

*Ratio and race.**

On humanity and racism in Hegel

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ABSTRACT: In this paper, I will argue that Hegel's thought is committed to racism and I will argue that Hegel's racism conflicts with his conception of universal humanity based on the possession of the capacity of reason. Moreover, I will highlight some theoretical issues stemming from an interpretive line of thought which suspects that Hegel's universalistic humanism is inseparable or even derivable from his racism.

KEYWORDS: Hegel, human being, rationality, racism.

“The struggle for reason—who is and who is not a rational animal—is the foundation of racism. Despite democracy and the culture of human rights in our time, the foundation of the struggle for reason remains unshaken.”

Ramose (2002)

Introduction

A possible way to organize the existing literature on racism in Hegel would be to divide it into the following triad of concepts: “racism,” “separability,” “possibility of appropriation.”¹

I) First, there are studies that tend to deny that Hegel was racist and consider his thought as appropriable in the sense that it can be exploited to fruitfully deal with contemporary philosophical problems and it contains core claims that can still be defended –

* I borrow the connection between *ratio and race* from MUNANGA, K. Uma abordagem conceitual das noções de raça, racismo, identidade e etnia. 2003.

¹ A very similar organization of the literature is offered by NA, J. S. The dark side of Hegel's theory of modernity: race and the other. *Esercizi Filosofici*, n. 14, p. 49-71, 2019, who distinguishes between i) interpretations that deny Hegel's racism, ii) interpretations that consider Hegel's racism somewhat separable from other theoretical cores of his theory, and iii) interpretations that take Hegel's racism to be essentially connected to his philosophy of spirit.



see, for instance, Houlgate,² Bonetto,³ DeLaurentiis,⁴ McCarney,⁵ Buchwalter,⁶ Bourgeois,⁷ Walsh,⁸ Vieweg,⁹ and Zander.¹⁰

II) Second, there are studies that (more or less openly) acknowledge that Hegel's thought contains racist elements, but tend to consider them as being separable from other parts of his thought – parts that are supposed to be more essential and appropriable in the sense specified above – see for instance Mowad,¹¹ Pinkard,¹² Brennan,¹³ Kain,¹⁴ and, as far as I can see, Kirkland.¹⁵

III) A third group of works claims that Hegel's thought contains racist elements, and that its racism cannot be cut off and separated from other core claims defended by Hegel. However, these studies argue that Hegel's thought contains conceptual resources that can be

² HOULGATE, S. **An Introduction to Hegel: Freedom, Truth and History**. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005, in particular p. 175ff.

³ BONETTO, S. Race and Racism in Hegel – An Analysis. **Minerva – An Internet Journal of Philosophy**, n. 10, p. 35-64, 2006.

⁴ DELAURENTIIS, A. Race in Hegel: Text and Context. In: Egger, M. (Ed.). **Philosophie Nach Kant: Neue Wege Zum Verständnis von Kants Transzendental- Und Moralphilosophie**. Berlin et al.: De Gruyter, 2014, p. 591-624.

⁵ MCCARNEY, J. Hegel's racism? A response to Bernasconi. **Radical Philosophy**, n. 119, 2003, p. 32-35.

⁶ BUCHWALTER, A. Is Hegel's Philosophy of History Eurocentric? In: Dudley, W. (Ed.). **Hegel and History**, Albany: SUNY Press, 2009, p. 87-110.

⁷ BOURGEOIS, B. **Etudes hégéliennes. Raison et décision**. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2002, in particular cap. 4.

⁸ WALSH W. H. Principle and prejudice in Hegel's philosophy of history. In: Pelczynski, Z. A. (Ed.). **Hegel's Political Philosophy. Problems & Perspectives**. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1971, in particular 192ff.

⁹ VIEWEG, K. Warum Hegel kein Rassist war. **Die Welt**, 24.12.2020.

¹⁰ ZANDER, F. Hegel als Zombie. Eine Erwiderung auf Daniel James und Franz Knappik. **Praefaktisch**, July 23, 2021. According to MCCASKIE, T. C. Exiled from History: Africa in Hegel's Academic Practice. **History in Africa**, n. 46, 2018, p. 23, Hegel is not racist in a strict sense – namely under an understanding of racism as amounting to biological determinism. For a criticism of this position, see JAMES, D.; KNAPPIK, F. Was meinen wir mit „Rassismus“, wenn wir von Rassismus in Hegels Philosophie sprechen? Replik auf Folko Zander, Teil 2. **Praefaktisch**, August 04, 2021. So far as I see, McCaskie does not discuss the question of appropriability.

¹¹ MOWAD, N. The Natural World of Spirit. **Environmental Philosophy**, vol. 9, n. 2, 2012, p. 55 fn. 10; MOWAD, Nicholas. The Place of Nationality in Hegel's Philosophy of Politics and Religion. In: Nuzzo, A. (Ed.). **Hegel on Religion and Politics**. Albany: SUNY Press, 2013, p. 157-186.

¹² PINKARD, T. **Hegel: A Biography**. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000, p. 493 and PINKARD, T. **Does History Make Sense?: Hegel on the Historical Shapes of Justice**. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2017, p. 94ff.

¹³ BRENNAN, T. Hegel, Empire, and Anti-Colonial Thought. In: Huggan, G. (Ed.). **The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Studies**. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013, p. 142-161.

¹⁴ KAIN, P. J. **Hegel and the Other: A Study of the Phenomenology of Spirit**. Albany: SUNY Press, 2005, p. 246ff.

¹⁵ KIRKLAND, F. Susan Buck-Morss, Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History. **Logos**, n. 2-3, 2012. KIRKLAND, F. Hegel on Race and Development. In: Taylor, P.; Alcoff, L.; Anderson, L. (Eds.). **The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Race**. London/New York: Routledge, 2018, p. 43-60. Kirkland seems to invite us to read Hegel beyond what is literally written and to regard the Hegelian ideas of freedom and development as being defensible and fruitful – but I confess I have some difficulty in placing Kirkland's interpretation within the landscape I have sketched. MOELLENDORF, D. Racism and Rationality in Hegel's Philosophy of subjective Spirit. **History of Political Thought**, vol. 13, n. 2, 1992, p. 243-255, argues that the racist elements in Hegel's thought do not necessarily follow from the central assumptions of his philosophy – yet Moellendorf does not seem to advocate for an appropriation of theoretical elements of Hegel's philosophy.

fruitfully exploited, possibly after a suitable transformation and adaptation, to deal with contemporary philosophical problems – see for instance Purtschert,¹⁶ and – if I understand them well – Na¹⁷ and Zambrana.¹⁸

IV) A final group of contributions charge Hegel with racism, arguing that his racism cannot be excised from other parts of his thought, and raise doubts about (or explicitly deny) the possibility of a fruitful appropriation of any Hegelian claims whatsoever – see for instance Eze,¹⁹ Taiwo,²⁰ Güven,²¹ Tibebe,²² Asante,²³ probably Bernasconi,²⁴ at least in spirit; and, if I interpret them correctly, Terada²⁵ and Harris²⁶.

Many of the scholars who either (I) deny that Hegel's thought is racist or (II) defend the idea that racist elements in Hegel's thought can be excised from other parts of his thought that can be made object of appropriation stress *Hegel's universalism about the concept of humanity*.²⁷ Hegel's claim, according to which – insofar as we are rational beings – we are all equally human and therefore equally worthy, respectable, and owners of rights, should make him either (I) immune to the accusation of racism or, at least, (II) show that there are parts of his thought that clash with and can be separated from his explicitly racist claims.²⁸ This

¹⁶ PURTSCHERT, P. On the limit of spirit: Hegel's racism revisited. *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, vol. 36, n. 9, 2010, p. 1039-1051.

¹⁷ NA. The dark side.

¹⁸ ZAMBRANA, R. Hegel, History and Race. In: Moyar, D. (Ed.). *The Oxford Handbook to Hegel*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2016, p. 251-260. The general idea here seems to be “reading Hegel beyond the Hegelian framework” – as Zambrana (p. 258) writes. However, Zambrana herself argues that dealing with the Hegelian treatment of race requires a more radical critical attitude.

¹⁹ EZE, E. C. Modern Western philosophy and African colonialism. In Eze, E. C. (Ed.). *African Philosophy: An Anthology*. London/New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 1998, p. 213-221 and, although implicitly, EZE, E. C. Philosophy and the “Man” in the Humanities. *Topoi*, n. 18, 1999, p. 55.

²⁰ TAIWO, O. Exorcising Hegel's Ghost: Africa's Challenge to Philosophy. *African Studies Quarterly*, vol. 1, n. 4, 1998, p. 3-16.

²¹ GÜVEN, F. Hegel and the Dialectic of Racism. *The Proceedings of the Twenty-First World Congress of Philosophy*, vol. 2, p. 51-57, 2006.

²² TIBEBU, T. *Hegel and the Third World: The Making of Eurocentrism on World History*. New York: Syracuse UP, 2011, in particular the introduction and the conclusion.

²³ ASANTE, M. K. *Kemet, Afrocentricity and Knowledge*. Trenton: Africa World Press, 1992.

²⁴ BERNASCONI, R. Hegel at the Court of the Ashanti. In: Barnett, S. (Ed.). *Hegel after Derrida*. London/Yew York: Routledge, 1998, p. 41-63; BERNASCONI, R. With What Must the Philosophy of History Begin? On the Racial Basis of Hegel's Eurocentrism. *Nineteenth Century Contexts*, n. 22, 2000, p. 171-201; BERNASCONI, R. Hegel's racism. A reply to McCarney. *Radical Philosophy*, n. 119, 2003, p. 25-27.

²⁵ TERADA, R. Hegel's racism for radicals. *Radical Philosophy*, Autumn 2019.

²⁶ HARRIS, K. A. Du Bois and Hegelian Idealism. *Idealistic Studies*, vol. 51, n. 2, 2021, p. 149-167.

²⁷ The passage from PS, § 393 Addition is often quoted to justify these views – see below, pp.66-68.

²⁸ For group I) see, for example, HOULGATE. *An Introduction*, p. 175-176; BONETTO. Race and Racism; McCARNEY. Hegel's racism?, p. 33; DELAURENTIIS. Race in Hegel, p. 623; BUCHWALTER. Is Hegel's Philosophy of History Eurocentric?, p. 92; BOURGEOIS. *Études hégéliennes*, p. 245-246, 251, 261 and, possibly, WALSH. Principle and prejudice, p. 192ff. For group II) see, for example, PINKARD. *Hegel: A Biography*, p. 493; PINKARD. *Does History Make Sense?*, p. 96; BRENNAN. Hegel, Empire, and Anti-

argumentative line tends (at least implicitly) to conceive of universalism about humanity as a part of Hegel's thought that can be made into an object of theoretical appropriation.

In this paper I would like to discuss an argument which stems from a different interpretive approach, one that shows that racist elements in Hegel's thought are inextricably tied to – and, paradoxically, threaten – his conception of the human being as rational being, thus undermining the possibility of theoretical appropriation. The theoretical core of this argument is all but original.²⁹ More particularly, my formulation of the argument can be seen as a sort of transposition of Mills'³⁰ argument against Kant – in particular I will adapt the argument replacing the Kantian concept of the moral person with Hegel's concept of human being as rational being, thus getting closer to Eze's intuitions.³¹

Colonial Thought; and KAIN. **Hegel and the Other**, p. 254-255.

²⁹ What I hope to offer in this paper is a convincing formulation of this argument with respect to Hegel's work. The spirit of the argument seems to be present, with a certain degree of approximation and in a more or less explicit way, in the reflection of racialized subjects in the most diverse areas of the humanities and of knowledge in general both linked and detached from exegetical purposes in relation to Hegel.

³⁰ MILLS, C. Kant's Untermenschen. In Valls, A. (Ed.). **Race and Racism in Modern Philosophy**. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2005, p. 169-193.

³¹ In a way, the subtitle of my paper could be "Hegel's Untermenschen," paraphrasing the title of Mills' brilliant essay. I will therefore discuss, in relation to Hegel's texts, an argument that is characterized as a specific case of Eze's thesis (EZE, E. C. **Achieving our Humanity**. London/New York: Routledge, 2001, p. 43): "the modern idea of humanity is irrevocably linked to a theory of race." This idea seems to ground Ferreira da Silva's theoretical proposal in her FERREIRA DA SILVA, D. **Toward a Global Idea of Race**. Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 2008, in which she sees raciality as being linked to a specific conception of the human being qua self-determined and transparent being (see p. xiv). Starting from this claim, Ferreira da Silva aims at drawing consequences that are more radical than Eze's and Mill's (see FERREIRA DA SILVA. **Toward a Global Idea of Race**, p. 10-11). Another text that lays out central elements of the argument with respect to modern philosophy in general is EZE. **Philosophy and the "Man"**; while EZE, E. C. **Race and the Enlightenment**. Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1997 and EZE. **Modern Western philosophy**, contain parts that more specifically bear on Hegel's philosophy. In general, it can be said that my paper owes Eze, Ferreira da Silva and Mills much more than is acknowledged here – see also Eze's works on Kant and Hume: EZE, E. C. **The Color of Reason: The Idea of "Race" in Kant's Anthropology**. In: Eze, E. C. (Ed.). **Postcolonial African Philosophy. A critical reader**. Oxford: Blackwell, 1997, p. 103-131 and EZE, E. C. **Hume, Race, and Human Nature**. **Journal of the History of Ideas**, vol. 61, n. 4, 2000, p. 691-698. Besides Eze, Ferreira da Silva and Mills, references that have been more important than explicitly acknowledged are the works of Bernasconi (BERNASCONI. **Hegel at the Court of the Ashanti**; BERNASCONI. **With What Must the Philosophy of History Begin?**; BERNASCONI, **Hegel's racism**. – but see also Bernasconi's works on Kant). Another relevant work, which I have read just before the acceptance of this paper for publication is FARR, A. **Whiteness Visible: Enlightenment Racism and the Structure of Racialized Consciousness**. In: Yancy, G. (Ed.). **What White Looks Like. African-American Philosophers on the Whiteness Question**. London/New York: Routledge, 2004, p. 143-159. Authors who have dealt with the relationship between racism and modern philosophy in general are, among others GOLDBERG, D. T. **Racist Culture. Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning**. Oxford/Cambridge: Wiley-Blackwell, 1993; MILLS, C. **The Racial Contract**. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1997; GILROY, P. **The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness**. London: Verso, 1993, cap. 2; WEST, C. **A Genealogy of Modern Racism**. In: Essed, P.; Goldberg, T. (Eds.). **Race Critical Theories. Text and Context**. Malden: Blackwell, 2002, p. 90-112; VALLS, A. (Ed.). **Race and Racism in Modern Philosophy**. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2005; ANDRADE, Érico. **A opacidade do Iluminismo**. **Kriterion**, vol. 58, n. 137, 2017, p. 291-309; HARFOUCH, J. **Another Mind-Body Problem. A History of Racial Non-Being**. Albany: SUNY, 2018. For an analysis specifically focused on Classical German philosophy, see PARK, P. K. J. **Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy. Racism in the Formation of the**

As a matter of fact, I will argue that Hegel is committed to racism³² and I will argue that Hegel's racism conflicts with his conception of universal humanity based on the possession of the capacity of reason.³³ Moreover, I will highlight some theoretical issues stemming from an interpretive line of thought which suspects the inseparability (or even the derivation) of Hegel's universalistic humanism from his racism, and therefore tends not to consider it as a claim that can be fruitfully made object of theoretical appropriation.

To achieve my goal, I will proceed as follows. Building on a recent essay by John McDowell, in Section 1, I will sketch a distinction between the two concepts of freedom that seem to be mobilized by Hegel to characterize the sphere of what is specifically human. The first concept is the concept of "formal freedom" (FF), the "fact of reason," the essence of what characterizes us as human beings from a metaphysical point of view.³⁴ The second is the concept of freedom as consciousness of the autonomy of formal freedom (CAFF), that is, the consciousness of the self-determination of reason. Building on this distinction, in Section 2 I will attribute the following claims to Hegel:

CLAIM A) All human beings possess FF in equal measure.

CLAIM B) Human beings create(d) societies that grant to their members different levels of CAFF.

CLAIM C) Hegel is a scientific racist.

CLAIM D) Racial determinations have no influence on the attribution of FF to human individuals and therefore on their capacity to have CAFF.

CLAIM E) Racial distinctions seem to influence the level of CAFF that particular societies enable(d) for their members.

CLAIM F) Non-Europeans (non-whites) seem to possess not only lower levels of CAFF but also lower levels of FF – and are therefore less human.

As we can see, CLAIM F) is in tension with CLAIM A) and its corollary, CLAIM D).

Philosophical Canon 1780-1830. Albany: SUNY, 2013. For reason of space, I do not mention here the vast specialized literature on racism in Kant.

³² I will try to specify Hegel's version of racism in fn. 55.

³³ This tension originates, at least in my reconstruction, from a reading of Hegel through a McDowellian lens – of course, this is *one* interpretation of Hegel among others possible interpretations. I opt for such a reading for two reasons. First, I believe this reading accounts for Hegel's relevant works at both the level of Hegel's general framework and at the level of textual details. Second, I believe that the tension that originates from this reading is relevant for many contemporary problems – namely, it seems to be able to encourage further reflection on problems that are important in present times and that go far beyond the exegesis of Hegel's thought. I would like to thank the anonymous referee for helping me clearly see this point.

³⁴ Of course, FF does not make an animal organism belong to the species *homo sapiens*, but it does make it a rational animal. Hegel does not seem interested in discussing possible non-human rational beings.

In Section 3, I will distinguish two general interpretive attitudes according to which this tension can be resolved – namely, a conservative attitude and a critical attitude – and I will briefly put forward some relevant questions arising from the critical attitude.

1. Two relevant concepts of “freedom”

Freedom, for Hegel, is said in many ways.³⁵ More specifically, Hegel has a generic, logical concept of freedom that is instantiated in different ways.

The generic, logical concept of freedom can be explained as “self-reference.” Freedom, in general, defines activities and processes that are not constrained by something external to themselves. The instantiations of this concept pervade, according to Hegel, both the merely natural world and the specifically human sphere. Hegel organizes them according to the principle of an increasing adequacy to the “standard” defined by the generic, logical concept of freedom. That is: configurations of the merely natural world and of the specifically human sphere can be characterized as being “free” to different degrees depending on their degree of adequacy to the generic, logical concept of “self-reference.”

Examples of instantiations of this generic, logical concept in the natural world, include universal gravitation³⁶ (the system of celestial bodies can be analyzed in terms of a dynamic process that is not limited by something external to itself) and living organisms in general and non-rational animals in particular³⁷ (for insofar as they cognitively and practically assimilated into their own environment, the latter is not conceived as an external limitation but as a part and a condition of their own animality).

In this paper, however, I will focus on two instantiations of the concept of freedom that are realized in the specifically human world, namely: 1.1) what Hegel calls “formal freedom”³⁸ (FF), that is, rationality, which according to Hegel defines human beings as animals of a special kind;³⁹ 1.2) freedom as the understanding of the autonomy of reason⁴⁰ – since I do not

³⁵ Some of the ideas in this section are based on my reconstruction in SANGUINETTI, F. Hegel and the Question “What Characterizes Human Beings qua Animal Organisms of a Specific Sort?” In: Altobrando, A; Biasetti, P. (Eds.). **Natural Born Monads**. Berlin: DeGruyter, 2020, p. 111-136.

³⁶ See PN, §§ 267 and 269 Addition.

³⁷ See PN, § 351.

³⁸ See NS 1827/28, p. 567-568.

³⁹ This is the topic of the Philosophy of the Subjective Spirit.

⁴⁰ This is the topic of the *Philosophy of History*.

know of any technical term used by Hegel to designate this specific concept of freedom, I will refer to it as “consciousness of the autonomy of formal freedom” (CAFF), following the path opened by McDowell. Indeed, Hegel often uses the term “freedom” indiscriminately to refer to both these capacities. Here, I shall borrow from McDowell⁴¹ a distinction between these two specific meanings of the term. In what follows, I will take up the McDowellian characterization of these two instantiations of freedom and adapt it to my argumentative goals in order to ground my reconstruction in Section 2.

1.1 Human formal freedom (FF)

According to the interpretation I follow in this paper, Hegel believes that FF is what characterizes human beings as animal organisms of a special kind from a metaphysical point of view. To have FF means, for Hegel, to be rational. One way in which the Hegelian concept of FF can be translated into contemporary vocabulary is as “responsiveness to norms as reasons.”⁴² That is: human beings are essentially formally free to the extent that they are in a position to provide reasons about what they think and do. Human beings are beings who are in the position to answer to questions like “Why do/did/will you do this?” or “Why do/did/will you think this?”

But what does it mean, more precisely, to say that human beings are essentially formally free insofar as they are responsive to norms as reasons?

Hegel believes that human theoretical performances are normatively constrained by how things are in the world and that human practical performances are governed by posited norms that determine how the world should be. Moreover, Hegel regards human beings as beings for whom norms *are self-consciously known*. This differentiates human beings from other animals. Non-human animals are also, according to Hegel, responsive to norms. However, they do not know norms as reasons.⁴³ To the extent that an individual self-consciously knows

⁴¹ See MCDOWELL, J. Why Does It Matter to Hegel that Geist Has a History? In Zuckert, R. and Kreines, J. (Eds.). **Hegel on Philosophy in History**. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2017, p. 15-32.

⁴² See, for instance, MCDOWELL, J. Autonomy and Its Burdens. **The Harvard Review of Philosophy**, vol. 17, n. 1, 2010, p. 4-15, PINKARD. **Hegel: A Biography**. See also KNAPPIK, F. **Im Reich der Freiheit**. Berlin/Boston: DeGruyter, 2013, cap. 6.2, for textual evidence that may support this proposal.

⁴³ See PN, § 360. See MCDOWELL. Why Does It Matter, p. 18: “The capacity to respond to reasons is not special to rational animals, but the capacity to respond to reasons taken to be reasons is. Some things that happen in the lives of nonrational animals can be understood as responses to reasons. A prey animal’s flight from a

the norms that govern his or her thought and action, these norms become *reasons* for what he or she thinks or does. This is the peculiar kind of freedom that characterizes human beings as animal organisms of a special kind – for norms, insofar as they are known, are no longer external constraints that limit such organisms.⁴⁴

predator is a response to the reason for fleeing that danger is. But rational animals are distinctive in responding to reasons self-consciously. The capacity to speak is integral to this. If a human being is acting for a reason, she can say what she is doing and why.”

⁴⁴ This reconstruction might seem to be very distant from Hegel’s text, in particular to those who are not familiar with post-Sellarsian interpretations of Hegel (in particular with McDowell’s interpretation and with the readings that are inspired by it). As much as possible, I will try here to unpack some argumentative steps in order to provide a textual basis for the interpretation I am following – as already mentioned, I offer a deeper treatment in my SANGUINETTI, F. Hegel and the Question “What Characterizes Human Beings qua Animal Organisms of a Specific Sort?” In: Altobrando, A.; Biasetti, P. (Eds.). **Natural Born Monads**. Berlin: DeGruyter, 2020, p. 111–136, which is based in turn on insights by CORTI, L. **Pensare l’esperienza. Una lettura dell’ “Antropologia” di Hegel**. Bologna: Pendragon, 2016; CORTI, L. Conceptualism, Non-Conceptualism, and the Method of Hegel’s Psychology. In: Hermann-Sinai, S.; Ziglioli, L. (Eds.). **Hegel’s Philosophical Psychology**. London: Routledge, 2016, p. 228–250; CORTI, L. Senses and Sensations. On Hegel’s Later Account of Perceptual Experience. In: Sanguinetti, F.; Abath, A. (Eds.) **McDowell and Hegel. Perceptual Experience, Thought and Action**. Switzerland: Springer, p. 97–116.

1) Hegel takes human beings to be special animals from a metaphysical point of view. The specification “from a metaphysical point of view” means that it is not biology that determines the special status of human beings. [See NG 1826, p. 558 (*my translation*): “[T]he human being is an animal, this [fact] is an object for him; he knows that he is an animal and this consciousness raises him to this higher sphere, which brings with itself a higher determination according to which he is spirit; insofar as he knows that he is an animal, he is not an animal anymore.” See also NH 1822, p. 5 (*my translation*): “Natural things, animals, do not know what they are, and the human being distinguishes itself insofar as he conceives of himself.”].

2) The metaphysically special character of human being is what Hegel calls spirit. Hegel defines it as what is “substantial” in human beings, his “*essence*”, his “genuine reality” (ES, § 377, p. 3).

3) Hegel says that the essence of spirit (= the essence of what is substantial in human beings) is freedom. [See NS 1827/28, p. 567–568 (*my translation*): “The essence of spirit is what is simply substantial, freedom, this lies in our consciousness.”]

4) As I have stated above, Hegel uses the concept of freedom in many ways. In light of this assumption, I interpret freedom qua essence of spirit as a specific instantiation of the logical concept of freedom qua self-reference. Particularly, I interpret freedom qua essence of spirit as *self-conscious self-reference*. This differentiates spirit from the kind of instantiation of the logical concept of freedom which takes place in nature. [See NG 1825, p. 198 (*my translation*): “This freedom, this being at one with oneself, this universal which has the universal as its object, is the concept of spirit,” – I interpret here the expressions “being at one with oneself” and “the universal which has the universal as its object” as formulations that designate the structure of self-consciousness].

5) In light of Hegel’s essentialism, self-conscious self-reference is the essence of spirit (= the *concept* of spirit), while all the shapes described in the Philosophy of Spirit are modes or realizations (Hegel calls them *shapes*) of self-conscious self-reference, which are progressively more adequate to the concept of self-conscious self-reference (= they are the manifestations *in reality* – or *in the existence* – of the concept of spirit). [See ES, § 553, p. 257 (*translation modified*): “The *concept* of spirit has its *reality* in the spirit. That this reality be *knowledge* of the absolute Idea and thus in identity with the concept, involves the necessary aspect that the *implicitly* free intelligence be in its actuality liberated to its concept, in order to be the *shape* worthy of that concept. The subjective and the objective spirit are to be regarded as the way on which this aspect of *reality* or existence develops itself.”]

6) This means that in the Philosophy of Subjective Spirit, the first part of the Philosophy of Spirit, we do not know what spirit is in its totality (= we do not know all the shapes of spirit and we do not examine to what extent they correspond to freedom qua concept of spirit, i.e., to freedom qua self-conscious self-reference). [See NH 1822, p. 5 (*my translation*): “[In these lectures on the philosophy of subjective spirit, FS] [w]e do consider the internal (*innerlich*) spirit, not spirit in general and as such (*nicht die reine Geistigkeit*), but the finite spirit.”]

As McDowell has argued, FF can be read as a capacity that coincides with a specific notion of autonomy – the autonomy that coincides with (being in the position of) knowing what reasons guide our thinking and our action.⁴⁵ At the same time, FF is also a capacity for the actualization of another form of autonomy. In particular, FF is what makes it possible for a given being to be in the position of knowing that the rational force of the reasons he or she adduces as a guide for his or her thought and actions is not derived from anything external to the reasons themselves. FF is therefore a potential for the consciousness of the autonomy of formal freedom (CAFF).

In the next section, continuing to follow McDowell's interpretation, I will try to define more clearly this latter concept of freedom.

1.2 Freedom as consciousness of the autonomy of formal freedom (CAFF)

CAFF can be explained as freedom qua consciousness of the self-determination (or

7) More specifically, in the Philosophy of Subjective Spirit we will know what spirit is “only formally and universally.” [See NS 1827/28, p. 567-568 (*my translation*): “here [*in the Philosophy of Subjective Spirit*, FS] what is spirit can be said only formally and universally; if we could define it already here, all the rest would be unnecessary.”]

8) Now, the Philosophy of Subjective Spirit seems to be organized in a “fractal” way with respect to the Philosophy of Spirit in general. Namely, the Philosophy of Subjective Spirit shares the structure of the Philosophy of Spirit, albeit on a smaller scale (since the Philosophy of Subjective Spirit is a part of the Philosophy of Spirit, and, therefore, a set of shapes of the latter – see, again, ES, § 553 quoted above). The Philosophy of Subjective Spirit thus also has a *concept* which operates as “essence” and a series of *shapes* which are its modes or instantiations in reality.

9) The *concept* which operates as the essence at the level of the Philosophy of Subjective Spirit is the concept of “formal freedom” [NS 1827/28, p. 567-568 (*my translation*)] – *which is what I call FF in this paper*. Its modes of realization (= its *shapes*) are the theoretical and practical capacities – such as sensing (§§ 399–402), habituating oneself (§§ 409–410), being conscious of an external world (§§ 413–423), being self-conscious (§§ 424–437), having intuitions of objects in space and time (§§ 446–450), having representations that are not bound to one's present empirical situation (§§ 451–457), speaking a language (§§ 458–464), comprehending concepts, judging, making inferences (§§ 465–468), having practical feelings (§§ 471–472), practical inclinations, and the capacity of making choices (§§ 473–477)]. I interpret these capacities as *conditions of possibility for one to possess FF*.

10) If all this is plausible, then one can interpret the Philosophy of Subjective Spirit as an explanation (Hegel talks of ‘explanation and demonstration’) of the formal essence of spirit (= FF), the latter being conceived as what is substantial in human beings and makes them special animals from a metaphysical point of view. The interpretive step which might be more controversial is the interpretation of FF as autonomy, in the basic sense of self-conscious responsivity to reasons. My treatment of what I call CALF in this paper should support this interpretive option.

⁴⁵ See McDOWELL. *Why Does It Matter*, p. 18: “[S]elf-conscious rationality, the capacity to think or act in light of what one takes to be reasons, coincides with freedom in a certain sense. If one's thinking or acting is determined by considerations to which one attributes the authority of reasons, one is autonomous, self-governing.”

autonomy) of reason – or being conscious of the fact that the reasons according to which we act or think *have their rational force because they are actually reasons*.

Whereas the concept of freedom as *FF* is not a gradual concept (an individual does or does not possess the capacity to know which reasons guide his or her behavior – there is no middle ground), the concept of freedom as *CAFF* is a gradual concept (that is, the more an individual is free in this sense, the more he or she is aware that the reasons according to which he or she guides his or her life have the rational force that they have as reasons).

The first [= *FF*, FS] is freedom as it figures in “the fact of reason.” Freedom in that sense is part of being a rational subject; it is in play whenever a human being regards a consideration as having rational force, however her so regarding it is to be explained. Someone is free in the second sense [= *CAFF*, FS] when the explanation of her taking a consideration to have rational force is that she recognizes the rational force it has. As a feature of a life, freedom in the second sense comes in degrees. The more one’s life is led in light of considerations one knows to have the rational force one attributes to them, the freer one is.⁴⁶

To further explain the difference between *FF* and *CAFF*, McDowell offers an example that seems enlightening to me.⁴⁷ All human beings, insofar as they possess *FF*, act or think on the basis of reasons as reasons. However, someone might think that the reasons another individual has for believing or doing something derive their rational force from something external to themselves (e.g., from education). Should this individual come to believe that it was his education that serves as the ground for his belief or actions, he or she will no longer consider it as a reason. The more an individual acts or thinks on the basis of reasons whose rational force he or she knows to be proper to reasons as reasons (without such rational force deriving from something external), the more such an individual is free in the sense of *CAFF*.

According to this interpretation, the concept of *CAFF* would be the concept that is involved in the “world history” that Hegel reconstructs in his *Philosophy of History*.⁴⁸ The various forms of life considered by Hegel in his world history would constitute moments of advancement in the conditions that allow for increasingly higher degrees of *CAFF*, that is, higher degrees of consciousness of *FF*:

⁴⁶ McDOWELL. *Why Does It Matter*, p. 31.

⁴⁷ See McDOWELL. *Why Does It Matter*, p. 21-22.

⁴⁸ See, for instance, Introduction 1830/31, p. 22: “World history is the progress in the consciousness of freedom—a progress that we must come to know in its necessity.” Hegel’s philosophy of history can therefore be interpreted as a philosophical history of *CAFF*, i.e. a philosophical history of the consciousness of the autonomy of reason.

In the world of the ancient Orient, people do not yet know that the Spirit – the human as such – is free [= *they do not have an adequate consciousness of FF, FS*]. Because they do not know this, they are not free [*in the sense of CAFF, not in the sense that they lack FF, FS*]. They know only that one person is free; but for this very reason such freedom is mere arbitrariness, savagery, stupified passion; or even a softness or tameness of passion, which is itself a mere accident of nature and therefore quite arbitrary. This one person is therefore only a despot, not a free man. It was among the Greeks that the consciousness of freedom first arose, and thanks to that consciousness they were free. But they, and the Romans as well, knew only that some persons are free, not the human as such. Even Plato and Aristotle did not know this. Not only did the Greeks have slaves, therefore – and Greek life and their splendid freedom were bound up with this – but their freedom itself was partly a matter of mere chance, a transient and limited flowering, and partly a hard servitude of the human and the humane. It was first the Germanic peoples, through Christianity, who came to the awareness that every human is free by virtue of being human, and that the freedom of spirit comprises our most human nature.⁴⁹

This path thus leads to the modern way of life, in which “unqualified self-determination is for the first time a real possibility.”⁵⁰ That is, modernity – according to Hegel – has provided the sociocultural conditions for all individuals to recognize the reasons that guide their actions and thoughts as being independent (of the authority) of something external to themselves. At the same time, modernity has established the need to critically reflect on the credentials of such reasons as a condition for leading an authentically free life in the sense of CAFF.⁵¹

2. *FF, CAFF and the racial distinctions – a short circuit*

Having defined the two relevant concepts of freedom on the basis of McDowell’s investigation, in this section I will investigate if racist assumptions influence the Hegelian attribution of FF and CAFF to individuals belonging to different societies, and, in case they does, I will investigate how this influence takes place. In particular, I suggest that such racist

⁴⁹ Introduction 1830/31, p. 21. It seems surprising that Hegel is arguing here as if the Germanic nations – which for Hegel also include (at least part of) the modern European world – were not linked to slavery. On this point, see BERNASCONI. *Hegel at the Court of the Ashanti*, p. 55. See also Intro 1830/31, p. 21-22.

⁵⁰ See McDOWELL. *Why Does It Matter*, p. 32.

⁵¹ See Introduction 1830/31, p. 25-26: “Nothing happens therefore, nothing is accomplished, unless the individuals involved are satisfied as well. They are particular persons, and this means that they have their own particular needs, drives, and interests. Among these needs there is not only one’s own need and will, but also one’s individual insight, conviction, or at least one’s own viewpoint (if the need for argument, for understanding, and for reasoning is at all aroused). Hence people demand, as well, that if they are expected to be active in behalf of something, then it should be in accord with their views – so that their opinions can be in sympathy with it, whether in regard to the utility of it, or their own rights or advantage. This is especially an essential aspect of our time, in which people are less drawn to something by their trust in authority, and would prefer to devote their activity to a cause on the basis of their own understanding of it, their independent conviction and opinions.”

assumptions give rise to a tension between different claims that seem to be endorsed by Hegel. More precisely, Hegel explicitly attributes a lower degree of CAFF to groups which are racially characterized as non-Caucasian.⁵² This claim is racist and Eurocentric, but is still compatible with the gradualist character of the concept of CAFF.⁵³ However, the way Hegel does this leads one to think that he is at the same time implicitly attributing lower degrees of FF to individuals which are racially characterized as non-Caucasian. The attribution of lower degrees of FF to individuals racially characterized as non-Caucasian would contradict the thesis according to which all human beings possess FF in equal measure – it therefore conflicts with the non-gradualist character of the concept of FF. In what follows, I will try to elucidate the claims that give rise to this tension. The first three claims are, so to speak, “simple,” while the last three are “compound,” insofar as they relate CLAIM C) to either CLAIM A) or CLAIM B). In Section 3 I will consider two possible ways to explain the above mentioned tension.

CLAIM A) All human beings possess FF in equal measure.

The concept of FF is a concept that does not admit degrees. Since FF is, for Hegel, what essentially defines the human being as a metaphysically special animal, either an entity possesses FF (therefore, it is a human being) or it does not possess FF (therefore, it is not a human being).⁵⁴

CLAIM B) Human beings create(d) societies that grant to their members different levels of CAFF.

As a matter of fact, the concept of CAFF does admit degrees. The greater an individual’s CAFF is, the greater is his or her consciousness that the reasons he or she has to think or do

⁵² BERNASCONI. *With What Must*, p. 184, notes that the term Caucasian is “Blumembach’s racial designator for Europeans.” Technically, for Hegel, Caucasians include Middle-Eastern peoples as well (see below, fn. 57) – but it seems clear that there is a tendency to regard Europeans as the most prominent prototype of the Caucasian race.

⁵³ According to BERNASCONI. *With What Must*, this attribution of lower degrees of CAFF seems to clash with the Hegelian claims about how purely natural determinations (such as Hegel conceives of racial determinations) influence determinations that are proper to us qua human beings. See also MOELLENDORF, *Racism and rationality*; MUSSETT, S. *On the Threshold of History: The Role of Nature and Africa in Hegel’s Philosophy*. *APA Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience*, 2003, p. 39-46; FARR. *Whiteness Visible*, and TIBEBU. *Hegel and the Third World*, p. 82.

⁵⁴ In light of what I have put forward in Section 1.1 and in the fn. 44, I take FF not to be a gradual concept. As stated above, the possession of FF seems to sharply discriminate between beings who *are in the position to self-consciously know* what are the reasons which govern their thought and their action, and beings who are not.

something possess the rational force he/she attributes to them – in the sense that his or her reasons do not derive their rational force from something other than themselves (e.g., they do not derive their rational force from a particular education, or from something external). The more an individual knows that the reasons he or she has for thinking or doing something derive their rational force from the fact that they are authentic reasons, the more an individual is free in this sense.

CLAIM C) Hegel is a scientific racist.

By scientific racism I mean that he endorses “the recourse to science to justify and rationalize hierarchical comparison between human populations.”⁵⁵

Hegel seems to accept the Blumenbachian distinction of the human population into five races (Caucasian, Mongolian, Ethiopian, American, and Malay).⁵⁶ In particular Hegel believes that racial distinctions are strictly linked to geographical differences between the continents,⁵⁷ and that they manifest themselves both on a physical and spiritual level.⁵⁸

With regard to physical differences, Hegel endorses the scientific approaches of Blumenbach and Camper, according to which osteological configuration provides a criterion for distinguishing and hierarchizing races from a physical point of view. Hegel underwrites such distinctions, focusing above all on the comparison between the Caucasian race and the Ethiopian race. In the 1825 *Lectures on the Philosophy of the Subjective Spirit*, for example, Hegel cites studies by Camper, who

⁵⁵ MELONI, M. Scientific Racism. In Turner, B. (Ed.). **The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social Theory**. 2017. There seems to be debate about what version of racism could be attributed to Hegel – whether biological, geographical, cultural, or a mixture of some or all of them – see for example BUCK-MORSS, S. **Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History**. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009, p. 74; NA. The dark side; BERNASCONI. Hegel at the Court of the Ashanti, p. 307 fn. 83; BERNASCONI. With What Must, p. 186; HOFFHEIMER, M. H. Hegel, Race, Genocide. **The Southern Journal of Philosophy**, n. 39, 2001, p. 40 and fn. 55 and 92; LETTOW, S. Modes of naturalization: Race, sex and biology in Kant, Schelling and Hegel. **Philosophy and Social Criticism**, vol. 39, n. 2, 2013, p. 128 and TIBEBU, **Hegel and the Third World**, p. 181. Here I attribute to Hegel a scientific racism in a broad sense on the following grounds: i) in his *Encyclopedia*, Hegel take race to be the subject of a specific philosophical science, namely Anthropology; ii) more generally, Hegel considers philosophy as a specific kind of reflection (*Nachdenken*) that starts from the results offered by the particular sciences. In any case, it is worth remembering here that Hegel’s conception of science needs not to coincide with any contemporary conception – see on this JAMES/KNAPPIK, Replik auf Folko Zander, Teil 2.

⁵⁶ Hegel seems to regard the last two categories as less clearly defined, if compared to the first three. Also, in the lectures of 1827/28 Hegel only mentions 4 races, thus excluding the Malay race. See BERNASCONI. With What Must, p. 195 fn. 40. On Hegel and Blumenbach, see HOFFHEIMER. Hegel, Race, Genocide.

⁵⁷ The Caucasian race corresponds to the European and Middle Eastern populations, the Mongolian race to the Asian populations, the Ethiopian race to the African populations, the American race to the populations of the Americas – the Malay race is not further specified.

⁵⁸ See PS, § 393 Addition, p. 40.

represented a line running from the forehead to the upper lip, and from this, from the root of the nose, another line running to the hole of the ear, and observed the angle between these lines. He shows that this angle among animals is very acute, while in men it becomes more obtuse, and in the most beautiful Greek profiles it come close to a right angle – or is a right angle. According to this angle, he established the distinction among the races. He noted that the angle in the Caucasian race comes closer to a right angle, while among the N* the mouth, the animal part in contrast to forehead and eyes, emerges outward, and therefore the angle becomes more acute.⁵⁹

He also reports that such observations are corroborated by Blumenbach:

He placed the skulls next to each other, in such a way that the posterior bones in particular came to form a horizontal line toward each other, and observed that the jaw (*die Kiefer*) protrudes with respect to the forehead, and that the posterior bones stick out or come inwards. In the N* he also observed that the mouth protrudes outward (*den hervorstehenden Mund*), and that the anterior teeth do not stand perpendicular but protrude (*ragen*) outward [...].⁶⁰

In these quotes it seems evident that the osteological comparison between skulls does not only ground the distinction between racial groups, but also establishes hierarchical relations between them. In fact, Hegel draws a general contrast between the form of the human skull and the form of the skulls of other animals. Upon doing so, he argues that there are human races in which the difference is more pronounced (the Caucasian race) and human races in which such a difference is less marked (the Ethiopian race).

This seems to imply that some human races are somehow closer to animality – and such a statement, within a theoretical context where the superiority of human beings over other animals is a deeply rooted assumption, clearly has a disqualifying character.⁶¹

⁵⁹ NG, 1825, p. 238-239 (*my translation*). See, on this point, WEST. A Genealogy. I have opted to translate Hegel's use of the German word "Neger" with "N*". My reason for this is that the English word "Negro", which is probably the closest translation of "Neger" in the context of Hegel's writings, is offensive. Moreover, as a non native speaker, I suspect that the German word "Neger" is more offensive than the English word "Negro" – see BUSCH, C. The Other of the Other?: Cultural Studies, Theory, and the Location of the Modernist Signifier. *Comparative Literature Studies*, vol. 42, n. 2, 2005, p. 162-180, fn. 19. I have taken the liberty to modify the quotations from other English translations of Hegel's works to match this translation.

⁶⁰ NG, 1825, p. 239 (*my translation*). See the drawing entitled "Tab II" at the end of the book *De Generis humani varietate nativa*. There Blumenbach presents five skulls that should correspond to the racial types he distinguishes and are ordered according the principle indicated in the quotation above. HOFFHEIMER. Hegel, Race, Genocide, fn. 91, p. 61 claims that Hegel read the 1795 edition of Blumenbach's text.

⁶¹ These hierarchical and disqualifying considerations are supported by two arguments. The first argument is aesthetic. According to Hegel, the skull of the Caucasians is more beautiful because the angle generated by the relevant lines would be closer to a right angle (as "in the most beautiful Greek profile" [NG 1825, p. 238 (*my translation*)]). Moreover, the skull of the Caucasians would be rounder – see NG 1825, p. 239. Although in the *Aesthetics* Hegel defines the circle as "only a curved line of little interest," he seems to regard it as a geometrical figure of greater perfection with respect to the others (at least, within the context of his analysis of human skulls). The second argument is cognitive. Hegel considers the supposed prominence of the buccal region with

It thus seems clear that physiological distinctions between races go hand in hand with differences in spiritual determinations⁶² – these are actually what Hegel is most interested in.⁶³

In what follows, I will merely consider the relation between racial determinations and the concepts of FF and CAFF.

CLAIM D) Racial determinations have no influence on the attribution of FF to human individuals and therefore on their capacity to have CAFF.

This claim is in a sense a corollary of CLAIM A): since the concept of FF discriminates between human beings and non-human beings, and since FF is not a gradual concept, racial distinctions between human individuals cannot be a relevant variable in the attribution of FF to a given individual. An argument in favor of Hegel's explicit commitment to this thesis can be extracted from Hegel's brief mention of the debate about monogenism (i.e., the thesis according to which human beings belonging to different races have the same origin) and polygenism (i.e., the thesis according to which human beings belonging to different races have different origins). Indeed, Hegel argues that such a discussion is irrelevant for the attribution of rights to human beings, because all human beings, qua rational beings (= insofar

respect to the frontal region as indicating a priority of the instincts that are more closely linked to animality (eating and drinking) over the cognitive capacities that are more closely linked to "theory" and that would specifically differentiate us from animals (seeing and understanding). See NS 1827/28, p. 609 (*my translation*): "If we represent the angle from the opening of the ear to the nose, which goes all the way to the forehead, at the tip (*Spitze*), and thus [we observe] the degree according to which the mouth protrudes (*das Hervortreten des Mundes*), we are thus reminded of animal physiognomy (monkeys), for the practical part of the face protrudes, the part that satisfies the needs of eating and drinking. When this angle comes closer to a right angle, these organs withdraw, the eye emerges, the ideal sense, the forehead, that which understands." Hegel also says that "the forehead in the N* is shorter than in the Caucasian race, in which it, on the contrary, is moderate (*gemäßigt*), less prominent (*weniger gewölbt*)." [NG 1825, p. 239 (*my translation*)]. The attribution of lower size and regularity of the forehead to blacks seems to suggest the attribution of a lower intellectual capacity.

⁶² From a physiological point of view, osteological considerations are not the only criterion for differentiation and hierarchization among racially classified groups. In fact Hegel seems to support the hierarchization of these groups also by appealing to the question of skin color. For an argument offered by Hegel regarding this latter criterion of hierarchization, in which, once more, he suggests a greater proximity of non-Caucasians to non-rational animals, see NG 1825, p. 237.

⁶³ See NS 1827/28, p. 609. Several authors have pointed out a contradiction between the Hegelian treatment of phrenology and physiognomics in the *Phenomenology of the Spirit* and the fact that Hegel endorses the osteological considerations of Camper and Blumenbach in the *Encyclopædia*. For an attempt to explain this contradiction, see JAMES, D.; KNAPPIK, F. Warum wir über die rassistischen und pro-kolonialistischen Elemente in Hegels Denken reden müssen: Replik auf Folko Zander, Teil 1. **Praefaktish**, July 28, 2021: the thesis of James/Knappik is that in his *Phenomenology* Hegel is discussing relations of determination from the physiological to the spiritual at the level of the individual, while in his *Anthropology* he is considering such relations at the level of populations. According to them, denying that osteological factors do not influence spiritual determinations at the level of individuals would not prevent Hegel from arguing that they influence spiritual determinations at the level of populations.

as they possess FF), are equal, regardless of if they belong to one race or another.⁶⁴

[β] With respect to the diversity of races of mankind it must be noticed first of all that the merely historical question, whether all human races sprang from *one* couple or from several, is of no concern whatever to us in philosophy. [α] Importance was attached to this question because it was believed that by assuming descent from several couples the spiritual superiority of one human stock over another could be explained, indeed it was hoped to prove that human beings are by nature so diverse in their spiritual capacities that some may be dominated like animals. But descent affords no ground for the entitlement or non-entitlement of human beings to freedom and to dominion. [γ] *Man is rational in itself* [*my italics*, FS]; [δ] herein lies the possibility of equality of right for all men, – the futility of a rigid distinction between races that have rights and those that have none.⁶⁵

The argument can be unpacked as follows:

α) Polygenism has been used as ground for explaining the “spiritual superiority” of one human stock (= race) over another. According to this scenario, there are various hierarchized races, and hierarchy is explained by means of polygenism.

β) Hegel does not take the dispute between monogenism and polygenism to be a philosophical issue.

γ) However, he restates that human beings are in themselves rational (and this *is* a philosophical issue!);

δ) and from this rationality in itself he infers the possibility of equal rights for all human beings, regardless of their race.

Now, if we interpret “rational in itself” to mean “...that possess FF,” it seems logically impossible to argue that race might have any influence on the attribution of FF to human beings. As a matter of fact, to possess FF is what defines what is human in the first place (CLAIM A). According to Hegel, it seems that one can differentiate between human races only after having determined what is human and what is not.

This interpretation seems to be corroborated by Hotho’s transcription of this passage in his notes from Hegel’s 1822 lectures:

The human being is human being, ancestry is irrelevant (*gleich*) for his concept. It has been believed that there has always been a difference in rationality, and therefore a difference in rights. [If this belief were true] [t]he human being would be rational while the animal would not be so, and therefore the human beings would dominate over them and there would also be subordinate human races. *But the human being is*

⁶⁴ See also NG 1825, p. 236.

⁶⁵ PS, § 393 Addition, p. 39-40, (*translation modified*). The Greek letters in brackets are mine.

*a thinking being, and therefore equal.*⁶⁶

CLAIM E) Racial distinctions seem to influence the level of CAFF that particular societies enable(d) for their members

Hegel seems to hold that the forms of life of Europeans (Caucasians) enable higher levels of CAFF (up to the highest level, achieved in modern European societies) for their members, while the forms of life of peoples belonging to different races only enable lower degrees of CAFF. Again, I will try to demonstrate CLAIM E) by analysing Hegel's statements about Caucasian whites, on the one hand, and blacks (Ethiopian race), on the other hand.⁶⁷

According to Hegel, societies shaped by white-Caucasians (in particular, Europeans) have produced sociocultural positive elements so that, in modernity, *all members* of these societies could develop an authentic (= unrestricted) consciousness of the autonomy of reason – and thus the possibility of being able to lead their own lives according to reasons that they know to possess rational force by virtue of the fact that they are actually reasons (= the possibility of a full CAFF).

Such positive elements would be (possibly among others):

Pi) A conception of God that allowed for the development of the idea of a stable and intelligible universal order in which human beings are embedded⁶⁸ – as well as the idea of the distinction (which is not a mere opposition) between objective conceptual universality and existing particulars⁶⁹ as well as the idea of the infinite value of human subjectivity.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ NH 1822, p. 33-34 (*translation and italics mine*). See also NG 1825, p. 236 (*translation and italics mine*): “This question about the original difference between human races, above all, attracted attention in relation to the rights that have been conceded to human beings. If human beings were different by nature, then one race would have a right to dominate (*herrschen*) over the others. It is not only by means of natural difference that right and justice are determined; right and justice are determined merely by reason; *to the extent that human beings are human beings, they are rational*, and by virtue of this they possess absolutely equal rights [...]”

⁶⁷ Hegel's statements about blacks are the ones that allow us to best reconstruct the argument. However, many of these features also appear in Hegel's treatment of other races, in particular the American race.

⁶⁸ Hegel seems to identify the God of the Christian/Western tradition with objective rationality. This identification of God with objective rationality seems to hold regardless of the type of interpretation (metaphysical/pre-critical, realist/conceptual, post-Kantian, or qualified revisionist – to use some taxonomic categories proposed by BUBBIO, D. **God and the Self in Hegel: Beyond Subjectivism**. Albany: SUNY Press, 2017 that we are inclined to give Hegel's conception of God.

⁶⁹ See PS, § 393 Addition, p. 43-44 (*translation modified*): “Europeans [...] have for their principle and character the concrete universal, the self-determining thought. The Christian God is not merely the undifferentiated One, but the triune God who contains difference within himself, who has become man, who reveals himself. In this religious representation the opposition of universal and particular, of thought and reality, has supreme intensity and is nevertheless brought back to unity. Here, then, the particular is not left so quiescent in its immediacy as in Mohammedanism; on the contrary, it is determined by thought, just as, conversely, the universal here develops itself to particularization. The principle of the European spirit is, therefore, self-conscious reason, which has the confidence in itself that for it nothing can be an insuperable barrier, and which therefore invades everything in

Pii) The comprehension of the opposition between the sphere of the human and the sphere of (mere) nature.⁷¹ The comprehension of this opposition allowed for the development of a conception of nature as exteriority whose existence and lawfulness are independent of human acts of thought, but which can be cognitively raised to the universality of thought.⁷²

Piii) The creation of a peculiar form of society animated by a configuration of law based on the mediation between the concepts of person (the legal dimension of a particular will), moral conscience (the private, subjective dimension of a particular will), and ethical substance (the institutions and customs of a society).

Hegel seems to hold that these positive sociocultural elements have made possible – in a full way, in Modernity – an authentic understanding of rationality. That is, they have allowed us to understand the conception of thought and action as being autonomous and self-determined beyond a merely subjective and unilateral conception of autonomy and self-determination.

[I]t is in the *Caucasian* race that spirit [= *FF*, *rationality*, FS] first attains to absolute unity with itself [= *attains to the full consciousness of itself*, FS], [...] apprehends

order to become present to itself therein. The European spirit opposes the world to itself, makes itself free of it, but again sublates this opposition, takes its Other, the manifold, back into itself, into its simplicity. Here, therefore, there prevails this infinite thirst for knowledge, which is alien to the other races. The European is interested in the world, he wants to know it, to make this Other confronting him his own, to bring into his view the genus, the law, the universal, the thought, the inner rationality, in the particularizations of the world.” On the relationship between Hegel’s interpretation of the Christian God and his concept of the concrete universal, see INWOOD, M. **A Commentary on Hegel’s Philosophy of Mind**. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010, p. 332-333.

⁷⁰ See PS, § 482 Remark, p. 215 (*translation modified*): “No idea is generally recognized as indeterminate, ambiguous and open to the greatest misconceptions, to which therefore it actually falls prey, as the Idea of *freedom*, and no Idea is in common circulation with so little consciousness of it [...]. Whole continents, Africa and the East, have never had this Idea, and are without it still; the Greeks and Romans, Plato and Aristotle, even the Stoics, did not have it; on the contrary, they knew only that man is actually free by birth (as an Athenian, Spartan etc., citizen), or by strength of character, education, by philosophy (the wise man is free even as a slave and in chains). This Idea came into the world through Christianity, according to which the individual has an *infinite* value since it is the object and aim of God’s love, destined to stand in its absolute relationship with God as spirit, and to have this mind dwelling in himself, i.e. man *in himself* is destined to supreme freedom.”

⁷¹ See PS, § 393 Addition, p. 42 (*translation modified*): “[H]ere [*in the Caucasian race*, FS] for the first time spirit enters into complete opposition to naturalness.” Recall that for Hegel the concept of humanity is defined in opposition to the concept of (mere) nature. Nature is defined by Hegel as the *Anderssein*, the other of the spirit (see PN, § 247 and 376 Addition). See also NHU 1826/27, p. 836 (*my translation*): “The human being is in general a thinking being, and what has priority is the human being, the spiritual, in opposition to the natural; as soon as the human being appears, it is in opposition to nature.” On the relation between the human being (again, in the metaphysical sense of “rational being”) and nature, see my SANGUINETTI. Hegel and the Question. On Hegel’s use of the relation between human being and nature as a principle of hierarchization, see FARR. Whiteness Visible.

⁷² See NH 1822, p. 38 (*my translation*): “The European knows himself to be free, leaves nature free before himself, and wants to know the universal in it [i.e., nature] and appropriate it. Likewise, he is driven to take everything that is natural as a mean for himself [...]. The European therefore has this restlessness, this permanent activity that wants to reconduct the particular to universality, to infinitude.”

itself in its absolute independence [= *has full CAFF*, FS], [...] achieves self-determination, self-development, and thereby produces world-history[.]⁷³

This outcome, made possible (among others) by the *sociocultural achievements listed above*, makes it so that “the [modern, FS] European wants to rationally determine the circumstances of his own agency, his own concretely determined life ought to be rational”⁷⁴ – that is, in McDowell’s words, the modern-European is in a position wherein he or she is able to determine his or her life “in light of considerations one knows to have the rational force one attributes to them.”⁷⁵ The more one can do this “the freer one is,”⁷⁶ in CAFF’s sense.

In contrast to social groups that are racially characterized as white-Caucasian, Hegel believes that societies that are racially characterized as black have not produced the sociocultural conditions which enable(d) the development of relevant levels of CAFF for their members.

In particular the *core sociocultural features of black populations* (points Ni, Nii, Niii below) *considered by Hegel are negative, and each of them can be defined in opposition to the sociocultural features that are peculiar to white-Caucasian, particularly European, populations* (points Pi, Pii and Piii above).

Ni) Hegel denies that blacks have developed an idea of God qua stable, objective, and intelligible universal order.⁷⁷ According to him, blacks live in a universe dominated by arbitrary choice (*Willkür*),⁷⁸ a universe ruled by occult powers – such as the Deads⁷⁹ – and at

⁷³ PS, § 393 Addition, p. 59 (*translation modified*).

⁷⁴ NH 1822, p. 38 (*my translation*). See also PS, § 503 and Remark, p. 224: “The subjective will is *morally* free, insofar as these determinations are inwardly *posited as its own* and willed by it. Its active expression with this freedom is *action*, in the externality of which the will only recognizes as its own and allows to be imputed to it, what it has willed within itself in full awareness. It is especially this *subjective* or *moral* freedom that is called *freedom in the European sense* [*italics mine*, FS]. In virtue of the right of freedom [...] ethical and religious determinations are supposed not to make a claim on him for his compliance only as external laws and regulations of an authority, but to have their approval, recognition, or even justification in his heart, disposition, insight etc.”

⁷⁵ McDOWELL. *Why Does It Matter*, p. 31.

⁷⁶ McDOWELL. *Why Does It Matter*, p. 31.

⁷⁷ See for instance NS 1827/28, p. 612 (*my translation*): “They properly have no God, no objective God.” In relation to this claim, TAIWO, O. Of Problem Moderns and Excluded Moderns On the Essential Hybridity of Modernity. In: Taylor, P.; Alcoff, L.; Anderson, L. (Eds.). **The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Race**. London/New York: Routledge, 2018, p. 10 observes that “pedigree arguments always serve an imperialist purpose.” On the Hegel’s interpretation of African religion see TIBEBU, **Hegel and the Third World**, p. 184ff. , and HOFFHEIMER, M. H. Race and racism in Hegel’s philosophy of religion. In: Valls, A. (Ed.). **Race and Racism in Modern Philosophy** . Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2005, p. 194-216.

⁷⁸ See PH, p. 113 (*translation modified*): “For if arbitrary choice is the absolute, the only substantial objectivity that is realized, the spirit cannot in such be conscious of any Universality.” For a contrast drawn by Hegel between the understanding of the Absolute as arbitrary choice among the blacks and the understanding of the Absolute as thought among the white-Caucasians, see NH 1822, p. 38 (*my translation*): “Here [among white-Caucasian Europeans, FS] there is [...] the absolute in the form of thought, in the form of freedom [...]”

the same time extremely unstable and arbitrarily influenceable through magical (often macabre) rituals.⁸⁰ Moreover, since they did not conceive of God as universality that exceeds the sensible existence of particulars,⁸¹ they were/are not able – according to Hegel – to differentiate between the essence of humanity (FF) and the empirical existence of human individuals.⁸² Thus, insofar as they have not been able to conceptually conceive of FF as the

⁷⁹ See PH, p. 112: “There is however one feature that points to something beyond; — the *Worship of the Dead* — in which their deceased forefathers and ancestors are regarded by them as a power influencing the living.” See also NHU 1826/27, p. 840-841 and NK 1824/25, p. 520.

⁸⁰ See PH, p. 112: “Although they are necessarily conscious of dependence upon nature — for they need the beneficial influence of storm, rain, cessation of the rainy period, and so on — yet this does not conduct them to the consciousness of a Higher Power: it is they who command the elements, and this they call “magic.” The Kings have a class of ministers through whom they command elemental changes, and every place possesses such magicians, who perform special ceremonies, with all sorts of gesticulations, dances, uproar, and shouting, and in the midst of this confusion commence their incantations.” See also PH, p. 113: “When magical rites are performed, it frequently happens that the sorcerer kills the first that comes in his way and divides his body among the bystanders.” See NK 1824/25, p. 519.

⁸¹ See NK 1824/25, p. 518 (*my translation*): “In general we have to say that, in the interior of Africa, consciousness has not yet attained the intuition of something stably objective, an objectivity in general. This stable object is called God, the eternal, the law, nature, and natural things. To the extent that the individual relates to something stable of this kind, he shows himself dependent on it, but also [knows, FS] that it has value to the extent that he elevates himself to such a relation. Thus African nature is this compressed being in itself (*Gedrunghenheit in sich*); Africans have not yet come to this recognition of the universal [...]” See also Walter’s variant in NS 1827/28, p. 611-612 (*my translation*): “The human being thinks: for (*denn*) the consciousness of freedom is the consciousness of universality in and for itself. The African, in his pure compressed individuality, does not pass from individuality (desire) to the universal, and has not achieved it — therefore he has attained neither the law, the States, nor the sciences.” See the Hegelian interpretation of “fetiches.” See PS, § 393 Addition, p. 41: “They sense a higher being, but they do not keep a firm hold on it; it passes only fleetingly through their heads. This higher being they transfer to the first stone they come across, thus making it their fetish and they discard this fetish if it fails to help them.” See also PH, p. 112: “What they conceive of as the power in question, is therefore nothing really objective, having a substantial being and different from themselves, but the first thing that comes in their way. This, taken quite indiscriminately, they exalt to the dignity of a “Genius”; it may be an animal, a tree, a stone, or a wooden figure. This is their *Fetich* — a word to which the Portuguese first gave currency, and which is derived from *feitizo*, magic. Here, in the Fetich, a kind of objective independence as contrasted with the arbitrary fancy of the individual seems to manifest itself; but as the objectivity is nothing other than the fancy of the individual projecting itself into space, the human individuality remains master of the image it has adopted. If any mischance occurs which the Fetich has not averted, if rain is suspended, if there is a failure in the crops, they bind and beat or destroy the Fetich and so get rid of it, making another immediately, and thus holding it in their own power. Such a Fetich has no independence as an object of religious worship; still less has it aesthetic independence as a work of art; it is merely a creation that expresses the arbitrary choice of its maker, and which always remains in his hands.” See also NK 1824/25, p. 519-520 and NHU 1826/27, p. 840 (*my translation*): “A second mode of mediation is by means of external objects, which they transform into their own God, into their own power (*Macht*). These are the fetich, the first stone at hand, or the first butterfly, beetle, tree, river. — The fetich of a land is an elephant, a tiger, a river. They lock the animal in a cage, worship it, attribute absolute power to it, and thus transfer this power out of themselves, out of their consciousness; they do not ascribe it to their own spirit, but only to a sensible object, not to the universal spirit. —The fetich also remains in their control (*Gewalt*). Moreover they carve for themselves wooden images and idols. When their fetich does not do what they want, they discard it, and make another one for themselves — for example, a tree instead of a river. This is only an external power; they make something higher with respect to them, but they keep it in their power; they institute it (*setzen es ein*), and then discard it.”

⁸² See PH, p. 110-111 (*translation modified*): “In N* life the characteristic point is the fact that consciousness has not yet achieved the realization of any substantial objective existence — as for example, God, or Law — in which the interest of man’s volition is involved and in which he realizes his own being. This distinction between

essence of humanity, they did not have the possibility of developing the relevant levels of freedom in the sense of CAFF. In other terms, the argument suggested by Hegel seems to go as follows: if there is no understanding of the concept of universal order qua thought, it seems that there can be no CAFF, since it does not even seem possible to understand FF as the essence of human beings.

Nii) In connection with its lack of understanding of both a stable objective order and the distinction (as well as reciprocal relation) between the universal essence and particular empirical existences of human beings (or other beings), Hegel highlights another feature of black culture, namely its close link to the natural dimension. “The N*, as already observed, exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state.”⁸³ Nature is for Hegel the mode of existence in which universality and singularity remain to some extent outside each other.⁸⁴ And nature, according to Hegel, is defined in opposition to the rationality that essentially characterizes what is distinctively human.⁸⁵ Hegel denies that blacks have come to an authentic intellectual understanding of the distinction between the human and the natural spheres and to the sociocultural gains that such a distinction carries with itself. By virtue of the absence of an adequate intellectual understanding of the distinction between the human and the natural, blacks have remained in an immediate, merely appetitive relation to nature.

[T]hey have not progressed to the separation (*Entzweiung*), to understanding, to thinking, to science, to legality – they always have remained in their naturality and desire (*Begierde*). [...]⁸⁶

For Hegel, this fusion with nature brings about a condition of cultural naïveté and an irrational sensualism without limits.

On the one hand, blacks are defined by Hegel as childlike, as people who have not yet reached cultural maturity on their own. Like children who have not yet reached the age of reason, they would still be culturally bound to the natural and appetitive dimension – a kind of

himself as an individual and the universality of his essential being, the African in the uniform, undeveloped oneness of his existence has not yet attained;” See NHU 1826/27 p. 838ff. (*my translation*): “What [Herodotus] says of the Africans is that they are all sorcerors (*Zaubrer*). Sorcery (*Zauberei*) is when the human being has no representation of God, that spirit is only the immediate human being.”

⁸³ PH (*translation modified*), p. 111.

⁸⁴ See PN, §§ 246 Addition and 250.

⁸⁵ On this point, see fn. 71 above.

⁸⁶ NS 1827/28, p. 611 (*my translation*).

“cultural state of nature”, if the paradox is allowed.⁸⁷ Indeed, they are described by Hegel as a “nation of children (*Kindernation*), which did not come out from its childlike lack of interest.”⁸⁸

On the other hand, and in connection with the supposed “cultural naïveté” of the blacks, the close identification with nature, for Hegel, implies that blacks – like children – are strongly characterized by arbitrary and contradictory sensible impulses.⁸⁹ Moreover, according to Hegel, they lack the capacity to stick to any universal end as the goal of their actions, as well as the capacity to control their drives or instincts. Indeed, blacks, according to Hegel, “do not progress to thought, to the universal end that becomes what determines the activity of the individual – therefore they are in general deprived of thought.”⁹⁰ “From these various traits it is manifest that want of self-control distinguishes the character of the N*. This condition is capable of no development or culture, and the way we see them at this day is the way they have always been.”⁹¹ Consistently with his claim that Africa cannot be considered as a protagonist in world history conceived as progress in the consciousness of the autonomy of reasons (= CAFF) Hegel argues that “[t]he Africans are still what they were 2000 years ago; they have not evolved onwards, but they have persisted in their own condition.”⁹²

Hegel indeed holds that the valuable sociocultural features that can be detected among

⁸⁷ The Africans’ way of life is defined by Hegel as “this first savage form of human being.” [NHU 1826/27, p. 845 (*my translation*)].

⁸⁸ NH 1822, p. 35 (*my translation*). See also PS, § 393 Addition, p. 41: “Their religion has something childlike about it”; and NK 1824/25, p. 516 (*my translation*), where Hegel describes Africa as “the land of childhood.”

⁸⁹ “Entirely good-natured and harmless when in a state of calm, they can become suddenly agitated and then commit the most frightful of cruelties.” (PS, § 393 Addition, p. 41). “On the one hand, they are extremely free from inhibitions, naïve and good-natured, but at the same time they are capable of turning to an extreme degree of savagery and cruelty.” [NH 1822, p. 35 (*my translation*)]. On this mixture of contradictory feelings and dispositions see also NG 1825, p. 234 and NS 1827/28, p. 611 (*my translation*): “Meekness on the one hand, but also the most astonishing savagery and brutality on the other.” See also NK 1824/25, p. 524 and p. 525-526 (*my translation*): “Sensible arbitrariness, enormous energy, capable of becoming so fanatical, in a condition where the ethical element does not possess any determined potency (*in der das sitliche keine bestimmte Macht hat*), and should one want to know dreadful manifestations of human nature, they can be found in Africa.”

⁹⁰ NG 1825, p. 234 (*my translation*).

⁹¹ PH, p. 116 (*translation modified*).

⁹² NS, 1827/28, p. 611 (*my translation*). It is important to stress that the sociocultural features of black people are discussed in the geographical section of world history – black societies are not taken to be, in fact, protagonists of historical development, but are, so to speak, the ‘degree zero’ of history. See on this point BERNASCONI. With What Must. Other relevant texts on Hegel’s geographical thought and its relation to racism are BOND, D. W. Hegel’s geographical thought. **Environment and Planning D: Society and Space**, n. 32, 2014, p. 179-198; MUSSETT. On the Threshold of History; LIVINGSTONE, D. N. Race, space and moral climatology: notes toward a genealogy. **Journal of Historical Geography**, vol. 28, n. 2, 2002, p. 159-180. For a contraposition between Hegel’s concept of development and the concept of repetition qua central element of black culture, see SNEAD, J. A. On Repetition in Black Culture. **Black American Literature Forum**, vol. 15, n. 4, Black Textual Strategies, Volume 1, 1981, p. 146-154.

blacks are not originally developed by them. Rather they come from the outside – in particular from European culture. And among these “imported” features there are those elements that enable an increase in CAFF for the individuals of black societies. As a matter of fact, Hegel writes, for example, that the black people “are very mouldable from the outside”⁹³ and that they have, “here and there, adopted Christianity with the greatest gratitude and spoken with emotion of the freedom they have acquired through Christianity after a long spiritual servitude [...]”⁹⁴

Niii) In connection with the above mentioned features of the forms of life of the black population Hegel seems to maintain that blacks have not come to conceive (indeed, neither to “feel” nor to “affectively experience”) the human individual as a person, i.e., as a subject of rights: “they do not attain to the feeling of man’s personality.”⁹⁵ Hegel thus relates the lack of recognition of the infinite value of the human being to tyranny, under which he tends to subsume all the indigenous political forms of black societies.⁹⁶ Hegel describes black societies as being still bound to a state of nature not only from a cultural point of view, but also from a political point of view. This results in forms of cruel and fanatical despotism.⁹⁷ For Hegel,

⁹³ NH 1822, p. 35 (*my translation*).

⁹⁴ PS, § 393 Addition, p. 41. See also, NH 1822, p. 35 (*my translation*): “[T]hey assume everything from outside.” Alongside with the idea according to which blacks do not autonomously make any cultural progress, Hegel maintains that their political advancements have also been “imported” from the political experiences of white-Caucasian Europeans. This seems evident from Hegel’s judgment of the Haitian revolution. As a matter of fact, Hegel says that it is “extraordinary (*merkwürdig*)” [NH 1822, p. 36 (*my translation*)] that blacks formed a state according to Christian principles [see also PS, § 393 Addition, p. 41]. Hegel says that “[t]he possibility of human freedom is present also in blacks, but it is not characteristic of them to rise above their naturalness.” [NH 1822, p. 36, (*my translation*)] On Hegel and Haiti, see in particular TAVARES, P. F. Hegel et Haïti ou le silence de Hegel sur Saint-Domingue. **Chemins Critiques**, vol. 2, n. 3, 1991, p. 113-131; BUCK-MORSS. **Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History** and DUPUY, A. **Rethinking the Haitian Revolution: Slavery, Independence, and the Struggle for Recognition**. Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019. On Hegel and colonialism, see STONE, A. Hegel and Colonialism. **Hegel Bulletin**, vol. 41, n. 2, 2020, p. 247-270.

⁹⁵ PS, § 393 Addition, p. 41. See also NHU 1826/27, p. 841 (*my translation*): “[T]he human being who has not comprehended (*gefaßt*) his freedom, has also not comprehended (*begriffen*) the difference of his person.” See also PH, p. 113 (*translation modified*): “The N* indulge, therefore, that perfect *contempt* for humanity, which in its bearing on Justice and Morality is the fundamental characteristic of the race.” See NK 1824/25, p. 521 (*my translation*): “It cannot be fully expected [from blacks, FS] that they regard the human being as essentially free precisely because it is a human being.” According to Hegel, this lack of consideration manifests itself in cultural practices that reduce the human being to mere flesh, which can be eaten. See NK 1824/25, p. 521 (*my translation*): “The human body (*Körper*) is animal, but it is essentially a body for something that represents, it has psychological connections. However, for the sensual N*, it is only flesh. It is not used very often as food, but at certain feasts many hundreds of prisoners, for example, are killed, beheaded, and their bodies are returned to the one who made them captive, who then shares them.” See also PH, p. 113: “the devouring of human flesh is altogether consonant with the general principles of the African race; to the sensual N*, human flesh is but an object of sense — mere flesh.”

⁹⁶ See NK 1824/25, p. 520 (*my translation*): “[T]he worthlessness of the human being among them goes so far as to be unbelievable (*geht... ins ungläubliche*); this can be seen as tyranny [...]”

⁹⁷ See PS, § 393 Addition, p. 41: “In their native country the most shocking despotism prevails” and in NHU

blacks cannot have any true constitution⁹⁸ since, insofar as they are dominated by sensible arbitrariness, they are not be able to produce stable political, ethical and social institutions.

The political bond can therefore not possess such a character as that free laws should unite the community. There is absolutely no bond, no restraint upon that arbitrary volition. Nothing but external force can hold the State together for a moment. A ruler stands at the head, for sensuous barbarism can only be restrained by despotic power. But since the subjects are of equally violent temper with their master, they keep him on the other hand within limits.⁹⁹

In particular, the lack of consciousness of personality would manifest itself among blacks in the phenomenon of slavery, which Hegel regards as a “characteristic fact in reference to the N*.”¹⁰⁰ According to Hegel, blacks “are sold, and let themselves be sold, without any reflection on whether this is right or not.”¹⁰¹

[I]t is the essential principle of slavery, that man has not yet attained a consciousness of his freedom, and consequently sinks down to a mere Thing — an object of no value [...]. Parents sell their children, and conversely children their parents, as either has the opportunity. Through the pervading influence of slavery all those bonds of moral regard which we cherish towards each other disappear, and it does not occur to the N* mind to expect from others what we are enabled to claim. The polygamy of the N* has frequently for its object the having many children, to be sold, every

1826/27, p. 833 (*my translation*) Hegel speaks of Africa as “absolute barbarism.” A passage in which Hegel compares such political relations to the state of nature is NH 1822, p. 35 (*my translation*): “Their States are in an intermediate stage between the state of nature and the transition to a more formed stage. This stage is a stage of the highest despotism and cruelty.” More particularly, tying together once more the threads of his interpretation of the culture and politics of the black population, Hegel links the generalized slavery that he attributes to black social groups to the universal injustice peculiar to the state of nature: “The doctrine which we deduce from this condition of slavery among the N*, and which constitutes the only side of the question that has an interest for our inquiry, is that which we deduce from the Idea: viz., that the “Natural condition” itself is one of absolute and thorough injustice — contravention of the Right and Just.” (PH, p. 116-117)

⁹⁸ See NHU 1826/27, p. 842 (*my translation*): “One cannot speak of a constitution.”

⁹⁹ PH, p. 114. See also PH, p. 114: “The standpoint of humanity at this grade is mere sensuous volition with energy of will; since universal spiritual laws (for example, that of the morality of the Family) cannot be recognized here. Universality exists only as arbitrary subjective choice.” See NK 1824/25, p. 522-523 (*my translation*): “Given this determination (*Aus solcher Bestimmung*), that great cohesion of individuals which we call ourselves the state cannot exist with rational universality, that is [according to the, FS] laws of freedom, but cohesion by means of arbitrariness can only be external violence, because for itself arbitrariness has nothing of that which moves human beings to be united. On the contrary, arbitrariness is when human beings let their own particular will be valid. So this is the relation of despotism, and this external violence is arbitrary because there is no common rational spirit, of which the government can be the representative and the activity. This despotism is therefore extreme because this arbitrariness is maximally arrogant.”

¹⁰⁰ PH, p. 113 (*translation modified*). See NK 1824/25, p. 521 (*my translation*): “Slavery naturally rules there.” See NHU 1826/27, p. 841 (*my translation*): “Slavery universally rules among the N*; the representation according to which the human being is free in and for itself is not present among them.” See also NH 1822, p. 35 (*my translation*): “In this stage there is the utmost lack of consciousness of personality; that is why they also let themselves be enslaved so easily.” See also NS 1827/28, p. 611 (*my translation*): “[A]mong them slavery is at home; freedom is only present where the consciousness of universal freedom emerges.”

¹⁰¹ PS, § 393 Addition, p. 41. See also NHU 1826/27, p. 842 (*my translation*): “They sell parents, wife and child (*Kind*). Sense of family (*Familienempfindung*) and ethnicity are alien to these N*.”

one of them, into slavery; and very often naive complaints on this score are heard, as for instance in the case of a N* in London, who lamented that he was now quite a poor man because he had already sold all his relations.¹⁰²

These negative sociocultural features of the black population (Ni, Nii, Niii) make black individuals occupy a position which is diametrically opposed to that of white-Caucasian Europeans with regard to degrees of CAFF. As a matter of fact, the negative sociocultural features of the black population – Ni) the absence of the idea of an objective and universal order, Nii) the absence of separation from nature and, as consequences of it, infantilism and the primacy of the arbitrary and natural-appetitive dimension, Niii) the absence of recognition of human dignity and the acceptance of reification – mean that black societies do not provide the conditions for their members to develop relevant levels of CAFF. More specifically, from Hegel’s point of view, such sociocultural features mean that blacks have not come to conceive of autonomous reason (= FF) as being the essence of the human, and – therefore – are not in a position to be conscious of the rational force of the reasons on the basis of which they act and think (= CAFF).

Now, these racist and discriminatory claims still seem to be compatible with the Hegelian idea that FF is not a gradual concept while CAFF is a gradual concept. Up to this point, Hegel is clearly racist and Eurocentric, but there seems to be no contradiction between his clearly hierarchical understanding of races and the idea that all human beings are formally equal insofar as they are rational beings (all possess FF in equal measure), as well as between his racism and the idea that different societies have provided conditions that enable higher or lower degrees of CAFF for their members.¹⁰³

¹⁰² PH, p. 113-114. See also NHU 1826/27, p. 842. Once more, in line with the naturalness and infantilism he attributes to blacks, Hegel puts forward the idea that the contact with European, white-Caucasian culture is a mean for the cultural and political advancement of the black peoples. Thus, Hegel considers even slavery as a moment of cultural and political advancement. See PH, p. 113 (*translation modified*): “N* are enslaved by Europeans and sold to America. Bad as this may be, their lot in their own land is even worse, since there a slavery quite as absolute exists [.]” See also PH 1822/23, p. 116: “ In [slavery] the N* see nothing unbecoming them.” See on this LONG CHU, A. Black Infinity: Slavery and Freedom in Hegel’s Africa. **Journal of speculative philosophy**, vol. 32, n. 3, 2018, p. 414-425. On Hegel’s sources (whose reliability is highly controversial), as well as on the truculent alterations he himself seems to have made of them see BERNASCONI. Hegel at the Court of the Ashanti. See also TAIWO. Of Problem Moderns, for important considerations about how a similar attitude may still be present today in European/Western/White studies on Africa and Africans.

¹⁰³ My point here is to try to show that someone who aims at defending Hegel on the ground of his universalistic humanism based on the concept of FF could still try to isolate and preserve such theoretical core from the racist infamy of Hegel’s claims. Obviously, “logical” coherence cannot be put into play here in order to relativize the gravity of Hegel’s claims. As mentioned above (see fn. 53), a possible contradiction between Hegel’s racism and his attribution of different levels of CAFF to members of racially-characterized collectives could result from the fact that determinations regarded by Hegel as “natural” should not be able to influence “spiritual” issues, such as

CLAIM F) *Non-Europeans (non-whites) seem to possess not only lower levels of CAFF but also lower levels of FF – and are therefore less human.*

Let us consider Hegel's assertions about the features of blacks that should justify the claim that they would not have developed considerable levels of CAFF. Although Hegel seems to maintain that racial distinctions do not influence the attribution of FF to human individuals, he deploys the repertoire of dehumanization,¹⁰⁴ in its most diverse nuances, when he describes the sociocultural features of black societies that would have prevented the attainment of high levels of CAFF for their members.

- a) First, the repertoire of *infantilization*:** Blacks are described, for instance, as „childlike,” nation of children (*Kindernation*), which did not come out from its childlike lack of interest.” [NH 1822, p. 35 – (*my translation*)] “Their religion has something childlike about it.” (PS, § 393 Addition, p. 41) Africa is „the land of childhood.” [NK 1824/25, p. 516 (*my translation*)]
- b) Second, the repertoire of *irrational impulsiveness*:** “Entirely good-natured and harmless when in a state of calm, they can become suddenly agitated and then commit the most frightful cruelties.” (PS, § 393 Addition, p. 41) “From these various traits it is manifest that want of self-control distinguishes the character of the N*.” [PH, p. 116 (*translation modified*)]

CAFF is.

¹⁰⁴ Authors who take Hegel's racist discourse to be dehumanizing are, among others: PURTSCHERT. On the limit of spirit, p. 1045; EZE. **Postcolonial African Philosophy**, p. 8-9; EZE. **Race and the Enlightenment**, p. 109; EZE. Modern Western philosophy; VERHAREN, C. C. The new world and the dreams to which it may give rise. An African and American Response to Hegel's Challenge. **Journal of Black Studies**, vol. 27, n. 4, 1997, p. 456-493; HABIB, M. A. R. **Hegel and Empire. From Postcolonialism to Globalism**. Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, p. 50; TAIWO. Exorcising Hegel's Ghost; WRIGHT, M. **Becoming Black. Creating Identity in the African Diaspora**. Durham and London: Duke UP, 2004, p. 44-45; FARR. Whiteness Visible, p. 149; ROONEY C. **African Literature, Animism and Politics**. London and NY: Routledge, 2000, p. 177; OUTLAW, L. Jr. “Black” Philosophy, “African” Philosophy, “Africana” Philosophy: Transnational Deconstructive and Reconstructive Renovations in “Philosophy. In: Afolayan, A.; Falola, T. (Eds.). **The Palgrave Handbook of African Philosophy**. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, p. 246; MUSSETT. On the Threshold of History; TIBEBU. **Hegel and the Third World**, p. 179-180; RAMOSE, M. Hegel and Universalism: an African Perspective. **Dialogue and Humanism**, n. 1, 1991, p. 75-87; GATES H. L. Jr. **Figures in Black: Words, Signs, and the “Racial” Self**. New York: Oxford UP, 1987, p. 21 and also HOFFHEIMER. Hegel, Race, Genocide, and PAREK, S. Hegel's New World. History, Freedom, and Race, In: Dudley, W. (Ed.). **Hegel and History**, Albany: SUNY Press, 2009, p. 111-134, who seem to explicitly advocate an argument similar to the one proposed here, although he focuses on Hegel's understanding of the American race. See what MILLS. Kant's Untermenschen, p. 25 says about Kant: “The ‘sub-person’ category is, admittedly, a reconstruction of the normative logic of racial and gender subordination in his thought, which is certainly not openly proclaimed in the articulation of his conceptual apparatus, and may seem, prima facie, to be excluded by it. Nonetheless, I would claim that it is the best way of making sense of the actual (as against officially represented) logic of his writings, taken as a whole, and accommodates the sexist and racist declarations in a way less strained than the orthodox reading. Note that the orthodox reading has to explain how it is, that, if (by hypothesis) women and nonwhites are supposed to be full persons, Kant is nonetheless able to say the kinds of things he says about them.”

“On the one hand, they are extremely free from inhibitions, naïve and good-natured, but at the same time they are capable of turning to an extreme degree of savagery and cruelty.” [NH 1822, p. 35 (*my translation*)] “Meekness on the one hand, but also the most astonishing savagery and brutality on the other.” [NS 1827/28, p. 611 (*my translation*)] “Sensible arbitrariness, enormous energy, capable of becoming so fanatical, in a condition where the ethical element does not possess any determined potency (*in der das sitliche keine bestimmte Macht hat*), and should one want to know dreadful manifestations of human nature, they can be found in Africa.” [NK 1824/25, p. 525-526 (*my translation*)] **c) Third, the attribution of the inability to think and develop culture:** „For if arbitrary choice is the absolute, the only substantial objectivity that is realized, the spirit cannot in such be conscious of any Universality [...]”. [PH, p. 113 (*translation modified*)] They “do not progress to thought, to the universal end that becomes what determines the activity of the individual – therefore they are in general deprived of thought.” [NG 1825, p. 234 (*my translation*)] “The universal does not arise in their heads, they assume everything from outside.” [NH 1822, p. 35 (*my translation*)] “The Africans are still what they were 2000 years ago; they have not evolved to the outside, but they have persisted in their own condition.” [NS, 1827/28, p. 611 (*my translation*)] „This condition is capable of no development or culture, and the way we see them at this day is the way they have always been.” (PH, p. 116) **d) Fourth, the repertoire of animalization:** “[I]t is not characteristic of them to rise above their naturalness.” [NH 1822, p. 36 (*my translation*)] “[T]hey have not advanced to the separation (*Entzweiung*), to understanding, to thinking, to science, to legality – they always have remained in their naturalness and desire (*Begierde*). [...]” [NS, 1827/28, p. 611 (*my translation*)] „The animal and the slave are here on the same level (*Stufe*).” [NK 1824/25, Variante Dove, p. 521 (*my translation*)]

e) Fifth, the repertoire of objectification: They “are sold, and let themselves be sold, without any reflection on whether this is right or not.” (PS, § 393 Addition, p. 41) „[I]t is the essential principle of slavery, that man has not yet attained a consciousness of his freedom, and consequently sinks down to a mere Thing — an object of no value.” (PH, p. 113) “[A]mong them slavery is at home; freedom is only there where the consciousness of universal freedom emerges.” [NS 1827/28, p. 611 (*my translation*)]

Although, officially, such descriptions¹⁰⁵ are presented as referring to psychological and sociocultural features that should not have repercussions on the humanity of blacks –

¹⁰⁵ Many other quotations could be added.

consistent with CLAIMS A) and D –, a doubt arises here as to whether or not Hegel is somehow taking away with one hand what he had conceded with the other.¹⁰⁶ It seems, therefore, legitimate to think that, along with attributing lower levels of CAFF to racialized groups, Hegel is attributing to them lower levels of FF – and, hence, lower levels of humanity. As he himself says of blacks, “there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character.”¹⁰⁷

On the one hand, this argument is strengthened by the ambiguity of Hegel’s use of the concept of freedom (*Freiheit*). As noted in Section 1, Hegel often uses the term ambiguously both to designate FF and CAFF. In this way, lower levels of “*Freiheit*,” in the sense of CAFF, are attributed to individuals belonging to non-white racial groups, and at the same time lower levels of “*Freiheit*,” in the sense of FF, are surreptitiously attributed to such individuals.¹⁰⁸ On the other hand, the argument seems to find support in Hegel’s reflections on physiological differences between races – see above discussion of CLAIM C), in particular pp. 53-55 above and notes 61-62. Hegel’s statements about the physiological characteristics of blacks clearly make use of the d) repertoire of animalization and b) of irrational impulsiveness, and c) indirectly deny them the ability to think.

But if, on the one hand, the attribution of lower levels of CAFF to individuals pertaining to racialized groups (CLAIM E) is a thesis that (although racist and Eurocentric) remains consistent with the gradualism of the concept of CAFF (CLAIM B), then on the other hand the attribution of lower levels of FF (CLAIM F), besides being racist and Eurocentric, would be a thesis that contradicts the non-gradual character of the concept of FF (CLAIMS A and D). In the next section I will present two possible ways of resolving the tension between claims A-F.

3. How to read these tensions: conservative attitude and critical attitude

Let’s summarize the argument up to this point. In Section 1, I evoked the McDowellian distinction between two concepts of freedom in Hegel that concern the sphere of the human,

¹⁰⁶ See again MILLS. Kant’s Untermenschen, for a brilliant presentation of this argument, specifically focusing on Kant.

¹⁰⁷ PH, p. 111.

¹⁰⁸ Also, the placement of Africans “outside” world history qua history of reason is at least very consistent with (though one might still say: need not be) an exclusion of them from the set of rational beings in LF’s sense.

which we can define as follows:

FF = Being in the position of self-consciously answering questions such as “Why did/do/will you do this?” or “Why do/did/will you think this?”

CAFF = Being in the position of knowing that the reasons adduced in answers to questions of the kind “Why did/do/will you do this?” or “Why do/did/will you think this?” are self-grounded – that is, they do not derive their rational force from something other than themselves.

In Section 2 I have attributed a number of claims to Hegel in order to investigate if, and how, racist assumptions influence his attribution of FF and CAFF to individuals belonging to different societies.

CLAIM A) All human beings possess FF in equal measure.

CLAIM B) Human beings create(d) societies that grant to their members different levels of CAFF.

CLAIM C) Hegel is a scientific racist.

CLAIM D) Racial determinations have no influence on the attribution of FF to human individuals and therefore on their capacity to have CAFF.

CLAIM E) Racial distinctions seem to influence the level of CAFF that particular societies enable(d) for their members.

CLAIM F) Non-Europeans (non-whites) seem to possess not only lower levels of CAFF but also lower levels of FF – and are therefore less human.

I have argued that CLAIM E), although racist and Eurocentric, does not contradict in principle Hegel’s understanding of the concept of CAFF as being a gradual concept (CLAIM B). By contrast, in addition to being racist and Eurocentric, CLAIM F) contradicts the non-gradualist understanding of FF included in CLAIM A) and in its corollary, CLAIM D).

In this concluding section I would like to outline two possible interpretative attitudes towards this set of claims and, in particular, towards the possible tension between CLAIM F) and CLAIMS A) and D).

i) The first is the *conservative attitude*. This attitude tries to separate claims that are considered as being theoretically important and defensible from claims that either are not to be considered as theoretically important and defensible or are not considered as being

attributable to Hegel.¹⁰⁹

ia) A first version of this conservative attitude, which we might call a *moderately conservative attitude*, could for example attribute to Hegel CLAIMS A), D) and B) and argue that CLAIMS C), E) and F) are epistemic errors committed by Hegel. Thus, Hegel's theoretical commitment to scientific racism (CLAIM C) and its influence on the attribution of CAFF and FF to individuals belonging to different societies (CLAIMS E and F) would be separable from Hegel's theoretical commitment to the metaphysical equality of all human individuals (CLAIM A), regardless of their racial classification (CLAIMS D) and from the thesis that different societies can grant different levels of CAFF to their members (CLAIM B). The tension between CLAIMS A), D), and F) is thus explained by attributing to Hegel some epistemic errors.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ This attitude roughly corresponds to the position described as the “anomaly view” by MILLS. Kant's *Untermenschen*.

¹¹⁰ One can also consider the possibility of a *minimal, moderately conservative interpretation*, which considers a non-defensible error also CLAIM B).

TABLE 1 – MODERATELY CONSERVATIVE ATTITUDE	
Actual Hegelian claims, which are supposed to be defensible and theoretically important	Epistemic errors committed by Hegel, which would be separable and would not affect the importance and defensibility of other Hegelian claims
<p><i>CLAIM A) All human beings possess FF in equal measure.</i></p> <p><i>CLAIM B) Human beings create(d) societies that grant to their members different levels of CAFF.</i></p> <p><i>CLAIM D) Racial determinations have no influence on the attribution of FF to human individuals and therefore on their capacity to have CAFF.</i></p>	<p><i>CLAIM C) Hegel is a scientific racist.</i></p> <p><i>CLAIM E) Racial distinctions seem to influence the level of CAFF that particular societies enable(d) for their members.</i></p> <p><i>CLAIM F) Non-Europeans (non-whites) seem to possess not only lower levels of CAFF but also lower levels of FF – and are therefore less human.</i></p>

ib) A more radical version of this conservative attitude could instead attribute CLAIMS A), D), and B) to Hegel and argue that CLAIMS C) and E) are epistemic errors committed by Hegel while denying that Hegel defended CLAIM F).¹¹¹

TABLE 2 – MORE RADICAL CONSERVATIVE ATTITUDE		
Actual Hegelian claims, which are supposed to be defensible and theoretically important	Epistemic errors committed by Hegel, which would be separable and would not affect the importance and defensibility of other Hegelian claims	Claim not ascribable to Hegel
<p><i>CLAIM A) All human beings possess FF in equal measure.</i></p> <p><i>CLAIM B) Human beings create(d) societies that grant to their members different levels of</i></p>	<p><i>CLAIM C) Hegel is a scientific racist.</i></p> <p><i>CLAIM E) Racial distinctions seem to influence the level of CAFF that particular societies</i></p>	<p><i>CLAIM F) Non-Europeans (non-whites) seem to possess not only lower levels of CAFF but also lower levels of FF – and are therefore less human.</i></p>

¹¹¹ One can also consider the possibility of extremely radical, conservative interpretations, which deny that Hegel defended either CLAIM C), or CLAIM E), or both.

<p>CAFF.</p> <p>CLAIM D) Racial determinations have no influence on the attribution of FF to human individuals and therefore on their capacity to have CAFF.</p>	<p>enable(d) for their members.</p>	
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What is important to stress is that in either version of the conservative attitude, the interpreter would argue that Hegel's endorsement of claims that he or she judges as being epistemic errors would not undermine Hegel's defence of claims that he or she judges to be plausible and defensible.¹¹²

ii) The second is a *critical attitude*. This interpretive stance does not separate between claims that are taken to be theoretically defensible and claims that are taken to be theoretically non-defensible. The critical attitude, therefore, denies that there can be separability between claims A-F. In particular, the critical attitude considers that the claims held as theoretically non-defensible¹¹³ by the conservative attitude are intrinsically connected to (or even are the foundation of) the claims that a conservative interpreter would maintain as defensible – thus changing the interpretation of the latter.

More particularly, the critical attitude tends to conceive of Hegel's commitment to CLAIMS B), C), E) and F), on the one hand, and Hegel's commitment to CLAIMS A) and D), on the other hand, as two sides of the same coin (or one may even interpret the first commitment as being more fundamental than the second).¹¹⁴ According to this reading, therefore, Hegel's assertion of metaphysical equality for all human beings qua rational beings, regardless of racial characterizations, would be an epistemic or political resource that goes hand in hand with (or even that is finalized to) racial hierarchization and the dehumanization of individuals. In other words, if, on the one hand, the conservative attitude aims at saving the idea of a formal equality among all human beings by removing racist implications from it, the

¹¹² See MILLS. Kant's Untermenschen, p. 3: "So even when racism is conceded, and discussed, it tends to be within the official framework of egalitarian assumptions, generating a language of 'deviations,' 'anomalies,' 'contradictions,' and 'ironies.' It is (reluctantly) admitted that these theorists may have been racist, but this concession is not taken to challenge the logic of the basic framework itself. Since equality is the globally dominant norm, the normative default mode, racism has to be a deviation."

¹¹³ Or not ascribable to Hegel, as in the case of CLAIM F) in attitude ib).

¹¹⁴ Another, perhaps more, suitable image could be the unique side of a Möbius strip.

critical attitude, on the other hand, considers that the idea of a formal equality among all humans as rational beings to be the inseparable co-product of a thinking that distinguishes and hierarchizes different races by means of a dehumanizing strategy. More than that, Hegel's commitment to CLAIMS A) and D) could be seen as *inseparable* from or even *functional to practices of domination* explicitly justified by CLAIMS B), C), E), and F). Therefore, CLAIMS B), C), E) and F) would affect the defensibility of CLAIMS A) and D). In this context, the tension between CLAIMS A), D), and F) could be explained by resorting to the device of hypocrisy.¹¹⁵ That is to say, the dehumanization of racialized subjects is a symbiotic thesis with regard to universalistic humanism¹¹⁶ and the fact that they are both defended by Hegel cannot be considered as an accidental error – the contradiction can be unconscious, but it is not naïve.¹¹⁷

TABLE 3 – CRITICAL ATTITUDE

¹¹⁵ See TAIWO. Of Problem Moderns, p. 16 and PIZA, S. O paradoxo de Hegel: liberdade e escravidão nas colônias. *Revista Eletrônica Estudos Hegelianos*, vol. 16, n. 27, 2019, p. 41-69. MUSSETT. On the Threshold of History, also stresses that the attribution of an unactualized humanity, which is actualizable through contact with Europeans, would be functional to the justification of domination. The point in question is clearly identified by EZE. Modern Western philosophy, p. 218: “But how does one, even conceptually, nicely and neatly separate the ‘ideals’ of European modernity, the Age of Europe, from its concreteness or ‘historical implementation’? Were the European philosophers’ ideas about ‘humanity’ and ‘freedom’ pure and ‘sterling’ and perfect as this argument presumes – in which case it is only in the ‘implementation’ that imperfections (racism, colonialism, etc.) arose? Is it not evident that these ‘imperfections’ were conceptualized as integral and as constitutive of the logic of capitalist and ethnocentric and racist modernity? Irele’s exhortation that ‘we must separate the [European] ideals of universal reason’ from the imperfect ‘historical implementation’ operates a false dichotomy that may mislead one to believe that we can clearly separate the ‘ideal’ from the ‘real’ (the tale from the teller, the message from the messenger, etc.) How do we know what constitutes ‘ideal’ except in/through the way it was and has been practiced? Furthermore, to speak of ideals or ideas as universally neutral schemes or models which we historically perfectly or imperfectly implement obscures the fact that these ideals and ideas and models are always already part and parcel of, i.e., always already infused with historical practices and intentions out of which ideals are, in the first place, constituted as such – and judged worthy of pursuit. Ideals do not have meaning in a historical vacuum.” Leading the hypocrisy thesis to the extreme one could say that nothing justifies racism better than the claim that all human beings are equal and racism should therefore not exist – I take and adapt this argument from LONG CHU. Black Infinity, p. 423, who formulates it in relation to slavery.

¹¹⁶ See the “symbiotic view” in MILLS. Kant’s Untermenschen.

¹¹⁷ Franz Knappik has drawn my attention to the possibility of an interpretive position that could be defined a *radical* version of the *critical attitude*. According to this interpretive position, Hegel would explicitly deny full rationality, in the sense I am calling FF here, to members of racialized groups. Such individuals would possess rationality only in potency, and the actualization of it would depend on their contact with white-European civilization. Such an interpretation would therefore attribute CLAIMS B), C), E), and F) to Hegel and deny that he advocated A) and D). From this perspective, therefore, there would not even be an internal tension between claims A-F. Indeed, such a position would tend not to accept the distinction between FF and CAFF and would not attribute to Hegel a humanism based on the possession of rationality, but – at best – a humanism based on the capacity to actualize the potential for rationality.

All claims are actually Hegelian. The claims listed in the right column would be inseparable from the claims listed in the left column. Moreover, the claims listed in the left column could be seen as inseparable or even as functional to the practices of domination explicitly justified by the claims listed in the right column. The tension between CLAIMS A), D) and F) is explained as a case of hypocrisy.

CLAIM A) All human beings possess FF in equal measure. CLAIM B) Human beings create(d) societies that grant their members different levels of CAFF.

CLAIM D) Racial determinations have no influence on the attribution of FF to human individuals and therefore on their capacity to have CAFF.

CLAIM C) Hegel is a scientific racist.

CLAIM E) Racial distinctions seem influence the level of CAFF that particular societies enable(d) for their members.

CLAIM F) Non-Europeans (non-whites) seem to possess not only lower levels of CAFF but also lower levels of FF – and are therefore less human.

Therefore, the two conservative interpretations ia) and ib)¹¹⁸ preserve as separable and defensible CLAIM A) and its corollary CLAIM D). The critical reading, on the contrary,¹¹⁹ gives support to projects of problematization and reconsideration of the concept of universal humanity based on the possession of FF – projects that seem to me very relevant from a theoretical and political point of view.¹²⁰ In particular, rather than asking how to save a universal concept of humanity based on a particular understanding of the capacity of reason, this interpretation seems to suggest a different question, namely, “are we really a humanity”?¹²¹ This question invites us to rethink the terms of, and reasons for, our attachment to a concept of humanity as essentially defined by formal freedom, i.e. by rationality. Put into other words, the question invites us to reflect on *how we arrived at, what is entailed by, what*

¹¹⁸ Including the extreme variants mentioned in fn. 111.

¹¹⁹ At least in its non-radical variant (see note 117).

¹²⁰ Probably, the inseparability of racism and the concept of human being as rational being proposed by the critical reading need not be restricted to the two concepts considered abstractly, but can be extended to these two concepts as being embedded in (and coherently determined by) a network of other concepts and within a specific historical context.

¹²¹ KRENAK, A. **Ideias para adiar o fim do mundo**. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2019, p. 12. On the interpretation according to which the concept of human being would be a fallacious universalization of the European self-image of humanity, see – among others – Mills, Eze, Farr, Tibebu and Serequeberhan. For a problematization of the emancipatory potential of post-racial conceptualizations of humanity, see FERREIRA DA SILVA. **Toward a Global Idea of Race**. Ferreira da Silva’s argument, if I interpret her correctly, turns out to be particularly interesting in this context. As a matter of fact, she seems to hold that the the notion of post-racial humanity mobilized by several critical race theorists turns out to be useless insofar as it maintains to some extent the characterization of the human being as universal and self-determined, and transparent. This characterization seems to me to correspond in a way to the Hegelian definition of the human being as an entity endowed with LF.

*is concretely achieved by, and who benefits from such a concept of humanity (and the related notion of rationality)?*¹²² At the same time, this question points to alternative conceptualizations of the human.

In other terms, this approach promotes questions that seem to me relevant today and that are not raised very often (at least in – or starting from – the field of Hegelian studies in a strict sense). To try to express this point with an image: it is as if, once we take seriously the thesis of the symbiosis between universal humanity essentialistically grounded on the possession of rationality and racism in the context of Hegel's thought,¹²³ we were invited to look through the 'other side' of the proverbial 'telescope.'¹²⁴ We are invited not to focus our attention on racism – asking ourselves how we can fight it with the help of the idea of universal humanity based on the possession of reason –, but on the concept of universal humanity based on the possession of reason – analyzing and problematizing it from the standpoint of racism.

I believe that reflecting on these questions starting from this change of perspective is an important program – and this not so much (or not mainly) to demonstrate some interpretative thesis with regard to modern philosophers or modern philosophy in general, but to problematize aspects that concern contemporary societies stemming from Western modernity.¹²⁵

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¹²² In this sense, once again, Eze's considerations are relevant: "When Western philosophy speaks of 'reason' it is not just speaking of 'science' and 'knowledge' and 'method', and 'critique' or even 'thought'. In and through these codes it is more fundamentally the question of the 'anthropos', of the human, that is at stake, for questions of knowledge and identity, logos and anthropos, always hang together. It is within this background of *anthropos* as *logikós*, the interlacing of human understanding and the understanding of the human, that Europeans originally introduced the notion of *difference in kind* between themselves and Africans as a way of justifying unspeakable exploitation and denigration of Africans." (EZE. *Modern Western philosophy*, p. 218-219). See also GOLDBERG. *Racist Culture*, p. 119; EZE. *Postcolonial African Philosophy*, p. 10; EZE. *Philosophy and the "Man"*, p. 53; FERREIRA DA SILVA. *Toward a Global Idea of Race*, p. xiv; ANDRADE. *A opacidade do Iluminismo*, p. 307.

¹²³ This seems to also apply to other thinkers (see, again, the works of Eze, Mills and Bernasconi on Kant, for instance).

¹²⁴ I have recently become aware that I also borrowed the metaphor of the telescope from Krenak, even though he uses it in another context.

¹²⁵ I would like to express my gratitude to the people who have read and commented on previous versions of this paper: Miguel Maribondo, Luiz Philipe Rolla de Caux, Franz Knappik, Dax Moraes, Luca Corti, Filipe Campello, Ricardo Crissiuma, and the members of CEBRAP's research group "Direito e Democracia." I would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers of the REH for the careful reading and insightful suggestions.

sanfede@hotmail.it**REFERENCES****ABBREVIATIONS OF HEGEL'S WORKS:**

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