

# "THE FREEDOM CONQUERED BY THE SLAVE IS NOT HIS ELEVATION TO THE STATUS OF A NEW MASTER"

From Hegel to Marx on emancipation  
beyond modern normativity

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## ABSTRACT

This paper aims to explore the alternative interpretation of Hegel's theory of recognition offered by Susan Buck-Morss and endorsed by Vladimir Safatle. The main objective is to answer to what extent some of the aspects highlighted by this interpretation – which points out to the limits of modern principles and institutions – reappear in Marx's critique, specifically in his critique of the conception of modern property represented by a political economy that is incapable of seeing the contradictory nature of a movement necessarily linked to the phenomena of domination and exploitation ultimately marking the alienating and fetishizing aspect of the capitalist market economy. To

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place the need of overcoming slavery in Hegel's time, i.e. the modern one, at the center of the discussion on recognition implies calling into question what Ludwig Siep calls the "Project of Modernity" (*das Projekt der Moderne*). Presupposing, as Safatle warns, a hegemonic conception of emancipation and a metaphysics that is inherent to it, this project places a strong emphasis on principles, rights, and institutions which, in Marx's conception, serve as a condition for the systematic reproduction of modern relations of domination and, consequently, a constant denial of true emancipation. Although Hegel himself criticizes the "Project of Modernity" by pointing out its limitations regarding the recognition of the person and in guaranteeing rights in purely juridical terms (which are constitutive of abstract freedom), he nevertheless advocates that the claims emerging from the jusnaturalist tradition should be integrated, as one of its essential moments, with the demands for a broader concept of freedom, which, in his *Philosophy of Right*, he calls, in the context of a modern ethical life, "concrete freedom". Marx, however, radically opposing Hegel's position, will show how the problem of recognizing the individual as a person and the right to property does not consist of its one-sidedness, to be solved by integrating it into a broader notion of emancipation. Instead, the problem lies in the very meaning of modern property as the direct antithesis of property based on one's own labor, which "grows only on its tomb" through a systematic movement of expropriation.

## KEYWORDS

Emancipation; Hegel; Marx; Project of Modernity; Property

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# “A LIBERDADE CONQUISTADA PELO ESCRAVO NÃO É SUA ELEVAÇÃO À CONDIÇÃO DE NOVO SENHOR”

Hegel e Marx sobre uma emancipação para além da normatividade moderna

## RESUMO

O presente trabalho propõe explorar a interpretação alternativa oferecida por Susan Buck-Morss, endossada por Vladimir Safatle, da teoria do reconhecimento de Hegel. O objetivo último é o de responder em que medida alguns aspectos colocados em destaque por essa interpretação, apontando para os limites dos princípios e instituições modernos, reaparecem na crítica de Marx, especificamente em sua crítica à concepção acerca da propriedade moderna representada pela economia política, incapaz de enxergar o caráter contraditório de um movimento necessariamente vinculado aos fenômenos de dominação e exploração que marcam, em última instância, o aspecto alienante e fetichizante da economia de mercado capitalista. Colocar a necessidade da superação da escravidão contemporânea a Hegel, isto é, a moderna, no centro da discussão acerca do reconhecimento, implica colocar em questão aquilo que Ludwig Siep denomina o “Projeto da Modernidade” (*das Projekt der Moderne*). Pressupondo, como alerta Safatle, uma concepção hegemônica de emancipação e uma metafísica que lhe é inerente, esse projeto dá forte ênfase a princípios, direitos e instituições, que, na concepção de Marx, servem de condição a uma sistemática reprodução das relações de dominação modernas, e, por conseguinte, a uma constante negação de uma verdadeira emancipação. Ainda que o próprio Hegel exerça uma crítica ao “Projeto da Modernidade”, indicando os limites de um reconhecimento da pessoa e da garantia de direitos em termos unicamente jurídicos constituintes de uma liberdade abstrata, ele defende, no entanto, que as reivindicações emergentes da tradição jusnaturalista sejam integradas, como um de seus momentos essenciais, às exigências por um conceito mais largo de liberdade, que, em sua *Filosofia do Direito*, ele denominará, no âmbito de uma eticidade moderna, de “liberdade concreta”. Marx, no entanto, opondo-se radicalmente à posição de Hegel, mostrará de que modo o problema do

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reconhecimento do indivíduo como pessoa e do direito de propriedade consiste não em sua unilateralidade, a ser solucionada através de sua integração a uma noção mais larga de emancipação, mas na significação da propriedade moderna como antítese direta da propriedade baseada no trabalho próprio, que "cresce unicamente sobre seu túmulo" através de um movimento sistemático de expropriação.

## PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Emancipação; Hegel; Marx; Projeto da Modernidade; Propriedade

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## Introduction

This paper aims to explore the alternative interpretation of Hegel's theory of recognition offered by Susan Buck-Morss and endorsed by Vladimir Safatle. The main objective is to answer in what extent some of the aspects highlighted by this interpretation, which points out the limits of modern principles and institutions, reappear in Marx's critique, specifically in his critique of the modern conception of property. According to Marx, this modern conception of property is represented by a political economy that is incapable of seeing the contradictory nature of a movement necessarily linked to the phenomena of domination and exploitation ultimately marking the alienating and fetishizing aspects of the capitalist market economy.

To place the need to overcome slavery in Hegel's time, i.e. the modern one, at the center of the discussion about recognition – as Buck-Morss does by defending the thesis of a connection between Hegel's elaboration of the theory of recognition

and the struggle for independence and abolition of slavery in Saint-Domingue at the beginning of the 19th century – implies calling into question what, based on Ludwig Siep’s writings, we call the “Project of Modernity” (2011: 10). This project presupposes, as Safatle (2017: 11) warns, a hegemonic conception of emancipation and a metaphysics that is inherent to it, and consists of the defense of principles, rights and institutions that, in Marx’s conception, in accordance with the properly contradictory character of capitalism, lead to a constant denial of any possibility of overcoming modern relations of domination.

Although Hegel himself can be understood as a strong representative of the “Project of Modernity”, the interpretations made by Buck-Morss and Safatle draw attention to what, within Hegel’s own philosophical thinking, could be used in the critique of this project. This includes his conception of recognition and even his theory of property,<sup>1</sup> through which the activity of work gains a central function both in the process of forming subjectivity and achieving true independence (*Selbstständigkeit*), as well as in legitimizing the right to property – which would allow a critique of modern property founded on *unpaid* labor.

Furthermore, it is well known that Hegel repeatedly criticizes the primacy, especially found in the jusnaturalist tradition, of the claims for the recognition of the person and for individual

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1 Compare with Thomas Khurana’s article for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, “Hegel und der Rassismus: Die Kolonialität unserer Freiheit” (2022). Khurana argues that the master-servant dialectic (according to which “freedom only becomes effective as social freedom”), as well as Hegel’s theory of property, can serve as tools for criticizing positions eventually found in Hegel’s own writings, notably those indicating racism and defending colonialism as a “means of achieving civilization”.

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rights, such as property, taken unilaterally. In his conception of the "free will *in* and *for* itself", Hegel seeks precisely to go beyond the abstract unilateralism of moments of the will that pretend to be unique and absolute (Tidre 2023b: 619 ff.). However, in his problematization of recognition and freedom understood in solely juridical terms, at the same time as he points out to their limits, Hegel also defends the need for the emerging claims of jusnaturalism to be integrated into the demands for a broader conception of freedom, taking the moment of abstract right (*das abstrakte Recht*) – together with that of morality – as essential to what, in his *Philosophy of Right*, he systematically characterizes as "concrete freedom", which is made effective through *Sittlichkeit* and is constituted by the modern institutional complexes of the family, bourgeois-civil society (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*) and the state. In contemporary times, in an attempt to update Hegel's conception of *Sittlichkeit* and freedom, now calling it "social freedom", Honneth attributes to the sphere of law and the modern moral principles the same meaning as Hegel gave them: these would be moments to be incorporated – and not rejected – in face of a broader notion of freedom.

Marx, however, shows that the real problem with the recognition of the individual as a person, as well as the right to property, does not lie in the claim to absolutization as it were expressed by jusnaturalism, or in its disregard of the need for a broader notion of emancipation. The problem, for Marx, lies in the very meaning of modern property as "capital": as such, this social form acquired by property is not only the antithesis of property based on one's own labor, but "grows only on its tomb"

(Marx 1990: 931), grounded on a systematic movement of expropriation. This movement, which, on the surface, contradicts “the eternal laws of commodity exchange” (Marx 1990: 301), is rather guaranteed precisely through their accomplishment (Tidre; Schäfer 2020: 185 ff.). As a result, the dependence, inequality, and expropriation characteristic of the new modern way of life and work – which, for Hegel, as well as for Honneth, seem to be linked to capitalism in an only accidental or “anomalous” way (as *Fehlentwicklungen*) – emerge not from the non-fulfilment of the normative promises of Modernity, but precisely from their realization.

Instead of only deepening – or taking to the extreme – Hegel's critiques of philosophical positions such as jusnaturalism or his diagnosis of the economic dynamics accompanying nascent capitalism (or “neoliberal” capitalism, as in Honneth's case),<sup>2</sup> I argue that, through Marx, we can support a thesis that is

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<sup>2</sup> This position can be found in the work *Freiheit*, by Andreas Arndt (2019), who defends that Marx's conception of freedom, and his understanding of the relationship between freedom and right (*das Recht*), would not diverge with Hegel's conception. As Márcio Schäfer notes, although Arndt recognizes that “individual freedom can only be realized on the basis of another mode of production” (Arndt 2019: 110), and that the domination of the social forms proper to capitalism would not be a simple deviation from the bourgeois rights of freedom and equality, but would be attained precisely because of their fulfillment, he remains “a supporter of the idea that it is the right (*das Recht*) that creates the spaces of freedom”, arguing that “even in communist society, freedom would be unthinkable without right [*das Recht*]” (Schäfer 2020: 436-437). Further on, Arndt emphasizes the young Marx's positions defending the law and the Civil Code, to relativize Marx's fierce criticism of the law in his later writings. Contrary to Arndt, Schäfer argues that it is “only with the advance of his economic investigations that Marx will come to know that individual freedom conceived in these terms [i.e. in the sense of the free development of human capacities] cannot be guaranteed through a legal and political regulation of the capitalist economy, but through its transformation” (Schäfer 2020: 437).

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radically opposed to Hegel's. According to Marx, modern freedom – and, thus, while presupposing it as one of its moments, Hegel's own concrete freedom (or even, in its updated version, Honneth's social freedom) – would be opposed to true emancipation.

Consequently – as Safatle's and Rancière's critiques of Honneth especially help to highlight –, there is a necessity for an inquire that is not limited to recognition as "*reconhecimento*" (or "re-cognition"), but that aims, instead, towards "another form of recognition" or "an original configuration of the habitual world" – which Honneth, reprehending a more radical questioning of modern principles, rights and institutions, would describe as "moral terrorism". Safatle's and Rancière's positions would therefore endorse the demand for overcoming the horizon imposed by a social organization and a concept incapable of responding to the aspirations of a true emancipation.

## **1. Buck-Morss and Safatle on Hegel's theory of recognition as a critique of the limits of Modernity**

Buck-Morss (2000; 2009) proposes a renewed interpretation of Hegel's theory of recognition in a work first published in the form of a long article in 2000, and then as a book in 2009, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*.<sup>3</sup> Throughout the book, which

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3 In Brazil, the text translated by Sebastião Nascimento is first published by the journal *Novos Estudos Cebrap*, in 2011 (Buck-Morss 2011), and then by N-1, in 2017, entitled *Hegel and Haiti* (Buck-Morss 2017).



is an extended version of the article, Buck-Morss seeks to respond to critics by defending her central and controversial theses. The main thesis is that Hegel thinks of the foundation of the processes of recognition from a perspective of overcoming slavery – slavery not conceived in a merely metaphorical sense or as an outdated historic event, as most hegelians seem to understand (Buck-Morss 2017: 75-76), but rather as a modern phenomenon.

Buck-Morss' interpretation could be classified, based on the characterization offered by Mariana Teixeira (2022), as “agonistic”: the lordship-bondage relationship, outlined by Hegel as early as the Jena writings and taken up again in the *Phenomenology* in chapter four, section one, “Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness: Lordship and Bondage” (*Selbstständigkeit und Unselbstständigkeit des Selbstbewusstseins: Herrschaft und Knechtschaft*),<sup>4</sup> could be understood, through the support of the text, as “a model (or contra-model) of the struggle for recognition between self and Other underpinning the intersubjective formation of human subjectivity” (Teixeira 2022: 74), thus opposing a reconciliatory interpretation, whose emphasis would be placed “on the mutuality of recognition rather than on the conflictual character of the death struggle at the origin of the lordship-bondage relation” (Teixeira 2022: 74-75) – and which,

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4 It should be noted that, in the edition of *Phenomenology* published by Vozes, the translation adopted for the title of this section is “Independence and dependence of self-consciousness: domination and slavery” (Hegel 2008). The choice of the term “slavery” for the translation of *Knechtschaft* can be seen as a reflection of Kojève's influence on the reading of the *Phenomenology*. Note 6 provides further explanation on this matter.

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paradoxically, would also be sufficiently corroborated by the text.<sup>5</sup>

According to Buck-Morss, Hegel, in the elaboration of his theory of recognition, gives the dialectic of master and slave<sup>6</sup> a prominent role. Moreover, in this elaboration – and this is the strong thesis – Hegel was inspired, from reading the press of the time, by the revolts that took place between 1803 and 1805 in Saint-Domingue, the western part of the Caribbean island of Hispaniola and one of the most profitable colonies belonging to France. These revolts culminated in the victorious revolution of that part of the island, which, abandoning its colonial name, renamed itself Haiti, and achieved, through this process, inde-

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5 One of the contributions of Teixeira's work consists precisely in proposing a possible solution to this supposed paradox. The fact that two opposing readings can be corroborated through sufficient evidence found in the same text would have a close relationship with the mode of presentation (*Darstellungsweise*) peculiar to the *Phenomenology*, which, more than merely a matter of style, would reveal "a philosophically charged resource that underpins Hegel's conceptual structure, ultimately leading precisely to a discussion on the theme of experience and knowledge" (Teixeira 2022: 75).

6 On the question of the terminology "slave", Buck-Morss argues that in the Jena writings between 1803 and 1806, in the *Jenaer Systementwürfe*, Hegel uses both terms, "slave" and "servant" (*Sklave, Knecht*) (Buck-Morss 2009: 52). In the *Phenomenology*, the term used in the first section of chapter 4 is, quite consistently, "*Knecht*" (servitude, servant), without the use of "*Sklave*" appearing there. However, the choice of the term "slave" for "*Knecht*" in editions of the *Phenomenology* persists. One of the reasons for this choice is undoubtedly the enormous influence exerted by the courses of Kojève, who opts for the term "slave" for "*Knecht*" (Kojève 1947: 49ff.). Hyppolyte, Kojève's pupil, also chooses the term "slave" in the translation of his French edition of the *Phenomenology*. In the note in which he clarifies the translation of "*Knechtschaft*" by "servitude", his understanding of "slave" and "servant" as synonyms is equally clear: "*Nous traduisons 'Knechtschaft' par servitude. Hegel, en effet, se souvient de l'étymologie de 'servus'. L'esclave est celui qui a été conservé (servare), c'est-à-dire celui qui a préféré la vie à la liberté et auquel on a conservé la vie par grâce*" (Hegel 1939: 155).

pendence and the abolition of slavery. In this sense, Buck-Morss formulates:

Either Hegel was the blindest of all the blind philosophers of freedom in Enlightenment Europe [...], or Hegel knew–knew about real slaves revolting successfully against real masters, and he elaborated his dialectic of lordship and bondage deliberately within this contemporary context (Buck-Morss 2009: 50).

The author argues that only the connection with the problem of real slavery and the struggle for its abolition would enable a theory that seeks to reflect on the necessary conditions for the realization of freedom to think of it in a truly universal way. In his preface to the Brazilian edition of Buck-Morss' work, Vladimir Safatle takes up this idea, endorsing it. Modern reason, he says, has produced a universalism with “geographical and colonial limits”, carrying with it an “implicit territoriality” (Safatle 2017: 9). According to Safatle, the interpretation proposed by Buck-Morss of the Hegelian theory of recognition would contribute to highlighting something that marks modern political philosophy because of its lack:

An absence haunts European political philosophy. The absence of slavery. [...]. This moment [of overcoming slavery as a condition for the realization of freedom] is not to be found in the liberal authors, such as Locke, and their complacency with slavery due to the supremacy of property rights. It is not even to be found in the French Enlightenment, which was so combative in various fields but was able to remain almost completely silent about the *Code Noir* and slavery in the colonies (Safatle 2017: 9).

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Therefore, more than drawing attention to Hegel's unprecedented treatment of modern slavery as a philosophical theme, Buck-Morss' contribution would serve to explore the question of "the moment when the overcoming of slavery actually became the condition for the realization of freedom" (Safatle 2017: 9), which would even lead to demanding a relativization of the weight that Hegel gives to the French Revolution in his philosophical conception of history. Thus, Buck-Morss' proposal seems to have the effect of demanding a shift<sup>7</sup> of the historical paradigm in which, for Hegel, marks the apex of the development of modern Spirit and the realization of freedom *in and for* itself – and which should enable the objectivation of the principle according to which everyone is free, and no longer just *one* or a *few*. Hence, based on this critique, the French Revolution, still marked, as Marx (2010: 47) rightly notes, by the distinction between "*le citoyen*" and "*l'homme*", would only seem to be able to achieve its completeness or truth by opening up to the Haitian Revolution and its demands.<sup>8</sup> As Safatle states,

the French Revolution only becomes a fact of world history when it is appropriated by the slaves against their own masters, when it turns against the immediate interests of the French themselves. Without this inversion, it would be just another moment of a false universality (Safatle 2017: 11).

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7 In a certain sense, this shift seems to be akin to the notion of *déterritorialization* that Deleuze talks about in *Kafka: Pour une littérature mineure* (cf. Tidre 2012).

8 For a critical analysis of the relationship between the French and Haitian Revolutions from a historical perspective, see James (2010).

This appropriation, however, would not merely imply a demand for an extension of the principles and rights guaranteed by the institutions made possible by the French Revolution for those to whom, until then, these rights had been denied. Rather, this would mean the perishing of the “narrative of a gradual extension of ideas generated at the core of bourgeois society” (Safatle 2017: 12). This is why Safatle states that true emancipation implies the refusal, by those who revolt, of a simple appropriation “of the system of ideas” of the oppressor:

this movement is not just about reversing oppression based on the system of ideas that the oppressor himself produces without knowing it and without being able to carry it out. There is something more here. This reversal is the general resonance of experiences of equality coming from dispersed locations (Safatle 2017: 11).

Moreover, Safatle argues that “thinking about the foundation of recognition processes based on overcoming slavery implies major changes to the very metaphysics naturalized in a certain hegemonic way of thinking about emancipation” (Safatle 2017: 11). Thus,

what was a “thing”, what was “property”, is transformed into an agent, so that what was merely an object now appears as a subject. This movement changes not only the “things”, but also those who until then were “subjects” only by force of exclusion and expropriation (Safatle 2017: 11).

Already in the first chapter of his *Grande Hotel Abismo*, “Love is colder than death”, Safatle argued that an alternative interpretation of Hegel’s theory of recognition would require a

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completely new understanding of concepts such as "individuality", "identity", "rights" or "subject" (Safatle 2020: 54). Thus, he interprets the concept of Hegelian self-consciousness, central to Hegel's theory of recognition, as "the *locus* of a fundamental experience of non-identity that manifests itself through the subject's material relations with the other" (2020: 23), which "refers not to another self-consciousness endowed with its own system of interests" – as he seems to understand Honneth's conception of "other" – but to "a deeper otherness" or "a beyond that puts me in confrontation with something [...] indeterminate" (2020 23-24). In his nominal critique of Honneth, Safatle is particularly interested to show how "from a Hegelian perspective, the process of recognizing individuality cannot be restricted simply to the claim for positive individual rights that do not find a position in determined normative situations" (2020: 25). It is also in this sense that, in the preface to Buck-Morss, Safatle insists on the fundamental difference between the notions of "*reconhecimento*" (recognition) and "*reconhecimento*" (re-cognition), stating that

true processes of *reconhecimento* (recognition) will not be *reconhecimentos* (re-cognitions) of what existed before. There is a difference in nature between *reconhecimento* and *reconhecimento*. True processes of recognition will be a generalized production and metamorphosis. They will mutate both the one who is recognized and the one who recognizes, bringing to light what has not existed until now. Thus, what Hegel shows us is that the freedom won by the slave is not his elevation to the status of a new master, but the abolition of the modes of relation that were in force until then, such as relations through property, such as relations to oneself through the individuality of a concept of person incapable of under-

standing the dialectical force of its relational implications. What the slave's self-liberation produces is the collapse of a world and the reconstitution of the general modes of existence and their grammar. This is the only condition for a “We that is I and an I that is We” not to be a simple imposture (Safatle 2017: 11).

This distinction is also present in Rancière's critique of Honneth (Tidre 2023a: 127). By insisting on the refusal to reduce the claim for recognition to a struggle limited to a search for obtaining positive rights to individuals or groups to whom they had previously been denied, Rancière emphasizes (in characterizing the sphere of social relations) the notion of “*mésentente*”, i.e. the disagreement that is indicative of the distortion and asymmetry characteristic of an eminently political sociability.

Although we might object, in support of Honneth, that he rejects the idea of a unilateral defense of the rights of the person and property, or of freedom understood solely in legal, or even moral terms (Tidre 2023a: 130 ff.), the common ground of Rancière's and Safatle's critique allows us to emphasize the significance that Honneth, in the manner of Hegel, gives to the sphere of law and to modern moral principles: these would be moments to be integrated into a broader notion of what he calls “social freedom”.

In the same context, Honneth highlights the “ethical significance” given by Hegel specifically to the right to property:

the objects we have acquired and which we exclusively own allow us to examine all those attachments, relations and obligations in which we are involved; we can best explore the kind of life we would like to lead in

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light of the existential meaning these things have acquired for us over time (Honneth 2014 75).

At the same time, Honneth points out that Marx sees liberal fundamental rights (including the right to property) as ideological instruments aimed at the exploitative interests of the ruling class over the proletariat (Honneth 2014: 74). For Honneth, on the other hand, the defense of social freedom should not imply a radical questioning of "every given institutional arrangement" and "all existing rules" (2014: 118) – at the risk of us falling into "moral terrorism":<sup>9</sup> for the author, the problem of the political interventions that he characterizes as suffering from the evil of "moral terrorism" arises "once the questioning of the existing order gradually descends into the questioning of all existing rules" (2014: 118), so that "one can take up a moral standpoint from which the interest of all potential victims can be generalized to an extent that every given institutional arrangement can be viewed as unjustified" (2014: 118).

As I have already formulated in previous works (Tidre 2023a: 133-134), the point to be emphasized from Honneth's critique of positions implying a more radical questioning of certain principles and institutions is to know to what extent, for him, this questioning could be seen as legitimate or as mere "moral terrorism". This is, in fact, a problem raised by Honneth himself

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9 Or into a "Jacobin misunderstanding", cf. Paulo Amaral's master's thesis (Amaral 2023: 47). See also Buck-Morss' characterization of the rebels of Saint-Domingue as the "black Jacobins" who "surpassed the metropole in actively realizing the Enlightenment goal of human liberty, seeming to give proof that the French Revolution was not simply a European phenomenon but world-historical in its implications" (Buck-Morss 2009: 39). See also James (2010).



in relation to Hegel, and although he argues otherwise, Honneth seems to adopt the same path. Leaving aside the “open and porous” aspect that, in *Struggle for Recognition*, he attributed to the framework of orientations from which each society would ascribe value to the qualities and abilities of each of its members (Honneth 1995: 122), in *Freedom’s Right* the author seems to adopt the “teleological idea” that he himself attributed to Hegel (Honneth 2014: 59) by correctly noting that the latter, considering the presupposition of progress in history, defends that it is in the society of his time (i.e. in Modernity) that the institutions capable of guaranteeing the realization of freedom of the *Mensch als Mensch* are to be found.<sup>10</sup>

In this case, Rancière’s critique would reveal all its vitality, especially when he defends, in objection to Honneth’s theory of recognition, not simply a search for recognition (as *reconhecimento*), but for “another form of recognition”, or for “an original configuration of the habitual world”:

if recognition is not merely a response to something already existing, if it is an original configuration of the common world, this means that individuals and groups are always, in some way, recognized with a place and a competence so that the struggle is not “for recognition,” but for another form of recognition: a redistribution of the places, the identities, and the parts (Rancière 2016: 90, emphasis on the original).<sup>11</sup>

This is how Rancière’s – and Safatle’s – demands for another form of recognition or another form of universalism

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<sup>10</sup> On this point, see also Deranty (2016: 78-79).

<sup>11</sup> See also Tidre (2023a: 133-134).

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(Rancière 2016: 84) becomes crucial, since it simultaneously can be understood as a demand for overcoming (through a refusal, and no longer a mere integration) social forms that would prevent a true emancipation.

## **2. Marx: *with* and *against* Hegel in his critique of modern property**

In her interpretation of the lordship-bondage relation thematized by Hegel, Buck-Morss follows a reading key that is close to the one offered by Kojève: it is not overcoming fear in face of death that makes the individual truly autonomous. This act of bravery, this display of courage, is an impetus that doesn't last. Therefore, as Hegel's own text attests, the life-or-death struggle must be followed by a new moment: the moment when servile consciousness is transformed into its inverse, becoming "the truth of the independent consciousness":

The truth of the independent consciousness is accordingly the servile consciousness of the bondsman. This, it is true, appears at first *outside* of itself and not as the truth of self-consciousness. But just as lordship showed that its essential nature is the reverse of what it wants to be, so too servitude in its consummation will really turn into the opposite of what it immediately is; as a consciousness forced back into itself, it will withdraw into itself and be transformed into a truly independent consciousness (Hegel 1977 [PhS] §193, emphasis on the original).

Hegel raises the question of the centrality of work and the relation to the object as a restrained desire, by which the true *Selbstständigkeit* of the consciousness would be attained:

Work, on the other hand, is desire held in check, fleetingness staved off; in other words, work forms and shapes the thing. The negative relation to the object becomes its *form* and something *permanent*, because it is precisely for the worker that the object has independence. This *negative* middle term or the formative *activity* is at the same time the individuality or pure being-for-self of consciousness which now, in the work outside of it, acquires an element of permanence. It is in this way, therefore, that consciousness, *qua* worker, comes to see in the independent being [of the object] its *own* independence. (Hegel 1977 [PhS] § 195, emphasis on the original).

Therefore, there is an inversion: the servile consciousness, previously considered as a thing, an object, the property of the master or of the “person”, achieves autonomy through its own work, discovering itself as a subject capable of transforming nature without annihilating it in the immediacy of enjoyment.<sup>12</sup> Buck-Morss takes up Hegel’s connection between the development of the “truth of the independent consciousness” and the activity of work, and emphasizes how the slave, until then treated as a “thing”, would achieve self-consciousness by revealing himself, in transgressing what Safatle called “hegemonic metaphysics”, as a subject capable of transforming material nature (cf. Buck-Morss 2017: 86).<sup>13</sup> The master, in turn, is the one who assumes the position of dependency, since he satisfies his

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<sup>12</sup> It would be useful to develop this point in connection with discussions linked to ecology and, in Marxist terms, ecosocialism. More about this topic in Gioppo (2021).

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needs not through his own work, but solely through the exploitation of the work of others.

This interpretation of Hegel's theory of recognition, which finds support in *Phenomenology* – and which will be extended to Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* – helps endorsing a conception of work that is a condition for the formation of subjectivity and *Selbstständigkeit*,<sup>14</sup> but that also legitimizes the right to property – from a perspective directly incorporated from the jusnaturalist tradition (Tidre; Schäfer 2020: 15ff.).

Locke, in particular, defends property whose legitimacy is based on work – either on one's own work (Locke 1998 [St]: §27 ff.)<sup>15</sup> or on the *paid* work of others, legally appropriated in

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13 Buck-Morss goes so far as to say that Hegel's emphasis on work would be "intriguing" (2017: 86, note 6).

14 Although Hegel, by placing work in a central place in his philosophical conception, goes against philosophical paradigms such as the ancient one – from which work is relegated to the domain of the *oikos* and is seen as incompatible with the activity of philosophy and politics, so that dedicating oneself to the affairs of the *polis* implies precisely free time in relation to work linked to the satisfaction of more immediate needs – it is important to remember that Hegel is not original in his proposal, since work already appears in the jusnaturalist tradition as a central element in justifying the legitimacy of property (cf. Locke 1998 [ST]). However, we must recognize that Hegel goes further, giving the activity of work an essential role in the process of forming subjectivity. In this sense, work is not only the activity that legitimizes property, but also the condition for the recognition of self-consciousness and, in the *Philosophy of Right*, free will.

15 "[E]very man has a property in his own person. To this no one has any right except himself. The labor of his body and the work of his hands[...] are his property. Therefore, whatever he takes from the state which nature has provided and left there, he has mixed his labor with it, adding something of his own, and thus makes it his property" (Locke 1998 [ST]: § 27); "the grass which my horse has grazed, the turf which my servant has cut, and the gold which I have mined in any place where I had a right to them in common with others, have become my property without the cession or consent of anyone. The work of removing them from that common state in which they were fixed

exchange for a wage (1998 [ST]: §85) – as well as on the notion of usufruct (1998 [ST]: §31).<sup>16</sup> However, according to Locke, while the usufruct and the imperishability of owned goods define the limit of their accumulation (*idem*), money unlocks these constraints, as it emerged as “some lasting thing that Men might keep without spoiling” (1998 [ST]: §47). However, even though, from this conception of money, his theory enables him to undertake a “dissolution of the determination of property as a means of satisfying needs” (Tidre; Schäfer 2020: 15-16), Locke “still does not understand the latter as an independent form of value” (2020: 16-17) or an “end in itself” (*Selbstzweck*), but as a mere non-perishable means of exchange.

This Lockean conception of property – and, by extension, of money – which will also be incorporated by Hegel, clashes directly with the constitutive determinations of modern property as identified by Marx, which would be based, on the contrary, on *unpaid* labor. In *Capital*, we find one of the most systematic expositions of the specific and contradictory character of modern property – even though Marx's critique of property and right has been a constant since his earliest writings. In chapter 25, after having previously dismantled the argument

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my right of property over them” (1998 [ST]: §28); “Although the water flowing in the fountain belongs to everyone, who doubts that in the pitcher it belongs only to the one who drew it? His work took it out of the hands of nature, where it was a common good and belonged equally to all her children, and made it his property” (1998 [ST]: § 29); “it is admitted that the thing belongs to the one who dedicated his work to it, even if before it was the common right of all” (1998 [ST]: § 30).

16 “All that a man can use in such a way as to derive some advantage for his existence without waste, that is what his work can fix as his property. Everything that exceeds this limit is more than his share and belongs to others. God created nothing for men to waste or destroy” (Locke 1998 [ST]: §31).

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that original accumulation would be based on "right and labour", Marx (1990: 874) shows how real history has nothing idyllic about it, rather consisting of a "historical process of separation between producer and means of production" marked by "conquest", "enslavement", "robbery", "murder" or, "in short, force", engraved "in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire" (1990: 875). Marx goes on to question the concept of property defended by the representatives of political economy:

Political economy confuses, on principle, two different kinds of private property, one of which rests on the labour of the producer himself, and the other on the exploitation of the labour of others. It forgets that the latter is not only the direct antithesis of the former, but grows on the former's tomb and nowhere else (Marx 1990: 931).

And further on: "To this ready-made world of capital, the political economist applies the notions of law and of property inherited from a pre-capitalist world, with all the more anxious zeal and all the greater unction, the more loudly the facts cry out in the face of his ideology" (Marx 1990: 931).<sup>17</sup> Marx argues that this conception of property discussed by political economists corresponds, rather, to a model of work of the free peasant, or of the craftsman in the city, which are independent or "*selbstständig*" because they are owners of the means of production – a conception that no longer coincides with modern or capitalist private property.

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17 For an in-depth look at the jusnaturalist conception of property, see Tidre; Schäfer (2020: 15 ff).

In addition to the distinction between these two forms of property, there is a differentiation within the very notion of modern property: the capitalist's property, as capital, which at the beginning of the process manifests itself in the form of money and means of production, guarantees that the capitalist can appropriate the unpaid labor of others, maintaining the cycle of domination and multiplication of capital over labor. The property of the wage worker, his labor power, which he alienates for a fixed period of time in exchange for a wage, not only does not guarantee his independence, but is precisely what makes him systematically submissive to this process of exploitation. In this sense, we can affirm that

not all property has the same economic quality. Owning money or labor power has relevant social consequences for its bearers, that is, for determining the place they will occupy in the structure of social reproduction (Tidre; Shäfer 2020: 183).

In justifying the difference in ownership between these two types of property, the discourse of “contingency”, familiar to modern philosophical conceptions, is often used. Before Hegel (2022 [PR]: §200), Rousseau (1995: 219) already used it to explain the inequality and disparity of wealth between individuals: some have more talent, some are more industrious, physically stronger, or mentally superior. Those who prove to be more capable of producing become more prosperous. In short: more work would result in more wealth or property (Tidre 2018: 27-28). The recent statement made by a Brazilian finance youtuber-coach that “there is no poverty that can resist 14 hours of work”

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is an emblematic example of how this idea still remains very popular. Discourses about the notion of “empowerment” or how to “become your own boss” are other variants of this same idea, remaining trapped in the logic of an aspiration to “elevate to the status of a new master”.

However, the functioning of the capitalist mode of production seems to constantly contradict this “Protestant spirit”. As Marx shows – in combating the anecdote of the genesis of the accumulation of capital derived from a supposed ethics of discipline, intelligence and frugality adopted by those who, for this reason, would have become the owners of money and the means of production (Marx 2013: 785) – the historical origin of capitalist production is conditioned by a violent process of expropriation of the producers from their own means of production and the disciplining of the workforce, which requires, among other things, the systematic and bloody intervention of the state. After two hundred years of this process, the application of extra-economic and direct violence is only exceptionally necessary, being replaced by a relationship of “voluntary servitude” in the form of a “silent compulsion” of the “natural laws of production”:

The advance of capitalist production develops a working class which by education, tradition and habit looks upon the requirements of that mode of production as self-evident natural laws. The organization of the capitalist process of production, once it is fully developed, breaks down all resistance. The constant generation of a relative surplus population keeps the law of the supply and demand of labour, and therefore wages, within narrow limits, which correspond to capital's valorization requirements. The silent compulsion of economic rela-



tions sets the seal on the domination of the capitalist over the worker. Direct extra-economic force is still of course used, but only in exceptional cases. In the ordinary run of things, the worker can be left to the “natural laws of production”, i.e. it is possible to rely on his dependence on capital, which springs from the conditions of production themselves, and is guaranteed in perpetuity by them (Marx 1990: 899).<sup>18</sup>

In this sense, it becomes crucial to analyze capitalist economy as a process of reproduction (chapter 21), which requires taking into account not only the sphere of circulation, but also that of production. This analysis allows us to understand how, in the “ordinary run of things”, where the use of direct violence is no longer predominant, the systematic inversion of property based on one’s own labor to property based on the labor of others takes place precisely through the proper observance of the law.<sup>19</sup>

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18 This does not mean that violence isn’t still used systematically, especially in connection with relations of oppression, which are just as fundamental to the reproduction of capitalism as the “legal” exploitation that takes place inside the workplace. Authors such as Rosa Luxemburg (*The Accumulation of Capital*) and Silvia Federici (*Caliban and the Witch*) will insist on the thesis that, in addition to the “silent compulsion” of the “natural laws of production”, violent methods are not only present in the historical genesis of capitalism, but are a constant and vital to its maintenance: “A return of the most violent aspects of primitive accumulation has accompanied every phase of capitalist globalization, including the present one, demonstrating that the continuous expulsion of farmers from the land, war and plunder on a world scale, and the degradation of women are necessary conditions for the existence of capitalism in all times” (Federici 2004: 12-13).

19 In fact, this allows us to object to Honneth’s understanding of what, for him, would be Marx’s two central problems in relation to the capitalist market: the lack of respect for legal freedom or civil rights which would be denied to a whole section of the population, and a relationship of inequality in the closure of a contract between the employer and the worker, since the latter would have no other commodity than his labor power (cf. Honneth 2015: 363, and Tidre 2020b: 984).

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Originally, the right to property appeared to us as being based on labor itself. At the very least, this assumption had to be admitted, because only possessors of commodities with equal rights faced each other, but the means of appropriating other people's commodities was only the alienation [*Veräußerung*] of their own commodities, and these could only be produced through labor. Now, on the other hand, property appears on the side of the capitalist, as the right to appropriate the unpaid labor of others or their product; on the side of the worker, as the impossibility of appropriating their own product. The split between property and labor becomes the necessary consequence of a law that apparently originated in the identity of both (Marx 2013: 659).

In this sense, especially in his analysis of the "market" as a sphere of circulation or exchange of equivalents – "a very Eden of the innate rights of man" (Marx 1990: 280) –, Marx argues that, in this sphere, respecting the principles of freedom, equality and property is precisely what guarantees, in the sphere of production, a systematic relationship of dependence, inequality and expropriation of those whose only property is their own labor power: "however much the capitalist mode of appropriation may seem to fly in the face of the original laws of commodity production, it nevertheless arises, not from a violation of these laws but, on the contrary, from their application" (Marx 1990: 730).<sup>20</sup>

Therefore, while Hegel (2022 [PR]: §40) states that the right is the immediate *Dasein* of freedom,<sup>21</sup> Marx (2006 [MEW1]:

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20 For a more in-depth discussion of this issue, see Tidre (2023b: 984-985; 986).

21 "Das Recht ist zuerst das unmittelbare Dasein, welches sich die Freiheit auf unmittelbare Weise gibt".

114), arguing that “value is the *Dasein* of bourgeois property”, ends up putting himself in an opposite position to Hegel’s, defending that neither the institutional complex of bourgeois-civil society – whose system of needs corresponds to the capitalist market –, nor the rights linked to the person and property, can be understood as essential moments of a broader notion of freedom. Instead, according to Marx, a radical break with the social forms linked to capitalism, as well as with the principles and institutions they require, is necessary.<sup>22</sup>

Consequently, positive concepts of freedom or work could only be thought of, from a Marxian perspective, in close connection with the demand for emancipation from this mode of production – or, as Safatle puts it (2017: 11), with the demand for the “abolition of the modes of relation hitherto in force” or the “collapse of a world”. Badiou, in *The Rebirth of History*, seeking to give a new meaning to the Idea as the “Idea of communism” (Badiou 2012: 6),<sup>23</sup> speaks in the same sense of a liberation from the “desire for the West” (*désir de l’Occident*) (2012: 49 ff.) and

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22 This does not imply that Marx rejects the struggle for legal recognition and for rights, whether they are civil, social, or political. This struggle is seen as fundamental, but it also needs to be understood as instrumental, as having a formative aspect in the organization of the workers towards a transformation that would itself serve to radically challenge the modern form of law (e.g. *Capital*, especially chapter 8). This is also the theme of Rosa Luxemburg (*Social reform or revolution?*) in her clash with the reformist current of German Social Democracy at the end of the 19th century. Furthermore, Marx’s work also raises the need for a radical critique of modern institutions such as the family and the state, and not just the market within bourgeois-civil society. If in *Capital* the author shows how the logic of the capitalist market economy opposes the possibility of the realization of concrete freedom, it is also shown, according to his own conception, that modern family (Engels, *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, 1884), as well as the rule of law (*The Civil War in France*, 1871) are crucial institutions for the reproduction of capital.

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from claims such as “democracy” and “freedom” brought about by modern principles of emancipation,<sup>24</sup> which would thus enable an opening to what he calls, in *The Communist Hypothesis*, an “event”: something which is “impossible” – until it becomes inevitable.

I call an ‘event’ a rupture in the normal order of bodies and languages as it exists for any particular situation [...] or as it appears in any particular world [...]. What is important to note here is that an event is not the realization of a possibility that resides within the situation or that is dependent on the transcendental laws of the world. An event is the creation of new possibilities. It is located not merely at the level of objective possibilities but at the level of the possibility of possibilities. Another way of putting this is: with respect to a situation or a world, an event paves the way for the possibility of what from the limited perspective of the make-up of this situation or the legality of this world – is strictly impossible (Badiou 2010: 242-243).

This characterization aligns with the one Badiou offered in *The Rebirth of History* when he states that in “a world structured by exploitation and oppression”, where “masses of people have [...] no existence” (Badiou 2012: 55), the event marks precisely the uprising of the non-existent – i.e. of what, according to the

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23 When talking about the “Idea”, Badiou doesn’t mention Hegel at any point in the text. However, understanding it as a rational principle or a “concept” that guides struggles for emancipation and the realization, in the objective sphere, of institutions that are adequate to it, certainly brings the two authors closer together.

24 In *The Communist Hypothesis*, Badiou states that the Idea, as the Idea of communism, can only be rescued in philosophy today in two ways: either by abandoning Hegel, or by putting forward a different Hegel, as Žižek does via Lacan (cf. Badiou 2010: 237-238, note 6).

conditions of possibility given by the “transcendental laws” of a *Zeitgeist* whose forms reduce everything (work, time, wealth, nature) to the logic of the movement of “valorization of value”, is declared impossible, requiring, for its existence, the irruption of new forms, manifestations of a new principle from which the Spirit begins to reorganize itself, actualizing new internal possibilities.

## Final considerations

Marx's problematization of the capitalist mode of production, which necessarily generates relations of domination, prompts calling into question the “Project of Modernity”, a “hegemonic model of emancipation” and a certain metaphysics that lead to the defense of principles (freedom, equality, property) and institutions (family, bourgeois-civil society and its free market, rule of law) that are, for Hegel, considered as essential moments or conditions of his modern notion of ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*).

According to the interpretation of the Hegelian theory of recognition defended by authors such as Buck-Morss and Safa-tle, it seems possible to show that Hegel's own arguments reveal a critical position in relation to this project, pointing out its limits. However, emphasizing the insufficiency of the recognition of the person and the rights that characterize it – when in *Phenomenology* Hegel stresses that the fact that we are recognized

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as a "person" does not imply that we are *selbstständig*, since "the individual who has not risked his life may well be recognized as a person; but he has not attained to the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness" (Hegel 1977 [PhS]: §187, emphasis on the original) – does not lead the author to conclude that there is a need for a radical overcoming of them.<sup>25</sup> Rather, according to Hegel's diagnoses, the problem lies in considering that legal rights alone would be sufficient to guarantee emancipation. Hegel's solution, presented in a more systematic way in *Philosophy of Right*, consists in the defense of the domain of "abstract right" as a moment to be integrated – in the sense of *aufgehoben* – into a broader conception of freedom belonging to the realm of *Sittlichkeit*.

In this work, Hegel also insists on justifying the legitimacy of property founded on one's own work and on defending work as an activity that should guarantee the right to subsistence,

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25 On this point, Safatle, in preparing his critique of the position he attributes to Honneth in *Struggle for Recognition*, understands Hegel's position in the *Phenomenology* as the need to go "beyond", or "below", the form of the juridical person in the claim for emancipation, by declaring that the mere recognition of the individual as a (juridical) person, as well as the mere recognition of their individualizing determinations, would not be a sufficient guarantee in the process of forming a truly free individuality. In this way, Safatle states that Hegel "is not afraid to say that not risking one's life can produce recognition as a person, but not as an autonomous and independent self-consciousness. As if the true autonomy of self-consciousness could only be placed on a terrain beyond (or even below) the form of the juridical person with positive rights and individualizing determinations" (Safatle 2020: 25). However, I believe that the argument put forward by Hegel in §187 of the *Phenomenology* only reinforces the idea that recognition as a person is "not enough" and must be "completed" by some other type of recognition in relation to which, however, this first legal recognition would function as a "complement", and not as something in relation to which a radical rupture would be necessary.

thus raising demands that, within the dialectic movement of bourgeois-civil society, as the author himself realizes, seem impossible to meet. This threat of “short-circuiting” is particularly evident in Hegel’s exposition of issues linked to the “system of needs” (*System der Bedürfnisse*) and to the modern market relations such as the problem of the rabble.<sup>26</sup> Hegel is not, however, in a position to address it in a consistent manner, since he fails to establish any necessary relationship between the contradictions emerging from the labor relations linked to the young capitalist mode of production and the modern principles and institutions he defends.

It is Marx who shows how the problem of recognizing the individual as a person and the right to property consists not in its supposed insufficiency that could be supplanted by a broader notion of emancipation capable of integrating this legal recogni-

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26 On the idea of “short-circuiting”, specifically in relation to the question of the rabble (*der Pöbel*), see Žižek (2012: 432). See also Tidre (2019: 143): “Indeed, in Hegel, whose conception of the socio-political community as an ethical whole implies the demand for the realization of ever greater levels of freedom – which is expressed in the formulation ‘the real is rational’, understood by me as a ‘programmatically motto’, a normative demand for the adequacy of objectivity to the concept that, ultimately, makes the realization of the principle ‘*alle Menschen sind frei*’ possible – the rabble, precisely as an ‘irrational excess’, as a ‘remnant’ that does not allow itself to be integrated, also seems to function as a symptom of the exhaustion and incapacity of a society existing under the auspices of the modern state to realize the universal principle of freedom”. For a more in-depth look at the issue of the rabble, see Ruda (2011), *Hegels Pöbel*, who argues that the problem of the rabble, which Hegel faces in his treatment of bourgeois-civil society, threatens to implode the very Hegelian system of ethical life presented in the *Philosophy of Right*, since the rabble would “disturb a conception of the socio-political community marked by an organic, conscious and desired union between the parts” (Tidre 2019: 140), being characterized by the social and subjective state in which it finds itself – “the excremental, the eliminated, the detached from bourgeois-civil society” (Ruda 2011: 65-66) – i.e. by the loss of “discernment about the rational whole of the organically interconnected state” (2011: 65).

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tion, but in the very meaning of modern property as the direct antithesis of property based on one's own work, a consequence of the capital-labor relation grounded on a systematic movement of expropriation. Thus, Marx shows that dependency, inequality, and expropriation, which, for Hegel, seemed to be linked to capitalism only in an arbitrary way, originate not from the non-fulfilment of the normative promises of Modernity, but precisely from their realization.

*Received on 23/04/2024*

*Approved on 12/10/2024*

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