their connection to the state" due to the "distance from the seat of administration," political activism wanes and reduces them to passive subjects. Similarly, Ferguson is preoccupied with the "disorders to which a great empire is exposed" because the "prevention, vigilance, and quick execution" necessary to retain distant colonies drains national prosperity and invariably terminates in despotism (256-57).³¹

In contradistinction to Hegel, expansion is not linked to economic and demographic factors, such as price fluctuations and rapid population growth, because Ferguson concedes, according to Istvan Hont, "no strictly economic bounds to the future of commercial society."³² Like Hegel, however, he comprehends the ubiquitous risk of moral decline associated with commercial prosperity. Yet Ferguson diverged from Hegel's viewpoint on the status of colonies: whereas Hegel prophesied the positive repercussions of colonial emancipation, Ferguson vehemently rejected American independence from Britain in 1776. Because "no nation ever planted colonies with so liberal or noble a hand

29. Adam Ferguson, *Institutes of Moral Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1994), 265.

30. Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, ed. Fania Oz-Salzberger (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), 99.

31. Lisa Hill claims that Ferguson believed civil society "contained the seeds of its own destruction." The division of labor's "specialization erodes martial and communal ardor," in "Adam Ferguson and the Paradox of Progress and Decline," *History of Political Thought* 18 (1997): 681.

32. Istvan Hont, "The 'Rich Country-Poor Country' Debate in Scottish Classical Political Economy" in *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. Hont and Michael Ignatieff (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983), 296; see also Anthony Brewer, "Adam Ferguson, Adam Smith and the Concept of Economic Growth," *History of Political Economy* 31 (1999): 237-54.

as England has done," Ferguson reasoned, the Americans should "repay us for all the blood and treasure we have expended in the common cause." Unlike Hegel, he was unable to grasp that "the liberation of colonies itself proves to be of the greatest advantage to the mother state."³³

Ferguson also considers poverty's tendency to erode the bonds of social attachment. Poverty is not a perturbation of commercial society, but its defining feature, as "the exaltation of the few must depress the many." Adhering to the theory of unintended consequences, Ferguson postulates that society must "suffer the wealthy to squander, that the poor may subsist." When commercial society's benefit disappears entirely, however, "the charm of dominion is broken and the naked slave, as awake from a dream, is astonished to find he is free. When the fence is destroyed, the wilds are open and the herd breaks loose."³⁴ This dissolution follows disenchantment caused by relative deprivation. Although he disparages the "extreme meanness" of the "rude and uncultivated" classes (177), he recognizes "an admiration of wealth unpossessed" could lead to "corruption and baseness," a tendency to "rate our fellow citizens by the figure they make" and "to bow to the splendid equipage" (239). Ferguson believes that public instruction, infused with martial vigilance, could offset these defects of civil society and help the poor recognize the necessity of social subordination. Wealth in civil society should be tolerated until it ceases to function as "the instrument of a vigorous spirit" (248).

Unlike both Hegel and Steuart, however, Ferguson does not countenance even well-intentioned government interference in commerce since it "only multiples interruptions and grounds of complaint." Similarly, he warned the "period of vision and chimera is near" (139)

33. Adam Ferguson, *Remarks on a Pamphlet Lately Published by Dr. Price, Intituled "Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty, the Principles of Government, and the Justice and Policy of the War with America" in a Letter from a Gentleman in the Country to a Member of Parliament* (London, 1776), 27, 19. For an analysis of Ferguson's views, see Richard B. Sher, "From Troglodytes to Americans: Montesquieu and the Scottish Enlightenment on Liberty, Virtue, and Commerce" in *Republicanism, Liberty, and Commercial Society 1649-1776*, ed. David Wooton (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1994), 401; Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §248 Add. G.

34. Ferguson, *Essay*, 177, 225, 263.

when self-interested merchants pursue national goals. For each party, the consequences of such action would be chaos. His disdain for overlapping spheres also applied to colonies: Ferguson concedes that population growth rendered indispensable the "planting of a colony," but it should never be administered as a "palliative" to stimulate economic growth since this "arises from regards to interest and personal safety" of individuals (135). Unlike Hegel, he neither conceives of colonization as an antidote to the poverty's venomous consequences nor explicitly links territorial expansion and economic fortune. Ferguson's predilection for the preservation of ardent civic activism and attachment, weakened by the atomism of commercial society, results from his views on colonial expansion. For this reason, he is a possible intellectual source for Hegel's theory. Like Hegel, Ferguson conceives of the market as an ethical sphere, though he does not maintain, as Hegel does, that it is subject to the interference of a public authority.

Hegel's justification of state intervention to combat poverty derived primarily from Steuart. Although Steuart argued that a Statesman should neither "establish what oeconomy he pleases" nor "overturn at will the established laws of it," he maintained the "principle object" of political economy is "to secure a certain fund of subsistence for all the inhabitants [and] to obviate every circumstance which may render it precarious."³⁵ Steuart contends that failures are endemic to the market, are not self-correcting, and produce poverty requiring public action. Labeling chronic poverty "a disease which must be endured" (1: 71), Steuart defends the notion that "a state should provide retreats of all sorts, for the different conditions of her decayed inhabitants" and entertains public works in undeveloped regions as a response to structural unemployment (1: 296-97). Hegel places less emphasis on the inevitability of market failure than Steuart, but permits police "oversight and advanced provision" with regard to "the commonest necessities of life"

35. Sir James Steuart, *An Inquiry into the Principles of Political Oeconomy: Being an Essay on the Science of Domestic Policy in Free Nations*, 2 vols., ed. A. S. Skinner with Noboru Kobayashi and Hiroshi Mizota (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1998), 1: 20-21; it should be noted also that Steuart employed Statesman as "a general term to signify the legislative and supreme power, according to the form of government," 1: 20.

and intervention to “moderate and shorten the duration of those dangerous convulsions” of market society.³⁶

Steuart's Statesman orchestrates, but does not unilaterally determine, intervention to eliminate poverty. Steuart insisted that “a good governor, by exposing the political state of certain classes of the people, to prevail with men of substance to join in schemes for relief.” In Steuart's framework, the rich and the poor are interdependent as “the desires of the rich, and the means of gratifying them, make them call for the services of the poor” whereas “the necessities of the poor, and their desire of becoming rich, make them cheerfully answer the summons.” Taxes further ensure the “public good, by throwing a part of the wealth of the rich into the hands of the industrious poor,”³⁷ as distinct from wealth redistribution to an indolent underclass. Steuart's emphasis on the necessity of work to mediate poverty resonates in Hegel's thought.

For Steuart, the advantages of industry, trade, and luxury compensates for defects, such as poverty, because they gradually transform the social ethos from “feudal and military” to “free and commercial.” Poverty is only a transient problem because Steuart's system, like Ferguson's, perceives the potential for economic growth to be almost limitless in the long run.³⁸ While he lauds “schemes for recalling antient [*sic*] simplicity and for making mankind honest and virtuous” as “beautiful speculations,” they are not “practical in our degenerate age” of commercial society.³⁹ Like Hegel, but unlike Ferguson, Steuart acknowledges that the past is irrevocable and the study of society requires a modern basis. Unlike both Hegel and Ferguson, however, Steuart does not attempt to integrate economic relationships into a grandiose vision of ethical life.

Colonies are a specialized, but not necessarily desirable, intervention to solve the problem of overpopulation.

36. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, § 235, 236, 236 Remark.

37. Steuart, *Principles*, 1: 293; 2: all of chapter 26 *passim*.

38. A. S. Skinner, “Sir James Steuart: The Market and the State,” *History of Economic Ideas* 1 (1993), 17.

39. Steuart, *Principles*, 2: 67; 1: 29, 69, 86; Steuart attributed a key role to “the discovery of America and the Indies” in European history because “modes changed and by turns enlivened the different branches of industry,” 1: 69. In this way, he acknowledges the importance of colonies to Europe's structural transformation.

Although "an increase in numbers in a state shews [*sic*] youth and vigour" (1: 87), Steuart alleges that population must be reduced "by degrees (either by encouragements given to leaving the country, or by establishing colonies & c.) until they be brought down to the just proportion of the growth of national subsistence" (2: 18). Colonies "check" population growth and enable the Statesman "to preserve the wealth [a nation] has already acquired" (2: 27) jeopardized by the hazardous unreliability of foreign export markets. Hegel's reliance on Steuart's mechanics of colonization is transparent, but he also absorbs Ferguson's anxiety concerning expansion's corrosive impact on social attachment. There were alternative and more sophisticated models in political economy for understanding colonies at Hegel's disposal, including those proffered by Smith and Say. Hegel ignores them because his chief concern is the manner in which a public authority could mend the frayed fabric of ethical life in commercial society.

Hegel's account of colonialism is complicated and this essay merely attempts to build upon, and contribute to, existing scholarship. An analysis of Hegel's other writings and his historical-intellectual context reveals his preoccupation with the effects of population growth and land scarcity that debilitate the full participation of the dispossessed in civil society. It is striking that Hegel endorsed colonialism because he applauded the liberation of the Americas from European dominion as mutually beneficial. It is equally curious that the prevailing antipathy toward colonies among political economists did not deflate his optimism. While avoiding speculations without textual evidence, it seems plausible to suggest that Hegel's views on colonies derived from his encounter with Steuart and Ferguson, whose ideas on poverty, population, and expansion were relevant to Hegel's notion of civil society. Hegel's proposal for colonialism emerged, in part, from his commitment to a system of ethical life within the boundaries of political economy.

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