

# Extravagance and misery: Hegel on the multiplication and refinement of needs

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## Abstract

The topic of this paper is Hegel's claim in the *Philosophy of Right* that, within the modern social world, human needs tend to be endlessly expanded. Unlike the role that the system of needs plays in the formation of its participants' psychological makeup and the problem of poverty and the rabble, the topic of the expansion of needs remains underdiscussed in the recent Hegel literature on the virtues and vices of civil society. My discussion of the topic aims to answer the following two sets of questions: How does it come to pass that individuals' needs are endlessly expanded in this way? And is that expansion a phenomenon to be applauded or condemned? In particular, does the endless expansion of needs aid or obstruct the realization of social members' freedom? In answer to the first question, I argue that for Hegel the endless expansion of needs results from the level of specialization and division of labor distinctive of the modern market economy, the human capacity for a certain kind of abstraction, and the desire to be recognized by other participants in the market system. In answer to the second set of questions, and despite Hegel's own apparent ambivalence, I argue on his behalf that the endless expansion of needs represents an obstacle to the realization of freedom, and is on that ground a phenomenon to be condemned, for the following two reasons: First, the endless expansion of needs increases the influence or "pressure" of

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desire on the members of civil society that are subject to that expansion. Second, that expansion leads to widespread frustration, understood as the inability on the part of the members of civil society to ever fully realize their ends or satisfy their desires. I end by briefly considering two Hegelian solutions to the pernicious effects of the endless expansion of needs.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Hegel is both a defender and a critic of the modern market economy. His official position in the *Philosophy of Right* is that civil society (i.e., the market along with a legal and judicial system designed to protect economic agents' private property and a public authority or "police" tasked with the provision of welfare) is one of the principal modern institutions that make up a rational, freedom-promoting social order. But despite his official position, Hegel is also highly attentive to the potential perils or vices of civil society, which he flags at the very outset of his discussion of the market when he tells us that "civil society affords a spectacle of extravagance and misery" (*PR*, §185). In Hegel's view, one of the main virtues of civil society (and, in particular, the market or what Hegel refers to as the "system of needs") is that it forms or educates its members in ways that allow them to acquire the psychological capacities necessary to realize their own freedom and to recognize their fellow members as bearers of freedom. This educational function of civil society is arguably the most original and important component of Hegel's claim that participation in civil society realizes its members' freedom, in a variety of senses, and for this reason it has rightly been the focus of detailed commentary among Hegel scholars.<sup>1</sup> One of the main vices of civil society, or one of the ways in which it nevertheless affords a "spectacle of misery," according to Hegel, lies in its tendency to generate a pauper-rabble, that is, a resentful underclass made up of social members who have developed a set of needs by participating in civil society, which civil society nonetheless precludes them from satisfying. The problem of poverty and the formation of a rabble is perhaps the most pressing challenge to Hegel's claim that the modern social world is on the whole rational or good in as much as it promotes the freedom of its members. That the problem of poverty and the formation of a rabble represents a challenge to Hegel's claim in the *Philosophy of Right* about the rationality of the modern social world is underscored by the way in which Hegel himself struggles over several paragraphs to find a satisfactory solution to the problem. Given the threat that the problem of the rabble poses for Hegel's project in the *Philosophy of Right*, it is no surprise that it, too, has been the subject of considerable commentary among Hegel scholars.<sup>2</sup>

In this paper, I shall discuss neither the educational function of civil society nor the problem of poverty and the emergence of the rabble. Other commentators have done so extensively already. My topic concerns another, less-discussed way in which civil society, as Hegel conceives it in the *Philosophy of Right*, offers both a "spectacle of extravagance and misery," namely, his view that within the modern market economy individuals' needs are endlessly multiplied and become more refined or "particularized." Because participants in civil society thereby come to acquire a taste for more refined means, including luxury goods, to satisfy their expanding needs, such an expansion contributes to the "spectacle of extravagance" that civil society affords, according to Hegel. Because a situation in which individuals have a boundless desire for more, and more refined, means is one in which their associated needs can in principle never be fully satisfied, as we will see, the endless expansion of needs leads to widespread frustration and thus contributes to the "spectacle of misery" that civil society also affords. Or so I will argue on Hegel's behalf.

Hegel's account of the multiplication and refinement of needs within civil society has received less scholarly attention than his discussion of the educational function of civil society and the problem of poverty. This comparative neglect might ironically be due to the fact that the view strikes us nowadays as more or less uncontroversial and

accordingly in need of little elaboration and defense. All that is needed, the thought goes, in order to ascertain the degree of refinement and the multiplication that our desires and needs have reached within our current social world is to look around and appreciate the role that modern advertising plays in our lives. Indeed, Hegel himself seems to have anticipated the role that advertising plays in our lives when he reportedly says that “[a] need is... created not so much by those who experience it directly as by those who seek to profit from its emergence” (PR, §191Z). But the role of advertising notwithstanding, the efforts of advertisers (to create in us a need for skinny, torn jeans or vitamin-infused watermelon-flavored sparkling water, for example) would have no impact whatsoever unless we were the sorts of creatures that are susceptible of forming new and more refined needs, and doing so indefinitely or without end, in the first place.

As the point I have just made about the point is intended to suggest, that the phenomenon of the endless expansion of needs is familiar to us does not mean that the phenomenon (and Hegel's treatment of it) is well understood. In this paper, I attempt to provide a clearer and more thorough account of that phenomenon on Hegel's behalf than what has hitherto been the case in the literature. I will refer to the claim that, within the modern social world, human needs as well as the means to their satisfaction are endlessly expanded as the “expansion thesis.” My aim in what follows will be to (1) piece together Hegel's answer to the question of how social members come to acquire a boundless desire for more, and more refined, means as a result of their participation in civil society. What is the origin of this endless expansion of needs or how does it come to pass, according to Hegel, that members of the modern social world are subject to an expansion of such a sort? Having offered an answer to this question, I will also (2) spell out the significance of the endless expansion of needs for Hegel's project in the *Philosophy of Right* of comprehending the institutions of our social world so as to reveal them to be inherently rational or freedom-promoting. Does the drive for indefinitely more, and more refined means, make individuals freer or is that drive somehow freedom-obstructive, in Hegel's view? I will refer to (1) as the “genetic question” and (2) as the “evaluative question,” respectively.

That Hegel endorses the expansion thesis, and even that his answer to the genetic question relies in some way or other on a combination of psychological features and features that are distinctive of the socioeconomic form of organization of modern societies, are points with which Hegel readers will be at least roughly familiar. Numerous commentators have certainly remarked that Hegel endorses the expansion thesis. Typically, however, treatment of that thesis is a matter of passing paraphrase on their part. Commentators who offer a lengthier treatment of the thesis often mention only some subset of the features that, on my reading, figure in Hegel's answer to the genetic question. And, even in cases where commentators do identify all the features that I argue play a role in the answer to that question, their treatments are sometimes less clear, precise, or thorough than what one might hope, as I indicate in the course of my own discussion below. As for the evaluative question: Commentary is even more terse and typically does not go beyond noting the connection that Hegel draws between our capacity for freedom and the expansion of needs.

The structure of the paper is as follows: I begin, in section 2, by making several qualifications and thereby clarifying the expansion thesis. In section 3, I deal with the genetic question and distinguish my interpretation from the readings offered by other commentators. In section 4, I turn my attention to the evaluative question. Having supplied an answer to that question, I suggest some Hegelian solutions to the dangers to which the endless expansion of needs gives rise. I conclude, in section 5, by summarizing some of my main points in the paper and underscoring the sense in which the endless expansion of needs is a distinctively modern phenomenon, in Hegel's view.

A final note before getting underway: It is surprising that the issue of the modern expansion of needs has been somewhat underdiscussed within the recent Hegel literature, since it is an issue that is clearly relevant to understanding our current social world. Another reason why this comparative neglect is surprising is that the issue is taken up by Feuerbach, Marx, and several members of the Frankfurt School, all of whom are indebted in some way to Hegel. My focus in this paper, however, is restricted to Hegel's own treatment of the expansion thesis. Discussion of its treatment by these later figures, and of their relation to Hegel, is a topic for another occasion. I shall also refrain in what follows from discussing in any detail the relation between Hegel and his predecessors Smith and Rousseau.

One of several lessons that Hegel undoubtedly learns from Smith concerns the impact that the specialization and division of labor has on productivity. It is also plausible that Hegel's account of recognition in his treatment of civil society, as the drive to be well regarded by one's fellow participants in the market system, is a descendant of Rousseauian *amour-propre*. And both division of labor and recognition, as we will see, play an important role in the answer to the genetic question that I piece together in section 3. However, I will neither assume that Hegel's answer to that question is basically the same as the answer one might find in Smith or Rousseau nor will I explore the Hegelian debt to Smith and Rousseau when it comes to the topics of division of labor and recognition, respectively.<sup>3</sup> In short, in what follows I attempt to elucidate Hegel's discussion of the modern expansion of needs on its own terms. Moreover, whatever the similarities between Smith, Rousseau, and Hegel might be when it comes to their respective answers to something like the genetic question, I believe Hegel has a more detailed and compelling answer than they do to what I have referred to as the evaluative question. The solutions to the pernicious effects of the modern expansion of needs and the role of the corporations in those solutions, which I explore at the end of section 4, also seem to me to be distinctively Hegelian and to set Hegel apart from Rousseau, Smith, and other political economists.

## 2 | THE EXPANSION THESIS

At the outset of his discussion of human needs, Hegel writes:

The ways and means by which the animal can satisfy its *needs* [*Bedürfnisse*] are limited in scope, and its needs are likewise limited. Though sharing this dependence, the human being is at the same time able to transcend it and to show his universality, first by *multiplying* his *needs* and *means*, and secondly by *dividing* and *differentiating* the concrete need into individual parts and aspects which then become different needs, *particularized* and hence more abstract.

(PR, §190, emphases modified)<sup>4</sup>

That the multiplication and refinement (or particularization) that human beings' needs and desires undergo within civil society is supposed to be endless is clear from the following, earlier passage, to which I shall return again below:

Particularity in itself [*für sich*] is boundless [*maßlos*] extravagance, and the forms of this extravagance are themselves *boundless*. Through their representations [*Vorstellungen*] and reflections, human beings expand their *desires*, which do not form a closed circle like animal instinct, and extend them to a bad [*schlechte*] infinity.

(PR, §185Z, emphases added)<sup>5</sup>

Following these and other similar remarks, I have so far formulated the expansion thesis as the claim that, within civil society, individuals' needs as well as the means to the satisfaction of those needs are endlessly expanded. But this formulation as well as Hegel's remarks raise questions (i) about the connection between the *multiplication* of needs and means, on the one hand, and their *refinement*, on the other; (ii) about the multiplication and refinement of *needs*, on the one hand, and the *means* to their satisfaction, on the other; and (iii) about the *nature of the needs* themselves that are allegedly multiplied and refined. In this section, I briefly take up each of these questions in turn and thereby attempt to clarify the expansion thesis. I also indicate the extent to which the multiplication and refinement of needs is a distinctively modern phenomenon, in Hegel's view. To anticipate in terms that I explicate in my discussion of (iii) below: Within both modern and pre-modern contexts, human beings' true needs and also their mere desires tend to expand. Within the modern social world, however, that expansion is exacerbated and, in the case of our mere desires in particular, leads to a "bad infinity," as we have seen Hegel put it above in the quote from §185Z of the *Philosophy of Right*. In other words, what is distinctive of civil society is that it tends to expand its participants' desires

endlessly. Having made these clarifications in this section, in the next section I will raise and attempt to answer the genetic question, namely: What is the origin of the endless expansion of needs and means? How exactly does it come to pass that, within modern social conditions, human beings' needs are endlessly expanded, as Hegel maintains?

(i). The formulation of the expansion thesis that we find in §190 of the *Philosophy of Right* refers to both the *multiplication* and the *particularization* or, as I have put it, the *refinement* of needs (and means). But what, if any, is the connection between multiplication and refinement? For all I have said so far, multiplication and refinement (of both needs and means) might each be simultaneous effects of some separate, underlying cause. That this possibility is not in fact how Hegel conceives of the connection between multiplication and refinement is suggested by a passage from the 1817/18 student lecture notes that anticipates Hegel's remarks in §190 of the *Philosophy of Right* above. In the passage from these lecture notes, Hegel is reported as saying that the “division and differentiation [of needs] into single parts and aspects” (i.e., their particularization or refinement) produces new or “different needs” (VNR, 118/167). A few lines down, he elaborates:

Hercules was attired in a lion skin, and this is a simple way of satisfying [the need for clothing]. Reflection fragments this simple need and divides it into many parts; according to its particular nature, each individual part of the body—head, neck, feet—is given particular clothing, and so one concrete need is divided into many needs and these in turn into many others

(VNR, 118/167–168)

As these passages indicate, Hegel's view is that the multiplication of needs results from their refinement or particularization. That is, it is by refining my existing needs (e.g., for clothing) that I come to acquire new needs (for shoes, a scarf, headwear, etc.) and thus multiply my current set of needs. For example, I might come to develop a need, real or perceived, for French vanilla-flavored, cold brew coffee. But such a need is just a new, more particularized or refined version of my need for coffee or, more generally still, my need for caffeine or some sort of stimulant.<sup>6</sup> As this example also reveals, my acquiring more particularized needs of this sort is a function in part of my ability to draw highly specific, fine-grained distinctions among both the set of my desires and other psychological items, on the one hand, and the properties of those things that serve as possible means to the satisfaction of those desires, on the other. I take Hegel to be making this latter point when he reportedly says: “The understanding, which can grasp distinctions, brings multiplicity into [human beings'] needs” (PR, §190Z).<sup>7</sup> In the next section, I attempt to explicate how precisely the ability to draw distinctions in this way figures in the process whereby needs and means come to be refined and consequently multiplied without end within civil society.

(ii). In formulating the expansion thesis, I have also referred to the multiplication and refinement of *needs* as well as *means*. But what is the connection between needs and means in this context? We can begin to answer this question by noting that a need standardly requires for its satisfaction the use (often in the form of consumption) of some part of the external world that functions as a means relative to the need. Experiencing a need, in particular, typically prompts us to seek out some means to its satisfaction. On pain of frustration, then, the emergence of a new need will be accompanied by the creation of a means to its satisfaction. Accordingly, the multiplication and refinement that will be our focus here concerns both needs and their accompanying means.<sup>8</sup> However, within the modern “system of needs,” this relation between needs and means is often reversed. Hegel observes that, within the market system, the production of particularized goods often occurs *prior* to the emergence of any need that might be satisfied by the consumption of those goods. This reversal, I believe, is part of what Hegel has in mind when he tells us (in a passage I have already cited and that anticipates the workings of modern advertising) that “a need is created... by those who seek to profit from its emergence” (PR, §191Z). As I will try to show in the next section, and as Hegel himself notes in §190Z, the drive to attain, enjoy, and consume goods that satisfy (real or merely perceived) needs that we do not experience prior to the production of those goods in the first place is fueled by the desire to be

recognized by others.<sup>9</sup> More specifically, Hegel maintains that members of civil society come to develop a desire to be esteemed, held in high regard and even to be seen by others as occupying a higher position within some social ranking. And, as we will see, once members of civil society come to acquire the desire to satisfy the opinion of others in this way, the drive to attain new and more refined goods will become both exacerbated and entrenched within these social members.

(iii). In my discussion in this section, I have spoken somewhat loosely of both needs and desires. I have allowed myself to do so in part because Hegel himself does the same in his own discussion of the expansion thesis, as the passages quoted at the start of this section make clear. Hegel's talk of both needs and desires, however, raises the question: How should we understand the needs that (along with the corresponding means) are multiplied and refined within civil society? And how should we distinguish needs from desires, if indeed such a distinction is to be drawn at all? Is the "need" I have mentioned for vanilla-flavored cold brew coffee, for example, a (true) need or a (mere) desire? Unfortunately, Hegel's text does not provide us with a clear and succinct criterion for distinguishing between (what I have just referred to as) true needs and mere desires. However, that Hegel implicitly acknowledges some such distinction can be appreciated, I think, if one recalls his remark that the expansion that human needs undergo within civil society leads to a "bad infinity" (*PR*, §185Z) and his similar, later claim to the effect that human needs as well as the means to their satisfaction undergo "an infinite process of multiplication" (*PR*, §191). If the modern expansion of needs leads to a "bad infinity," then it would seem that at least some of the "needs" that compose that infinite set must be frivolous, not necessary for our physical or spiritual wellbeing or otherwise exceed the set of our true needs, however exactly we define this latter group.<sup>10</sup> Explicating what the distinction I am attributing to Hegel between true needs and mere desires consists in admittedly requires some degree of interpretive reconstruction. Nevertheless, I believe Hegel's text provides us with sufficient clues to piece together an account of the extension of the class of true needs on his behalf.

Among our true needs, I suggest that Hegel includes what he refers to as the "immediate natural needs of animal life" (*VNR*, 114/162), namely, the need for food, shelter, clothing, and anything else that is required for our biological survival. The means by which we satisfy these "immediate" needs, however, are not determined or limited by instinct as they are in the case of non-human animals. As Hegel puts it, even such natural needs are in the human case "rais [ed] to universality" (*VNR*, 114/162). We can step back, reflect on these needs and select any number of means to their satisfaction. For example, we can boil, roast or fry our food. And it is even up to us whether to obtain our nutrients from animal or plant sources.<sup>11</sup>

Our true needs, however, outstrip these "natural" or "immediate" needs, as I think Hegel's discussion in "The System of Needs" (§§189–206) reveals. The economic system whose contours Hegel describes in that section is meant to supply the institutional context within which modern social members (or, more precisely, male heads of family) come to acquire the means to satisfy their (and their families') needs. In order to successfully participate in civil society and thereby acquire the means to the satisfaction of their needs, economic agents have to make themselves into "links in the chain of this [economic] *continuum* [*Zusammenhang*]" (*PR*, §187), that is, they have to perform socially productive work by (among other things) taking into account the needs, desires, and opinions of others. For example, in order to make himself into a "link" in the market "continuum," a cobbler will have to produce shoes that satisfy the needs, desires, and even the opinions of his would-be buyers.<sup>12</sup> Unless he does so, our cobbler will fail to satisfy his (and his family's) needs, including his (and their) "natural" or "immediate" needs. Thus, on Hegel's account, our true needs must presumably include whatever is required in order to successfully perform our role as economic agents or members of the "system of needs," be that raw materials, instruments, machinery, training, and so forth.<sup>13</sup> Participation in the "system of needs," then, expands our true needs from the strictly biological to whatever is required by our economic role within that system.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, in Hegel's view, the class of our true needs also includes, I propose, the distinctively spiritual need for recognition. By describing this need as "spiritual," I mean to denote that it is a need we experience as free beings or creatures with wills. Realizing our nature as free beings requires for Hegel that we be recognized ( $\alpha$ ) as equal to our fellow human beings (and thus bearers of the same rights as them) but ( $\beta$ ) also as particular wills (and therefore not

just as abstract bearers of right). Recognition as ( $\alpha$ ) bearers of rights is required in order to safeguard our personal freedom and private property, as we learn from Hegel's discussion in "Abstract Right." Why do we also need to be recognized ( $\beta$ ) in our particularity, however? The short Hegelian answer to this latter question is that the project of realizing freedom includes as a component part the ability to pursue our own particular or private interests. I take Hegel to be making this latter point, for example, when he writes at the outset of his discussion of the state that "concrete freedom" requires inter alia that "personal individuality and its *particular interests*... reach their full development and *gain recognition* of their right for itself (within the system of the family and of civil society)" (PR, §260, emphases modified).

Against the background of the foregoing qualifications, we can now say that one of the features of the modern form of economic organization to which Hegel is meaning to allude in his discussion of the expansion thesis is that that form of organization tends to blur the very distinction between (true) needs and (mere) desires. More specifically, participants in the modern system of needs come to acquire desires that far exceed the set of their true needs as I have attempted to delimit them on Hegel's behalf. This latter claim is surely part of the import of Hegel's remark that civil society gives rise to "boundless extravagance" (PR, §185Z). The market expands, multiplies and refines, not only participants' true needs, particularly those attached to their economic station, but also instills in them new, more refined "needs" that only appear to be such (i.e., mere desires) and it does so boundlessly or without end. It is this latter sort of "needs" that I will be mostly referring to in my account of the expansion thesis in what follows. What exactly is pernicious or freedom-endangering about an endless expansion of such "needs" is part of my topic in section 4. How such an endless expansion comes to pass in the first place is my topic in section 3.

### 3 | THE GENETIC QUESTION

In this section, I attempt to answer the genetic question about the expansion of needs. To repeat: How exactly does it come to pass that the needs and means of participants in civil society are multiplied and refined without end?<sup>15</sup> The answer that I articulate on Hegel's behalf in what follows is guided by two desiderata: (a) the "psychological condition" and (b) the "economic condition."

We can state (a) and (b) in the form of the following two sets of questions: (a) What is it about human beings that makes them susceptible of developing an endless drive for more, and more refined, means to satisfy their expanding set of needs? More specifically, what psychological feature, or set of features, of human beings accounts for the multiplication and refinement of needs within civil society? As I have already noted, in the course of his discussion of these issues, Hegel is reported as saying that "[a] need is... created not so much by those who experience it directly as by those who seek to profit from its emergence" (PR, §191Z). Be that as it may, the efforts of "those who seek to profit from [the] emergence" of new and more refined needs would fall flat unless individuals were such as to develop a drive for more and more refined means in the first place. So again, what is it about human beings that allows the market (and more specifically those participants in the market "who seek to profit from [the] emergence" of needs) to trigger that endless drive within us? And (b) why does the drive for more, and more refined, means to satisfy our endlessly expanding set of needs arise within civil society? More precisely, what is it about the modern form of economic organization (as opposed to, say, feudal or other heavily regulated, pre-modern economic organizations) that explains the degree of refinement and multiplication of needs that Hegel observes among modern individuals? Why, in short, does Hegel think that the infinite expansion of needs is a phenomenon that deserves to be discussed specifically within the context of his treatment of the modern "system of needs"?

That a satisfactory answer to the genetic question requires that we satisfy the psychological condition is hopefully brought out by my remarks about "those who seek to profit from [the] emergence" of new needs in the previous paragraph. That such an answer requires that we also satisfy the economic condition is evident from the fact that it is in the context of civil society (and not any other, pre-modern economic institution) that the endless

expansion of needs, according to Hegel, occurs. Although Hegel's own discussion of the expansion thesis is somewhat scattered and brief, I again believe he supplies the reader with sufficient clues to piece together an answer to the genetic question that abides by the text of the *Philosophy of Right* and related lectures. The answer I begin to articulate on Hegel's behalf immediately below relies on the idea of the human capacity for a certain kind of abstraction, on the one hand, and the ideas of specialization and division of labor, on the other. The first of the two ideas I have just mentioned ensures that the answer to the genetic question satisfies the psychological condition. The second of these two ideas ensures that the answer satisfies the economic condition as well. (Although the division of labor is not a modern invention, the degree to which labor is divided and specialized within the modern "system of needs" helps explain why it is that our needs and means are endlessly expanded within civil society and not, say, in a feudal or Ancient Greek system.) Further below, I introduce another psychological component into the account, whose role is to both exacerbate and entrench the endless expansion of needs that the participants in civil society undergo. This third component is the drive for recognition or the desire to satisfy the "opinion" of others, as Hegel puts it in §190Z.<sup>16</sup>

What psychological feature or what fact about us leads us to develop new needs and means and to do so without end? More precisely, how does our capacity for abstraction figure in Hegel's answer to the genetic question? And how does Hegel conceive of that capacity, anyway? In attempting to answer these questions, we can begin by recalling the way in which Hegel distinguishes human from non-human animals in the context of his discussion of the expansion thesis. In the *Zusatz* to §190 of the *Philosophy of Right*, we read:

The animal is a particular entity [*ein Partikulares*] which has its instinct and the means of satisfying it, means whose bounds cannot be exceeded. There are insects which are tied to a specific plant, and other animals whose sphere is wider and which can live in different climates; but there is always a limiting factor in comparison with the sphere which is open to the human being.

Although neediness is common to both human and other animals, human beings are not governed by instinct or "tied to" a narrow range of means in the way that non-human animals are. Human beings can step back from and resist any one of their needs as well as assess and choose among a range of means wider than that available to any non-human animal. Moreover, human beings have the ability to abstract from or set aside some of the properties of the means in order to focus on other properties (e.g., the type of cut of beef as opposed to the method of cooking), they can draw highly fine-grained distinctions among the latter properties (shank, loin, rib, etc.), and they can compare and rank the means on the basis of such distinctions.

That this capacity for a certain kind of abstraction and reflection plays an important role in the answer to the genetic question is clear from Hegel's remark that the expansion of needs presupposes "a rapid succession of representations, the ability to grasp complex and universal relations, and refinement of the understanding and of language" (VNR, 124/173).<sup>17</sup> We can illustrate that role with what is admittedly a somewhat simplified example: Although driving to campus is more time-efficient and comfortable than having to take the train, I can ascertain with minimal effort that I would get to campus even faster, and I would enjoy a smoother ride and more pleasant driving experience, if I drove a car that handled potholes better and had a properly functioning AC and heating system. I arrive at this observation about the level of comfort of my old Ford by singling out and scrutinizing some of the features of the car: heating system, suspension, etc. "[E]very comfort in turn reveals its less comfortable side," Hegel reportedly tells us (PR, §191Z). Realizing that there are more efficient and comfortable ways of getting to campus than by driving my old Ford, I will come to develop a desire, or even a felt need, for a vehicle that has a better suspension, a more reliable heating and AC system, and perhaps even more comfortable, leather seats. But what is true of my old Ford is true of the car that I now only wish I drove instead. It, too, would reveal an uncomfortable side. On account of our capacity as humans for drawing ever more nuanced distinctions and comparisons, comfort turns out to be "something utterly inexhaustible" (PR, §191Z).<sup>18</sup> Again, "every comfort in turn reveals its less comfortable side" (PR, §191Z, emphasis added). Human beings' capacity for a kind of abstraction and reflection thus leads them to



desire new and more refined means to satisfy their correspondingly more refined needs. And since every new way of satisfying some need “in turn reveals its less comfortable side,” the process of creation of new, more refined means and needs is in principle boundless. Or as we read in Hegel's 1817/18 lectures: “The quest to discover means of satisfying [needs] is stimulated anew by *each* new means” (VNR, 119/168, emphasis added).

I now turn to the part of the answer to the genetic question that is meant to satisfy (b), the economic condition. In order to appreciate how the modern level of specialization and division of labor figure in the answer to the genetic question, and how these features of the modern form of economic organization fit together with the human capacity for abstraction in that answer, it might help to start by asking, more generally: What role does the idea of division of labor play in Hegel's discussion of civil society?<sup>19</sup> As I have already noted, civil society provides the institutional context within which modern individuals obtain the means to satisfy their needs. In the opening paragraphs of his treatment of civil society, Hegel describes this institution as a “system of all-round interdependence” (PR, §183), by which he means in part that members of civil society depend on others for the satisfaction of at least some (and in fact most) of those needs.<sup>20</sup> No member of civil society, that is, can produce on her own all the means required for the satisfaction of her needs. As a result of this division of labor, work becomes both more efficient and specialized (or, as Hegel likes to say, “abstract”), which in turn results in an increase in productivity.<sup>21</sup> In other words, the fact that labor is increasingly divided and specialized within civil society means that economic agents can produce exponentially more and more refined or particularized goods.

Hegel makes the points I have just rehearsed about the division of labor when he tells us in the *Philosophy of Right* that “[t]hrough the division [of labor], the work of the individual [*des Einzelnen*] becomes *simpler*, so that his skills at his abstract work become greater, as does the volume of his output” (PR, §198). In the 1817/18 lectures he is more expansive:

[A]s a result [of the division of labor], labor or work becomes less concrete in character, becomes abstract, homogeneous, and easier, so that a far greater quantity of products can be prepared at the same time... This is the basis for all factory and manufacturing labor. Each single operation is assigned to a single individual. In a smallish factory employing ten persons the daily output [per person] is 4,800 pins, whereas an individual working on his own can make 20 pins at most.

(VNR, 127/175-176)<sup>22</sup>

Of course, specialization and division of labor is not specific to civil society. In other, pre-modern forms of economic organization, labor was divided and specialized to various degrees as well. But Hegel's point in characterizing civil society as a “system of all-round interdependence” is that labor is divided and specialized to a far greater extent under that system than under any previous economic system. Corresponding to this increase in dependence among economic agents and the increase in specialization is an explosion in the amount and particularization of goods produced. And without that sort of explosion one of the conditions of the expansion thesis would fail to be met. For only a system with the ever-increasing degree of specialization and thus the enormous level of productive power of the modern market can keep up with a (potentially endless) increase in means and needs. More precisely, only such a system can produce and make available highly refined means to match the boundless flights of abstraction on the part of the members of civil society. Or to borrow some of the terms introduced in the course of our discussion above: Only a market system like the one Hegel describes in “The System of Needs” can keep up with (what Hegel calls) the infinite “ramifications” of comfort (PR, §191Z) or continuously satisfy individuals' “quest” to discover means for new, more refined needs.

The market system, however, does more than just produce and make available highly refined means for new needs that would otherwise, in pre-modern societies, have gone unsatisfied. The modern level of specialization and division of labor plays a second, arguably deeper role in the explanation of the endless expansion of needs. According to Hegel, as we have seen above, the human capacity of abstraction engenders both new needs and means. But only in the context of a market system are human beings' exercises of that capacity boundless. Although Hegel himself

does not explicitly make this point, I suggest that the market system also determines just how far its participants' flights of abstraction might extend in the first place.<sup>23</sup> To make the point more perspicuous, consider how implausible (and anachronistic) it is to say that a 16th century Persian could exercise her powers of abstraction and thereby come to form a desire for anything like, say, a vanilla-flavored nitro cold brew cup of coffee. In a pre-modern world, these and other extravagances (like fine leather car seats or the latest smartphone) would be simply unimaginable. Only within a system with the level of specialization and productive power of the modern market are such extravagances even conceivable. Thus, our modern form of economic organization, I propose, is partly responsible for the psychological makeup of its participants (or, more specifically, for the lengths that the exercises of their powers of abstraction are capable of reaching).<sup>24</sup>

The foregoing discussion of the ideas of specialization and division of labor, on the one hand, and the human capacity of abstraction and reflection, on the other, represents the beginning of an answer to the genetic question. That discussion, however, cannot be the full answer to the question, for it fails to assign any role whatsoever to the desire of the members of civil society to satisfy the "opinion" of others (PR, §190Z). And Hegel is unequivocal that that desire plays some important role or other: The desire to be recognized by one's fellow members of civil society, he tells us, is "an actual source of the multiplication and spread [*Verbreitung*] of needs" (PR, §193).<sup>25</sup> But in what way does the desire for recognition contribute to the endless expansion of our needs and means, exactly?<sup>26</sup>

In order to answer this question, it might be useful to contrast the role that recognition plays in "The System of Needs" with its first appearance in the text of the *Philosophy of Right*, namely, in the transition from "Property" to "Contract" within "Abstract Right." By that point in the text, Hegel has told us that private property represents the first "existence" of (personal) freedom. Persons, he argues, have a right to claim ownership over whatever (ownerless) things are involved in their realizing their freely chosen ends. As Hegel himself puts it, the things in question make up a person's "external sphere of freedom" (PR, §41).<sup>27</sup> The transition from "Property" to "Contract" relies on the idea that in putting our will into, and claiming ownership over, some (will-less) thing, our will makes reference also to the will of others. For the things that make up a person's property are things in an external world that she shares with other persons. And in as much as a person's property is part of a world that she shares with others, the things she owns exist also "for the will of another person" (PR, §71). Thus, in claiming ownership over some part of the external world, a person is not only relating to some will-less thing, but she is also relating to other persons or wills. Relations of property (between persons and things) thus depend on relations (agreements or contracts) between persons. In claiming ownership over something, then, I make an (at least implicit) demand on others that they recognize me as a property owner and acknowledge that thing as my property or as a repository of my freedom.

What shape does the reference to the will of others take within the modern "system of needs"? More specifically, how is the demand that one be recognized by others as a bearer of (property) rights transformed in civil society? As we have just seen, within civil society goods become endlessly refined as well as an expression of lesser or greater degrees of comfort. Accordingly, my reference to the will of others in that social context will become a matter of signaling my level of comfort and therefore, as I am about to suggest, my standing in relation to others. And my desire for recognition will no longer be satisfied simply by being respected as a bearer of rights or property owner but only by obtaining the approval and admiration of others for the degree of comfort (and thus social standing) that I have achieved.

In his discussion of these issues in his 1817/18 lectures, Hegel distinguishes between two related desires or drives, (1) an "imitative drive [*Trieb der Nachahmung*]" (VNR, 120/169) to fit in and (2) a "competitive desire [*Wetteifer*] to distinguish oneself" (121/170) from or stand out in relation to others. Hegel then goes on to characterize the former drive as "the well-known drive to be recognized by the other as equal" (120/169) and the latter desire as a "drive to *present oneself* as a particular [*sich als Besonderes darzustellen*]" (121/170, emphasis added).<sup>28</sup> These drives or desires, then, are desires to be (1) equal to and (2) both different and superior to others *in the eyes of these others*.<sup>29</sup> But to be seen by others as (1) an equal (in some relevant respect) is to fit in and, to that extent, to be the object of their acceptance or approval. And, as we might also say on Hegel's behalf, to be seen by others as

better than or occupying some superior position in relation to them is to be the object of their admiration. Thus, in distinguishing between (1) the “imitative drive” and (2) the “competitive desire,” Hegel is effectively claiming that having obtained the recognition as an equal or the approval of others, members of civil society will tend to seek the admiration of their peers by excelling and so standing above them.

The distinction between these two drives or desires for recognition (as equal, on the one hand, and as both distinct and superior, on the other) is helpful in understanding how the desire to satisfy the “opinion” of others, to which Hegel alludes in §190Z, serves to both entrench and exacerbate the drive for ever more, and more refined, means to satisfy our expanding needs within civil society. In particular, my “competitive desire to distinguish [myself]” from and seek the admiration of others, and your desire to do just the same, implies that the drive for recognition becomes a further trigger for the emergence of ever more numerous and refined means.<sup>30</sup> For if Jones seeks to be regarded by others as better than or superior to them, Smith desires the same, and so does Brown, then neither of them can hope to achieve the sort of recognition they seek unless they continuously outdo one another by externally signaling their standing through more, and more refined, goods. Moreover, the way in which Jones, Smith, and Brown seek to outdo each other reveals how within civil society needs and means can become detached, or their relation reversed, as I indicated in section 2. Typically, experiencing a need (say, for a drink) leads us to seek some means to satisfy it (e.g., by getting a glass of water). But Jones' desire for the latest available luxury item is not one that seems to depend on some prior need in this way, aside from the drive to obtain the admiration of his peers. Outside of civil society, needs typically precede means. Within civil society, means often precede and trigger new needs. For example, it is the production of diamond cufflinks (presumably by “those who seek to profit from [the] emergence” of new needs, as Hegel tells us in §191Z) that arguably first instills in Jones the corresponding desire, whose satisfaction will then serve to further establish Jones' standing in the eyes of Smith, Brown, and others.<sup>31</sup>

#### 4 | THE EVALUATIVE QUESTION

In the previous section, I supplied an answer on Hegel's behalf to the genetic question based on the ideas of the human capacity of abstraction, the modern division of labor, and the desire to satisfy the opinion of others. To recapitulate: Unlike other animals, human beings enjoy a capacity to step back from any need, reflect on the means to its satisfaction, abstract from certain properties of those means in order to focus on other properties, and compare the various available means in the light of that abstraction. On account of this capacity, any available means to the satisfaction of some end might be subject to scrutiny and outranked by some other means that can satisfy our needs more efficiently, pleasantly or with less effort on our part. As we saw Hegel say: “The quest to discover means of satisfying [needs] is stimulated anew by each new means” (VNR, 119/168). In a pre-modern system of production and exchange, however, the endless extravagances of modern comfort would be unimaginable. By contrast, and thanks to its level of specialization and enormous productive power, the modern market system is able to keep up with and satiate the constant “quest” of which Hegel speaks in the line I have just cited. Finally, this boundless drive to discover ever more refined means becomes ingrained in us and is further fueled by the desire that participants in civil society experience to be recognized by their peers. Hegel's answer to the genetic question thus depends on both psychological factors (the human capacity for abstraction and the drive for recognition) and economic factors (ever-increasing specialization and division of labor), where the latter sort of factors play a role in molding participants' psychological makeup. In particular, the degree of specialization and division of labor that characterizes the modern social world partly determines precisely what exercises of abstraction members of that world are capable of performing.

In this section, I turn to the evaluative question: What is the significance of the expansion thesis for Hegel's project of comprehending our modern social world so as to reveal it to be at least in principle rational or freedom-promoting? More specifically, is the endless multiplication and refinement of needs and means that modern individuals

experience conducive or inimical to the realization of freedom? Is it a phenomenon to be applauded or condemned? And in what sense, exactly, does that endless expansion make us more or less free, as the case may be? Hegel's own scattered remarks in answer to the evaluative question appear to be ambivalent. In some passages, Hegel seems to claim that the expansion of needs has a liberating effect on the individuals whose needs are thus expanded. In other passages, he laments the freedom-endangering consequences that the endless expansion of needs has on those who experience it. I shall consider both sets of passages in turn and extract from Hegel's text what I take to be the most coherent, compelling answer to the evaluative question. By Hegel's own lights, I propose, the endless expansion of needs should be regarded as inimical to the realization of individuals' freedom and thus one of the ways (in addition arguably to the emergence of a rabble) in which civil society turns out to be irrational. I end, in a somewhat reconstructive manner, by suggesting some Hegelian solutions to the unfreedom that the expansion of needs engenders.

The first passage relevant to answering the evaluative question occurs at the outset of Hegel's discussion of human needs in the *Philosophy of Right*. Hegel there distinguishes human from non-human animals, as we saw above, on the grounds that the latter are "tied" in the satisfaction of their needs to some narrow set of means. The lion satisfies its need for food by chasing down a zebra or gazelle, say, and some "insects... are tied to a specific plant" (PR, §190Z). Human beings, by contrast, are bearers of free wills. On account of this capacity for freedom, human beings have the ability to step back from or resist any one of their needs as well as scrutinize and choose among a range of means wider than that available to any other, non-human animals. The expansion of needs and means is thus (as we might put it) symptomatic or expressive of human freedom.<sup>32</sup> But in posing the evaluative question, I am not concerned with this sort of connection between the expansion of needs and means, on the one hand, and freedom as a capacity, on the other. I am concerned, more specifically, with the exercise of that capacity within the modern social world. The evaluative question thus asks: Does the modern, endless expansion of needs and means facilitate or impede the exercise of our capacity for freedom? In answer to this latter question, we find Hegel saying:

The very multiplication of needs has a restraining influence on desire, for if people make use of many things [*viele gebrauchen*], the pressure to obtain any one of these which they might need is less strong, and this is a sign that necessity [*die Not*] in general is less powerful.

(PR, §190Z)<sup>33</sup>

Let us grant the (phenomenologically plausible?) point that, as our needs expand, the "pressure" that any one of them exerts on us is weakened. And let us also insist that the expansion of needs is symptomatic or expressive of the human capacity for freedom in the sense I have just indicated.<sup>34</sup> Hegel's remarks in the passage I have just quoted are nonetheless surprising because even if we grant that as a result of the expansion of needs no one single need exerts as much "pressure" on us as it otherwise would, it does not seem to follow from this observation that "[t]he very multiplication of needs has a restraining influence on desire." For the sake of argument, let us grant with Hegel that the greater the extent and degree of refinement of our needs, the less forceful will the "pressure" of any one of those needs on us be individually. My desire for *x* might well be dimmed by the cumulative pull that my newly acquired, refined desires for *v*, *w*, *y*, and *z* exert. But a whole, infinite set, of which my desires for all of *v*, *w*, *x*, *y*, *z* are members, will presumably have a greater pull or exert a stronger "pressure" on me than what a smaller, finite set of needs would.<sup>35</sup> If that is so, then it is not the case that the modern, endless expansion of needs has a liberating effect or a "restraining influence on desire" as a whole, as Hegel puts it. The endless expansion of needs seems to tether us to and make us more rather than less dependent on desire overall.

To the extent that Hegel is indeed expressing the optimistic view in the passage I have quoted that the expansion of needs makes those that undergo it freer than they would otherwise be due to the alleged restraint on desire, that optimism seems to be misplaced. Even though human beings are free in ways that other animals are not, and therefore can freely choose the means by which they satisfy their expanding needs in ways that non-human animals cannot, the endless expansion of needs and means that the members of civil society experience represent an

obstacle to the exercise of their freedom. We can thus conclude on Hegel's behalf that the endless expansion of needs is not liberating but enslaving.

In one of the other passages in the *Philosophy of Right* that is directly relevant to the evaluative question, Hegel appears to condemn the endless expansion of needs on account of the pernicious effects that that expansion has on those who undergo it. In §195, he writes:

The tendency of the social condition towards an indeterminate multiplication and specification of needs, means, and pleasures—i.e. *luxury*—a tendency which, like the distinction between natural and educated needs, has no limits [*Grenze*], involves an equally infinite increase in dependence and want [*Not*].<sup>36</sup>

In what follows, I argue that at least one point Hegel is effectively making in this and other similar passages is that the infinite multiplication and refinement of needs leads to widespread frustration among the members of civil society.<sup>37</sup> In a pre-modern situation in which our needs expand in some limited, finite way, it is possible to reach a state in which all of those needs are fully satisfied (at least for some period of time, e.g., until the hunger pangs strike again and the cycle of desire satisfaction restarts) and thus to achieve a sense of enduring (though, to be sure, not permanent) satisfaction. In a situation in which the expansion of needs “has no limits,” by contrast, such a state of enduring satisfaction is by definition unattainable. In this latter situation, a large number of needs will remain in principle unsatisfiable and, accordingly, frustration among the members of that social world will be widespread. If the expansion of needs within civil society indeed “has no limits,” then any need that is met or any desire that is satisfied will be immediately followed by other, as-yet-unmet needs.

What does the widespread frustration that individuals experience within civil society as a result of the “indeterminate multiplication and specification” of their needs have to do with their freedom or lack thereof? In particular, why does that frustration lead to an “infinite increase in dependence” and thus unfreedom, as Hegel puts it? In order to answer this question, we need only recall part of Hegel's discussion of the free will in the Introduction to the *Philosophy of Right*. Willing freely, he tells us there, involves the transformation of something “inner” or “subjective” into something “outer” or “objective.” An exercise of our free will, Hegel writes, “is the process of translating the *subjective end* into *objectivity*” (*PR*, §8).<sup>38</sup> More specifically, being free consists in part in translating unrealized subjective ends into modifications of the objective, external world. But in a context in which our needs or desires are multiplied without limit, our ends can never be fully attained and the realization of our freedom will be therefore impeded. Again, any need or desire that is satisfied will be met by some further desire that is (as yet) unrealized.

The answer to the evaluative question, then, is that the endless expansion of needs is inimical to the exercise and realization of freedom along two dimensions: First, the endless expansion of needs increases the influence or “pressure” of desire on the members of civil society that are subject to that expansion. The expansion of needs might well have a “restraining influence on desire” when we consider some desire or other individually. But the expansion plausibly has the opposite effect when we consider our endlessly expanding set of needs or desires as a whole. In other words, the endless expansion of needs would seem to impede rather than facilitate the exercise of our ability to resist or step back from the set of our desires. Second, the endless expansion of needs leads to widespread frustration, understood as the inability on the part of the members of civil society to ever fully realize their ends or satisfy their desires. Because Hegel describes freedom in part as the ability to realize our subjective ends, the frustration that the infinite expansion of needs procures amounts to an “increase in dependence” and thus unfreedom.

Before concluding, I consider two solutions that Hegel's text seems to provide to the perils associated with the endless expansion of needs that I have reviewed so far in this section. I shall refer to these solutions as (I) the “state solution” and (II) the “corporation solution,” respectively. My aim in examining and raising some difficulties for (I) and (II) is not to offer knock-down arguments against them. I believe both the state solution and the corporation solution are

intriguing and worthy of our attention. My aim is, more modestly, simply to bring out just how difficult it seems to be to find a satisfying solution to the dangers associated with the endless expansion of needs.

(I). The first candidate solution appears toward the beginning of the section of civil society in the *Philosophy of Right*, where Hegel remarks in a passage I partially quoted at the outset of section 2:

Particularity in itself [*für sich*] is boundless [*maßlos*] extravagance, and the forms of this extravagance are themselves boundless. Through their representations and reflections, human beings expand [*der Mensch erweitert*] their desires, which do not form a closed circle like animal instinct, and extend them to false [*schlechte*] infinity. But on the other hand, deprivation and want [*Not*] are likewise boundless, and this confused situation can be restored to harmony only through the forcible intervention of the state.

(PR, §185Z)

The suggestion that Hegel is making here is that the boundless want from which members of civil society suffer, along with the threat to freedom that that “want” brings, can be remedied, or at least alleviated, only through “the forceful intervention of the state.” The idea, I take it, is that the state can intervene and regulate production and exchange (by, say, implementing a different taxation scheme on luxury goods) so as to put a stop to (or at least impair) the endless pursuit of means on the part of members of civil society. Individuals’ needs will cease to expand endlessly if the means that would satisfy those needs cease to be so easily available on the market. Or so the thought would seem to go.

There are two possible problems with this solution. The first problem is that state regulation arguably threatens the personal freedom of economic agents and flies in the face of the principles of the market, which Hegel regards as a system governed by the forces of supply and demand<sup>39</sup> and which, unlike its pre-modern counterparts, promotes the “development of [its members’] particularity” (PR, §185A). Hegel, of course, remarks elsewhere that the state is also entitled to intervene in the workings of the market to regulate the prices of basic goods, a measure which is presumably compatible with economic agents’ freedom.<sup>40</sup> By parity of reasoning, then, we should perhaps conceive of the intervention of the state in combating the pernicious effects of the endless expansion of needs as likewise compatible with the personal freedom of participants in the market. There is, however, a second, and arguably more obvious, problem with the state solution. The second problem is that, in a modern context in which individuals’ boundless desire for more has already been ignited, state regulation of the economy would contribute to the widespread frustration among participants in the market, who would then be endowed with a boundless desire but unable to satisfy that desire due to economic measures imposed by the state. The state solution, then, would seem to (at least initially) aggravate rather than help to solve the dangers associated with the expansion of needs.

(II). The second solution to the freedom-obstructive consequences of the endless expansion of needs is found in Hegel’s discussion of the corporations. We there read:

If the individual [*der Einzelne*] is not a member of a legally recognized [*berechtigten*] corporation..., he is without the *honour of belonging to an estate*, his isolation reduces him to the selfish aspect of his trade, and his livelihood and satisfaction lack *stability*. He will accordingly try to gain *recognition* through the external manifestations of success in his trade, and these are limitless [*unbegrenzt*], because it is impossible for him to live in a way appropriate to his estate if his estate does not exist...

(PR, §253A)

Part of the point that Hegel seems to be making in this passage is that the sense of “honour” that membership in a corporation procures, along with the recognition bestowed by the other members of the corporation, can serve as a substitute to the “limitless” desire to achieve a superior status in relation to other members of civil society.<sup>41</sup> One obvious problem with the corporation solution is that there are no organizations in our current social world that quite fit Hegel’s description of the corporations, a fact that arguably testifies to the corporations’ inability to survive

in a competitive market system like our own. Although labor unions resemble the kind of association Hegel has in mind in his characterization of the corporations in some respects, the latter seem to have a much more extensive role than the former in the life of its members.<sup>42</sup> Another worry with (II) is that there might conceivably be corporations, or corporation-like associations, that encourage the pursuit of luxury goods. Think, for example, of a banking association.<sup>43</sup> If that is the case, then membership in a corporation might well worsen rather than remedy the dangers associated with the expansion thesis.

## 5 | CONCLUSION

In closing, I wish to summarize some of the main points I have made in the paper and also briefly clarify the extent to which, in Hegel's view, the expansion of needs and its perils are distinctively modern phenomena. In answer to the genetic question in section 3, I told a story based on the ideas of specialization and division of labor, the human capacity of abstraction, and the drive for recognition that brings together Hegel's own, somewhat scattered remarks about the topic. The phenomenon I have attempted to explain in that section is how civil society expands both its participants' (true) needs and its (mere) desires and does so (specifically in the latter case) endlessly. Of course, other, pre-modern forms of economic organization also expand participants' true needs (as Hegel's example involving the way in which Hercules satisfies his need for clothing reveals) and even their mere desires (as the lifestyle of the pre-modern aristocratic classes arguably demonstrates). But only within civil society are participants' (mere) desires expanded endlessly. Or so Hegel, as I read him, maintains.

In reply to the evaluative question in section 4, I have argued on Hegel's behalf that the modern, endless expansion of needs impedes the realization of freedom, and is on that ground a phenomenon to be condemned, for the following two reasons: First, the endless expansion of needs increases the overall "pressure" that desire exerts upon the members of civil society that are subject to that expansion and, second, that expansion also leads to widespread frustration, understood as the inability on the part of those members to ever fully realize their ends or achieve enduring satisfaction. These two reasons to condemn the expansion of needs presuppose that our needs tend to expand without limit within the modern social world. If our needs expanded only in some finite, more restricted or more manageable way neither of the perils I have just summarized would unavoidably arise. In a social context in which our needs expand finitely, or within certain bounds, the overall pressure that the expanded set of needs exerts on its bearer need not be greater than the total pressure prior to that expansion if we accept Hegel's point that the pressure of each individual need diminishes along with the expansion of needs. As for the second of the two reasons to condemn the modern expansion of needs: If our needs expanded only to some limited, restricted extent, then it would be in principle possible to fully satisfy those needs, at least until the cycle of desire satisfaction restarts. Enduring (even if limited) satisfaction would be attainable in such a context.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> See especially Neuhouser (2000, 157–165), as well as Heisenberg (2018) and Honneth (2022, 13–17).
- <sup>2</sup> See for example Anderson (2001), Avineri (1972, 147–154); Hardimon (1994, 236–250); Houlgate (2022); Melamed (2001); Ruda (2011); and Wood (1990, 247–255). I have qualified my mention of the rabble by referring to it as the “pauper-rabble” because Hegel maintains that both the poor and the extremely wealthy members of civil society have a tendency to develop an attitude of resentment that he refers to as the “rabble mentality.” For a discussion of the pernicious effects that extreme wealth tends to have on members of civil society, see Ruda (2011, Chap. 6), and Heisenberg (2022).
- <sup>3</sup> On the influence of Smith and the Scottish enlightenment on Hegel, see especially Herzog (2013) and Waszek (1988). For an account of Rousseau that anticipates some of Hegel's main claims about the human drive for recognition, see Neuhouser (2008).
- <sup>4</sup> Particularized needs can be said to be “more abstract,” as Hegel notes in the passage I have quoted from §190, because they presuppose an ability to draw highly fine-grained distinctions and this ability, in turn, requires a capacity in human beings to abstract, step back from or reflect on the various aspects of their immediate needs as well as the possible means to the satisfaction of those needs.
- <sup>5</sup> Along similar lines, Hegel tells us that within civil society human beings' needs as well as the means to their satisfaction undergo “an *infinite* process of multiplication which is in equal measure a differentiation [of needs and means]” (PR, §191, emphases modified).
- <sup>6</sup> It is perhaps worth noting that although Hegel describes luxury as the tendency toward an *infinite* multiplication and refinement of needs and means (see PR, §195 and VNR, 122–123/171), not every refinement is a case of luxury. For example, the cobbler's need for a specific tool (an awl, say) is highly refined but not luxurious.
- <sup>7</sup> One might worry that for all I have said so far on Hegel's behalf, refinement does not lead to multiplication. I now have a need, or perhaps merely a desire, for French vanilla-flavored cold brew coffee where I previously had an (unrefined) desire for coffee, period. My total number of needs has not increased as a result of this change. But the unrefined need for coffee is not particularized in just the one way I have mentioned. For example, I might come to develop a need for French vanilla-flavored, cold brew coffee in the mornings, and a need for a cappuccino in the afternoons. Where before I had just one unrefined need, I now have multiple refined counterparts.
- <sup>8</sup> On the connection between needs and means as I have so far described it, see for example VPR19, 153 or VPR4, 489.
- <sup>9</sup> The line from §190Z to which I am referring reads: “In the end, it is no longer need but opinion which has to be satisfied...”
- <sup>10</sup> Further evidence that Hegel implicitly acknowledges the distinction in question can be gleaned from his definition of luxury as a “tendency towards an infinity of needs” (VNR, 123/171). What makes a need luxurious is presumably that it is not required for some basic standard of living or, in the terminology I have introduced, that it is not part of our true needs. Some of the items that make up that “infinity of needs,” then, must be such as to not count as true needs, by Hegel's lights. For a defense of the interpretive claim that Hegel draws a distinction between (true) needs, on the one hand, and mere desires or wants, on the other, see also Stojkovski (2017).
- <sup>11</sup> On the way in which even “natural” or “immediate” needs are transformed at the hands of human beings, see also VPR19, 154.
- <sup>12</sup> On the way in which successful participation in the market requires that one heed the needs and desires of others in the manner I have just indicated, see especially §§187+A, 192+Z, and 197 of the *Philosophy of Right*.
- <sup>13</sup> What a cobbler truly needs qua cobbler will obviously vary across historical epochs. But the outer boundary of this subclass of true needs is not only historically variable but blurry even within a given historical period. Does the CEO of Bank of America need a gold, diamond-engraved tie clip? Probably not. Do cobblers need to wear (and be seen to be wearing) fine leather shoes in order to successfully make themselves into “links” of the economic “continuum”? It is not obvious to me that the answer to this latter question is a straightforward “no.”
- <sup>14</sup> The point I make in this paragraph was a point made by Dan Mendez in the course of one of our many conversations on these issues.
- <sup>15</sup> Hegel scholars have certainly commented on the expansion thesis. See for example Avineri (1972, 144–145); Knowles (2002, 266); and James (2007, 64). Each of these commentators, however, mentions only some subset of the features that, on the reading I piece together in this section, figure in Hegel's answer to the genetic question.
- <sup>16</sup> Two commentators that discuss the expansion thesis more extensively than do Avineri, Knowles, or James are Waszek and Fraser. Waszek (1988, 146–157 and 211–214), reviews Hegel's claims on human versus animal needs, and the multiplication and refinement that set the former apart from the latter, touching on all three of the ideas I have just mentioned. But perhaps because his focus is on showing Hegel's debt to the Scottish enlightenment, it can be hard to make



out a clear and precise answer on Waszek's behalf to the question: What is the source or origin of the endless multiplication and refinement of human needs and in what sense is that phenomenon a distinctively modern occurrence, according to Hegel? Waszek seems to be content with quoting and paraphrasing Hegel's claims and offering textual evidence in support of his interpretation that most of those claims were influenced by the views of Hegel's Scottish predecessors. Like Waszek, Fraser (1998, 76–82), also mentions all three ideas on which I focus in this section in piecing together Hegel's answer to the genetic question. Unfortunately, it is also similarly hard to make out a clear and precise interpretive view from among Fraser's remarks.

- <sup>17</sup> See also Hegel's remark in §190Z of the *Philosophy of Right* that “[t]he understanding, which can grasp distinctions, brings multiplicity into [human] needs...”
- <sup>18</sup> For the claim that comfort is “inexhaustible,” see also VPR3, 593.
- <sup>19</sup> In his remarks about the role of the division of labor within civil society that I review in what follows, Hegel seems to have in mind (or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that he conflates) both the assignment of a specific occupation (e.g., cobblery) to each social member and the division of some manufacturing process into more specialized, simpler tasks to be carried out by distinct individuals.
- <sup>20</sup> Hegel makes the same point in several passages, for example in the *Zusatz* to §182 of the *Philosophy of Right*: “[Each individual] cannot accomplish the full extent of his ends without reference to others; these others are therefore the means to the end of the particular person.”
- <sup>21</sup> We can understand Hegel's designation of increasingly specialized work as more “abstract” if we bear in mind that the modern division of labor requires that we break apart complex processes of production and divide them into many simpler, more specific tasks.
- <sup>22</sup> Hegel is here borrowing an example from Adam Smith. Claims like the ones contained in the passage I have just cited can be found in VPR19, 158–159. For a discussion of these and other similar passages, see Waszek (1985) and Waszek (1988, Chap. 6). For more on the influence that Smith had on Hegel, both early and mature, see also Henderson and Davis (1991).
- <sup>23</sup> To be clear, the main point I make in this paragraph goes beyond any claims Hegel himself explicitly makes. Nonetheless, the point is at the very least consistent with his account of civil society. That features of our economic system, such as the degree of specialization and division of labor, can have an impact on its participants' psychological makeup, according to Hegel, is clear from his discussion of the formative or educational role of the division of labor in §§187+A, 192+Z, and 197 of the *Philosophy of Right*. Moreover, and as we have already seen, Hegel observes that a “need is created not so much by those who experience it directly as by those who seek to profit from its emergence” (PR, §191). Presumably, this creation does not occur in a vacuum but depends on the flights of abstraction and “inventions” (PR, §191) of these profit-seekers that are possible only as a result of the level of specialization of labor and productive power that has been reached within the modern market system.
- <sup>24</sup> One commentator whose discussion of the expansion thesis (albeit brief) stands out due to its clarity and who also identifies the three ideas that I singled out at the start of this section is (Houlgate, 2022, 272–274). Unlike Houlgate, on my reading the modern division of labor is not “ma[de] necessary” (273) by the endless multiplication of needs but rather helps explain that multiplication. Contra Houlgate, I also make no claim to the effect that the human capacity for abstraction is (solely?) causally responsible for the phenomenon of the division of labor in general or for the degree that that division attains within the modern world. Finally, I take my interpretation to add to Houlgate's by attempting to identify the sense in which the endless multiplication of needs and its perils are distinctively modern phenomena, in Hegel's mind.
- <sup>25</sup> Although he is more explicit elsewhere, Hegel indicates that the desire for recognition plays some important role in the passage from §193 of the *Philosophy of Right* when he characterizes what he calls the “need of particularity” as the need to “make oneself count [*sich geltend zu machen*] through some distinction [*Auszeichnung*].”
- <sup>26</sup> Church (2010) claims to offer two different though compatible accounts of the endless expansion of needs, one based on (i) the modern division of labor and another on (ii) the desire to satisfy the opinion of others (118–132). Unlike Church, in this paper, I set aside Hegel's intellectual debt to Rousseau and attempt to elucidate Hegel's view in the *Philosophy of Right* and associated lectures on its own terms. More importantly, on the reading I am offering here (i) and (ii) are by contrast ingredients in a single explanation: They are individually necessary but insufficient to explain the endless expansion that human needs undergo within the modern social world.
- <sup>27</sup> Of course, the way in which modern individuals typically come to acquire property is not by seizing some ownerless thing, but by engaging in processes of production and exchange within civil society. In other words, civil society (along with the rest of ethical life) provides the institutional context within which the requirements of “Abstract Right” can be fulfilled. On this point, see PR, §217A.

- <sup>28</sup> In the course of describing the “imitative drive,” Hegel is also reported as further saying: “It is no less necessary to give this equality determinate existence for the other, and to make oneself aware of being regarded and *recognized* by the other as his equal” (VNR, 120/169). Although he is arguably somewhat less explicit on this point in the case of the “competitive desire,” Hegel does allegedly describe this latter desire in the 1817/18 lectures as a drive to “give oneself value as something particular [*sich al sein Besonderes einen Wert zu geben*]” (121/170), in a way that anticipates his characterization of it in the *Philosophy of Right* as a need to “make oneself count [*sich geltend zu machen*] through some distinction [*Auszeichnung*]” (§193). Elsewhere, Hegel associates both desires or drives with the idea of recognition. See VPR1, 312. That recognition plays some important role in the endless multiplication of needs is further confirmed by some of the remarks Hegel makes in the context of his discussion of the role of the corporations in the *Anmerkung* to §253 of the *Philosophy of Right*.
- <sup>29</sup> Because the second drive is a “competitive desire,” I take the sort of difference with respect to others that it motivates us to seek to be a matter of searching for *superior* standing. This claim about the competitive nature of the desire and the resulting search for superiority seems to be confirmed by Hegel’s later remark that “the drive to imitate and to excel [or to stand out or distinguish oneself, *der Auszeichnung*] leads... to the multiplication [*Vervielfältigung*] of needs” (VNR, 122/170, emphasis added). Moreover, this quotation indicates again that the drive for recognition plays some role in the multiplication of needs, according to Hegel. And it is hard to see how the drive for recognition could contribute to the endless multiplication of needs, in the way that Hegel maintains it does, unless the “competitive desire” involved a desire to achieve some superior position.
- <sup>30</sup> Contra (Chitty, 1994) and in line with Hegel’s own text, my discussion in this section has aimed to show how the drive for recognition can “become an actual source” (PR, §193) of the expansion of needs, but is not the *only* source of that expansion. See Chitty (1994, 169).
- <sup>31</sup> The drive to outdo others requires us to qualify another aspect of the answer to the genetic question that I have pieced together in this section. In explaining how it comes to pass that the desires of participants in the market system have a tendency to expand endlessly, my foregoing discussion has drawn on Hegel’s claim that comfort is “something utterly inexhaustible” (PR, §191Z). But think of the desire to wear, and to be seen as wearing, a pair of expensive high heels or tight designer jeans. These desires are arguably triggered by an endless “competitive desire to distinguish oneself” (VNR, 121) from other market participants, but their satisfaction seems to be accompanied by no increase in one’s degree of comfort. The examples I have just mentioned thus suggest that one of the effects of participants’ desire to satisfy the opinion of others is that some degree of comfort might be sacrificed in exchange for the greater satisfaction that the admiration attained by outranking one’s peers allegedly brings.
- <sup>32</sup> On the general point that freedom for Hegel requires the ability to step back from and resist any one of our needs or desires, see PR, §5+A. The point I have just made by saying that the expansion of needs is symptomatic or expressive of human freedom is one Hegel himself seems to be making in some of the passages where he associates that expansion with a kind of freedom or liberation. See for example PR, §190Z or §194A. I take Hegel to be making the point negatively in the latter passage when he writes that a “state of nature” would be a state in which human beings are reduced to an animal-like “condition in which natural needs as such [are] immediately satisfied” and thus would be “a state of... unfreedom.”
- <sup>33</sup> Along similar lines, in lecture notes from 1822/23 we read: “[In the fragmentation of needs] there lies an inhibition [*Hemmung*] of desire. As concrete, natural desire is more pressing, whereas abstract need is weaker. If human beings have manifold desires, that is a sign that necessity [*die Not*] is not in fact as pressing any more” (VPR3, 593).
- <sup>34</sup> In discussing the connection between the expansion of needs and human freedom, one point which Hegel to my knowledge does not make is that the expansion of needs and means has the (liberating?) consequence that the menu of options upon which one can exercise one’s personal freedom is thereby widened.
- <sup>35</sup> If human needs multiply *finitely*, then assuming *ex hypothesi* that the pressure that each individual need exerts decreases along with that expansion, the total pressure that the expanded set of needs has on its bearer need not be greater than the total pressure prior to that multiplication. But if our needs expand *infinitely* or *without limit*, as Hegel maintains they do within the modern social world, then it seems much more likely that the total pressure exerted on its bearer by that endlessly expanding set of needs will be greater than that of a smaller, limited set. Being flooded with needs and desires without limit will have the effect of overwhelming those subject to that infinite expansion. And being thus overwhelmed will in turn increase the urgency or pressure of desire overall and impair the ability to step back from that set of desires in the way that acting freely requires, according to Hegel.
- <sup>36</sup> See also both §185 and the corresponding *Zusatz*, where Hegel makes similar remarks, including the claim that within the modern social world human needs “extend...to a bad [*schlecht*] infinity.” In his corresponding discussion in the 1817/18 lectures, Hegel likewise tells us that luxury, understood as a “tendency toward an infinity of needs” (VNR, 123/171), “gives rise to a no less infinite proliferation [or multiplication, *Vervielfältigung*] of need [or want, *Not*].”

- <sup>37</sup> It is worth noting that one other claim that Hegel is arguably making in §195 and that he elaborates on later (e.g., in PR, §243 or VPR19, 193–194) is that luxury and an increase in wealth among a few tends to bring with it a dependence of others upon the few along with a condition of want [Not] among those others. Since this latter claim does not obviously depend on our needs and means expanding infinitely, which has been my focus throughout, I set the claim aside here.
- <sup>38</sup> See Enz, §469Z for a similar claim.
- <sup>39</sup> In support of this claim, see for example Hegel's discussion of the ways in which economic agents depend on others' opinions and needs in order to satisfy their own needs in §§187+A, 192+Z, and 197, to which I have already referred above.
- <sup>40</sup> See PR, §236.
- <sup>41</sup> Similar points about the role of the corporations in alleviating the perils of the market can be found in Herzog (2015, 152–156), and Schmidt am Busch (2011, 246–262).
- <sup>42</sup> See PR, §255.
- <sup>43</sup> Heisenberg raises this sort of worry in the context of his discussion of the problem of affluence. See Heisenberg (2022, 235).

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ENZ. *Enzyklopädie der Philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse (1830). Dritter Teil: Die Philosophie des Geistes*, ed. E. Moldenhauer and K. M. Michel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986) / *Philosophy of Mind*, trans. W. Wallace and A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); cited by paragraph (§) number (followed by 'A' or 'Z', if the reference is to the Anmerkung or Zusatz).

PR. *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, ed. E. Moldenhauer and K. M. Michel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986) / *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); cited by paragraph (§) number (followed by 'A' or 'Z').

VNR. *Vorlesungen über Naturrecht und Staatswissenschaft: Heidelberg 1817/18*, ed. C. Becker, W. Bonsiepen, A. Gethmann-Siefert, F. Hogemann, K. R. Meist, H. J. Schneider, W. Jaeschke, and C. Jamme (Hamburg: Meiner, 1983) / *Lectures on Natural Right and Political Science: The First Philosophy of Right*, trans. J. M. Stewart and P. C. Hodgson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); cited by German and English page number.

VPR. *Vorlesungen über Rechtsphilosophie 1818-1831*, ed. K.-H. Ilting, 4 vols. (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1973-1974); cited by volume and page number.

VPR19. *Philosophie des Rechts: Die Vorlesungen von 1819/20 in einer Nachschrift*, ed. D. Henrich (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1983); cited by page number.

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