



Globalization, Hegel's Theory, and the Dialectics between Openness and Structure

Cristiana Senigaglia

University of Trieste, Italy

Abstract

One of the main issues of globalization is the development of an open and universal society which overcomes the borders of national states. Hegel's vision of civil society has the merit of anticipating several views concerning global settings and tendencies by highlighting at the same time its ambivalent aspects. On the one hand, he notes that the access of individuals to civil society implies a form of independence and self-determination. On the other hand, the mechanisms of its organization create a system of reciprocal dependence which reduces their sentiment of security and freedom. By featuring the structures of civil society, Hegel relates to corporate structures as an effective possibility to counteract the negative side-effects. He distinguishes between logic of the Understanding, which stresses the opposition, and logic of the Reason, based on the Concept, which finds a mediation between the extremes and creates organized structures. The paper illustrates these aspects and analyzes which forms of balance and integration should be promoted in the global society and how an interaction between openness and structure could appease the negative side-effects of the globalized world.

Keywords: Globalization, Hegel, Civil Society, Corporation, Corporate Social Responsibility

JEL Classification: I30, M14

Paper Classification: Research Paper

Introduction

The process of globalization shows the tendency to undermine the traditional ties which were present in society. On the one hand, it allows people to affirm their independence as well as to develop their capacities; on the other hand, it risks creating isolated individuals who are deprived of the social structures and organizations which provided in the past for their sentiment of security and welfare. An insightful analysis of a similar condition had been anticipated by the philosopher Hegel, who in his *Philosophy of Right* depicts the difficulties and the potential of social conflict which are entailed in an economic organization which opposes the particularity of the individuals to the universality represented by a system overwhelming them. In order to mitigate these conditions, Hegel proposes a network of corporate organizations that perform the task of compensating the loss of social ties, and at the same time offers the opportunity to enhance their agency through forms of concerted activity, support, and cooperation.



The present analysis intends 1) to provide a more detailed insight into the factors of globalization which destabilize the previous social structures, 2) to illustrate the global tendencies inherent to the economic system as they have been highlighted by Hegel, 3) to explain which risks and negative side effects have been detected by him, 4) to introduce the idea of corporation that Hegel proposes in order to counterweight the destructuring tendencies, and 5) to inquire the possibilities of application and their possible advantageous effects.

Globalization and the Weakening of the Social Structure

When people today speak of globalization, first of all they think of the economy. In reality, the economy was one of the propulsive factors, but not the decisive one. Rather, the origins of the present process of globalization (historical tendencies have existed for centuries) mainly reside in two different new conditions: 1) the new international political situation with the end of the cold war, and 2) the technical-digital revolution in connection with the development of the media. On the one hand, the end of the two-bloc-politics has led to a reduction of the importance of the ideological conflict and to a situation of a generally peaceful (with the persistence of some troubling sources of conflict) embracing view, or at least to its expectation. This has favoured the proliferation of international contacts, interweaving, and cooperation, supported on the personal level by the desire to travel, to get to know others and their culture, and to feature life projects in new and different conditions. On the other hand, the technological transformation and the correlated intensification of communication have created, with the help of the media, a sentiment of proximity and possibility of close interaction with foreign and distant realities. Of course, the media (and especially television) had already provided the sprouts for this development; however, they had kept the public in a condition of passivity and sporadic information. By contrast, the new media provide the impression (or illusion) that one is able to quickly obtain the suitable information, and that he or she is an active participant establishing rapid contact and shaping his or her life. Be that as it may, these two aspects have spread a more open-minded attitude which has created the favourable conditions for an economic globalization which, on its part, had already begun long ago. This explains at least partly why globalization evoked in the 90s the modification of the relation between peoples in accordance to intercultural paradigms, and now, by contrast, is immediately associated to competition, optimization, price dumping, and the precariousness of work.

Now, this accentuation of the economic aspect has certainly a positive side: the free movement of people, products, and information; the improvement of the supply and the quality; new chances for capacity and innovation as well as for qualified people. However, the prevalence of the economic organization also implies the predominance of its categories and patterns of thinking: simplification, optimization, deregulation, and the recognition of the best. In the economic field, they are undoubtedly positive qualities. If applied to the social and political dimension, however, they also present a negative side, which has to do with the fact that not all moments and situations of life can be driven by competitiveness, although a certain degree of it (seeking amelioration) can often be desirable. Not all people can be competitive in all sectors, and at all time of their lives (Koch, 2017, p. 106). In a similar way, the rush decisions which have to be taken in economic management do not always cope with the transformation of the life conditions which they impose on the individuals, especially if the previous life was the result of a long standing process. It is not by chance that this phase of globalization and industrialization, at least where it is successfully performed, privileges young people: they are well-informed, more up-to-date, rapid and flexible,

¹On this aspect of globalization, see Appadurai (1996).

²On the roots of globalization in the modern period, see Martell (2011, pp. 58-59).

and find themselves in a period of their life in which it is possible to experiment more, and to change life conditions with less disarrangement. The problem is that this state of things, further supported by high technology which rapidly reduces the possibility of human work especially for the less qualified, provokes a hard, potentially worldwide process of selection and ranking of people. At the same time, since the major actors in the economy are more and more global players which can act in very different places, they impose their criteria of competition on the (national) states (Beck, 2015, p. 14) and play them off against each other. In doing so, they de facto weaken the only political subjects which could and should afford for the disadvantaged.

Thus, globalization and the power which it confers on economic players risks exerting a destructuring function and instates a progressive dismantling of the political state which in the last decades had guaranteed a form of social reequilibration and that feeling of social security which was indispensable for a successful welfare society. This has as a consequence the progressive disempowerment of the national states, to which welfare was confided. The situation of international competition constrains them to offer advantageous conditions (especially tax reductions) in order to keep investors and enterprises in the country or to attract new ones. Therefore, they are forced to progressively reduce social benefits, but also the resources to be invested in education, research, and the like, finally also undermining that sentiment and condition of security which converted their people into trusting citizens and, additionally, into reliable clients and consumers.

In order to adequately provide an answer on the social and political level, international institutions are required, which trespass (without eliminating it) the national level. A form of more effective counter-power can be provided by supranational organizations which can count on the unified power of several states (Beck, 2015, p. 185). Hence, they have the possibility to feature a political and economic organization which possesses more chances to establish limits and conditions to the global players. Nevertheless, if the aim consists in realizing a power capable of establishing rules and sanctions for the economy, the optimal level is the global one; otherwise it has to be reckoned with an asymmetry of power which leaves attractive alternatives to the global players, and a grey area which facilitates uncontrolled action. This is the reason why world institutions have increased their role and their popularity in the last years. Nevertheless, on this level, there are still some deficiencies: first, there are not representative organs comparable with the national parliaments (Rademacher, 2013, pp. 69-70), and second, they do not have consolidated yet direct channels of communication and debate with the people.

The flexibilization of life conditions, their degree of uncertainty and subjection to economic and social transformations, combined with the weakening of the welfare state, diminish the political sphere of action of the individuals and cause them to live in situations which are exposed to more uncertainty and risk. At the same time, they reduce that complexion of traditional ties which rendered the social environment more familiar and trustworthy. This path of development can be synthesized by the title of Thomas Tiefel's book *From the Open to the Abstract Society*. The abstract society is formed by isolated individuals who chiefly use telecommunication to handle their financial affairs, to execute their work, and to establish relationships to other people. In everyday reality, by contrast, they hardly take note of the presence of others and have visible difficulties to create face-to-face contacts and social solidarity. According to Tiefel (2003, p. 215), the consequence to be expected is that especially people who are less flexible and adaptable will tend, in case of malaise and failure, to revert to a close identity and to show tribal feelings.

³It has been ascertained that the dislocation of some enterprises can be less easy as people think because of the ties which are built in the course of time. Nevertheless, it is undisputable that economic global players exert more power than in former times and can impose their conditions on states and people. Cf. Crouch (2011, p. 181).

However, in my view, it is possible to imagine that the phenomenon could also extend to opener and more educated people, in case of prolonged hopelessness and exclusion.

In this respect, an interesting analysis is provided by the philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, who considered the economic system in which the individual is submerged also as a form of abstract society. Hegel analyzes the problems and the condition originating from a society incapable of integrating people and inclined to produce high quantities of unemployed and marginalized who are and feel excluded. Surely, Hegel relates to the society of his time, which had not experienced globalization in the terms we know today. However, he already imagines, in his description of civil society, a social and economic setting which transgresses national boundaries, and, additionally, he makes some suggestions which could also apply, with some transformations, to our present conditions.

Hegel's Insight into the Global Tendencies of the Economic System

The way Hegel depicts the modern economic system can be considered in some respects as an anticipation of the present functioning of the economy in global society, since the categories that he uses are not contextualized in the frame of the national state. On the contrary, he already shows a universal vision in relation to the economy, because he faces topics such as international trade, the significance of the sea for connecting people, forms of transport and communication as well as the questions of migration and colonization (Stillmann, 2009). Furthermore, another interesting and distinguishing aspect, which makes his analysis worth considering, is that he also faces the development of the economic system from the standpoint of the single individuals, by analyzing the changes it provides for them and the kind of relationships which are engendered.

According to Hegel, modern society and its system of economy imply a personal emancipation, since they allow for the detachment of the individuals from the family ties, by developing their independence and their "free personality". In comparison with former traditional societies, individuals who become adults have the chance to organize their own life, to start their own family, to be independent owners, and to earn their own living. Furthermore, they are entitled to underline their condition of private persons and to bring forward their particular interest, which is not to be treated as an expression of egoistic attitude, but as a legitimate claim. Within civil society and its economic system (which Hegel names the "system of needs"), the individuals are encouraged (and allowed) to consider their particular interest as their own and main end, and to regard the others as a means in order to attain it. Indeed, this profoundly changes the nature of relationships with the others. These relationships are external, purposive, and guided by utilitarian criteria. In this sense, Hegel speaks of a (seeming) loss of the ethical dimension.

This independence, however, has also an opposite (and in some way deceptive) side, for the individuals discover very soon that, if it is true that they are allowed to explicitly favour their own particular interest, nevertheless they are not able to attain it without the activity and the work of the others. From a more general perspective, this implies that "the subsistence and the welfare of the individual and his or her rightful existence are interwoven with, and grounded on, the subsistence, welfare and rights of all, and have actuality and security only in this context" (Hegel, 2003, § 183, p. 221). From a theoretical point of view, the particular interest appears to be indissolubly entangled with the universal one:

The concrete person, who, as a particular person, as a totality of needs and a mixture of natural necessity and arbitrariness, is his or her own end, is one principle of civil society. But this

⁴The title is originally in German, and the work concerns a social analysis which refers to Karl Popper (Tiefel, 2003).

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, 2003, § 183, p. 221).

The idea is that the individuals, by seeking the realization of their personal interest and the satisfaction of their personal needs, are dependent on the work and the activity of the others, and more generally on a system organizing the production and exchanges of products and services. On their part, in order to be able to obtain the necessary or wanted products, individuals are compelled to participate in this system and to be subject to its organizational patterns and to its rules of functioning. This kind of relationship is abstract in more respects. It is abstract, because individuals are considered as numerical entities, and not (or not primarily) in their specific identity and particularity. Also their performances and the performances of the system in general are abstract, because they are segmented in a plurality of tasks, functions, and issues that all contribute to the required achievements. Finally, they are abstract, because persons can be substituted by other persons or, more frequently, by machines, and their contribution is not recognizable in their specific individuality.

This fragmentation renders then individuals as such abstract, because they are not considered and needed as whole persons, but as substitutable segments of activities and processes. Correspondingly, their relations are external, contingent, i.e. necessary to the process, but not necessary in their individual quality. On the whole, individuals show themselves to be dependent on the universality of the system, and be reliant on it for the satisfaction of their needs. The economic relations implement therefore a system of "all-round interdependence" (Hegel, 2003, § 183, p. 221): "Individuals [...] are private persons who have their own interest as their end. Since this end is mediated through the universal, which thus appears to the individuals as a means, they can attain their end only in so far as they themselves determine their knowledge, volition, and action in a universal way and make themselves links in the chain of this continuum" (Hegel, 2003, § 187, p. 224).

However, for Hegel, this process has not compellingly only negative sides. The positive aspect is that the pursuit of the personal interest is related to the activity of the others, so that everyone takes note (at least partly) of the needs and requests of the rest. In this sense, the economy entails a socializing moment, which opens the way to social relations and attention to the demands of society. Furthermore, the economic system also contributes to developing the intellectual and practical capacities of the individuals who can improve their qualities and their personality as a whole, although the repetition of work then provokes forms of mental rigidity. At least in its first phase, in fact, work activity requires education and an acquisition of ability, and this always signifies an increment of intellectual capacities and a kind of freedom, since it includes the distancing from immediateness, the learning of skills, and a process of elaboration and transformation. Additionally, the work process stimulates in a sense also creativeness, since the demand not only concerns natural necessity, but also the arbitrariness of interests and desires, which can be incepted. It is not by chance, according to Hegel, that "not the ones who have means are so inventive by creating needs, but the ones who make a living of their production" (Hegel, 1968c ff., § 193, pp. 722-723).

Nevertheless, there are also negative aspects related to the process. The kind of exterior relationships between the individuals and more generally between the individuals and the system, i.e. the particularity and the universality, are exposed to chance, arbitrariness and moreover to a condition of ethical weakness. Contacts are superficial, interest-related, and temporary,

and concern abstract persons in abstract relations and conditions. In particular, the economic system, still offering chances of individual freedom and emancipation, subjects at the same time the individuals to a condition of general dependence upon the system itself. This dependence is strengthened by the fact that the social ties and connections offered by traditional society are loosened without providing equivalent substitutive forms of social bindings. On the whole, there is a risk of undermining the structures of social life and the kinds of relationship which make individuals feel secure and integrated.

In Hegel's judgement, this is only a seemingly rational organization of the relation between the particular and the general. In reality, however, it is only a deficient relationship, because, by opposing the individual as an abstract entity to the universal, it sanctions in the facts the overwhelming of the universality, which is on its part a nebulous and non-transparent entity whose laws and rules are difficult to understand and handle. With respect to this, Hegel distinguishes between a logic of the Understanding (2003, § 183, p. 221), which is still abstract, contrastive, and merely opposing two extremes without forms of mediation (i.e. individuals and universality), and a logic of the Reason and of the Concept (2003, § 1, p. 25), which seeks forms of mediation between the extremes by means of organizations as well as institutions framing and structuring the social life of the individuals. While the logic of the Understanding leads to overwhelm individuals and predominate over them, the logic of the Concept aims at an integration of the particular within the general, without compromising the affirmation of particularity, but on the contrary by helping to realize it. The idea is that individuals should find the realization of their individuality and freedom by at the same time being able to integrate themselves into structures and organizations which back them and give them more social support and assistance. If these categories are applied to globalization in present time, the logic of Understanding would mirror a form of globalization which opposes individuals and their exigencies and tends to subject them to the necessity of the moment, by leaving them in a substantial condition of precariousness and dependence. By contrast, the logic of Reason implies an effort to combine the openness made possible by mobility and individual emancipation with the provision of social structures and care which can compensate for the loss of traditional bindings and security. If we follow the Hegelian perspective, particularity is neither a value which has to be interpreted in an egoistic way, nor an expression of courageous isolation which can be at risk in every moment. Rather, it is an issue which can positively contribute to the general development, and which can also convert into more embracing interests and objectives to be shared with others.

The Economic System and its Risks

In Hegel, we find the description of the consequences which are connected with the development of a system which rests on the logic of Understanding. Personal and structural aspects can contribute to determining personal and economic success, but they can also create hindrances which are not necessarily due to individual failure or incapacity. Health, abilities, the

⁵Hegel defines here civil society as an external state and as the state of necessity and of the understanding. The opposition between Understanding and Reason is a core content of his philosophy. In the Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences of 1830 (Hegel, 1968a ff., § 65), he explains that the logic of the Understanding is an "either-or" logic, which does not mediate between the two extremes.

⁶On Hegel's conception of right as a rational right founded on the logic of the Concept, see Siep (2017).

⁷Hegel explains here that the conception of right is based on the concept. With respect to this, the opposition which takes place in civil society and the unilateral stress on particularity represents a (seeming) destruction of its "substantial concept" (Hegel, 2003, § 185, p. 222) which is overcome through a concept of the state which integrates civil society in its structure as the sphere of particularity.

possess of one's own capital are all factors which influence the possibility of a successful activity, and the rapid change of conditions in the economy augments the level of instability and the role of chance. As a matter of fact, distant and unexpected combinations of factors, such as new trends, demands, fashions, and the appearance of new competitors can profoundly modify the conditions of the markets. On the one hand, it is not certain that the individual can be at the height of powers and meet the requirements lifelong. On the other hand, "the branch of industry to which the individual has devoted him- or herself can suddenly decrease, and thus a large multitude can find themselves in dire straits" (Hegel, 1968b ff., p. 490). In the worst cases, entire categories of workers and sectors can be affected by a deep crisis.

Because of the entailed possibility of a negative development, the risk of poverty on a large scale has to be taken into account as an intrinsic possibility of the system, with which one has to reckon.

Not only arbitrariness, [...] but also contingent physical factors and circumstances based on external conditions may reduce individuals to poverty. In this condition, they are left with the needs of civil society and yet [...] they are more or less deprived of all the advantages of society, such as the ability to acquire skills and education in general, as well as of the administration of justice, of health care (Hegel, 2003, § 241, p. 265).

The condition of poverty is worsened by the transformations enacted in society through the weakening of familiar bindings. This is the main reason why society is called to undertake a substitutive function and provide for their subsistence. Moreover, the prolonging of the condition of poverty has negative effects which transgress the economic sector and which affect the psychological, social, and even the legal dimension, since people who live in poverty and unemployment are excluded from an integral social life and perceive themselves as marginalized. The absence of work and the sentiment of having suffered injustice provoke, according to Hegel, a gradually increasing sentiment of lawlessness, which detaches people from society and drives a wedge between the disadvantaged and the institutions. On a large scale, this originates in society the presence of a "rabble" that is not only defined by their level of poverty, but much more by their sentiment of dissatisfaction which culminates in rage:

When a large mass of people sinks below the level of a certain standard of living [...], that feeling of right, integrity, and honour which comes from supporting oneself by one's own activity and work is lost. This leads to the creation of a rabble, which in turn makes it much easier for disproportionate wealth to be concentrated in a few hands (Hegel, 2003, § 244, p. 266).

The lack of integration and dignity, or, as Hegel clarifies it in another context, the lack of recognition are the origin of discontent, rejection, and a grave source of instability and tension for society. The appearance of the phenomenon on a large scale, moreover, provokes a spiral effect, which contributes to aggravating the situation, since, in consequence of the increase of unemployment, the presence of low wage workers on the market is steeply increased, and Hegel does not believe that there can be a spontaneous reequilibration of forces which solves all problems. Therefore, it is society itself which is called upon to find the adequate countermeasures in order to reintegrate the disfavoured people and to create the conditions which make them into active and worthy members again. However, such a reequilibrating process is not so easy to perform, since, according to Hegel, it tends to provoke an imbalance in the economic process itself.

⁸On the applicability of Hegel's considerations on poverty to a global level, see Moland (2012).

⁹On the concept of exclusion in Hegel, see Casuso (2017).

A kind of intervention which ignores or plays down the laws and the functioning of the economy is for Hegel not the right means to react in the long run, since it has to be maintained that the activity of the producers and the needs of the consumers should meet and suit each other. Therefore, the creation of work activities and employment which permit people to work is a positive issue, since it confers on the individuals a sentiment of dignity and a feeling of independence, allowing them to be able to provide for themselves and their families and to be reintegrated in their social positive contribution and function. Nevertheless, if this creation of work flows into a kind of production which does not find a correspondent number of customers and consumers, this will lead to a process of exuberance and overproduction which will cause prices to fall and result in many unsold products.

Also another possible answer by society, consisting of providing the necessary means of subsistence for the unemployed, is neither sustainable nor desirable in the long run. It is not sustainable, in particular if the people concerned are a relevant quantity: "This shows that, despite an excess of wealth, civil society is not wealthy enough – i.e. its own distinct resources are not sufficient – to prevent an excess of poverty" (Hegel, 2003, § 245, p. 267). Furthermore, there is a greater reason which prevents supporting poverty through a simple distribution of means and by ensuring subsistence, and this has to do with the very roots of civil society, which originate from an emancipation of the individual from the traditional contexts and signify their affirmation of independence and personal freedom. The providing for their subsistence without the perspective of giving them the chance of independent work and activity means forcing them into an attitude of passivity and dependence upon the external.

If the direct burden [of support] were to fall on the wealthier class, or if direct means were available in other public institutions (such as wealthy hospitals, foundations, or monasteries) to maintain the increasingly impoverished mass at its normal standard of living, the livelihood of the needy would be ensured without the mediation of work; this would be contrary to the principle of civil society and the feeling of self-sufficiency and honour among its individual members (Hegel, 2003, § 245, p. 267).

Modern society has conferred on the individuals a sentiment of independence and the chance to self-realization which should not be obstructed and negated in its fundamentals. A solution which only provides for the means, and not for the chance to an active participation in the process of social wealth and activity, would perhaps eliminate the objective effects of poverty, but not the feeling of uselessness, unworthiness which finally provoke marginalization and rancour against society. For Hegel, a better solution is in any case represented by the attempt to extend the market and trade by intensifying exchange and exportation.

The inner dialectic of society drives it – or in the first instance this specific society – to go beyond its own confines and look for consumers, and hence the means it requires for subsistence, in other nations which lack those means of which it has a surplus, which generally lag behind it in creativity, etc. (Hegel, 2003, § 246, pp. 267-268).

Hegel thus indirectly suggests promoting creativity as well as supporting a diversification of production while pleading for an intensification of commerce. From this perspective, and with reference to the situation of his contemporary time, he also praises the role of the sea, which furnishes possibilities of communication and exchange, and favours welfare and openness, by creating at the same time more links and friendly relationships among the nations.

Just as the earth, the firm and solid ground, is a precondition of the principle of family life, so is the sea the natural element for industry, whose relations with the external world it enlivens.

[...] Through this supreme medium of communication, it also creates trading links between distant countries, a legal relationship which gives rise to contracts; and at the same time, such trade is the greatest educational asset and the source from which commerce derives its world-historical significance (Hegel, 2003, § 247, p. 268).

Thus, the intensification of trade among nations appears in general to favour the richness of the concerned countries, to create a climate of international rapprochement, and to promote international cooperation. However, with the experience of present time, it could be objected that the risks of weakening some sectors could be entailed also in expanded markets, if the exchange is left to chance and arbitrariness. Thus, a solution able to at least partially contrast the disarranging factors should question the logic of functioning of the system itself.

The Corporate Principle and the Challenge of Solidarity

For Hegel, the individuation of efficacious corrective means resides in a change of the logic itself. The logic of Understanding, which consists of the rigid opposition between the individual and the universal, cannot avoid providing the weakness of the individuals and their precariousness. The confrontation between the two poles, taken as extremes, has a disorganizing effect on society as a whole and on the individuals in particular, since it provokes their isolation. Taken as boundless and uprooted, the individual slips into the condition of the (single) player (Hegel, 1968c ff., § 253, p. 760), who has no stable reference points and has to simulate a successful and strong condition through exterior signs: "The individual will accordingly try to gain recognition through the external manifestations of success in their trade, and these are without limit, because it is impossible for them to live in a way appropriate to their estate if their estate does not exist, for a community can exist in civil society only if it is legally constituted and recognized" (Hegel, 2003, § 253 note, 272). Because of the condition of instability, however, individuals will be often pressured into accepting low-wage work. And this mainly depends on the condition of weakness to which isolated people are exposed:

The shortcoming of civil society [...] is a higher shortcoming in its concept. We have known civil society in general as the coming apart of the ethical, the both moments of which, the subjective self-consciousness and the universal, each for themselves, attain its right" (Hegel, 1968b ff., p. 504).

This right, however, is only a possibility, and not a reality. The guarantee concerns the chance, and not the security of its implementation, whereby, in his or her isolation, the individual, compared with the system, often draws the short straw (at least in the long run).

The alternative, then, is entailed in a different logic, the logic of the Concept pertaining to Reason, which consists of mediation and a process of integration between the particular and general. This means for Hegel activating a principle of self-organization which allows for differentiation, self-structure through the creation of sub-systems, lively connection and cooperation: "The totality must divide itself into species, which are again a whole, a system, a whole totality. This division is essentially organization, only what differentiates in itself is alive" (Hegel, 1968d ff., p. 1370). This division is then able to create organized forms of progressive mediation and interweaving between the particular and the general.

¹⁰These are, as Rossi Leidi (2009, pp. 160-161) has defined them, the aporetic aspects of civil society and of the conception of modern freedom highlighted by Hegel's analysis.

At the level of society, i.e. not at the level of overarching institutions, but from the bottom up, Hegel presents as a reequilibrating factor providing for organization, structure, and as a substitute or a complement to family ties, the corporate principle. The corporation is based on the idea that more individuals have a common interest based on their work and then unite and organize themselves.

Since the interest likeness of such particulars, as the quality common to them all, comes into existence in the association, the selfish and which pursues its own particular interest comprehends and expresses itself at the same time as a universal end, and the member of civil society, in accordance with their particular skill, is a member of corporation whose universal end is therefore wholly concrete, and no wider on scope than the end inherent in the trade which is the corporation's proper business and interest (Hegel, 2003, § 251, p. 270).

The idea is that on the basis of a shared particular interest, essentially based on the qualities of one's own work, people aggregate and form intermediate organizations which shape, protect, and develop their activity and offer protection against the contingency of the market and the arbitrariness of more powerful actors or of unfavourable constellations. The corporation creates, still acting in the sphere of the particular and caring for its implementation, a form of common and concerted agency, which implies forms of cooperation, reciprocal support, and solidarity. On the other hand, its aims are not overextended, and they maintain a field of free initiative for the individuals.

Through their way of acting, corporations constitute for Hegel a kind of second family (Vieweg, 2017, pp. 34-35) which compensates the loss experienced by the individuals through entering into society as independent and free persons, and at the same time develops a new form of reciprocal and collective concern and engenders a relation of solidarity. As a family of second level, however, they instate a reflective relationship, since the individuals consider themselves through the eyes of others and their representation, and they develop a common interest based not exclusively on nature (like the family), but by weighting and connecting their needs and interests. Corporations exert a socially securing function, since they try to secure the subsistence and a stable property, accustom people to acting with more solidarity and reciprocal attention, and at the same time make social discrepancies less weighty and less injuring. The individuals, on their part, find their social and professional recognition, and are therefore less eager to demonstrate at all costs their capacities and their success at the external (Schülein, 2017, pp. 109-110). The two joined components of 1) being introduced into a more solidarity-based way of thinking and concern, and 2) of being less urged to prove one's own qualities, according to Hegel, instate an ethicization of economic activity and appease its negative side effects by reducing the risks (Rossi Leidi, 2009, pp. 152-153). On the other hand, the idea of corporation also avoids that the individuals are reduced to an exclusively passive attitude and expectation, since they are encouraged to be active and to develop professionally, also by unfolding their personal ideas and qualities. In this sense, Hegel pleads for an open idea of corporation, which should be not at all a closed and discriminating system, but only soften its pernicious effects and support the efforts of the individuals. In Hegel's words: "The corporation in and for itself is not an enclosed guild; it is rather a means of giving the isolated trade an ethical status and of admitting it to a circle in which it gains strength and honour" (Hegel, 2003, § 255 addition, p. 273).

Hegel also ascribes to the corporations more demanding tasks which are difficult for the individuals alone to solve. Thus, the most delicate charge consists of organizing the professional activity with a view oriented to the future and the trends of the market. One of the most typical erroneous tendencies, comments Hegel, leads to focus the production on present trends and

fashions, so that an overproduction in that sector is reached which signifies the ruin especially of small enterprises:

One branch of industry flourishes, many seize it, and the strong sale causes a strong inflow of producers, so that the number is so increased that many cannot take advantage of it. [...] The beginning of a new activity is not so easy, the capital and the skill stick in it and are not so easy to change, the acquisition of a new skill is difficult, and at a certain age a person is no longer able to begin a new activity (Hegel, 1968d ff., p. 1401).

From this vantage point, the corporation has also the task of seeking a reequilibration by furnishing indications which can avoid too much concentration in a product or sector as well as defend society from monopolies, and which can help to provide the differentiation of production and to probe new possibilities and directions of development. Hegel charges corporations with the task of furnishing adequate professional preparation (Vieweg, 2012, p. 338), and this could also entail providing for that information and market research which are difficult to be attained by single individuals. From his point of view, moreover, higher-level institutions should support these intermediate organizations. In conformity with his time, Hegel thinks of the state, but also international and supranational institutions could be charged with the responsibility for them. Nevertheless, they also should exert a control function on the activity of the intermediate institutions, which is made necessary by the fact that they continue to be an expression of a collective particularity.

Possibilities of Application in the Present Time

The meaning of the corporate principle can be extended to a more widespread field of application than Hegel originally had conceived of, and which was primarily thought of for work associations or also for groups of cities and communes cooperating together (View e.g. 2017, pp. 38-39). The main idea based on Hegel's conception, which is worth considering, is that a particular interest, if it becomes the focus of the activity and gathers the efforts of an association, progressively loses the merely egoistic traits and accustoms the members to acting together and to concerting their efforts. Moreover, it helps them to develop forms of self-organization which strengthen their role and increase their possibility of taking influence upon the economic and social environment. If we connect this conception with the possibilities offered by the new media today, this association system is also able to create a web of horizontal connections which could better meet the challenge of globalization by interconnecting groups in several countries. Furthermore, it could constitute a valid interlocutor in the form of a more extended public who nevertheless has a more articulated structure and a more efficient organization, and can better exert control, criticism, but also emphasizes exigencies and impulses coming from below.

This could also have the further consequence of reinstating the initial meaning of the recent process of globalization, which intended to provide more openness, contacts, and interaction, and was not to be dominated by economic sorrows caused by the increase of global competition. The strengthening of the corporate principle in a Hegelian sense could provide advantages on the subjective as well as on the objective (structural) side. On the one hand, when people are more involved, they can confide in the possibility of intervening more directly in the process by stressing their issues. On the other hand, a network of intermediate and interconnected organizations can help to better prevent or at least smooth down negative trends as well as provide more technical information and know-how, by (partially) withdrawing it from contingent profit and speculation. A more relaxed and confident attitude can even positively act on the economy, because it gives trust in the possibility of a more steerable process.

The corporate principle in a Hegelian sense can also play a relevant function in relation to the idea of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Corporate Governance (CG), which is considered as a cognate concept to CSR (Schneider, 2012, p. 26). CSR entails the interest of the enterprises for the welfare and development of the individuals and communities that are directly or indirectly concerned by the industrial and business activity. Internally, it particularly refers to labour and employment practices; externally, to the respect for the rights of the people concerned and the engagement for the lasting sustainability of the process. The interesting aspect of this concept is that it entails a change of perspective in management (Painter-Morland, 2011), which leads to considering the enterprise not only as an abstract entity producing for a global market, but also as an actor interacting with specific contexts and the concrete life of the people, and, internally, as an undertaking taking on responsibility for its employees on different levels. This leads back to the Hegelian idea of a particular interest which can progressively assume the character of a shared and of a common or general interest within a determinate context. Naturally, CSR is essentially a manager policy which is also conceived of in order to guarantee a good reputation for the enterprise; in this sense, it can be considered as a marketing operation. At least, this shows the sensitivity of the enterprise to a “good” image in the public and confers on the public the power to exert pressure on it. Nevertheless, the focus on CRS can also help to an internal improvement, since it changes, despite all, the perspective with which the conditions of labour, social interaction and environment are perceived and taken into account. As we have seen, the corporate principle for Hegel does not negate the starting point from a particular interest; nevertheless, the only fact that this is themed and made object of engagement contributes to modifying the function of economic business, which is compelled to enter into contact with the people and their life and to progress from the abstract productive activity to a more concrete view into society. The arrangement of some activities and interventions, especially if they are not reduced to a simple money contribution, but are guided by a strategy based on relation and communication, introduce the presence of some limited common ends, which aim at least to a successful employment of the resources. And also if they are originally motivated by the effort of creating a good reputation among the consumers and the public, this nevertheless contributes to generating a more rooted habit of following a more ethical behaviour. Certainly, this can also be implemented by a seeming ethical attitude which is only performed in view of a better profit. However, the modification of perspective and the framing of the economic activity in a widespread context, more concretely rooted in society, constrains at least to a more elaborated perception of social reality and to an ethically sensitive interaction.

Additionally, if it is true that the economic mentality is not forcedly ethical, it is not likewise true that the respect for some ethical principles damages economic success. The economy bases many of its successes and positive results on a relation of trust (Suchanek, 2012): trust of the consumers in the producers, trust between commissioners and suppliers, between management and the different departments and sectors, between domestic and external or foreign personnel. A corporate principle in a Hegelian sense, concentrating on the particular interest of the specific activity and progressively embracing common and shared ends, can help to mitigate conflicts and in general to smooth the path to a more trustful and ensuring work and cooperation atmosphere. This does not mean eliminating or by-passing control from the part of the institutions and the public, which continue to represent an indispensable supervising authority, but contributes to diminishing the potential of conflict and the reciprocal wearing down.

¹¹With respect to this, for instance, Klikauer (2017, p. 219) has noted that a corporation in Hegelian sense should entail a democratic criterion of the selection of corporate management.

On the contrary, if the individual and the universal are opposed in a conflictive way and there is a progressive destructuring of the social-related forms of organization and association, it can be expected that the reaction will focus back on more natural and even ancestral ties and provoke reactive forms of closeness and hostility to every form of mobility and openness to the other. It is difficult to say if this could be a real obstacle to the prevailing trend to globalization and break its irresistible advancement. Certainly, this is nevertheless a source of conflict and reciprocal damaging. Hegel had seen in the corporate principle the possibility to create in society differentiated forms of association and cooperation, capable of compensating the isolated condition derived from the movement of self-emancipation entailed in modern society. If the movement started by globalization succeeds in destroying this network of associations and corporate organizations instead of finding the adequate form of extension suited to the global challenge, this will not only signify precariousness for the individuals, but also the formation of new kinds of closeness and exclusion as a reaction.

Conclusion

Hegel's analysis of the economic system and of its intrinsic tendencies to expansion and universality highlights the risks entailed in a system which tends to destroy social ties and to eliminate previous forms of organizations without providing structures which are able to compensate them. Hegel also gives us a philosophical and logic-related explanation by distinguishing between logic of the Understanding which persists in a rigid opposition and a logic of the Reason based on an articulated relation between the particular and the general, which is performed also from the bottom up by means of intermediate structures. His conception of corporation shows itself to have significant possibilities of application also in the present, since it is inspired by the leading idea of progressively transforming particular interests into common issues and forms of cooperation and solidarity. The globalization has produced a strong impulse to openness, which risks provoking a negative reaction, if it is not compensated by social structures and forms of organization supporting the individuals. The strengthening of intermediate and corporate associations can be an appropriate means in order to find the right balance between openness and need for structure. It can avoid the negative consequences of two opposite extremes which respectively consist of a progressive undermining of the social ties, or of the attempt to set new bounds and separations. This solution can also be successfully applied to the policy of the enterprises through the enhancement of the Corporate Social Responsibility. By following a Hegelian model, CSR can provide the strengthening of the contact and the relationship with the employees as well as with the other social actors on an interactive level. It can instate that progressive transition from a particular to a common interest which reduces the risks, diminishes the sentiment of insecurity of the people, and additionally allows for a positive intervention in society.

References

- Appadurai A. (1996). *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Beck U. (2015). *Was ist Globalisierung?* (3rd ed.). Frankfurt : Suhrkamp.
- Casuso G. (2017). Kooperation und Exklusion. Zur Aktualität von Hegels Korporationsbegriff. In S. Ellmers, S. Herrmann (Eds.), *Korporation und Sittlichkeit. Zur Aktualität von Hegels Theorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (pp. 141-155). Paderborn: Fink.
- Crouch C. (2011). *Das befremdliche Überleben des Neoliberalismus*. Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung.

- Hegel, G.W.F. (1968a ff.). Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften. In *Gesammelte Werke*(Ed.), *Proceedings of the Nordrhein-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Künste*. Hamburg: Meiner.
- Hegel G.W.F. (1968b ff.). Vorlesungen über die Philosophie des Rechts (Nachschrift Anonymus Bloomington). In *Gesammelte Werke* (Ed.), *Proceedings of the Nordrhein-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Künste*. Hamburg: Meiner.
- Hegel G.W.F. (1968c ff.). Vorlesungen über die Philosophie des Rechts (Nachschrift Anonymus Kiel). In *Gesammelte Werke* (Ed.), *Proceedings of the Nordrhein-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Künste*. Hamburg: Meiner.
- Hegel G.W.F. (1968d ff.). Vorlesungen über die Philosophie des Rechts (Nachschrift Griesheim). In *Gesammelte Werke* (Ed.), *Proceedings of the Nordrhein-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Künste*. Hamburg: Meiner.
- Hegel G.W.F. (2003). Elements of the Philosophy of Right. In Wood. W.A (Ed.), *Proceedings of the A.W. Wood, translated by H.B. Nisbet*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Klikauer Th. (2017). Hegel's Moral Corporation and Corporate Governance. In S. Ellmers & S. Herrmann (Eds.), *Korporation und Sittlichkeit. Zur Aktualität von Hegels Theorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (pp. 205-227). Paderborn: Fink.
- Koch E. (2017). *Globalisierung: Wirtschaft und Politik. Chancen – Risiken – Antworten* (2nd ed.). Wiesbaden: Springer Gabler.
- Martell L. (2011). *The Sociology of Globalization* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Polity.
- Moland. L. (2012). A Hegelian Approach to Global Poverty. In A. Buchwalter (Ed.), *Hegel and Global Justice* (pp. 131-154). Dordrecht : Springer.
- Painter-Morland M. (2011). Agency in corporations. In M. Painter-Morland, R. ten Bos (Eds.), *Business Ethics and Continental Philosophy* (pp. 15-36). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Radermacher F.J. (2013). Globalisierung und Gerechtigkeit. Einige Überlegungen zu einem schwierigen Thema. In Th. Moos, F.J. Radermacher (Eds.), *Verantwortung und Gerechtigkeit im Zeitalter der Globalisierung* (pp. 25-88). Hildesheim, Zürich, New York: Olms.
- Rossi Leidi Th. (2009). *Hegel et la liberté individuelle ou les apories de la liberté moderne*. Paris: Harmattan.
- Schneider A. (2012). Reifegradmodell CSR – eine Begriffsklärung und Begrenzung. In A. Schneider, R. Schmidpeter (Eds.), *Corporate Social Responsibility. Verantwortungsvolle Unternehmensführung in Theorie und Praxis* (pp. 17-38). Berlin-Heidelberg: Springer.
- Schülein J.-G. (2017). Die Korporation als zweite Familie in Hegels Theorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft. In: S. Ellmers, S. Herrmann (Eds.), *Korporation und Sittlichkeit. Zur Aktualität von Hegels Theorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (pp. 101-116). Paderborn: Fink.
- Siep L. (2017). Vernunftrecht und Rechtsgeschichte. Kontext und Konzept der *Grundlinien* im Blick auf die *Vorrede*. In L. Siep (Ed.), *G.W.F. Hegel: Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (4 ed., pp. 1-22). Berlin, Boston: de Gruyter.
- Stillmann P. (2009). Hegel as a Colonial, Anticolonial, and Postcolonial Thinker. In A. Davison & H. Muppidi (Eds.), *Europe and its Boundaries. Words and Worlds, Within and Beyond* (pp. 25-47). Lanham : Lexington Books.
- Suchanek A. (2012). Vertrauen als Grundlage nachhaltiger unternehmerischer Wertschöpfung. In A. Schneider, R. Schmidpeter (Eds.), *Corporate Social Responsibility. Verantwortungsvolle Unternehmensführung in Theorie und Praxis* (pp. 55-66). Berlin-Heidelberg: Springer.

- Tiefel Th. (2003). *Von der Offenen in die Abstrakte Gesellschaft. Ein interdisziplinärer Entwurf*. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot.
- Vieweg K. (2012). *Das Denken der Freiheit. Hegels Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*. München: Fink.
- Vieweg K. (2017). Zur logischen Grundlegung des Begriffs der Korporation in Hegels *Rechtsphilosophie*. In S. Ellmers, S. Herrmann (Eds.), *Korporation und Sittlichkeit. Zur Aktualität von Hegels Theorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (pp. 29-43). Paderborn: Fink.
-

Authors' Profile

Cristiana Senigaglia is Lecturer at the University of Trieste, Italy. She has obtained the Ph.D. as well as a post-doctorate scholarship. She has a twelve-year experience as a Contract Lecturer and a long research experience in philosophy of morals, ethics, political theories, and German philosophy. She has published 5 books and about 140 articles, essays, and book reviews.
