

Introduction to Part 1 of the Themed Issue, ‘Racism and Colonialism in Hegel’s Philosophy’: Rationale and Topics

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It is increasingly realized today that Western modernity has not only promoted progressive ideals such as scientific thought, human rights and democratic political systems. Its history is also marked by a much darker side, one of brutal conquest, biological and cultural destruction, enslavement and exploitation of non-European peoples in the context of European colonialism. This dark side of Western modernity was legitimized by pro-colonial ideologies of property, war, civilization, progress and race. Such ideologies emerged in areas like jurisprudence and philosophy since the 16th century, often building on views from classical antiquity (Pagden 1995). They shaped academic paradigms such as ‘scientific racism’, colonial anthropology and Orientalism in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and in many ways continue to influence contemporary societies and their academic practices.

Recognizing this dark side, several scholars have turned a critical eye to the works of Western canonical thinkers such as Locke, Hume, Kant and Marx (to name but a few: Bernasconi 2003; Sala-Molins 2006; Arnel 2007; Smith 2017; Bhambra and Holmwood 2021; Lu-Adler 2023, and many of the contributions in Valls 2005; Muthu 2012; Dhawan 2014; Flikschuh and Ypi 2014). They have examined how these thinkers’ views on race and colonialism have shaped, and been shaped by, debates about the racial and colonial aspects of modernity. They have also explored how these views in turn related to other views held by such thinkers—not least on issues such as universal rights or the critique of domination. This approach has not only led to calls for a more ambivalent collective memory of these philosophers, one that does not shy away from confronting their troubling views of non-European peoples. It also raises questions about how contemporary philosophers can engage with these historical figures without perpetuating their racist and pro-colonial baggage.

Hegel presents a fascinating case for such research, for several reasons. First, he is an eminently systematic thinker, and it can be argued that his views on issues such as the alleged mental deficits of non-European peoples (cf., with further literature, de Laurentiis 2021; James and Knappik 2023), the contemporary political



debate on transatlantic slavery, or British rule in India and Spanish rule in Latin America (cf. James and Knappik MS) are carefully integrated into his philosophical account of reality. For example, Hegel himself explicitly links his partial legitimation of transatlantic slavery—as an institution with a positive and necessary ‘disciplinary’ function, to be abolished only gradually—to themes such as consciousness of freedom, ethical life, his theory of legal personhood and property, and the dialectic of lordship and bondage (cf. Jaarte, this issue; James and Knappik MS). Similarly, Alison Stone (2020) has shown that essential elements in Hegel’s conception of freedom pave the way for pro-colonialist attitudes, and we have argued elsewhere that Hegel’s hierarchical theory of race is closely linked to his more general views on scientific classifications and their metaphysical underpinnings (James and Knappik 2023). These systematic entanglements raise pressing questions: how are other, seemingly more emancipatory parts of his system affected by his views on race, colonialism and transatlantic slavery, and to what extent can post- and neo-Hegelian critical theory disentangle Hegelian insights from these connections, or revise them in ways that can ‘sav[e] Hegel from himself’ (Stone 2020)?

Second, as part of his global intellectual influence, Hegel has left various strands of legacy that themselves speak directly to issues of race and colonialism. On the one hand, there are strands that draw on the racist and pro-colonial aspects of Hegel’s thought. For example, Park (2013) has argued that Hegel’s racially motivated exclusion of Africa and Asia from the history of philosophy played an important role in defining the modern, exclusionary canon in the historiography of philosophy. Hegel’s equally racist exclusion of Africa from world history (see Tibebe 2011) has subsequently become an influential racist trope, prominently invoked as recently as 2007 by the then French President Sarkozy in a notorious speech in Dakar. Hoffheimer (1993) has pointed out that in 1860, on the eve of the American Civil War, the Southern congressman Lucius Lamar quoted extensively from Hegel’s *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* in defence of slavery. Applying Hegel’s views on organic political unity to the level of international relations, several British Idealists developed a neo-Hegelian interpretation of the British Empire that would influence the creation of the League of Nations after the First World War (James and Knappik MS).

On the other hand, Hegel’s philosophy has also served as an important philosophical inspiration for thinkers who represent, in Enrique Dussel’s term, the ‘underside of modernity’ (Dussel 1996)—for thinkers who themselves belong to formerly colonized and enslaved groups, and who have developed philosophical critiques of colonialism and racism, as well as accounts of decolonial and abolitionist struggles. Frantz Fanon’s seminal work *Black Skin, White Masks* engages Hegel’s dialectic of domination and subjugation through the lens of Kojève’s influential interpretation. This exploration, particularly in the context of slavery and its abolition in the French colonies, has attracted considerable exegetical interest (for a

recent review, see Hogan 2023). Fanon's mentor, Aimé Césaire, uses Hegel's concept of 'concrete universality' as a model for conceptualising 'négritude' and, by extension, decolonization. Similarly, the postcolonial philosophy and poetics of their fellow Martinican, Édouard Glissant, is deeply informed by a sustained engagement with Hegelian thought (Mascot 2014). Another Caribbean thinker, C. L. R. James, wrote a commentary on Hegel's *Science of Logic* to develop a theory of revolution, which he later applied retrospectively to his own account of the Haitian Revolution and to contemporary decolonial struggles (Renault 2016; Ilieva, this issue). In the US, too, thinkers such as Martin Luther King, Jr. (Yonover MS) and Angela Davis (Renault 2021; James and Knappik forthcoming) have drawn on Hegel to theorize black struggles and liberation.

This themed issue is the first collection to bring together research on these topics. The articles presented shed new light on all the above aspects—the nature and systematic role of Hegel's views on race and colonialism, as well as Hegel's legacy, both pro-colonial and anti-colonial. (A bibliography of previous research on these topics can be found at hegelantikolonial.wordpress.com/bibliography.) We are glad that this issue has attracted contributions from a wide range of academic and geographical backgrounds, including both established and emerging scholars, and authors from within and outside the Anglosphere. (To facilitate the latter, we have allowed submissions in several languages and assisted with translations into English.) We are confident that the contributions collected here will stimulate further debate and research in this rich area of inquiry. The themed issue consists of two journal issues; the next issue will contain the second part of our editorial introduction, in which we discuss some common objections to such research and formulate questions for future investigation.

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