

## Gilroy's *Black Atlantic*, Hegelian *Aufhebung*, and the culture of reparation

**Author Details:** Dr Rebekah Howes

**Email:** Rebekah.howes@winchester.ac.uk

**ORCID** [www.orcid.org]: 0000-0001-7230-4335

### **Biographical note:**

Rebekah is currently programme leader for the BA Liberal Arts programme at the University of Winchester. Her research focuses on the relation between philosophy, politics and education in the work of Hegel, Adorno, Gillian Rose and Nigel Tubbs.

### ***Abstract***

This article argues that within Paul Gilroy's notion of the 'changing same' and his more famous articulation of the 'Black Atlantic' there is a culture, an education, that can be retrieved by way of recent re-readings of the Hegelian *Aufhebung* by Gillian Rose and Nigel Tubbs. The piece begins with an exploration of these ideas in Gilroy's work, noting in particular the ways in which they speak of both complicity in, and moving beyond, eternal repetitions and reproductions of existing power relations and existing notions of identity. This is then taken to Rose's Hegelian critique of identity and of the postmodern critiques of identity. Finally, these two contributions are reworked as cultures in a logic of education found in Tubbs. This commends reading the changing same and the Black Atlantic as self-educating and re-forming experiences, expressing the deeper significance of current culture wars, including as a lived experience of the tensions constituting the challenge presented by the idea of reparation.

## ***Introduction***

It is sometimes the case that the current ‘culture wars’ expressed, for example, around statues, Black Lives Matter, taking the knee etc., gets reduced in and for the popular mind to the claims that black lives matter and the counterclaims that all lives matter. The former articulates past and present inequalities and injustices that were and continue to be grounded in racism and legacies of slavery. It has an acute sociological awareness of individual and cultural contingency upon relations of power and privilege that enforce the status of subaltern. The latter expresses the fear of a present and future inequality and injustice accompanying any kind of restitution for past crimes. It represents a growing resistance to the awareness of individual and cultural mastery as contingent upon any such crimes. At its most basic, the idea embodied in the notion of reparation, that ‘There is a debt to be paid for the historical injustices of slavery upon which your own continued privileges are based’ is met with ‘I am not to blame. I wasn’t even born then. I’ve worked hard for everything I have and I’m not giving any of it up in the name of some kind of hereditary guilt’.

What does this suggest about the present condition of the idea of freedom? Perhaps that it cannot extricate itself from the conditions of its possibility, or from its contingency upon its history and the social relations that shape it. If so, might one see the so-called culture wars as an expression of the struggle that freedom is having in understanding itself, similar in some ways (not in others) to Kant’s famous tribunal of reason in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/1787). Kant demanded that reason undertake ‘the most difficult of all its tasks, namely, that of self-knowledge, and to institute a tribunal which will assure to reason its lawful claims, and dismiss all groundless pretensions’ (Kant 1968: A xi). Seen in more modern

terms, this tribunal displayed the mechanism of power when the power that is made the object of its own critique is also responsible for its own defense. One might say that in the tribunal reason is being asked to make reparation to truth for its abuses in metaphysics over the centuries. It is on trial for all of its dogmas which overstepped the bounds of what it is possible to know and simply asserted what it thought it ought to be able to know, or what it simply wanted to pretend it knew. This Kantian tribunal continues to this day, not least in the shape of ‘difference’ demanding reparation from the *logos* for all of the voices or narratives it has enslaved, dominated and suppressed.

In the culture war of ‘colour’, that ‘special rhetoric’ (Gilroy 1993: 2) created around the language of nationality, ‘race’, authenticity and ethnicity, black identities may be said to be taking white masteries/privileges to court. The charge is simple. The advantages that the descendants of the white masters continue to enjoy were established in crimes against black people. These crimes must be atoned for. Mastery knows that any atonement might require losing some of its ill-gotten privileges. It will therefore use any means to prevent the loss of its mastery. In turn, the claimants see this as a continuation of the crimes.

The result of the tribunal is not yet decided. Perhaps it is undecidable. And perhaps that is because this struggle in freedom’s self-understanding is caught within a dialectic of enlightenment that can also be seen as playing out a logic of reparation. In what follows I want to rehearse this tribunal as a dialectic of enlightenment and a logic of reparation using not only the conceptual terms of mastery and slavery that emerge from Hegel’s famous reading of this struggle in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, but also in the ways it can be played out in Paul Gilroy’s notion of the ‘Black Atlantic’ and in his vision of humanity ‘after

empire'. I will argue that employing a recent interpretation of the famous Hegelian *Aufhebung* can open Gilroy's thinking here into a wider vision for his critique of modernity in general, and of identity in particular.

I must add here a caution about bringing Kant and Hegel to the politics of reparation. Both are implicated in the racism of eighteenth and nineteenth century European enlightenment philosophy (Bernasconi 2002, Fanon 2001, Verharen 1997) yet both have influenced liberation thinking. For example, CLR James spoke of the logic of the infamous Hegelian *Aufheben* as both chilling and thrilling. 'As I propose to myself to begin the actual *Logic*, I feel a slight chill' (1981, 67), yet 'I think myself, that all this is thrilling' (1981, 85).<sup>1</sup> In some ways, the place of Kant and Hegel in cultural theory mirrors the debates around colonial literature. Should their work be included or excluded in critiques of empire, or can the question offer itself in a different way? This is what I will now try to address.

### ***Gilroy: The Black Atlantic***

The publication of Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993) was a significant intervention into diasporic and post-colonial studies at the end of the twentieth century. The book offered a paradigm for re-thinking the complexities of identity and cultural belonging contra to what he saw as the temptations in much black political discourse at the time to various forms of nationalism and 'ethnic absolutism' (Gilroy 1993:2). Such tendencies were intent on abstracting the idea and experience of cultural belonging from the conditions of possibility which determined it, in this case, the 'intercultural and transnational formation' (4) which he calls the black Atlantic. Whether these absolutisms pertained to the idea of 'a national or proto-national group with its own hermetically enclosed

---

<sup>1</sup> See also C.W. Mills 2018.

culture,’ or to the constructions of alternative canons which proceed to ‘formalise and codify elements’ (33) of the cultural heritage on equally exclusive grounds as those they reject, Gilroy is suspicious of notions of purity or authenticity which suppress the ambivalences and contingencies of black identity in relation to the black diaspora. In a recent interview Gilroy has reiterated this concern around current anxieties to do with identity, saying, ‘we should be sceptical about the seductions of the ontological turn recently promoted in the study of race politics. It has become disastrously complicated by prospective nostalgia for the easy, essentialist approaches that were dominant when assertive cultural nationalism ruled the roost’ (Gilroy 2019). To begin with, then, Gilroy is critical of notions of absolute identity that ground any side of the debate.

But the continued success of the book lies in its transposing of ‘the appeal to and need for roots’ (12), forged in the political struggle against racism and enslavement, onto a discourse of ‘routes’. His recasting of roots around the spatial and temporal routes and ruptures of the triangular slave trade articulates the ‘rhizomorphic, fractal structure’ (4) of the black diaspora for a more enlarged understanding of what it means to be black in the West today. He does this through the ‘chronotope’ (4) of the ship. For Gilroy, ships as a unit of analysis, concentrate attention ‘on the middle passage, on various projects for redemptive return to an African homeland, on the circulation of ideas and activists as well as the movement of key cultural and political artefacts: tracts, books, gramophone records, and choirs’ (4). The historical, political, economic and cultural middle which the black Atlantic represents teaches not only of the value of ‘mutation, hybridity, and intermixture’ (223) in configurations of black identity today, but, and this is a second element in Gilroy’s analysis, that identities are negated by the contingency of their conditions of possibility. Leading on from this, the ships which connect the fixed points of the middle passage can also be studied not only as a unique

‘mode of cultural production’ (17) but as the vital link between the slave trade and the development of modern capitalism. To this end, the black Atlantic challenges capitalist modernity with an education regarding its continued investment in denying the actuality of itself and its others as always and already engaged in some structure of power and domination.

In addition, for Gilroy, the thought and culture of the black Atlantic has always had a well-developed sense of reason’s complicity in the terrors of white supremacy. This has shaped a distinct and critical counterculture to modernity and its various versions of the emancipatory project. But what is interesting is that his analysis of this counterculture, particularly music, reinstates, rather than rejects, the ambivalences that it, too, carries. ‘Black expressive cultures’ (77) and their corresponding forms of identity are always and already within, and outside, modernity and its dogmatic narratives of legitimation, such as ‘the idea of universality, the fixity of meaning, [and] the coherence of the subject’ (55). It is the contradictory nature of such identities and the idea of their complicity within the social relations that are the object of critique that displays the characteristics of the Kantian tribunal. And so, in a third element of his thinking, the movement of the dialectic of enlightenment occurs. To paraphrase Horkheimer and Adorno’s original formulation that myth is already enlightenment and enlightenment returns to myth, Gilroy is concerned to show not only that cultural nationalism is already resistance and that resistance returns to cultural nationalism, but, and again in the language of complicity, that roots are already routes and that routes return to roots.

The question which often accompanies the seemingly vicious reproductive circle of the dialectic of enlightenment, however, is its quietism. It seems to offer no way beyond its own self-reproducing antinomy. But Gilroy's thinking is not infused with such resignation. Far from being an impotent negativity without transformation, the value of dialectical experience in black Atlantic thought and culture 'lies in its promise to uncover both an ethics of freedom to set alongside modernity's ethics of law and the new conceptions of selfhood and individuation that are waiting to be constructed from the slaves' standpoint' (56). In theorising such a project Gilroy turns to Hegel. But, as noted earlier, any association with Hegel in cultural or post-colonial studies is always going to be controversial. Africa, he writes in his *Philosophy of History*, does not belong to the history of the world. It is the 'land of childhood, which lying beyond the day of self-conscious history, is enveloped in the dark mantle of Night' (Hegel 1956: 91). Of the African character, he writes that it is lacking in 'the category of Universality' and so in any 'substantial objective existence' (92) which accompanies the highest thoughts of European civilisation. Furthermore, because 'the Negro...exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state [ ] we must lay aside all thought of reverence and morality—all that we call feeling—if we would rightly comprehend him; there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character' (93). Like Kant, Hegel is for many a deeply suspect figure and not one carrying credibility in terms of post-colonial thinking.

But Gilroy's approach to Hegel is not as straightforward as one might imagine. Hegel's insights into slavery as the inner essence and 'premise of modernity' (Gilroy 1993:54) are, for Gilroy, a doorway into reading modern history and the dialectic of enlightenment 'as fractured along the axis that separates European masters and mistresses from their African slaves' (55). This not only 'foregrounds the issues of brutality and terror' (54) in accounts of

modernity. It also helps to reconstruct its racialised hierarchies ‘from the slaves' points of view’ (55). Schooled in a more ambivalent relationship to Hegel’s dialectic by a number of black intellectuals such as Du Bois and Richard Wright, Gilroy is keen to utilise the ‘potency of the negative’ (55) as a framework for understanding the ‘inescapable fragmentation and differentiation of the black subject’ (35) including in relation to ‘the intracommunal antagonisms’ (35) which subsist in black communities around questions of gender, sexuality, class, race and disability.

For Gilroy, a genealogy of the antinomies of modernity would reveal a deeply divided and wounded subjectivity, forged in and out of the structures, practices and scientific rationales of racial, sexual and gendered subordination. The black Atlantic reveals the nature of such a negative self-identity lived perennially as the relation of ‘insider-outsider’ (186). To be European or American and black, for example, presupposes but also generates the experience and exercise of what Du Bois called ‘double consciousness’, the awareness of being an unbearable dialectic; ‘two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body’ (Du Bois, 2015: 68). The complex affirmations and negations involved in accommodating and negotiating this dialectic is the diasporic heritage Gilroy is interested in. He finds a profound expression and re-construction of its experience in the work of thinkers from Douglass and Du Bois to Baldwin and Morrison, all writers who re-appropriate the conceptual tools claimed by white modernity in a black idiom. But Gilroy is not simply drawing attention to the intersections of black and white experience but to the ‘logic of unity and differentiation’ (Gilroy 1993: 20) at work in the construction of black identities. He is interested in exploring the ways in which such a logic becomes the basis for a different sort of identity, one lived and understood as the ‘changing same’ (122). I will explore this concept further below but not without noting its resonance to Gilroy’s reading of Hegel’s famous



section on lordship and bondage (*Herrschaft und Knechtschaft*) in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, something then rehearsed in his reading of the narrative of Frederick Douglass.

Unlike the slave in Hegel's version, Douglass refuses to submit to the fear of death and faces it head on. This transforms his servile relation to death into one of freedom, one of 'agency' (63). In Hegelian terms, it is Douglass and not the master that carries death here as a form of self-relation, that is, he learns that freedom is never free of its relation to death and the fear and vulnerability that accompany it. Only the master is caught in an illusory identity of freedom without death, a freedom utterly dependent on 'the continuing condition of inhumanity' (63) that is slavery. But, argues Gilroy, Douglass' freedom does not conform to 'a dialectic of intersubjective dependency and recognition' (68) of the sort proposed by Hegel's concept of the 'I' as 'the universal essence common to all men' (Hegel 1971: 171). It is not an agency that can be reappropriated within the paradigm of Western subjectivity. Rather, the principle of negativity configured in the life and thought of Douglass conceptualises its own freedom, a freedom articulated from the standpoint of the slave's particularity. Only then is his experience transformed into a substantive freedom. Thus, it is not the freedom of (Western) mastery, or its interminable repetition in the dialectic of enlightenment, but rather a freedom that reworks emancipation by preserving within it the negations which 'transform' racial domination. This is what grounds the aesthetics of the black diaspora – an aesthetics that is at once a part of the conventional structures of modernity and a 'liberatory' or 'pre-discursive' and dissident critique.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Against this reading, Simon Gikande argues that Gilroy is too willing to accept the terms of Hegel's logic regarding the relation of master and slave when that logic itself presupposes slavery. Gilroy 'seems so eager to recover the affirmative character of modernity that he is unwilling to deconstruct its foundations' (Gikande 1996: 146). I argue that Gilroy uses Hegel, not only in the full awareness of the presuppositions his philosophy carries, but because of them.

Arguing against the seemingly plausible claim for an ‘invariant’ and authentic African tradition to oppose Euro-American modernity, Gilroy proposes here a ‘non-traditional tradition’ which carries the principle of negativity in the ‘different practices, cognitive, habitual, and performative, that are required to invent, maintain, and renew identity’ (198). To put ‘Africa, authenticity, purity, and origin in crude opposition to the Americas, hybridity, creolisation, and rootlessness’ (199) is to reduce tradition and identity to ‘the transmission of a fixed essence through time’ (101) which is to repeat the dominating logic of western rationality against the formative negativity of the black Atlantic. This non-traditional tradition is carried in and by the development of what he calls ‘black modernisms’ (73), those aesthetic and literary practices which display the dialectical rhythms of being ‘simultaneously inside and outside the conventions, assumptions, and aesthetic rules which distinguish and periodise modernity’ (73). Such a tradition, and the identities to which it gives form and content, is the logic of the relation between *within* and *contra*, a logic that is lived and conceptualised as the *changing same*.

Two further examples lend themselves as working through this changing same in Gilroy. Both concern a vision after empire. First, around the centenary of Du Bois’ *The Souls of Black Folk*, Gilroy notes that the effects of decolonisation need to be added to the discourses on globalisation. Du Bois’ ‘skill’ (Gilroy, 2004, 35) is in finding something that emerges from the bind (the dialectic of enlightenment) of double consciousness, something that speaks of a ‘modern humanity shorn of its historic attachments to racism and equipped with a renewed concept of raceless democracy to match its aspirations toward social progress as well as its progressive political agenda’ (37). However, as Gilroy also cautions, in such thinking Du Bois is ‘upholding rather than rejecting what is today the unfashionable possibility that human brotherhood might be rescued from those temporary conditions’ (38) as he seems only to repeat the humanist or spiritual thinking that, as Fanon notes, is soaked in

blood. In some important ways, Gilroy here is criticising the Hegelianism of Du Bois that would appear to be grounded in the intersubjective reading of mutual recognition seen as emerging in and from the resolution of the master/slave relation,<sup>3</sup> or the ‘cosmopolitan Negro’ (38). But Gilroy defends Du Bois beyond this reading, arguing that the latter offers a contested vision of humanity after empire, one in which it is only ‘in the face of a whole, complex, planetary history of suffering, that the luxury and the risk of casual talk about humanity can be sanctioned’ (39). The question that is posed here is, how can suffering be both negated and preserved in a vision of humanity after empire?

This same theme, and its accompanying question, can be found in Gilroy’s comments on how to approach the trauma of colonial history. He explores the conundrum of Britain’s postmodern nationalism, arguing that ‘powerful feelings of comfort and compensation are produced by the prospect of even a partial restoration of the country’s long-vanished homogeneity. Repairing that aching loss is usually signified by the recovery or preservation of endangered whiteness’ (95). Here the relation between negation and preservation sees identity preserved (or believed to be preserved) through the overcoming of, or renewed triumph over, suffering, for which read, the overcoming of the perceived causes of suffering, namely, the assertion of black identity. He finds here a refusal to face up to, or even to mourn, the end of empire and its implications. ‘Once the history of the Empire became a source of discomfort, shame, and perplexity, its complexities and ambiguities were readily set aside. Rather than work through those feelings, that unsettling history was diminished, denied, and then, if possible, actively forgotten. The resulting silence feeds an additional catastrophe: the error of imagining that postcolonial people are only unwanted alien intruders without any substantive historical, political, or cultural connections to the collective life of their fellow subjects’ (98). Gilroy notes that the country’s multicultural future depends on

---

<sup>3</sup> See Tubbs, 2022 on *Aufhebung* in the master/slave relation.

what is now done with the pain of colonial history. Indifference to responsibility characterised post-war Germany. What Gilroy suggests for Britain is a new national identity that is grounded in acknowledging the negations—the cruelties—of the past, and negating their negation—their being suppressed and forgotten—therein assimilating ‘the painful obligations to work through the grim details of imperial and colonial history and to transform paralyzing guilt into a more productive shame that would be conducive to the building of a multicultural nationality that is no longer phobic about the prospect of exposure to either strangers or otherness’ (108).

I want to argue here that implicit in Gilroy’s argument is a logic that is different from that of identity and its dialectic of enlightenment. To establish this as a new idea of identity, a new concept of liberation, and in addition as an experience of a logic of reparation, requires us to push Gilroy’s thinking through its own negative dialectic. It is, he writes, a ‘ceaseless motion’ for which the ‘state of self-realisation... continually retreats beyond its grasp’ (122). Here, Gilroy keeps the negative (change) immune from knowing itself (same). What Gilroy does not name, although he very clearly acknowledges, is how, within the structure of negation, and the negation of such negation, there is always also some kind of preservation that is not dogmatic, or fixed, or providing of comfort in the preservation of empire. I want to name this new identity as something commended by a logic of education that is at work here. But I have to be very clear here in order to avoid an easy misunderstanding. When negation is coupled, visibly or invisibly, with preservation, then negation is most often interpreted as belonging to the dogma of ‘overcoming’ and subjugation, and preservation is often interpreted as just the maintenance of the unchanging same. Instead, in *Aufheben* understood as educational logic, what is preserved is the way the same is become same *and* different. I want to suggest that Gilroy’s reworking of emancipation through preservation and negation,

and the different sort of identity captured by the changing same, are suggestive of a recent re-interpretation of the Hegelian *Aufhebung* first by Gillian Rose and then Nigel Tubbs.

### *Gillian Rose and the broken middle*

Gilroy notes in a 2011 interview that Gillian Rose was one of his ‘great’ (Gilroy 2011:750) teachers at the University of Sussex in the late seventies, prior to his move to the School of Cultural Studies in Birmingham. Sussex at this time, he says, was ‘a kind of educational experiment’ (750) in higher education, where tutorials took the place of lectures. At this time Rose had just published her own radical rethinking of Hegel’s philosophy, arguing that Hegel’s absolute must be thought if his philosophy is to have any social and political import. Her reformulation of the absolute, later called ‘the broken middle,’ is an idea whose import for identity politics is yet to be understood. For Rose, philosophy is always already the thinking of the middle, whether she is writing about state and religion, God and freedom, theory and practice or her health and terminal cancer. Her own struggles with identity were also a series of contested middles. She ‘refused to identify with cancer as a generality’ (Rose 1999:46) choosing instead to carry it as ‘*autopoiesis*’ (Rose 1999:45). Her ‘return journeys between Protestantism and Judaism’ helped to ‘defy any idea of "ethnic" identity’ (Rose 1995:57) which she saw as dubious. She was ‘too Jewish to be Christian and too Christian to be Jewish’ (Harvey 2015) and the contours of such a fruitful dialectic were to be investigated, not abjured. Feminism also was no consolation for her negative self-identity because it failed ‘to address the power of women as well as their powerlessness, and the response of both women and men to that power’ (Rose 1995:140). Only the work of the middle can teach ‘that it may be better, sometimes, not to get what you want’ (Rose 1995: 142). This is a lesson

reason had to learn in Kant's tribunal, and it may well be one that identity has to learn in the tribunal of mastery and slavery.

Reading Rose, one can be forgiven for thinking that her views on identity are limited. Her comments, for the most part, pertain to Judaism, and her thoughts on race and gender tend merely to reinforce the point that identity thinking in general is an anti-political and anti-philosophical distraction from the work that the middle requires as a way of life. This is why she was so frustrated with authors who wrote 'as a woman' or 'as a Jew' (Rose 1993: ix) for such declarations eschewed the risky work of beginning in the middle and therefore without the mastery and consolation of identity. But her question to us is always, from where do we speak? If reason in its spurious universality and patriarchy has silenced, dominated and exploited its 'others' then how and from where do those others speak? From outside? From a particularity which 'could only stutter'? From within? Would reason even 'want to unmask itself?' (Rose 1995:139). The difficulty, for Rose, betrays the actuality of our speaking, our protesting, our critique, all as expressions of more or less self-critical power. The antinomy of reason's self-critical tribunal, one that Gilroy recognises, is that to speak against is already to be mediated by that which is opposed. But for Rose this dialectic expresses just the kind of formal identity that it rejects. It is to Hegel that she turns for an education regarding what Habermas called 'the paradoxes of a self-negating philosophy' (Dews 1992: 108). From within these paradoxes Rose retrieves the substance of life lived in the broken middle of the same and different, and of the certainty and uncertainty about who and what we are. It is a move that I have drawn attention to above in Gilroy's notion of the changing same.

Rose's thinking of the broken middle stems from her critique of post-Kantian sociology. In her book *Hegel Contra Sociology* (1981) she makes the case that neo-Kantians turned the complexities of Kant's transcendental deduction into a dualism of an objective general logic of validity and a subjective consciousness which is ultimately unknowable in and to itself. This subject-and-object-dualism in turn became neo-Kantian sociology wherein validity was assigned to society *sui generis* and subjectivity became the paradigm of values in *verstehen* sociology. In later work Rose condensed this into her theory of the diremption of law and ethics. Here, Kant's separation of external and heteronomous legality from internal, autonomous and free morality shaped the antinomic experience of modernity by giving rise to oppositions which Kant took to be categorical: universal and particular, necessity and freedom, heteronomy and autonomy, theory and practice, legality and morality etc.

Just as Gilroy argued for the ambivalences and contingencies of black identity in relation to the conditions of its possibility, so Hegel demonstrated how the Kantian diremption of law and ethics was in fact conditioned, that what appears unconditioned is presupposed, and that what is presupposed is really 'modern legal status – the law of subjective rights separated from the law of the modern state' (Rose 1996:75) – or the separation of inner morality from the development of ethical life. Furthermore, she argues that in this diremption 'those with subjective rights and subjective ends deceive themselves and the other that they act for the universal when they care only for their own interests' (Rose 1996:73). The unintended consequence of this is that 'greater moral or subjective freedom invariably develops together with less objective or ethical freedom' (Rose 1993: 27). As Max Weber pointed out, an 'increase in individual rights in modern societies may be accompanied by an increase – not a decrease – in domination' (Rose 1993: 27).

This insight is part of Gilroy's thinking regarding the dangers of cultural nationalism noted above. If identity politics uncritically repeats its own sociological conditions of possibility, then it should not be surprised when it recreates the same mastery it seeks to overcome. If it does so, then the dialectic of enlightenment comes into play in the totality in which roots that have become routes, will return to roots.

For Rose, however, Hegel provides a different concept of identity altogether. To read Hegel adequately, she says, is to experience the abstraction of identity negatively or as a contradiction so that 'the identity which is affirmed between subject and predicate is seen equally to affirm a lack of identity' (Rose 1981:48-49). This experience of contradiction 'provide[s] the occasion for a change in ... consciousness and its definition of the object' (46). Hegel does not suggest that our ordinary or 'natural' consciousness is overcome here. On the contrary, 'the *Phenomenology* is not a teleological development towards the reconciliation of all oppositions between consciousness and its objects... but a speculative presentation of the perpetual deformations of natural consciousness' (150). Here is a movement in thinking that carries negation and preservation, but not negation as merely overcoming, and not preservation as merely reproduction or repetition of an unchanging same. Nigel Tubbs has recently theorised this movement of negation and preservation (or the changing same), and therefore of Rose's reconceptualising of identity, as the *educational* substance of Hegel's *Aufhebung*.

*Nigel Tubbs and the logic of know thyself*



In a body of work spanning 30 years Tubbs finds in the broken middle of Hegel's absolute a different logic—an *educational logic*—to the logic of mastery and property that has dominated Western intellectual history.

The Aristotelian tradition, says Tubbs, defined truth as the *in-itself* because it was an independent substance, unified within itself and lacking any and all contingencies. In contrast, that which was *for-another* was mediated in being contingent or dependent upon another, and so was defined as error in relation to truth in-itself.<sup>4</sup> This Aristotelian logic has its roots in the social relations of the ancient world, specifically those of master and slave, wherein mastery is defined as free because it is 'a principle in-itself' (Tubbs 2017: 2) in contrast to the slave who has no principle in himself. Ownership is formalised in the Roman world through the law of property which means that those with the status of legal persons (truths in themselves) own those who, like things, lack truth in themselves: women, children and slaves. The salient point is that the logic of truth in-itself is always already a 'propertied logic' (Tubbs 2015:140).<sup>5</sup> This is why the master/slave relation is the template for understanding the conditions of possibility for the thinking of objects and why it is of central importance for 'understanding the determination of identity in, and by, prevailing property relations' (Tubbs 2005: 165). This logic of mastery dominates the next 2500 years of Western thinking about truth, freedom, and nature. It is this same logic that the Kantian critical philosophy employs uncritically, and this same logic that Hegel negates and preserves immanently in his notion of the *Aufhebung*.

---

<sup>4</sup> The idea is carried in Aristotle's notion of the Prime Mover which is its own condition of possibility. Necessity—that it must be itself—is the principle of non-contradiction and the absurdity of infinite regression.

<sup>5</sup> Tubbs rehearses this in Tubbs 2021.

The *Aufhebung* is usually taken to be the principle of the Hegelian dialectic wherein thought transcends and reforms its own limited relation to the object: thesis-antithesis-synthesis. In this sense, the *Aufhebung* has a claim to be critical of all abstract identities and the logical presuppositions upon which they are grounded. And since, for Hegel, ‘there is nothing in heaven or in nature or mind or anywhere else which does not equally contain both immediacy and mediation’ (Hegel 1969: 68), so, one might argue, all fixed identities are overcome by mediation. No identity survives negation intact. But it is what happens next in the *Aufhebung* that causes such controversy. Hegel says that what is negated is also preserved.<sup>6</sup> On one reading this is taken to mean that the negation is reason’s foremost imperial force. This view is shared, in different ways, by critiques of Hegel such as Derrida, and more dialectical critiques of Hegel, such as Adorno. Where Rose finds both kinds of critique blind to their own determination within and by the object of their enquiry, Tubbs finds in Rose a path to an educational reading of the *Aufhebung* that makes something very different of this power-relation of thought to itself.

For Tubbs, the tribunal of reason is not just witnessed, it is experienced. And since the tribunal concerns the experience of experience, so the tribunal is self-changing. It is the changing same in which reason is not an unattached observer, but a compromised observer, changed by the observing of itself.<sup>7</sup> If this is the *Aufhebung* then it is the experience in and by

---

<sup>6</sup> In the *Science of Logic*, Hegel writes that it has two meanings. The first is ‘to preserve, to maintain’ but it is just as much ‘to cause, to cease, to put an end to’ (Hegel 1969: 107).

<sup>7</sup> I want to thank the Reviewer who noted the question of the relationship between Hegel’s phenomenology or logic and lived, material conditions. I would make two points. First, the Rose/Tubbs reading of Hegel would suggest that Hegel’s famous formulation that the rational is the actual means that reason (logic) is always *materially* presupposed as the conditions of the possibility of experience. Second, because of this, the distinction between logic and life is itself abstract and propertied but cannot be avoided within the propertied social relations that the distinction already presupposes. In short, Hegelian critique is always imminent self-critique, but because of that is also always already complicit in the material pre-conditions that it is learning about.

which consciousness can ‘realise a determinate self-(re-) formation’ (Tubbs 2008: 48). This not only captures Gilroy’s idea of the changing same, it is also the invention, maintenance, and renewal of the very concept of identity, exactly that which Gilroy is seeking for, and as, black modernisms.

Tubbs makes extensive reference to mastery and enslavement in his educational reworking of the *Aufhebung*. At times he expresses the logic of education through the concepts of mastery and slavery as they appear in the life and death struggle. In his version, life and death are the conditions of the possibility of cultures which play out life and death in manifold ways.

Property is the dominant culture of life and death, grounded in the shape of logic which actualises property. Life desires to survive. It avoids death and the experience of vulnerability by owning it in the form of slaves. The slave is a living death, and lives death for the master. Such propertied logic and social relations can only reproduce their dialectic of enlightenment in which the master is already slave (the truth of lordship is bondage) and the slave reverts to mastery (the slave achieves a mind of his own). It is in the logic of property that this becomes an interminable dialectic of enlightenment of the kind that Habermas considered hopeless.

But in Tubbs it is in property’s own ‘culture of aporia’ that ‘the broken relation between thought and truth’ (Tubbs 2009: 25) is always self-re-formation, or learning. This is also the logic of the tribunal, for the tribunal is, as Kant said, a task of self-knowledge. Indeed, Tubbs has recently explored the history of educational logic as the logic of ‘know thyself’, one in which the truth of identity and the identity of truth re-educate themselves and each other.

### ***Conclusion: The Spirit of Reparation***

I want to end by returning the discussion to where it began, to the so-called culture wars. It was mentioned above that Kant's tribunal could be seen as reason making reparation to truth for the dogmas that it has inflicted upon it. Is there a sense now in which we can see the experience that societies are going through in trying to evaluate their relationship to past barbarisms, as also a tribunal regarding reparation? Are the present conflicts regarding identity, white privilege, de-colonisation etc., cultural shapes of a tribunal in which western freedom is being asked to undertake the most difficult of self-examinations regarding past actions? Are we living through what might be called the educational logic of reparation?

If so, the culture wars will have stages that we can now recognise. Freedom, being prosecutor, defendant, and judge, will appear as the interminable reproduction of a power accountable only to itself. Its abstract assertions of power will then be exposed as contingent upon the historical and social shapes of power that hide themselves behind the abstractions. Indeed, behind such abstractions, individual black lives always mattered. But, when in recent philosophy and postcolonial theory the contingencies of historical and social inequalities and injustices were laid bare, and activists opposed the privileged abstractions upon which they were based, Black Lives Matter expressed a universal philosophical and political significance. In turn, those who express their opposition to Black Lives Matter sometimes justify this opposition by refusing to recognise its historical contingencies or, what is the same thing, by abstracting material struggle into abstract principles. This is popularly represented by the idea that all lives matter. What is at work here is that prioritising contingencies, or prioritising material and historical black lives is taken to offend the formal principle of equal treatment for all. And it is in this relation between material life and its abstraction that an educational logic of reparation can be experienced as the trauma of the dialectic of enlightenment. The myth of white supremacy is challenged by enlightenment

regarding its injustice and racism. The enlightenment returns to myth, in Gilroy's terms, in the forces of cultural nationalism. Roots are already routes, and routes return to roots.

Gilroy and Rose both see the trauma as commending identity as the changing same. Rose is fiercely critical of the post-modern turn to a new ethics of identity because it tries to circumvent the trauma, leading to reason being abandoned altogether. In its place is exalted the 'abused Other' (Rose, 1993: 3). But the problem with this is that the other—black, woman, body, love—becomes 'utterly unequivocal' (4). Difficulty, she writes, 'is brought to certainty' (4) and otherness is fixed in its exclusiveness like the reason that has been renounced. Similarly, for Gilroy, an absolutist notion of cultural belonging repeats the same fate when the subject is in fact 'located in historically specific and unavoidably complex configurations of individualisation and embodiment, black and white, male and female, lord and bondsman' (Gilroy 1993: 46). For both Rose and Gilroy, if this is left unacknowledged then there can be no process of *mourning* for what has been lost and brutalised and so no capacity for working through 'the grim details of imperial and colonial history' (Gilroy 2004: 108), no way 'to transform paralyzing guilt into a more productive shame that would be conducive to the building of a multicultural nationality that is no longer phobic about the prospect of exposure to either strangers or otherness' (108). In Gilroy, Rose and also in Tubbs, the shapes of such experience lend themselves to a re-conception of what identity is and how it can be lived. This involves the trauma of the tribunal of reason's past actions. It concerns the question of what should be negated (cancelled) and what be preserved. But as an educational experience, it is a self-re-formation of the idea of identity.

Finally, then, what is the educational logic of reparation? It is not a form of Nietzschean revenge. It does not calculate resentment and enact internal self-hatred outwardly as pain caused to another. If it does, then the only victor is the formalised legal subject of propertied logic. Reparation is not a displacement of *ressentiment*. Instead, reparation is an educative process. It is a culture. It is a self-re-forming experience that commends lives different to those of resentment and calculation. It is too soon to say what those lives might look like because the trauma of reparation is still being played out as a cultural experience. This educational logic of reparation offers no quick or easy solutions by way of overcoming the other and asserting new masteries. As such, it is a painful logic, preserving the negations as struggles in order to let them educate in new ways of understanding. We are living through the cultural experience of freedom taking itself to court. Viewed one-sidedly, either black lives matter or all lives matter, one side negated and one side preserved. But in the aporia of this culture of reparation lies a logic of education in which what is negated and preserved is the culture, not its one-sided resolution. Perhaps in such a culture, the changing same might be represented by ever-changing statues, and perhaps for Gilroy, capture a ceaseless motion for which the state of self-realisation advances beyond the identities of empire, but not beyond its own continuing self-re-formation.

### **Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s)

### **References**

Bernasconi, R. 2002. 'Kant as an Unfamiliar Source of Racism,' in Ward and Lott,

*Philosophers on Race: Critical Essays*, Oxford, Blackwell.

Dews, P. 1992. *Autonomy and Solidarity*. London, Verso.

Du Bois, W. E. B. 2015. 'Strivings of the Negro People'. In *The Problem of the Color Line in the turn at the Twentieth Century, The Essential Early Essays*, edited by N. D. Chandler. New York: Fordham University Press.

Fanon, F. 2001. *The Wretched of the Earth*, London, Penguin.

Gikandi, S. 1996. 'Review Essays: In the Shadow of Hegel: Cultural Theory in an Age of Displacement'. In *Research in African Literatures* 27, No. 2, pp. 139-150.

Gilroy, P. 1993. *The Black Atlantic, Modernity and Double Consciousness*. London and New York: Verso.

Gilroy, P. 2004. *After Empire, Melancholia or Convivial Culture*, Oxford: Routledge.

Gilroy, P. 2011. 'PAUL GILROY INTERVIEW – 2 JUNE 2011'. *Cultural Studies*, 27:5, 744-756.

Gilroy, P. 2019. 'Never Again: refusing race and salvaging the human'. *The 2019 Holberg Lecture*, 11 03 2019. Available online at <https://holbergprisen.no/en/news/holberg-prize/2019-holberg-lecture-laureate-paul-gilroy> (accessed 28 May 2021)

Harvey, R. '9 December 1995 baptism and passing of Gillian rose philosopher cultural theorist and believer in Yeshua'. *On This Day In Messianic Jewish History*, 09 December 2015. Available at <https://jewinthepew.org/2015/12/09/9-december-1995-baptism-and-passing-of-gillian-rose-philosopher-cultural-theorist-and-believer-in-yeshua-otdimjh/> (Accessed 12 07 2021)

Hegel, G.W.F. 1956. *The Philosophy of History*. Translated by J. Sibree, New York: Dover Publications.

Hegel, G.W.F. 1969. *Science of Logic*, Translated by A.V. Miller, London: George Allen and Unwin.

Hegel, G. W. F. 1971. *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind: Being Part Three of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*. Translated by W. Wallace, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

James, C.L.R. 1981. *Notes on Dialectics: Hegel, Marx, Lenin*, Westport: Lawrence Hill and Co.

Kant, I. 1968. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated by N. Kemp Smith, London: Macmillan.

Mills, C.W. 2018. *Res Philosophica*, Vol. 95, No. 1, January 2018, pp. 1–33.

Rose, G. 1981. *Hegel Contra Sociology*. London: The Athlone Press.

Rose, G. 1993. *Judaism and Modernity, Philosophical Essays*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Rose, G. 1996. *Mourning Becomes the Law, Philosophy and Representation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rose, G. 1999. *Paradiso*. London: The Menard Press.

Rose, G. 1995. *Love's Work*. New York: New York Review of Books.

Tubbs, N. 2005. *Philosophy of the Teacher*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Tubbs, N. 2008. *Education in Hegel*. London: Continuum.

Tubbs, N. 2009. *History of Western Philosophy*. Basingstoke: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN.

Tubbs, N. 2015. 'Gillian Rose and Education'. In *Telos* 173, pp. 125-143.

Tubbs, N. 2017. *God, Education and Modern Metaphysics, The Logic of "Know Thyself"*. New York and London: Routledge.

Tubbs, N. 2021. *Socrates On Trial*. London: Bloomsbury.

Tubbs, N. 2022. 'The myth of *Aufheben*: A comment on Matthieu Renault's Hegelian myth of counter-violence', *Radical Philosophy* 212, Spring, pp. 109–118.



Verharen, C.C. 1997. 'The New World and the Dreams to which it may give Rise,' *Journal of Black Studies* 27.4. pp. 456-493.