

HEGEL AND THE FUTURE OF THE WORLD

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“Philosophy ... is *its own time comprehended in thoughts*,” writes Hegel in the preface to his *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (Hegel, 1991, 21). This essay is an attempt to comprehend in thought our time — 200 years after Hegel. I shall do this in the style of Hegel, that is, as an attempt to comprehend and represent our current political world as one that is inherently reasonable (vernünftig), just as Hegel sought to comprehend and represent the state as inherently reasonable (Hegel, 1991, 21).

Where Hegel spoke of the state in the broad sense, I speak vaguely of “our political world,” of how people organize themselves politically in our time. While states continue to be central to this, their character has changed, especially through ongoing globalization. In Hegel’s time, a state was essentially a unique individual: the Prussian state, or the French; and the character of each of these — in his time rather few — states was essentially determined from within, primarily by the particular ethics or ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) of the people constituting it. Each of these leading peoples had its own national institutional structure, its own way of organizing itself and of presenting itself to the outside world. In contrast, the family was and is primarily a generic form of organization that persons, under the pressure of normative expectations and within certain margins of tolerance, reproduce again and again. This is what the state has become since Hegel: a globalized *schema*, externally imposed on all world regions and populations. Our political world has evolved into a *system* of states. And with this claim I am contradicting those who, with questionable appeal to Hegel, have postulated an end of history — without, however, wanting to investigate their thesis here in more detail.

I. The Idea of the Present States System

In order to reflect in the style of Hegel, we must focus on the *idea* of our contemporary political organization — just as Hegel focused on the *idea* of the state — of the Prussian state.¹ To attain a reasonable understanding of our

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¹ He writes: “In considering the Idea of the state, we must not have any particular states or particular institutions in mind; instead, we should consider the Idea, this actual God, in its own right [für sich]. Any state, even if we pronounce it bad in the light of our own principles, and even if we discover this or that defect in it, invariably has the essential moments of its existence [Existenz] within itself (provided it is one of the more advanced states of our time). But since it is easier to discover deficiencies than to comprehend the affirmative, one may easily fall into the mistake of overlooking the inner organism of the state in favour of individual [einzelne] aspects. The state is not a work of art; it exists in the world, and hence in the sphere of arbitrariness, contingency, and error, and bad behaviour may disfigure it in many respects. But the ugliest man, the criminal, the invalid, or the cripple is still a living human being; the affirmative aspect — life — persists

political world, we must understand it *as reasonable*. So, what is the affirmative aspect of today's world order, its idea or actuality? To put it concisely: *rule of law* under *just rules*.

Rule of law. An important contrast between our time and Hegel's is that in ours the rule of law has been internationalized. It applies generally to the settlement of all conflicts — not merely those among legal entities within the same state, but also those among states, as well as those between states on the one hand and domestic or foreign private individuals, associations, corporations, and communities on the other. According to its idea, our political world is legally structured through and through — and violence as a method of conflict resolution is therefore abolished — even quite officially, by the way, with the Kellogg-Briand Pact agreed in Paris on 27 August 1928.

From the vantage point of his time, Hegel would have welcomed this ban on violence (“the determination of war is that of something which ought to come to an end” — Hegel, 1991, §338), but not wholeheartedly. Following popular contemporary thinking, he calls prolonged peace a “stagnation [Versumpfen] of human beings” (Hegel, 1991, §324A, my translation): “The higher significance of war is that, through its agency ... the ethical health of nations is preserved ..., just as the movement of the winds preserves the sea from that stagnation which a lasting calm would produce — a stagnation which a lasting, not to say perpetual, peace would also produce among nations” (Hegel, 1991, §324).

The world spirit can no longer share this praise of war today — for two good reasons. War is no longer the chivalrous competition of national armies, but has in the 20th century evolved into total war, in which far more civilians than soldiers are regularly harmed, and which can even destroy all of human civilization and culture, or set it back by centuries. Moreover, cutting-edge warfare offers little opportunity for states and their soldiers to develop and demonstrate courage and bravery. Enemies sit in underground bunkers and unleash missiles on each other — or drones or cruise missiles. This is truly no virtue-enhancing test of courage. And if one state survives such an exchange of blows better than another, this can hardly be taken as an indication of its superior ethics.

Just Rules. According to its idea, our world order is one in which states as well as individuals and their associations, corporations and communities can develop freely. Our world order lives in the tension between the claim to self-determination of states, on the one hand, and their citizens' claim to free development, on the other. Just rules must protect, facilitate and promote the freedom of states and of human beings. These various claims to freedom must be balanced against one another: the human rights of every human being are to be understood so that they are compatible with the human rights of other human beings. And the right to self-determination of every state is to be understood so that it is compatible with the self-determination of other states and with the human rights of citizens and foreigners.

The guiding idea of our political world — rule of law under just rules — can be fully realized today. Yet, we fall far short of it. Violence and threats of

[besteht] in spite of such deficiencies, and it is with this affirmative aspect that we are here concerned” (Hegel, 1991, §258A — the added letter “A” stands for “Addition” or “Zusatz”).

violence continue to be commonplace in intercourse among states — rule of law is lacking. And extreme economic inequality prevents many people and states from even beginning to develop freely — there is great injustice.

We might downplay these great deficits as contingencies. Instead, I will try to understand their systemic causes, drawing especially on Hegel's concept of the universal. Rule of law under just rules does not simply appear, but must be institutionally established and then actively maintained and enforced. We need to understand how this is reasonably possible, just as Hegel sought to understand how the universal in the Prussian state can prevail against the manifold particular interests. I will address the justice deficit first and then turn to the rule-of-law deficit.

II. Justice: Inequality and Poverty

The justice deficit consists primarily in extreme economic inequality, which also manifests itself in social and political inequality. This is inequality among citizens of the same state, inequality among states, and — most extreme — inequality among human beings. At the top end, the 2,755 USD-billionaires own at least (as far as is known) USD 13.1 trillion.² In the bottom quarter, the poorest 2 billion human beings must get by on about USD 1 trillion a year³ — not enough even to provide adequate food to their families.⁴ As in Hegel's time, poverty and hunger are the ugly face of injustice. Yet today, because of their much easier and more obvious avoidability, they have become a much greater scandal.

Hegel's highly-developed understanding of poverty can be summed up in three sentences. First, he saw that poverty cannot be explained simply by recourse to personal decisions of individual actors, but that its social manifestation — its range and severity — depends crucially on how the civil sphere of the state (in the broad sense) is organized. Following on from this, Hegel understood it to be a central function of the state to enable all its members to freely develop their personalities; thus, according to its idea, the state is to be organized so as to avoid poverty as far as reasonably possible. Third, Hegel urged that such poverty avoidance be maintained without alienating humiliation, that is, neither through — always unreliable — alms from wealthier compatriots, nor through social assistance from the public purse. To avert formation of a rabble corrosive of a thriving society, the state must avoid conditions in which “that feeling of right, integrity, and honor which comes from supporting oneself by one's own activity and work is lost” (Hegel, 1991, §244). Citizens should not merely have their needs met, but be able to meet their needs and those of their families. And they should be integrated into solidary subunits of society: its associations, communities, corporations, guilds or estates — should “feel and enjoy the wider freedoms, and particularly the spiritual advantages, of civil society” (Hegel, 1991, §244) on a basis of mutual recognition.

² <https://www.forbes.com/billionaires/>.

³ Email communication from Branko Milanovic.

⁴ According to the FAO's latest annual report, 2.368 billion human beings are food-insecure and over 3 billion out of 7.7 billion human beings could not in 2019 afford a healthy diet requiring purchasing power of around USD 4 per person per day (FAO et al, 2021, 18 & 27).

Hegel's thoughts on how a state can live up to its idea in regard to poverty avoidance do not, as he himself realizes, lead to any real solution. From today's perspective, with greatly expanded knowledge of economics, one would want to combine five elements for a definitive abolition of poverty at both the national and supranational levels.

First, a strong and egalitarian education and vocational training system, freely accessible to all, tasked with preventing the intergenerational transmission of poverty. This would give children even of poor and uneducated parents encouragement, incentive and equal access to educational opportunities — not as redistributive assistance, but for the sake of the common good. Every young person should understand that she or he is important to society. All are invited to develop their abilities and to contribute to their nation and to humankind.

The second element is a global basic income, which some states or associations of states (such as the European Union) could supplement with additional national basic incomes. Such basic income is not to be presented as a social gift extracted from the work of others, but as each person's share in humanity's heritage, which consists of our planet's natural resources and of the capital that previous generations have built up. A basic income would ensure fulfillment of basic needs, would give people extended freedom to develop in their own way even without any additional income resulting from market demand. This expanded freedom would also reduce supply in the labor market, strengthening the social and financial position of employees. Even a small global basic income of 3–4% of gross world product would in our time suffice to eradicate extreme poverty worldwide.

In diverse ways, the first two elements point to the third: a strong dampening of wealth inheritance. It makes sense to design the economy so that those who have demonstrated exceptional abilities in deploying scarce resources acquire greater control over such resources. But it makes no sense to construct this privilege as alienable — for example, to entrust me with billions of dollars of wealth just because my mother was a brilliant entrepreneur. Of course, whoever earned money should be allowed to spend it, even suboptimally. She should be able to buy me a car, or even a house. But with even larger gifts, a high tax rate should apply so that the lion's share of capital, which always is ultimately jointly generated, can benefit all members of the next generation *via* education and basic income.

The fourth element is progressive taxation of income and wealth. Most obviously, this means higher tax rates for higher incomes.⁵ But the greatest problem in our world is not that high incomes are taxed at too low a rate, but that by far the larger share of rich citizens' income is not taxed at all. This non-taxation is an — intentionally! — enormously complicated phenomenon, which I can here outline only briefly by way of three examples.

1. Jeff Bezos, the world's richest person, has earned over USD 100 billion in the last few years, mainly through increase in the value of Amazon stock. This

⁵ Many countries violate this principle by having lower rates for income from capital gains, which tends to dominate in the income of the rich. Thus, in the United States currently, the highest tax on labor income is 37% versus a maximum capital gains tax rate of 20% for gains on investments held over one year. In Germany, the highest tax on labor income is 45% versus a capital gains tax rate of 25%.

capital gain is only taxable if Bezos sells shares. He has no need to do this, because he can hedge his exposure and borrow against his Amazon shares as collateral. In one year, billionaire Bezos had so little taxable income that he could claim a USD 4,000 tax credit for poor people with children (Eisinger et al., 2021). Under current U.S. tax law, when Bezos dies, the accrued appreciation is forgiven — when his heirs sell stock, they are taxed on only the gain since the date of their inheritance.

2. Rich citizens avoid taxation on their capital income by hiding their wealth. It has been found that, even in friendly Scandinavia, the super-rich cheat the state out of 20–30% of their tax liability — by keeping their assets in secret foreign accounts, for example. Ordinary citizens cheat the state by an average of 1–2% of their tax liability (Alstadsæter et al., 2019).

3. Multinational corporations, which are mostly owned by rich citizens, have many good opportunities to shift corporate profits through internal transactions among their subsidiaries to countries where such profits are not or only slightly taxed. Such avoidance of corporate taxation amplifies the gain in stock prices which, as we saw in the Bezos example, also escapes taxation.

In short, the fourth element, progressive taxation, is nominally implemented to a modest extent but, in reality, rich citizens are subject to much lower tax rates; and often states even go completely empty-handed, receiving tax revenues neither from their rich citizens nor from the corporations they own.

The fifth element is preference for egalitarian structural solutions. Although enormously important, this element is generally overlooked. Reflections about designing society to be poverty avoiding tend to focus on tax and social support systems, which determine what taxes people owe on their income and consumption, and what support is available to poor people in the form of free or subsidized goods and services, health insurance, income support and the like. While such “tax-and-transfer” institutions are specifically designed to influence rather directly the distribution of the social product, many other structural features of national societies and supranational systems also have profound distributive effects that, far from their rationale and purpose, are easily overlooked. These structural features might be loosely categorized under four headings: institutional arrangements, especially including the structure of the economy as encoded in law; social and cultural practices, customs and habits; infrastructure, including transportation, energy, water, and communications; and the physical environment as continually modified by the population’s interactions with it (settlements, agriculture, mining, pollution, rivers and canals, parks, forests, coastlines etc.). To a greater or lesser extent, all these structural features also have significant impact on the socioeconomic distributional profile.

One example was briefly mentioned in connection with basic income: our world is set up so that proceeds from the sale of mineral resources accrue to a small wealthy minority. A more egalitarian solution would be to consider nature to be part of our common heritage and then to use the relevant sales revenues — as well as levies on various pollutant emissions — to finance a basic income.

Innovation incentives provide another important example. In our world, innovation is rewarded by monopoly patents that allow patentees to charge high markups or royalties — with the result that pharmaceuticals, for instance, are often sold at over 1000 times the cost of production and are therefore inaccessible to poor people. In 2013, finally, a good drug for hepatitis C came on the market

— in the U.S. at a price of USD 84,000 per course of treatment (Barber et al, 2020). It is less expensive in poorer countries, but still unaffordable with the also much lower ordinary incomes there. Some 93% of relevant patients worldwide, 66 million, remain infected and continue to infect others (CHAI, 2020).

Monopoly patents aggravate inequality and poverty because they systematically prevent poorer people from benefiting from innovations. It does not have to be this way. A more egalitarian solution would pay for innovation through publicly funded performance rewards: a new drug according to the health gains achieved with it, for example, or a new green technology according to the emission it averts.⁶ In this way, innovations would be accessible not only to a small rich minority, but would spread rapidly around the world. This alternative innovation reward mechanism would also give innovators incentives to address problems heavily concentrated among impoverished people: health impact rewards would finally trigger profitable research into diseases of poverty, such as tuberculosis, malaria and the aptly named “neglected tropical diseases.”

III. Politics

Focusing on poverty avoidance, we have seen how more justice is possible. But insight is not enough. Just rules that promote the common good must be enforced politically against all kinds of particular interests. Hegel addresses this problem as the tension between universality and articulation of the state. Articulation (*Gliederung*) means that people, in addition to their role as state citizens, play other roles: in their respective families, corporations, associations, communities, guilds and estates. As a result, they have particular responsibilities and interests that may run counter to the state’s universal interest. Hegel saw the solution to this problem in a distribution of political power favoring the state’s universal interest, in which the state in the narrow sense, the government, dominates — supported by the universal estate of civil servants (Hegel, 1991, §250 & §303) and by the substantial estate of landowners (Hegel, 1991, §203), whose estate interests, according to Hegel, are close to the state’s universal interests (Hegel, 1991, §307).

This solution may seem naive from today’s perspective. Under the heading of “regulatory capture,” there is a vast literature that analyzes — theoretically and empirically — how governments are corrupted by particular interests, especially by rich corporations and individuals who, with the help of lobbyists and campaign contributions, know how to bend the rules of their society and even supranational rules in their own favor. The injustice of the rules, the persistence of abject poverty — these are due not to a lack of insight or resources, but simply to such corruption of political power.

This objection has its justification. Yet we can draw four lessons from Hegel’s discussion of the state that might help us in our political world today.

⁶ For work on concretizing these proposals, see <https://healthimpactfund.org/en/> on a proposed Health Impact Fund (HIF) offering to reward pharmaceutical innovations according to the health gains achieved with them; and <https://globaljustice.yale.edu/green-impact-fund-technology> on a proposed Green Impact Fund for Technology (GIFT) offering to reward green innovations according to the ecological benefits achieved with them.

First, there is, in most major cultures, a special estate honor in roles entrusted with universal interests. This can be observed, for instance, in the powerful and deeply internalized rejection of nepotism. Citizens are genuinely appalled when they learn that a mother has used her political office to benefit her son, even when his gain is much greater than the social loss. Such disgust is surprising. Human beings form deep bonds, such as those between lovers or parent and child. It is quite natural for those who partake in such a very close relationship to give it special weight: for a mother greatly to prioritize her child over others. Yet, in advanced societies the scope of such partiality is strictly limited: there are contexts in which a mother must not give any special weight at all to even quite important interests of her child. When she acts as principal of a high school, for instance, submitting pupils' grades to colleges and universities, she is expected completely to disregard her own child's very important interest in a strong application. And, likewise, when she awards a contract for some work that her son's firm has put in a bid for. If she favors him even a little, she risks a public outcry that may well cost her her job.

Second, Hegel also sees quite clearly that a state that is governed and regulated by a universal estate with such an estate honor has a considerable competitive advantage over other states and peoples. This explains the astonishing civilizational achievement that the gray universality of civil servant loyalty could prevail so decisively over what is probably the deepest love that human beings are capable of: the love to one's own family.

Third, we find in Hegel the idea that the obligation to universality is not at all limited to the civil service. Hegel writes of every member of the state: "His universal determination in general includes two moments, for he is a *private person* and at the same time a *thinking* being with consciousness and volition of the *universal*" (Hegel, 1991, §308). It is true that many citizens do not know well how to think about the good of the state and the eternal principles of justice (cf. Hegel, 1991, §308 & §§316–17). Nonetheless, "in public opinion ... the way is open to everyone to express and give effect to his subjective opinions on the universal" (Hegel, 1991, §308). What Hegel is saying here — in somewhat Habermasian fashion — is that we all can take up the standpoint of the universal at any time, for example by participating in public political discourse. We are not obligated to do so. But if we do, then we are obligated completely to set aside our other role loyalties.

Fourth, if we really want to capture our world in thought, we are committed to the idea of rule of law under just rules. The remainder of this essay explores this idea. As stated at the outset, the state is today no longer the highest level of universality, but is itself a member of a worldwide state system structured by a dense network of supranational rules and organizations that profoundly determine the inner workings of states and the coexistence of people. Innovation incentives, for example, whose inequality-enhancing effects were discussed earlier, are prescribed at the supranational level, in the TRIPS Agreement, Annex 1C of the founding treaty of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Each member state of the WTO — and this now includes virtually all states — is contractually obligated to reward innovations of various kinds with 20-year product patents and then effectively to enforce these monopolies in its jurisdiction. TRIPS is just one supranational agreement of many; the WTO just one supranational organization

among dozens. And this vast network of supranational rules and organizations naturally has its own supranational bureaucracy. According to their idea, these international rules, organizations and officials represent the highest level of universality: the universal interest in the good of humankind and in justice on Earth. But this idea is today realized only very rudimentarily — in the oath of office of the UN Secretary General, for example. The overwhelming reality is another: the structure of our world order reflects the distribution of bargaining power among states and the large corporations behind them. And the prevailing role expectation for international officials is that they work mainly for the interests of their respective countries of origin. This is evident, for example, in the considerable efforts that national governments make to fill important supranational posts with one of their own. Consider the lengths to which the U.S. government regularly goes to ensure that the World Bank President is American. By contrast, the people and government of Texas make little effort to ensure that the office of President is filled by one of their own. This difference cannot be explained by the greater power of the World Bank President — quite the contrary! Rather, most of the difference can be explained by the fact that Texans know that a U.S. President will not or cannot particularly advance the interests of their home province — while governments and citizens around the world understand very well that the World Bank President will run the Bank in a way that gives special consideration to U.S. economic and political interests and ideological predilections, and that such action is expected and accepted by global elites and replicated by other international officials. We are far from a world order structured according to the universal interest in rule of law under just rules toward securing human rights and state rights to self-determination. Most supranational officials are openly guided by particular interests. The same applies *a fortiori* to heads of state and their delegates when they negotiate supranational rules of the game. And most citizens and companies that take an interest in global rules also do not push for fair arrangements, but quite openly for arrangements favorable to themselves.

Is this kind of world really the end of history, or can humankind still overcome the great gap to global universality — just as it has at the national level overcome the gap to the universality of the state interest, in the best states anyway?

IV. Rule of Law

Let us analyze the problem. It is well known among political actors that it is better for all of them if their relationships and interactions are governed by rules. Such rules unlock enormous cooperative surpluses by allowing actors to adjust to one another much better and then to maintain vastly more complex and mutually beneficial collaborative relations than would be possible without rules. This advantage of rules explains the transition from unlimited war of all against all to coordinated self-restraint: political actors (individuals, tribes, states ...) understand that each of them adheres to certain rules in his or her conduct in order thereby to obtain reciprocal self-restraint from other political actors. Such an agreement need not be explicit. Nor does it require morality: mutual trust can be based solely on each actor's judgment that it would be unwise for the other —

in light of his interests, opportunities, and circumstances — to break the agreement.

Once such nonviolent coexistence under rules is established, it is sustained by the fact that all participants have sufficient incentives to continue to participate, on the assumption that the others will do so as well. One can bring this kind of regulated coexistence based on prudential reasons under the concept, revived by John Rawls, of a *modus vivendi*, whose participants are primarily motivated by their self-defined interests and values and take no interest in the interests and values of the other participants as such (Rawls, 1993, xxxix–xliv & 146f.). Nonetheless, each participant has an interest in maintaining a common institutional order of rules, conventions, practices, procedures, bodies, and offices that accommodates the interests of the other participants to the extent that they find it prudent to continue playing along. This common order must therefore be designed so that it fulfills the condition of a prudential equilibrium: so that it is in the interest of each participant to continue to cooperate within the framework of these rules of the game.

Whether a particular participant P finds the existing rules acceptable depends on several variables — in particular, on its self-defined values and interests, as well as on its position in the existing distribution of power, which depends on its vulnerabilities and also on the opportunity costs it incurs by participating. Accordingly, which rules of the game satisfy the condition of prudential equilibrium is subject to change. This can happen through a change in the values or interests of some participants or, more commonly, through a shift in power. For example, if P₁ gains power at the expense of P₂, so that P₁ now has less to lose from a partial or total breakdown of the existing agreement and P₂ has more to lose, then it may be prudent for P₁ to insist on renegotiating the rules. And other participants will wisely accede to this demand, with weakening participants having to accept rules less favorable for themselves as a result of their increased vulnerability and reduced threat potential. If a *modus vivendi* is to survive long-term, its rules for the distribution of benefits and burdens must be occasionally adjusted so that continued participation remains the prudent option of each participant. Such adjustment lies in the interest not only of those who have become politically stronger, but also of those who have become weaker: the latter have a strong interest in ensuring that those who have become stronger are sufficiently motivated to continue to participate in maintaining a well-regulated social system. Effective rules that unfairly disadvantage the weak are still better for the weak than fair rules that the strong will break for their own advantage.

Thus, while a *modus vivendi* superficially involves self-restraints on the part of its participants, it is nonetheless the case that beneath this surface its rules are the object of an ongoing contest that is not subject to any restraints. Here, the power of a participant can be weakened indefinitely by a kind of death spiral in which a loss of power by this participant results in a modification of the rules to its disadvantage, which then results in a further loss in power, and so on. There is no limit to the humiliation laid down in social rules to which a declining participant will prudently agree rather than risk a breakdown of the *modus vivendi*. Thus, an international *modus vivendi* cannot realize the Idea of the present state system — neither human rights, nor self-determination of states. This is so not only because it leaves weak states and populations ultimately defenseless against strong ones, but also because it compels even the strongest states to orient their

foreign and even their domestic policies toward maximizing power. A state that allowed itself to be impeded by morality or ethics in the international competition would, in the long run, be displaced by other states that effectively and ruthlessly orient their decisions toward power maximization. In a *modus vivendi*, everything is ultimately a matter of national security. A *modus vivendi* destroys not merely the hope for just rules, but also the hope of each state's citizens to shape their state according to their own ethics.

And there is yet a third hope that a *modus vivendi* cannot fulfill: the hope for non-violent conflict resolution, or rule of law. This is a consequence of the unlimited adaptability of a *modus vivendi* to shifts in power. A state with shrinking power may foresee that it will enter a death spiral in which its loss of power is repeatedly exacerbated by strengthening states modifying international rules to its disadvantage. It is not unlikely that such a state, instead of submitting to its fate, would rather risk war by rejecting such rule changes while it is still reasonably strong. That the Soviet Union did not do so was fortunate. It is at least uncertain whether the United States would allow itself to be overtaken by China without a fight. And regional power shifts, such as between Pakistan and India, could also tempt the declining state to launch a pre-emptive strike, with disastrous effects on all of humankind.

A *modus vivendi* harbors yet another danger of war which arises from the fact that its rules are negotiated on the basis of the existing distribution of political power. The power of states derives from three sources: military strength, economic strength, and a heterogeneous residual category of international prestige, often referred to as soft power. The relative weight of these three sources depends on the context. In wartime, military strength is paramount, and soft power largely irrelevant — as epitomized in Stalin's mocking question: "How many divisions does the pope have?" In times of stable peace, on the other hand, as today within well-ordered states or in the peaceful European Union, the parties' capacity for violence is quite irrelevant for the distribution of political power.

Now, states differ in the composition of their political power and therefore have conflicting interests as far as peace is concerned. Militarily weaker states, and also those that do better in the international distribution of economic and cultural strength than in the international distribution of military strength, benefit from a context of stable peace. This is a large majority. But there is always a minority of militarily strong states that do better in the international distribution of military strength than in the international distribution of economic and cultural strength. These few states — today these may be Russia, the United States, Pakistan, Israel, and North Korea — have an interest in maintaining the relevance of military strength. This is not an interest in war, which could be catastrophic for all involved, but an interest in a continued prominent role for states' capacity for violence. For this purpose, these states need frequent international tensions, crises and conflicts, in which troops are moved around and military options excitedly discussed, plus occasional minor bloody confrontations in order to remind everyone of the existing distribution of the means of violence and to ensure their continued relevance. Although these states are few, it lies in the nature of things that they can prevail — can, even against the will of the rest, maintain the world's political climate in a cold-war state, by means of disinformation, manipulation, or skillful provocation if necessary.

This danger of war becomes even more evident when one also reflects on the central actors *within* powerful states. In the intra-state competition for power, it can be advantageous for politicians to use aggressive rhetoric and then to brand their rivals as unpatriotic, naive or pro-foreigner. Such strategies can be countered by reasonable arguments; it may even be possible to immunize the population against performances of this kind. Much more dangerous is the fact that the holders of certain important offices have a systematic interest in maintaining the relevance of the means of violence. A state's executive branch gains power and influence against the other branches if, in contentious conflict with other states, it can wrap itself in the national flag and produce in the population patriotism, national pride, a sense of honor, chauvinism, or fear and distrust of foreigners. Top military, intelligence and defense officials gain influence, wealth and social prestige through aggressive squabbling among states. And the same is especially true of the chief executive, whose status and power relative to the legislative and judicial branches would be substantially diminished by the irrelevance of military capabilities. The U.S. President and Commander-in-Chief is — *ex officio* so to speak — a natural enemy of genuine peace, because both his state, internationally, and he himself, domestically, would thereby lose much power and influence.⁷

V. Conclusion

At the end of this essay, we see not one end of human history, but two. The first is a real ending, by accident. It may well be that humanity will not find its way out of the existing international *modus vivendi* and will therefore, sooner or later, fall victim to a third world war which is (if the *modus vivendi* persists) a dead certainty.

The other end is an end in Hegel's sense, namely the horizon of our time, the end of our field of vision. This better end involves the realization of the idea, inherent in our world today, of a genuinely peaceful global order that guarantees rule of law under just rules. To conceive such an order in greater detail and to sketch the extremely difficult path toward it — these are the noblest tasks of political philosophy today.

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⁷ Already in Hegel's time, James Madison argued that "the executive is the department of power most distinguished by its propensity to war: hence it is the practice of all states, in proportion as they are free, to disarm this propensity of its influence." For this reason, he advocated "a rigid adherence to the simple, the received and the fundamental doctrine of the constitution, that the power to declare war including the power of judging of the causes of war is fully and exclusively vested in the legislature: that the executive has no right, in any case to decide the question, whether there is or is not cause for declaring war" (Frisch ed., 2007, 86–87).

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