

Labour Against Capitalism? Hegel's Concept of Labour in Between Civil Society and the State

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Abstract

The concepts and phenomena of civil society, political economy and labour are ambivalent matters in Hegel's political philosophy. They simultaneously contain productive and destructive potential in the realization of the political community. This article investigates Hegel's concept of labour against the backdrop of his theory of civil society in order to bring forth the ambiguous role of labour in relation to the 'capitalism' of civil society. According to Hegel, labour is both economically productive and the activity by which the society and its members can transcend the mere capitalistic dimensions of society. Labour can therefore simultaneously be understood as capitalistic and non-capitalistic in Hegel's political philosophy. The cultivating dimensions of labour in Hegel's theory offer a counterpart to the mere capitalistic forms of labour. Labour can therefore be used as a promising platform for the discussion of the relation between economy and culture and for the revitalization of capitalism critique.

Keywords: Labour, Hegel, capitalism critique, philosophy of right, political economy, civil society.

Introduction

The concepts and phenomena of civil society, political economy and labour are ambivalent matters for Hegel (1770-1831) since they simultaneously contain productive and destructive potentials within the realisation of the political. Hegel early on perceived the potency of the liberal economic principles within the awakening civil society and its leading bourgeoisie, and he integrated civil society and economics as a relatively independent part of the state in his political theory. The productive potential of political economy, or rather the potential of its productivity, plays an indispensable role in his conception, making it possible to understand society as a common product of all members through societal labour and to grasp labour as the activity dialectically mediating all members of society through the division of labour, hereby making grounds for their mutual recognition. At the same time, the destructive threat of civil society consists in its loss of ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) because of the predominance of egoism as the motivator for the actions of the (negatively) free individual agents.

In Hegel's system, civil society is to be found as the mediator and difference between family and the state, where the family incorporates the idea and first immediate form of ethical life and the state its fulfilment. In the state the difference between individuality and the common shall be entirely sublated, or, with Hegel's words, *aufgehoben*. However, this phase of alienation incorporated by civil society is necessary for the historical and dialectical formation of the state, and therefore the productivity of civil society must be acknowledged. With regard to this focus on the connection of political philosophy, history, political economy and labour, Hegel was an important predecessor to Marx. For example, Lukács (1948/1973) points out that Hegel's philosophy was an indispensable source of inspiration for Marx and his theory of political economy, on the class struggle, and on the substantial role of labour for human culture and society.

This article investigates Hegel's concept of labour against the backdrop of his theory of civil society (mainly according to the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* from 1821) in order to bring forth its ambiguous status in relation to the 'capitalism' of civil society. Labour is, according to Hegel, both economically productive *and* the activity by which the society and its members can transcend the mere capitalistic dimensions of society and thereby become politically established within the boundaries of the ethical state. Labour could thereby simultaneously be understood as capitalistic and non-capitalistic in Hegel's political philosophy. Labour, understood as an anthropological category, can generally speaking be seen as caught in the crossfire between economy and culture (also understood as an anthropological concept), especially as it is conceptualised as a part of *Sittlichkeit* by Hegel. *Sittlichkeit* is translated into 'ethical life' in the English version of Hegel's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, but *Sitte* also means tradition or custom. Labour, being an essential human cultivating act, can be viewed to be

both (1) an activity exclusively occupied by economy and its measures of profit, and (2) the activity by which humans turn human, namely by turning nature upside down (when ploughing the field), processing and refining the outer and inner nature and making it 'human', lastly cultivating themselves when together recognising each other in the product of their labour (Hegel names this *Bildung*).

At the same time Hegel can be said to resist this dichotomy: economically productive labour is also cultivating, it differentiates, refines and multiplies the needs, tastes, abilities and work methods of the individuals in society. Still, Hegel can also be understood to view economically and mechanical labour as threatening the cultivating dimensions of labour. In this sense, economy would be a form of culture threatening the cultivating dimension of labour. To summarise, labour can, departing from Hegel, be used as a promising platform for a discussion of the relation of economy and culture, and in particular to be formulated as a concept incorporating a critique of capitalism as culture-destruction and anti-cultivating *and* simultaneously as a concept able to revitalise the activity of cultivating itself. To show this is the aim of this article.

In the current discussion on the meaning and future of labour the positions often are dichotomized into the simplified alternatives of either criticising and rejecting or entirely embracing labour. On the one hand many a critiques of labour seem to ignore or only in a minimal way acknowledge the important role that labour arguably plays and must play for human beings. But although a critique often is legitimate, here labour is considered only to be a problem. On the other hand, there is a widespread tendency in politics and political theory to uncritically define labour and full employment as the self-evident goal of society. Here, the current forms of labour are not questioned, labour is not considered to be a problem at all. To avoid these options I return to Hegel. As already sketched out, Hegel's theory represents both an emphatic critique of labour in its sheer capitalistic forms *and* makes a strong case for labour as an indispensable act of cultivation. This is why Hegel can be made a useful resource for our current debate on labour and capitalism.

The Productive Negation of Civil Society

Hegel does not systematically use the term 'capitalism' (although the term 'capital' occurs in his texts), but it nevertheless seems possible to interpret his theory of civil society and the concept of 'system of needs' as an attempt to grasp the essence and mechanisms of the early capitalist society. Thus, analysing Hegel's relation to civil society – containing both criticism and recognition –, can also be understood as an approach to Hegel's implicit view on capitalism.

Hegel's political philosophy is inherent in his philosophy of spirit, which on a macro level is divided into three parts: the subjective spirit, the objective spirit, and the absolute spirit. These parts are conceptualised as three phases of the entire

development of the *Weltgeist*, the World spirit, heading towards self-fulfilment and absolute self-knowledge. The political dimension belongs to the stage of objective spirit in Hegel's conception, in which the spirit is incorporated and realised in different objective stages, institutions and forms. In *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* Hegel additionally divides the political into three dimensions: *Abstract Right*, *Morality*, and *Ethical Life* (Hegel 1821/1991). The part on *Ethical life* finally contains three chapters: on the family, on the civil society and the last on the state. Ethical life thus develops through three stages, where civil society is the middle part, at the same time the mediating concept and dynamic link between family and state. The family is conceptualised by Hegel as the first and immediate form of ethical life and ethical spirit, which is lost in civil society – in which individual freedom and egoism, and not solidarity, are the operating principles – and finally is re-conquered in the state, being the final *télos* of the political in Hegel's philosophy. In this movement of ethical life, civil society plays the role of what can be called a *productive negation*. Civil society is for Hegel the systematically and dialectically necessary destruction of the community of family, a destruction, which makes the fulfilment of ethical life possible on the state level, that is, for the community on the whole. Ethical life must be destroyed on the particular level (family) in order to be established on the common level (the state).

Civil society is also an important platform for the realisation of individual and personal freedom. Hegel considered himself being part of a time in which freedom already had become reality on at least three levels: (1) the reformation and its protestant subjectivity, (2) the proclaimed freedom and human rights by the Enlightenment and in relation to the French Revolution, and finally, (3) the economic and industrial revolution and its founding of the individual (self) interest (Ritter 1974; Riedel 1969 and 1974; Waszek 1988: 23). Hegel – according to his philosophical program of grasping his own time in concepts – acknowledged this emergence of freedom, and in his theory he was trying to favour its fulfilment. In order to establish ethical life on the state level, the individuals have to be set free from earlier forms of societal power relations. The split of family stages individual freedom in civil society, a freedom yet not the fulfilment of ethical life, but the necessary step headed towards it in the state. Hegel tries to evoke the development of ethical life from out of and with help from its loss in civil society.

In the chapter *System of Needs* in *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* the most mature version of Hegel's theory of political economy can be found. Hegel was the only German philosopher of his generation showing interest in the English and Scottish Enlightenment and political economy (Hegel 1821/1991: § 189; see also Waszek 1988; Lukács 1948/1973: 26 ff., 501; Priddat 1990). Hegel was not only a defender of the state, but essentially a thinker and defender of civil society (Avineri 1972: 133; Riedel 1969 and 1970). A main achievement of Hegel's political theory is to have integrated economic theory – in Hegel's time being the most modern branch of theory adequate to modern and already real forms of society –

in a positive philosophy of the state. But Hegel also essentially transformed economic theory and its concepts and mobilised them philosophically (Lukács 1948/1973: 26 ff., 496). The concept of labour, for example, receives, as will be shown, a more substantial and cultivating meaning in Hegel's theory. He remained not within economical criteria, although his philosophy was crucially inspired by modern economic theories of labour, division of labour and its dialectical production of the society as a system of needs. Without these theories Hegel would not have been able to design his philosophy of labour as a cultivating *Bildung*, which is a theory of the human self as a product of its labour. This is a form of labour that transcends the mere economic scope of labour.

Hegel conceptualises the system of needs as founded on the self-interest of individuals mediated within the division of labour. The concrete person or egoistic individual is the main principle and foundation of civil society. Every individual follows only its own interest, ignoring everything else. The individual's relation to others is merely strategic (Hegel 1821/1991: §§ 182 and 187; see also Avineri 1972: 134). But nevertheless, the relation to other individuals is essential for it. Its needs are only satisfied in relation to and with help from the division of labour, that is, with the help from others. In reality the individuals are intertwined and anonymously interdependent with each other. Through the division of labour the individuals become more efficient and skilled within their speciality and the work becomes easier and its result more extensive. But this also increases the societal interdependence: no one can survive alone anymore. Hegel writes:

The concrete person who, as a particular person, as a totality of needs and a mixture of natural necessity and arbitrariness, is his own end, is one principle of civil society. But this particular person stands essentially in relation to other similar particulars, and their relation is such that each asserts itself and gains satisfaction through the others, and thus at the same time through the exclusive mediation of the form of universality, which is the second principle (Hegel 1821/1991: § 182; see also §§ 192, 198, and 200; Avineri 1972: 91).

Hegel is hereby acknowledging the achievement of Smith's theory, recognising the formation of rational patterns within the constellation of seemingly randomly interacting egoistic individuals. Hegel recognises, with help from Smith, a dialectical transition in civil society and that the subjective self-interest is transformed into the contribution to the satisfaction of the needs of everybody. In so far as the individual is working for himself, he is also unintentionally working for everyone. Hereby a common and permanent social product is formed.

In this dependence and reciprocity of work and the satisfaction of needs, subjective selfishness turns into a contribution towards the satisfaction of the needs of everyone else. By a dialectical movement, the particular is mediated by the universal so that each individual, in earning, producing, and enjoying on his own account, thereby earns and produces for the enjoyment of others (Hegel 1821/1991: § 199; see also § 189 and Lukács 1948/1973: 516; Riedel 1970: 48 ff.; Avineri 1972: 146).

The egoistic actions of the individuals therefore have a different result than intended. They unintentionally run errands for the World spirit and work for his mission. The actions are only seemingly particular, but end in the creation of a common social product. In Hegel's theory this is accounted for as the 'List der Vernunft' (cunning of reason) (Lukács 1948/1973: 550).

The principle of civil society is difference, not only as being the negation and difference between family and state (Hegel 1821/1991: § 181), but also as having a differentiating tendency (Hegel 1821/1991: § 191). The mechanisms of civil society have the merit, that they cultivate the individuals in differentiating and multiplying their needs and the means to satisfy them within the division of labour. Their abilities are refined (Hegel 1821/1991: §§ 182-208, especially § 191). But society, as civil society, is risking to fall apart, since the individuals are striving against the unity of the collective through their egoism. But for Hegel this is necessary for the dialectical movement to work: the stronger a negation is (and its cultivating aspects), the richer is the state resulting from it. Hereby Hegel tries both to acknowledge the mechanisms of civil society and to conceptualise them such as culminating in a political community transcending civil society (see Avineri 1972: 134). Hegel's conception requires the loss of ethical life in order to regain it on a societal and higher level in the state. Hegel acknowledges Smith's insight into the natural principles of society, namely that the individuals' free and egoistic actions unintentionally result in a social common product and the wealth of nations. This dialectical transition, when the individual's egoistic disregard of the common results in the formation of a refined collective, gives the civil society the function of a *productive negation*. Of course, for Hegel, this dialectical transition also means that the individuals must overcome their natural egoistic instincts and, thus, that the transition has to go further than in Smith's theory. The individual, being a member of the state, has to be aware of it being a part of society and its division of labour, and actively and consciously work for the sake of the whole. This was not a part of Smith's conception. Nevertheless, for Hegel, the freedom of the individual and its egoistic actions – being the negation of the family's community and the negation of ethical life as such – have a productive effect for ethical life, they establish and refine the common, mainly through labour. The negation is productive because it is not merely a destructive negation, but is rather an essential moment in a dialectically productive movement of ethical life. Ethical life develops *because of* this loss of ethical life, not despite its negation. Still, it is doubtful whether this transition can fully recover from the destructive effects of civil society. Even if the negation is productive precisely because it has a destructive dimension, it is difficult for Hegel to stage a full reconciliation between society and state. Therefore he systematically mobilises *The Police* and *The Corporation* as transition functions in his political philosophy (Hegel 1821/1991: §§ 231-256), trying to make grounds for the ethical life and non-egoistic community of the state by transcending civil society.

Following Arato, one can say that ‘Hegel’s social theory presents modern society both as a world of alienation, and as an open-ended search for social integration’ (Arato 1991: 301), but the question is: is it possible to mobilise the negation for the benefit of the whole? Exactly here one of the main questions for Hegel’s political philosophy gets distinct. How can modern individual freedom be developed in its own right without restrictions, but at the same time transcend itself and transgress into the fulfilment of ethical life in the state? Hegel’s idea is that the individual will transcend itself when developing and sharpening itself as person, not by softening itself. This would mean that the capitalism of civil society must destroy the immediate cultural forms of ethical life and community in order to help fulfilling them on a societal and dialectically mediated level. Hegel hereby makes this loss of ethical life meaningful. Being conceptualised as the mediator between family and state, civil society shall be risking ethical life in order to conquer it. In this context, labour is essential. Labour for Hegel is the founding principle of civil society and modern politics (Riedel 1970: 47). Through labour individuals form their society, history and themselves as self-conscious members of society. Like civil society, labour is to be understood in this twilight of destruction and reconciliation. Labour is productive only by risking the ethical life it unintentionally is developing. According to Hegel, labour at the same is supposed to overcome and negate this negation and therefore can be viewed to have a potential in overcoming the destruction. Labour as a cultivating activity inherits the destruction of nature and risking ethical life in civil society, but simultaneously holds the potential for creating a synthesising reconciliation.

The Ambiguity of Labour

The concept of labour is present in all of Hegel’s political writings, yet it plays an ambiguous role in Hegel’s conception. Labour (1) produces and plays an essential part in the loss of ethical life in civil society, but simultaneously (2) is given the potential of overcoming this loss and to lead society towards the reestablishment of *Sittlichkeit*. Labour in this sense is to be placed in between the loss of ethical life in civil society and in its direction towards the fulfilment of ethical life in the state. Labour in this sense is both capitalistic, insofar as it is motivated and driven by egoistic individual and anti-collective interests, and anti-capitalistic, since Hegel gives it an ego-transcending character, and is able to produce the common and not only is reduced to create and strengthen the economic particular. Labour analogously is on the one hand destroying cultivation and *Sittlichkeit*, but on the other hand it is a cultivating activity with the possibility to criticise and to transcend this destruction of culture. Labour, in the meaning of this cultivating activity, needs to deal with labour as a destructive force. This opposition corresponds to the relation between labour (1) as differentiating and particularising and (2) as speculative and unity-creating. Although these meanings are intertwined insofar as the first is a

necessary negation of the common in order for the common unity to be established, Hegel nevertheless has a hard time securing the productive constellation of these dimensions of labour: they are not easily reconciled. On the one hand labour in the first sense differentiates itself in multiple forms of satisfying needs in correspondence to the strengthening of individuality in civil society. On the other hand labour is the movement towards the common, through the necessary detour of the negation of itself. Labour as *Bildung* always means transcending the particular and forming the common (Hegel 1821/2004: § 187), which according to Hegel in part already is in play in civil society in the way that labour at least already unintentionally transcends the particular and creates society as the common social product. But as already mentioned, labour needs the help functions of police and corporation in order to reach state-maturity. Instead labour in the speculative and difference-transcending sense is installed through reason and bridges the gap of negation, although negation is a systemic necessity also here.

Labour, according to Hegel, consists in the realisation of an idea put into play by a working subject in the objective material, and returning to the working actor as a realised idea and results in a widened self-consciousness. The idea is alienated in the object – the actor gets frantically out of himself –, but is fulfilled through the rise from the object and the return to the actor. Labour is unity-creating in the sense that its end is to make the working actor self-identical, that is to sublimate the negation of labour and create an again undivided subject identical with the object (Hegel 1830/2007: § 428). In his discussion of Hegel's theory, Colón León points at the important differentiation between the product of labour – the concrete thing that is being produced; the formed and owned object – and the result of the labour process: the now self-identical subject itself as result of the sublated labour (Colón León 1993: 144). Kojève also points out that within Hegel's concept of labour the working human being is transforming both the given object and transforming itself when transforming the object (Kojève 1947/1980: 52).

In order to understand this movement of the idea in and through labour it is necessary to analyze Hegel's concept of labour all the way back to his early Jena writings and lectures, especially the lecture from 1805/06, known as *Jenaer Realphilosophie*. Here, Hegel defines labour as the activity through which an I or a consciousness is turning itself into a thing (*sich zum Dinge machen*) (Hegel 1805/06/1974: 219; see also Schmidt am Busch 2002). This means, that the subjective and still unproven idea of the human being, is transforming itself into a thing with objective existence through labour, when forming and objectifying itself in the object. Labour in this sense is the satisfaction of a need, where the satisfied need or instinct is '*aufgehobne Arbeit*', that is, sublated labour. The will manifests and fulfils itself objectively through labour and when the need is satisfied, labour is not only over, but the subject relies now on the result of labour: being a refined subject. Labour contains here the immediate and individual relation to, formation of and consumption of nature, but also the incipient social la-

bour when producing tools: thus, when producing a tool, labour turns social, since the range of the tool transcends the need of the individual (Colón León 1993: 13).

In the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* the part on *Property* is important for understanding Hegel's concept of labour within the objective spirit of the political. Hegel discusses the subject's right to property and its way of taking objects into possession through labour:

The will alone is infinite, absolute in relation to everything else, whereas the other, for its part, is merely relative. Thus to appropriate something means basically only to manifest the supremacy of my will in relation to the thing and to demonstrate that the latter does not have being in and for itself and is not an end in itself. This manifestation occurs through my conferring upon the thing an end other than that which it immediately possessed; I give the living creature, as my property, a soul other than that which it previously had; I give it my soul (Hegel 1821/1991: § 44 Addition).

Property in this sense is particular, but the formation of the object is essential for the self-consciousness of the members of society.

In later passages in *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* also important for the understanding of Hegel's concept of labour, he describes how the spirit only can overcome its objective and natural limitations by projecting himself into and forming the object and thereby giving himself and his idea objective existence. The *Bildung* of labour is the transition towards the liberation from natural existence. In labour the idea of the subject receives reality (Hegel 1821/1991: § 187). Within this *Bildung*, labour and the individual subjects strive and elevate themselves towards universality. Hereby, the particularity of labour is transcended. Labour is essentially a social phenomena for Hegel, corresponding partly to the egoistic principle of civil society and the division of labour. The common results from the egoistic individuals ignoring the common (Hegel 1821/1991: §§ 182, 189, 192, 196). But the *Bildung* and refinement of labour, making the individuals richer human beings and the society a highly developed one, consists in the more speculative and unity-creating kind of labour, taking a necessary detour through negation.

What can be said about the relation between these two dimensions of labour, namely the differentiating and particularising on one hand, and the unity-creating and speculative on the other hand? They clearly mark two different dimensions, but are also essentially intertwined. The speculative dimension of labour as *Bildung*, is already at work in civil society in the movement of particular labour towards the social and common product of civil society. It is also unity-creating in the sense that the working subject turns self-identical as a result of the labour process. But although labour in civil society is supposed to establish the common through, not despite, the differentiating of the division of labour, the particularising principle of civil society tends to jeopardise the capitalism-transcending potential of labour. Also, the labour of civil society tends to be mechanical and dumb. Still, as Riedel points out, labour has freedom aspects either way (Riedel 1970, 52). But in civil society, according to Hegel, the negative freedom is only a

formal freedom and therefore insufficient. It is clear that Hegel explicitly criticises labour as merely executed for individual reasons, although he acknowledges the fact that it indirectly has productive effects for the society as a whole. But labour still has difficulties to rise automatically from the differentiating principle of civil society. Therefore, as already mentioned, Hegel constructs various forms of help functions (Police and Corporation), in order to transcend civil society's negation and make the individuals 'members of the state', conscious of, and active for the sake of the common (Hegel 1821/1991: §§ 257-360).

This bird's-eye view is needed for Hegel in order for his evolving World spirit (*Geist*) to be able to transcend its objective dimension (consisting largely in the political sphere) and to reach its absolute dimension. I hereby return to the macro level of Hegel's philosophy and his concept of the World spirit. A differentiation must be made between (1) the concrete individual act of labour, (2) the societal labour striving towards the state, and (3) the labour of the World spirit. In order to transcend the objective spirit as such (and the political), Hegel seemingly is forced to leave the concrete individual and societal forms of labour (including the state) behind in order to reach the highest form of the reason. Hegel therefore conceptualises the development of the World spirit as such as a process of labour, which has the same dialectical principle as every individual act of labour and the development of social labour, which in civil society is supposed to establish the link between the family and the state within *Ethical life*. The dialectic of concrete labour consists in the subject's negation of itself in the object and the formation of it, resulting in the sublated negation and the establishment of the self-identity of the subject. The societal development from family to state has the analogue form of the family's negation in civil society, which eventually is sublated in the state. Finally, the dimension of objective spirit on the macro level in Hegel's system, containing the entire political philosophy of Hegel and being the negation and the real incarnation of the subjective form of the World spirit, is to be sublated into the absolute form of spirit. The objective dimension on a macro level corresponds to the concrete idea of labour as it is set into work (incarnated) in nature or an object on the individual level. The civil society is the objective and negative dimension on a societal level. These moments all represent the objective dimension. But in order to rise from its objective dimension, the activity of the World spirit is conceptualised as a labour equipping the spirit with the ability to return from its objective form, which is the negation of itself (the prior subjective form). This is the speculative concept of labour, which, according to Hegel, is manifested through the spirit of philosophy. This speculative concept is already at play in the self-identity of the working subject as the result of the labour process, but now it has the result of the absolute spirit becoming self-identical. Labour is hereby constituting and realising reason in the shape of Hegel's World spirit (Arndt 2003: 15; see also Lim 1966: 87 ff.). Yet, although the concept of World spirit is necessary for the understanding of Hegel's theory on the unity-creating aspect of la-

bour, it is not necessary to refer to it when developing the concept of the capitalism-transcending dimensions of labour; its dialectics is at play in every concrete act of labour as being the realisation of an idea.

To summarise, this conflict between the ‘capitalistic’ and particularising labour and the speculative and difference-transcending labour (both on a societal and macro-systematic level) can’t be dissolved easily in Hegel’s work. Both are clearly present in his theory, and they also are essentially interconnected, but hard to melt together entirely. The differentiating and negative dimension of labour is a systemic moment of speculative labour, being its productive negation. But civil society still strives towards the collective unity of the state. Yet, at best the particularising dimensions of labour should fully culminate in the unity of the individual self-identity, in the state and in the absolute spirit.

Conclusion

But how can labour be understood as a cultivating activity which incorporates a critique of capitalism? Firstly, with help from Hegel’s theory, the destructive and alienating aspects of labour are getting visible. When grasping the difference-producing principle of civil society, Hegel makes the problems (and merits) of civil society distinct. Additionally, through Hegel’s analysis, the inherent tension in labour is brought to light, that is, the tension between the destructive and cultivating aspects. According to Hegel’s thinking, these dimensions can’t be separated from each other: even a cultivating labour is changing and therefore in a way destroying objects and also destroying prior forms of the identity of the working individual. The moment of negation and difference is inherent in cultivating labour. In order to be a cultivating activity, labour has to produce the transcending of differences. The difference between these different dimensions of labour is that the cultivating labour is set to overcome the mere destructive aspect of labour. The working human being is supposed to be strengthened through labour, and not empty himself of energy.

This is also the case with society: it should be made stronger through labour. But because of the differentiating development of society through labour and its division, the risk for society to fall apart is present. Nevertheless, the transcending of differences has the consequence of labour transcending its economic dimension. Of course, labour is essentially economic, but it is not exclusively economic, and for Hegel, the individual must leave its mere economic motifs behind. Hegel defends the unity and identity creating dimensions of labour, which have the result of a capitalism critique. All forms of labour having this difference-transcending dimension inherit a capitalism critique since they stop to dwell in an unreflected individualist and anti-collective stand.

Still, Hegel’s collectivist political conclusion of the state can be questioned. May it be possible for labour to be cultivating without culminating in a collectivist

unity-model of the political as in Hegel? Yet, according to the reading of Hegel's concept of labour in this article, capitalism critique must not end in a general critique of labour. The critique of capitalism and of certain forms of labour can rather return to the question of labour and emphasise its cultivating dimensions in order to attempt to oppose capitalism. Such a balanced position is needed today, simultaneously able to criticise labour and to emphasise its importance.

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