The subjugation of the possible
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It is widely accepted that we are now in an era distinct from modernity. The failed enlightenment project and dreams of humanity developing greater consciousness of itself have given way to a new project fuelled by new Ideas. After outlining G.W.F. Hegel’s hopes for modernity, and elements of Michel Foucault’s more recent work, I will discuss how these somewhat opposing approaches can actually be viewed as complementary components in Hegel’s philosophical system. Hegel outlines the developmental path of freedom in conjunction with our collective self-consciousness, suggesting that it manifests in the form of the state and its institutions. Foucault’s project is focused on re-evaluating constraining structures of power which developed during modernity in those same institutions. I suggest that by combining elements of both theories, the enlightenment project can be resuscitated: that it still holds great potential and its rejection was a mistake; furthermore, rather than failing us, it can be argued that it is us that have (as yet) failed it.

Foucault’s genealogical method will then be applied to elements of the ‘post-enlightenment’ project, including his own ‘power discourse’ to show how, without crucial components of the former project being in place, these Ideas produce social disharmony. In one sense, they aid in increasing individual liberties, in another, they deny and aid in repressing a superior measure of freedom. Through the rejection of metanarratives and the acceptance of a constant struggle of all against all, they legitimate and perpetuate a particularized and fragmented social world. This ensures that struggle is indeed perpetual, denying the positive progressive elements of the enlightenment project, actively suppressing the very possibility of a ‘universal’ form of freedom unprecedented in the history of humankind.

Keywords: Hegel- Foucault- Freedom- Progress- Consciousness.

If you assume that there is no hope, you guarantee that there will be no hope. If you assume that there is an instinct for freedom, that there are opportunities to change things, then there is a possibility that you can contribute to making a better world. That’s your choice (Chomsky 2002, p.6).

Introduction
G.W.F. Hegel’s grand narrative for modernity outlines the development of our individual and collective consciousness, alongside our struggle for individual freedom in a social environment, and the resulting emergence of rational universal agreements about what is right. Initially made sense of and defined by their inhabitants, ‘Ideas’ – and the practices that they develop from, describe, and legitimate – emerge defining shared values and norms, providing members of collectives with order, increased freedoms and ‘ontological security’ (Giddens 1984). In their most discernible form these shared narratives emerge as laws, rational manifestations of our will to be free, emerging from agreement or struggle between individuals; even if not realized as such at that time, they are products of, and understandings held by, some or all of that given group’s members. These shared forms of consciousness are what Hegel refers to as Geist (spirit), functioning at a different level from individual consciousness, existing in others, in religious belief systems, laws and state institutions.
Alternatively, Friedrich Nietzsche argues progress comes from a natural state of ‘becoming’, where humans express their unfettered ‘will to power’ (1886, 1886, 1967). Laws, democracy, and morality force order onto chaos and create a state of ‘being’. Slave morality, suggests Nietzsche, develops from the weakest members of society’s resentment of those that would otherwise live a truly genuine existence. Great men and their ideas are subjugated by the collective will of those who seek comfort in order, forcing them to conform and repress their ‘will to power’, stifling their – and ultimately humanity’s – progress. Michel Foucault further advanced Nietzsche’s genealogical method – which he developed to analyse the emergence of morality – to re-evaluate many of the constraining objective ‘truths’, discourses and institutions which emerged from modernity and the enlightenment project. This process and the post-modern project more generally, although essential in recognizing constraints which developed as part of our ontology, I will argue, have led to the adoption of a new narrative, one which rejects grand narratives, falling foul of this very process by being one itself; and in doing so, become a barrier to societal progress.

Although numerous thinkers could be used to support this discussion, the general focus of this article will draw from Hegel and Foucault’s systems of thought as they suitably convey the argument being presented. Due to the length of the article, and complexity of the works being discussed, their presentation here is limited. Further analysis, application and explanation will be given in following works. This paper will consider two periods in history: modernity and what follows it, two of the thinkers which outline these periods, and the corresponding rationales about human ‘nature’ which underlie them both. I will then discuss how these seemingly opposing narratives shape how we understand, distribute and/or obtain freedom in a social environment and how they can be seen to constrain or enable social development. Modernity and its ‘enlightenment project’ are said to have failed us, and these failings are often used to differentiate what is from what was. Let us first consider the constitution of that which was.

**Modernity**

As outlined by Immanuel Kant, one of its greatest protagonists: ‘enlightenment is man’s emergence from his self-incurred immaturity’ (1784, p.54), maturity here being the use of one’s own understanding/reason without the guidance of others. Kant’s critical analysis of pre-enlightenment existence claimed dogma and formula were missuses of our natural endowments; all too convenient shortcuts which afforded and encouraged laziness, cowardice and avoidance of individual thought and therefore self-development. His motto of enlightenment was: *Sapere aude*, have courage to use one’s own understanding or ‘dare to know’. Through rejecting religious dogma and superstition we were to impose order onto chaos. Rationally managing society and the wider world, humankind would master nature and its greatest creation, itself, shaping a better future for one and all.

Industrial and technical developments led to greatly improved standards of living for those in the West at least. Production processes and new machinery gave rise to the creation of surplus produce and wealth, hence the possibility of escape from mere subsistence (Landes 1969). Newly emerging material conditions, relations and the resulting inequalities, combined with increased secularization and rationalization led to greater awareness and the realization of ‘hierarchical differentiation’ (Bottero and Irwin 2003). Collective identities emerged from the realization of specific forms of difference. Class, gender and ethnic divisions provided clear physical distinctions around which meanings were constructed, resulting in the development of counter-
cultures, ideologies and the formation of political movements and parties, as newly emerging disciplines and academics made sense of corresponding conflicting social situations (Gouldner 1976).

To Hegel, a German idealist and political philosopher of this period, these shared ‘Ideas’ were partial realizations of ‘The Concept’, containing elements of something which was yet to be fully understood by society. Whilst using reason to make sense of our social world, ourselves, and our relationship to others, Hegel suggests we realize and simultaneously construct reason’s ‘absolute determination’; as we develop consciousness of it – and ourselves as creators of it – its substantive form emerges. Hegel’s understanding of the human condition proposes that we each possess a will to be free, a ‘particular will’ (1821), a similar concept to Nietzsche’s ‘will to power’. The ‘free will which wills the free will’ wishes to nullify the contradiction between subjectivity and objectivity in giving substantial form to its aims. These aims, or one’s will – when projected out onto the world – appear as ‘rights’, freedom manifested as Ideas (1821, §27-29). Through clashes of different individuals’ expressions of will or freedom, and in making claims to ‘Rights’ or recognizing and defining behaviours as wrongs, Hegel suggests we compromise or collaborate in developing norms and values. Shared ‘Ideas’ of what is ‘Right’ form a collective understanding or a ‘Geist’ (spirit/mind). ‘Right in itself, the universal will, is essentially determined through the particular will’ (1821, §82), thus in seeking to secure freedom/rights for themselves, agents ‘dialectically’ establish a universal agreement of rights ensuring the freedom of others/all.

As part of a historical and teleological process, these intersubjective agreements emerge subconsciously as superstitions, moral frameworks, religions and/or ideologies: mere semblances or externalized projections, each being embryonic instances of the universal right/will. If conditions are suitable, as this process can and often fails (and thus need not be seen as linear) (1857, p.68) they would take their true substantive form in civil society and ethical life – the final stage in freedoms development – becoming concrete in the institutions of the state, e.g. the legal system or government, which safeguard and enforce the universal will. Through the systematic balancing and inclusivity of individual freedoms, the particular and the universal will find equilibrium in a social environment. Reason reaches its inevitable outcome in this temporal and physical setting, the Geist achieving self-consciousness, realizing ‘why’ the universal will is essential and inevitable. In other partially developed instances, arbitrary laws were forced upon individuals through despotism (1857, p.105) or in religion would appear to come from an external force (1857). A truly self-conscious spirit, ‘world reason’ – and a state and society which represented and embodied it – would be conscious of itself as the creator of its own reality. The state and its institutions would be recognized as the product of this process, and universality – safeguarded and implemented by those reflexive institutions – would be understood as the rational outcome of social existence. Each would be embraced by the Geist as it would be recognized and understood as a product of its own making, serving its own interests.

Hegel claims the family is the principal site of unity, where we begin to recognize the universality of right itself: an attempt to make an enduring community of wills held together with the ‘Idea’ of love: the consciousness of my unity with another (1821, p.162). This partial realization emerges in the formation of a collective will, which (ideally) its members play a part in creating, and thus is both structured, but also structuring (Bourdieu 1994; Giddens 1984). This Geist exists outside them in language (Bandom 2014) and in others, and thus transcends them (forming ‘history’) yet is at the same time ‘embodied’ and perpetuated by them (Foucault 1982,
This process can be observed in the development of shared identities, as discussed above, which through struggles with other groups collaborate, subjugate or compromise, forming further intersubjective understandings (if they do not destroy each other in the process). They may then – potentially – develop into a democratic state; whose institutions would be the mechanisms developed to serve, and the substantive manifestation of, the universal will. Hegel saw these institutions (e.g. legal system) as complete, yet the process of managing the content (laws) as infinite (1821, §216). Recognition of ‘wrongs’ within them would lead to a further development of the universal Right, as long as the content was visible to all and was open to be challenged (1821, §215). Although individually incapable of comprehending all that was intersubjectively recognized as Right, just or virtuous (1821, §211), members need only to be self-conscious of ‘why’ universality was Right to acknowledge the state and its institutions as working in their interests (both Kant’s categorical imperative (1785) and John Rawls’ veil of ignorance (1971) are useful tools to help validate this understanding).

Hegel claimed philosophy was ‘its own time apprehended in thoughts’ (1821, p. 15); he was thus seemingly not a prophet. Arguably though, if one were to follow this process through to its ‘potential’ outcome, its ‘absolute’, it would result in the clashing and unifying of nations and their collective identities, globally; where all forms of difference and particularity were embraced, developing a ‘cosmopolitan Right (Kant 1970): a universally acknowledged human Right to freedom. His ideas are arguably perennial and have been expressed in many different ways and at many different times, as ‘there is nothing new under the sun’ (Eccl. 1:9). Just as mathematics is not the language the universe was written in; rather one which we developed in order to understand it. Hegel provides a philosophical system which can be used to understand how our individual and social development occurs through our interactions with the natural world and our relationships with others. In turn, it is through the practice and phenomenological comprehension of these processes that he suggests we achieve self-consciousness. He, amongst other great thinkers of this period, saw reason as the mechanism through which we could potentially realize the possibility of, and simultaneously develop, a balanced harmonious social world. The civil rights, labour and feminist movements are examples of this developmental process occurring. Each of these groups recognized the wrong in their positions of difference (1977, §178-205) and struggled for freedom from them, something they believed to be achievable and possible. These possibilities were made sense of, and driven by, thinkers and their (often grand) social/political theories, each holding at their core a belief in the possibility of emancipation through struggle.

Many of the elements outlined above did indeed lead to greater efficiency, wealth creation, equality, and an increased standard of living for many. Max Weber argued they also led to a self-imposed ‘iron cage of bureaucracy’ (1958), as sub-autonomous economic and social institutions and the ‘disenchantment’ (1918) of our world – resulting from rationalization – dissolved traditions, practices, and beliefs of previous ages. Antonio Gramsci claimed the material and social conditions of this period produced ‘a new type of man’ (1971), many thinkers suggesting that we lost something fundamentally human as a result. Conservative reactions to the process of disenchantment draw on romantic/nostalgic notions of a more traditional society, where ‘the world remains a great enchanted garden’ (1971, p. 270): a return to the shadows in Plato’s cave (1955), arguably stemming from an envy of Mill’s ‘satisfied man’ (1859). Lest we forget, this enchantment came with the arbitrary burning of its practitioners and the numerous horrors they committed. These dehumanizing processes were also recognized by Adam Smith (1776), Karl
Marx (1844, 1867, 1875), and more recently by John Maynard Keynes (1930) amongst numerous others, yet each of these thinkers saw them as a means to an end, a compromise through which we could set ourselves free from mere subsistence and rise to new heights: again progress and possibilities stemming from struggle.

Developments since the early industrial stage of modernity, many argue, have indeed led to the conditions and the rights of the majority (in the West) improving, partly due to the efforts of the progressive labour, feminist and civil rights movements. Some argue that due to the separation of work and private spheres, rather than gaining self-realization through labour, as Marx had claimed we should, we can now realize ourselves through being consumers (Bauman 2000, Giddens 1991, Beck 1992), labour being a means to provide for leisure time. This would suggest, as Foucault does (1982), that the project of the self is not fixed to some natural form, rather it is relative to one’s environment. Yet, for Hegel, the self-realization of individuals that they present is merely another stage in the development of the self-conscious spirit, here, in individualism, the particular takes precedence over the universal; a topic which we will return to shortly.

So, at the heart of modernity was the enlightenment project. At its core, belief in the possibility of progress towards harmony and equality, often achieved through struggle. Grand solutions were offered to seemingly perennial problems, yet it is now taught in many institutions that the project failed us, that it created more problems than it solved and the solid practices and corresponding ideas of this age created failings which are as numerous and unprecedented as its successes. Although this era led to many of the greatest atrocities in history (colonialism, slavery, Western imperialism, genocide, two world wars, countless other conflicts and unprecedented death and suffering), these events, if viewed objectively, could be seen as elements of the struggle for freedom discussed above. As well as the vast local and global inequalities it has played a part in producing, this age has also contributed towards unprecedented pollution, climate change, the threat of nuclear annihilation and unsustainable population growth, each creating new risks and global threats (Beck 1992). This realization and arguably the addressing of these problems are often used to define the period post-modernity.

The poststructural (meta-)narrative

Many material, economic and cultural factors could be discussed in relation to the transition into this ‘new’ social and physical existence, but here concern is focused on the adoption of a different Idea and our current state of consciousness. In the West, we witnessed the implementation of Friedrich Hayek’s neo-liberal economic processes to counter the ‘crisis of Keynesianism’ in the 1970’s. In the UK, this was seen as ‘necessary’ to free up the markets and the labour force to survive economically (Jessop 2008). The defeat of the unions and the progressive labour movement by the Conservative government in the 1980s was a defining factor in the dissolution of the ‘Idea’ of the left. On a grander scale, we experienced the fall of the Soviet Union, the Cold War being the largest collective struggle between competing ideas of how to obtain freedom. These East/left West/right divisions can again be viewed as the uniting of individuals with collective group interests aimed at obtaining freedoms, culminating in ideological power struggles. Each rationalized their arguments using fundamentally different understandings of the ‘nature’ and potential of humankind: the left seeking to redistribute power and end history creation through equality, the right seeking to manage power in a ‘naturally’ emerging hierarchical order (Collingwood 1944). Communism, and to a large degree the left political movement, were again
seen to have failed us (Foucault 1984). These systems resulted in the creation of greater inequalities or economic collapse, often attributed to the modernist beliefs upon which they were built and the grand narratives which described and prescribed them.

The changes in society and the failings of the project outlined above led to the emergence of new ways of attempting to understand, control and improve it. Nietzsche, although writing during modernity, was perhaps the father of this form of thought. He was resentful of the homogenizing effects of democracy and morality, suggesting that by forcing being onto becoming, we held back great men and stifled progress (1886). Although Foucault rejects the label, in many ways he epitomizes post-modern thought. He claimed the political problem we face ‘is not emancipating truth from every system of power (for truth is already power) but of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time’ (1984, p.74-75). Foucault focuses on the relationship between knowledge and power and how such knowledge has historically been employed to political ends, particularly through the adoption of truths which have come to define the subject. Following the post-modern/structuralist approach, Foucault essentially rejects the existence of ‘grand narratives’ (Lyotard 1984). Much of his work and postmodern thought more generally look to re-evaluate the solid, ‘constraining’ narratives, institutions and identities which formed in the modern period.

Foucault sought to remove domination through the recognition and deconstruction of power discourses and their legitimating truth claims. Denying accusations of scepticism, he argued all ‘truths’ are dangerous; consequently ‘the ethico-political choice we have to make every day is to determine which is the main danger’ (1983, p.231). For him the state and its institutions are ‘regimes of truth’ (1991) used as forms of control, and therefore limit freedoms. He claimed that once an idea becomes structuring – particularly in law – it is essentially constraining. Using his genealogical method, he explored the formation of truth claims (Ideas) and corresponding norms, values and laws surrounding sexuality, mental health and criminality, highlighting the role they played in the constitution of the modern conception of the self (1993, p.202). In tracing how power discourses, backed by science, became accepted as ‘objective’ truths embodied through ‘Governmentality’ and ‘biopower’ (Foucault 1998), he illustrated how states manage and control populations using these behavioural control technologies (2003). It would initially seem then that these thinkers hold opposing views as to the purpose of similar social institutions: Hegel and Kant seeing the state and the embodiment of morality as liberating; Foucault, and certainly Nietzsche, seeing these mechanisms as constraints to individual liberty; yet this involves a misinterpretation of Hegel’s work. Foucault, I will argue, despite rejecting elements of the enlightenment project, is born from it and is at best a constituent of it, suggesting – as Kant believed of his era – that we are still undergoing the process of enlightenment.

Hegel himself refers to claims of objectivity in such instances as the ‘German sickness’ (1821, §216). As discussed above, the content of the legal system is infinite and is thus constantly developing out of practice. Although the state, its institutions, and elements of Hegel’s discourse may well have led to individual constraint, he clearly warned of these dangers. Modern and post-modern thinkers both seek to discover how individuals can cohabit and be free. The criticism of modernity is that its ‘knowledges’ act against freedom; yet placed within Hegel’s project, Foucault’s work can be seen as further refining it. His re-evaluation of ‘truth’ as power, and recognition of its misuse in the construction of the institutions of the state could then be viewed as the realization of wrongs, thus further determining a universal Right. His concern is with the
‘tyranny of overall knowledges’ (Foucault, 2003, p.8). Again this is not a new idea. J. S. Mill criticized solid democratic ideals of his time suggesting they resulted in the ‘tyranny of the majority’, stipulating their ‘dangers’ and the need for space (free scope) for diverse ways of life to be practiced (1859).

What is perhaps new stems from Foucault’s genealogical method. David Owen suggests Foucault has been hugely influential in highlighting the ways that norms can be embedded as beyond our everyday perception, at a far deeper level than traditional critical theorists’ ideological targets. He has pointed out actual instances of self-disciplining which don’t necessarily involve any wilful coercion by others, where consciousness is ‘restricted’, not just false, and where we are unable to recognize the possibilities of other possibilities (Owen 2002). In this light, each of these thinkers can be seen as proponents in the development of an inter-subjective universal Right. Foucault would clearly reject this claim as he rejects both universals and teleological development. His work has led to increased freedoms in the areas of sexuality and mental health, rejecting ideas of ‘what we are’ in favour of ‘what we are not’, and resulting in a greater understanding of what we are nonetheless. Even if the resulting ‘truth’ is a more Eastern conception of the self, not as a thing but rather as an idea in constant flux which we construct (Foucault 1982), that in itself must be seen as a progression on previous conceptions in attempting to make them more ‘Right’. This conception is then another stage in Hegel’s development of self-consciousness, where we come to recognize ourselves as the creators of our own individualistic reality/selves. Foucault himself claimed that it was through ‘suppression’ (in psychoanalysis) that sexuality was finally understood: ‘the ‘universality’ of our knowledge is acquired at the cost of exclusions, bans, denials, rejections, at the cost of a kind of cruelty with regard to reality’ (1971). His re-evaluation of sexuality exposed constraining discourses surrounding it, but he would not look to remove constraints prohibiting individuals from raping one another, again placing emphasis on re-evaluating content rather than the institution itself. Certainly, due to the misuse/misinterpretation of universalism in the past, it is wise to be vigilant to its dangers, but this can be avoided if viewed as an empirical aspiration of an inter-subjective universal right for (and of) every citizen/human, rather than a meta-physical truth. In this sense, it could be argued that Foucault’s and others’ exposure of faults in the content were interpreted as faults of the project itself, which in turn led us to throw the entire bathwater out with the bathwater.

Reason also comes under criticism from Foucault, Nietzsche and the post-modernists. Foucault suggests that it is employed as a political technology which normalizes and excludes in the interests of political aims; it can be, has been and frequently is, but Foucault’s intention is surely to free it from these aims, from power – or at least the misuse (or more dangerous forms) of it. Hegel though would argue reason used in this way would be a ‘civil wrong’, a fraud or a ‘crime’ depending on its intention (1821, §83). For Kant this would be irrational, reason cluttered by subjective impediments, or based upon limited information (1785). In recognizing this, through the methods Foucault presents, as long as there was ‘free-scope’ allowing development of the content, we could work towards establishing ‘truths’ – used to gain or maintain power and legitimate acts – in line with a universal Right.

As we are working in the realm of the social sciences, it is necessary – particularly when discussing Ideas – to embrace intersubjectivity as an ‘ideal type’ (Weber 1958), otherwise we must reject any form of understanding which is seemingly incomplete (1821, §216). For instance, we accept that a child ‘develops’, although one could (and perhaps should) reject that it is
developing towards any perfect end. The claim outlined above is one which similarly suggests that an intersubjective form of knowledge, developed from previous human experience, manifested in constantly reflexive institutions, could and should (if correctly implemented) progress towards increasing the freedoms, and thus improving the lives of its members. Yes, the education or legal systems may teach or enforce wrongs, but as impediments to certain freedoms are realized, if the state structure is performing as it should and is open to challenges, changes would be made to the content of that system to correct this. Hegel suggests that we attain this through the development of what is right, Foucault by re-evaluating what has been determined as such, synthesized, they produce an intersubjective understanding. Yet the latter is only possible from a position where the former has constructed truths which can then be re-evaluated. Traditionally thought to set us free, Foucault’s claim is that due to its relationship with power, truth limits liberty. Once again, this is not an intrinsic quality of ‘truth’ itself – particularly a transparent intersubjective one – rather it stems from our acceptance of semblances yet to be realized as such. In being recognized as ‘the perversity of the particular over the universal’(1821, §40) – as wrongs – it would result in a further development of the universal will. These intersubjective truth-claims are themselves linked to the alternate understandings of human ‘nature’ outlined above and how each seeks to distribute power.

**Power**

Foucault’s understanding of power is a radical shift away from, and rejection of its traditional conceptions as concentrated structures of coercion, sovereign power or something wielded against others. Rather, Foucault claims, ‘power is everywhere’, at every level of society, diffused and embodied in discourse, knowledge and ‘regimes of truth’ (1984). He suggests these claims are constantly being redefined and reordered by scientific discourse and institutions, re-established, embodied and perpetuated through the education system, the media, and economic and political ideologies. In a way he seeks, as Kant does, for us to be masters of our own destinies by daring to know. Foucault, again drawing from Nietzsche, here from his concept of master/slave morality (1887), makes a larger claim: that across history there has only ever been one real power struggle, one war – be it physical or political – between ‘the race that holds the power and is entitled to define the norm, against those who deviate from that norm’ (2003, p.61). Furthermore, he claims – and a grand claim it is – that ‘we are always writing the history of the same war, even when we are writing the history of peace and its institutions’ (1975, p.16). In other words, the whole of history and all narratives and claims to truth are legitimations on opposing sides of a struggle for power. After physical warfare has ceased, as a result of one claim to truth/knowledge physically subjugating another, political peace is just war by other means: political ones. The established political power is then legitimized by the dominant narrative and its corresponding truth-claims and the subjugation, suppression, or de-legitimization of competing ones.

Although this view is similar to the one outlined above (Hegel’s reduction of all struggles to particular wills seeking freedom), there is a fundamental difference. Hegel saw progress towards an end – the argument developed by Marx and drawn upon by the left to justify the redistribution of power –, Foucault ‘prescribes’ only one possible future: a constant struggle for power.

On the one hand, Foucault dismisses the meta-narratives of modernity, yet offers an historical truth about human existence: that humanity is forever at war. In applying his method to
the power discourse he presents us with, the truth claim: struggle is constant, can be said to have
subjugated another: struggle can be progressive. He also falls foul of another of his own
apprehensions, in constituting his own idea of the subject: that they act in their own interests, and
are incapable of conscious development beyond competition. If we accept that Foucault’s whole
project is focused on unearthing constraints through revaluing narratives – due to them
inevitably becoming prescriptive and controlling – his narrative prescribes a constant struggle for
power, by the self-interested, with no hope of an end except through war, ultimately negating the
possibility of a competing narrative by suggesting there are no grand narratives. His is a powerful
contemporary discourse, a legitimating narrative for neo-liberalism, consumerism and
individualism, personified in the recently elected (2017) leader of the free world and justified
using the language of freedom and choice. Applying Foucault’s method further, we could ask
whose interests this power discourse serves: ultimately a very small number of particular wills.
We allow this to happen, because the narrative we draw from suggests that we are all individuals,
we have no shared identity, there is no collective ideal, no shared story, and no possibility of
progress or improvement; our only option is a constant struggle against one another.

This, arguably, is the true fulcrum of what has been an on-going struggle, not a struggle for
power which is constant, but a struggle between these two core principles: the current ‘truth’ that
struggle is constant, versus the subjugated ‘truth’ of struggle towards something greater. Now, if
this is our ‘ethico-political choice’ – and ultimately it is us who get to make that choice through
our everyday actions – the choice is seemingly quite simple. In dismissing the existence and
possibility of progress towards a universal, and blaming the enlightenment project for our failings,
Foucault (and we) have dismissed the true site of this single war between the universal and the
particular, between harmony and endless struggle. Foucault’s war – to use the language of Hegel
– is the war between particular wills, the end or vast reduction of which (through increased
equality) spells harmony for Hegel and comes about through the realization of a universal will.
Foucault’s narrative not only prescribes the means as the ends, it denies the very possibility of an
end. Thus, although he is working to increase freedoms at the site of the local, in denying the
universal, whether intentionally or not, he ignores, denies and outrightly dismisses the meta-
constraints which frame all that he works upon. Therefore, one can strive for sexual liberation or
challenge the mental health service and its practices – both aided by Foucault – but the struggle
for universal freedom is off the menu. In rejecting the possibility of progress and increased
equality through a universal realization and collective development in consciousness, Foucault
must accept – indirectly – the alternate core narrative above: that there is a natural hierarchical
order. To test universalism one need only make it transparent. The narrative of natural hierarchical
order can be challenged by opening it up for discussion. It legitimates war, fuels constant struggle
and serves only the interests of a small number, and thus is dangerous and clearly undesirable
when made visible and/or realized by the Geist. Alternatively, the consequence of Hegel’s
narrative is the intersubjective outcome and rational conclusion of said struggle, which is, by its
very nature, universal. A self-conscious spirit, recognizing this, would embrace it as such.

Foucault is an interesting case because I’m sure he honestly wants to undermine power but
I think with his writings he reinforced it (Chomsky 2003).

Foucault is currently held aloft as a contemporary libertarian. I hope I have been able to share my
– and perhaps Chomsky’s – concerns that he may in fact have impaired freedom. This narrative
not only exists in the halls of great schools of thought and the thinkers therein but can be found in everyday life. The larger project that this piece is drawn from looks to demonstrate empirically our capacity and intrinsic longing to develop a universal will, our frustrations towards the current narrative and our shared feelings of powerlessness and ‘alienation’ (Hegel 1977) from one another which negate spirit progress.

**Conclusion**

The progressive grand narratives of modernity are buried and have been replaced by political apathy and hopelessness. Yes, there is hope in the form of sexual liberation and identity formation through consumption. Although one can be socially mobile within dispositions, this is insignificant in comparison to the once grand hopes of an unimaginable future: a future where the lives of the majority of the world’s population would improve. The economic insecurity felt by the majority is also a product of the narrative of all against all. Those who fear losing what they have are the greatest protagonists of this hegemonic domination. Through clinging on to what we have, we actively deny the very possibility of process through which we could potentially, collectively, change the world, further affirming and strengthening this narrative. The resistance we feel is no different from that felt by reformers in the early days of the feminist or civil rights movements. They felt powerless and hopeless, as many do now, angry and frustrated by their inability and powerlessness to achieve – or even realize – an intuitive Ideal (1857, p.33). Many became apathetic in response to what seemed unachievable, unaware that in doing so they were repressing the very possibility of it. It is not our fault: an endlessly competitive society breeds insecurity, and we naturally adopt a narrative to avoid dissonance (Festinger 1957). This has become ‘our’ story, once told to us, but we are now telling it. We are the masters of ‘our’ collectively constructed reality. If we were only to realize this – given our current level of technological development – we could potentially ‘choose’ a story of true universal liberty and begin to work towards the development of a world unprecedented in the history of human kind.

Those that benefit most from the current narrative and its base principles will of course, consciously or otherwise, look to defend their position, drawing on truths and whatever mechanisms they can to legitimate and defend their particular interests. Yet, as suggested above, we are all guilty of this. A truly world spirit is the manifestation of a collective will, a united group of individuals who can ‘choose’ their collective destiny; a task which is unattainable without a collaborative understanding of how to achieve it. Struggle in a complex social environment is inevitable; but we once struggled collectively towards something. Kant, as Foucault, saw physical revolutions as merely replacing one form of power with another (1970); but a revolution in consciousness could lead to the development of a self-conscious spirit. Together, realizing ourselves as the creators of our reality, we could re-evaluate our current systems and institutions. This is not possible without a narrative which at least contains the possibility of progress, developing ways in which to communicate that discourse (Habermas 1984), and creating space to adapt our systems to aid in this progression. Rather than building walls we must reunite and build bridges, collaborating rather than competing at every level. Academically, we must regain control of the creation of narratives from the corporations which currently weight them in favour of their particular interests (Macintyre 2006), and find ways of bridging the gap between our ivory towers and wider society: the site of true spirit.
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