

G.W.F. HEGEL (1770–1831)

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel was born in Stuttgart in 1770, the son of a provincial official. For a thinker who came to dominate German philosophy for much of the nineteenth century and influenced Western thought for much longer, Hegel was a remarkably late developer. He was diligent but undistinguished both at school and, later, as a theology student. He worked as a private tutor for a number of years before obtaining his first lowly university post at the age of thirty-three. It was not until five years later that he published his first major work, *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), which outlined the evolution of human consciousness. It became the keystone of his whole vast system of thought, which he set out principally in the three volumes of his *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline* (1817): the *Logic*, *The Philosophy of Nature* and *The Philosophy of Mind*. Other works – such as *The Science of Logic* (1812) and *The Philosophy of Right* (1821) – elaborated particular sections in more detail. Further elaborations concerned with the philosophy of history, of aesthetics and of religion appeared after his death and were based on his lecture notes. Hegel was Professor of Philosophy at Berlin from 1818 until his death in 1831 during the great cholera epidemic that swept Europe at that time.

Hegel was a major influence upon European thought generally and had much to say about politics – set out in detail in his *Philosophy of Right*. However, he tends not to be as widely studied as perhaps he should be, especially in the English-speaking world. A major reason is Hegel's bewildering and notorious obscurity. He is the most difficult of all major thinkers to read. Usually people who write this obscurely have little to say, or if they do it does not fit together. But Hegel is a rare exception. His philosophy is vast, original and quite breathtakingly audacious. A brief sketch of the total system is necessary in order to set his political philosophy in context.

We have to begin by imagining the universe totally empty. All that exists is *Geist*, which is Mind or Spirit; not a particular mind or spirit, but mind or spirit in general (it is also God, but a very strange and peculiar notion of God). It is Mind, but is totally without consciousness – more potential mind really. It contains just one idea, the concept of being, although this idea is, so to speak, pregnant with other ideas. Out of the idea of being comes the idea of nothing, which is its opposite and in turn gives rise to a synthesis of the two ideas, the notion of becoming, from which in turn further concepts flow: one and many, substance and accident, cause and effect, time and space, and so on. In this way all the

basic concepts we need to understand the world are deduced, or rather deduce themselves, according to Hegel's own special kind of logic which he calls the dialectic. In the dialectic things turn into their opposites and then into something that brings together the two opposites in a higher synthesis. (This is difficult, but it is meant to reflect the way the mind works, the way it explores ideas and reaches conclusions.)

So, having deduced the possibility of the world, the next thing that happens is that Mind (still entirely unconscious) turns itself into its opposite, which is matter. In modern cosmology we might identify this moment with the famous Big Bang. How Mind can just turn itself into its opposite like this is one of the mysteries of Hegelian metaphysics. On the other hand, it is perhaps no more mysterious than the notion of God creating the world out of nothing – or for that matter the Big Bang itself.

But if the question of *how* Mind does this is deeply mysterious, the question of why it does so is not. It is because Mind (Spirit, *Geist*) has a destiny. All that happens – the creation of matter, the emergence of organised life, the appearance of mankind and the whole of human history – all happens so that Mind can fulfil that destiny, which is for Mind to achieve self-understanding and therefore freedom.

When Mind becomes matter, Mind is, so to speak, buried in matter, and gradually emerges again over time. Organic life represents progressively higher levels of complexity and rational organisation that finally culminate in the emergence of humanity. It is with the emergence of human beings that Mind (or Spirit or God), for the first time, achieves consciousness. But it is only consciousness; it is not yet self-consciousness. Self-consciousness is only achieved over the course of human history.

Hegel sees human history as a kind of growing up of Mind, modelled on the stages of human development – babyhood, infancy, childhood, adolescence and so forth – with a succession of civilisations representing the different stages. From Ancient China, to India, to Ancient Greece, Rome, medieval Europe and on to modern Europe, each of these civilisations represents a new advance of Spirit's self-understanding. Hegel sometimes speaks of it as the World Spirit passing from civilisation to civilisation as each level of maturity is reached. It is portrayed as a painful process of struggle and self-doubt, involving different forms of alienation, which is the feeling of estrangement from the world.

In each civilisation Spirit or Mind objectifies itself, expresses itself in the forms of social life, morality, politics, science, art, religion and, above all, philosophy. All the elements of a given civilisation are united by a common theme or quality or essence: the *zeitgeist*, the spirit of the age. It is through objectifying itself in this way that Mind achieves a new

level of self-understanding. It is just as when we are growing up we do things, form relationships, test ourselves, and in doing so find out who we are and what kind of people we are. Hegel believed that at the end of each civilisation a great philosopher arises who sums up the age in his thought, before the World Spirit passes to the next stage – as, for example, **Aristotle** did for the Greeks.

The entire historical/cosmological process reached its climax and conclusion, according to Hegel, in the Germany of his own day: the contemporary Prussian state was the highest possible achievement of Mind as expressed in social life, Protestantism the highest expression of religion, Romanticism the highest perfection of art – all of which, in their different ways, expressed the full maturity of Spirit. But over and above all was philosophy, the crowning achievement of any age. In this case it was *his* philosophy that summed up his age; much more than that: he saw *his* philosophy as summing up the whole process, including the whole of history, the whole development of the universe, and the whole evolution of Mind since before the universe was formed. It all culminates in Hegel's philosophy, because it is through *his* philosophy that Mind finally comes to understand itself and comes to realise that reality is its own creation, is itself (that is, an objectification of itself). Thus, only in Hegel's philosophy does Mind (or Spirit or God) become fully developed, fully self-conscious and fully free, which is its final destiny, the point and purpose of the whole process.

In Hegel's philosophy the ultimate destiny of Mind/Spirit/God is fulfilled. Mind or God is not some separate being but ourselves, each one of us is part of the whole – the collective mind – and it is only through human thought that Mind or Spirit or God can express or understand itself. In achieving self-understanding God/mankind is no longer alienated; the world is no longer a strange place, but is an objectification of Mind, which is the ultimate reality. Now that the historical process is complete, Mind is finally at home in the world and free, and the evolutionary process of human history is complete.

Hegel sees human history as the history of freedom, and the modern state – exemplified above all by contemporary Prussia – represented the final stage of humanity's development of social and political freedom. The freedoms of early nineteenth-century Prussians were extremely limited by today's standards, so it is important to see just what Hegel meant by political freedom and to grasp his understanding of the modern state.

Hegel's notion of freedom is more than our usual one of people being able, within the law, to do what they like. He also has a positive conception of freedom derived from **Rousseau** and **Kant**, who both saw freedom as essential to human nature, but identified being free with

acting morally. However, Hegel disagrees with Kant's view that human beings must be free to live by whatever moral rules they choose for themselves that are consistent with the freedom of others. Morality, Hegel thought, had to have a content, and this could only come from the community and institutions that have shaped us and made us what we are. The assertion of abstract rights of man, divorced from any social context, was, he believed, responsible for the violence and terror of the French Revolution. In his more social concept of morality he is closer to Rousseau, for whom citizens are free when they conform to the General Will, which represents everyone's desire for the good of the community as a whole. Hegel has a somewhat similar view, but his version – the 'Universal Will' – largely dispenses with any democratic apparatus for expressing or recognising it. On the other hand, he goes beyond the narrow conformity that Rousseau's view implies. He has a much more complex conception of the state and what freedom amounts to.

Characteristically, Hegel also saw the development of the state and of political philosophy in evolutionary terms. He saw the early Greek city as a moral community in which the individual was subsumed. It was the moral community of the family writ large. That moral community began to be weakened with the rise of Socratic philosophy and the critical attitude that went with it. **Plato** recommended an ideal state that all should strive for, but Hegel did not think that the invention of such states, which we should then be under some moral obligation to create, was an appropriate task for philosophers. Their proper function was to penetrate and reveal the inner nature of things. Hegel argued that the significance of Plato was that he revealed the tight moral unity of the city-state that subordinated the individual. As Hegel believed was characteristically the fate of philosophers, Plato revealed the nature of a way of life that was in fact passing away.

The rise of individualism, expressed in various aspects of Roman civilisation (the rule of law), and the rise of Christianity, expressing the individual conscience, were the opposite of the close moral unity of the Greek *polis*. This growth of individualism eventually culminated in the development of civil society and the social and economic individualism represented by **Locke**, Adam Smith and Kant. The rise of commercial societies, such as Britain and Holland in the seventeenth century, saw the state conceived in terms of individuals bound together by contract: that is, in terms of civil society.

As always with Hegel, the final phase of any development sums up and holds together all previous phases in a synthesis. In particular he saw in the national state of his own day a reconciliation of the concept of the state as a moral community that prevailed in the Ancient world, with

more recent concepts of the state that supported freedom and individualism. It is a synthesis of the unselfconscious moral unity of the Greek *polis* and the freedom of civil society in a higher self-conscious unity of the state where people willingly and freely embrace the obligations of citizenship and duty to the nation in both war and peace. In the willing, self-conscious acceptance of these obligations, as in the obligations of the family, freedom lies. In this way Hegel claimed to combine the negative freedom of civil society with the positive freedom of living according to the ethical and political system of which we approve, because it is rational and is part of the national community with which we identify and whose moral purposes we see as our own.

Hegel's conception of the fully developed state was, therefore, a complex dialectical synthesis of the different levels of social life: of family, civil society and the state itself. It is through participating in these different levels that the individual finds self-expression and fulfilment. The most basic level is the family in which the individual shares a common life based upon unselfish love and duty, in which one cares for others as much as oneself, and does so freely. Beyond the family we are in a quite different sphere based on quite different principles. This is civil society. Civil society is the sphere of self-assertion and the pursuit of self-interest, of competition and ambition, and of the cultivation of the self. It is the sphere of individualism, and where property is important as an extension and expression of the self.

There is an overall unity in civil society, although it is the largely unselfconscious unity of the market, which makes everyone interdependent. However, there are some conscious though partial unities. As well as individuals, civil society is inhabited by many organisations, businesses, professional bodies and corporations of various kinds that also have interests that need to be represented. These should be the basis of representation in a parliament based on function, with an upper house representing the agricultural interest and a lower house the commercial; the latter should supervise the nations' finances and be elected on a limited franchise. Finally, civil society is the sphere of personal freedom and rights that Locke and Kant emphasised. But where they were mistaken, Hegel insists, was in identifying civil society with the state. They saw the representing, reconciling and regulation of the conflicts of civil society and the maintenance of freedom as the particular sphere of the state. This is indeed where the state interacts with civil society, but the state for Hegel has a much higher and more important function.

Hegel was the first theorist to insist upon a clear distinction between civil society and the state. He saw the state as embodying the ethical will of the whole people (in fact a variation of Rousseau's General Will).

He argued that unless it did represent the common good in this way, the state could make no claim upon a society of purely self-interested individuals. It is because it embodies the moral will of the community that the state can demand the support of the people in peace and in war beyond the claims of mere utility.

The moral will of the community expresses itself through the executive. Parliament is the arena in which all the competing claims and conflicts of civil society are expressed, and it is the function of the executive to harmonise these and decide what is best for all. The principal elements of the executive are, first of all, the monarch and his advisers and ministers. The monarchy symbolises the single will of the community, but the person of the king has limited real power as a constitutional monarch. Second, the professional civil service, or 'universal class', works for the community as a whole. This includes a degree of intervention in the market to provide a moderate amount of social welfare, including poverty relief and education to prevent the development of an underclass that is detached from society in general (though not to the extent of undermining the self-sufficiency and self-respect that underlies civil society). In sum, a society in which the moral will of the community, embodied in the executive, accords with our own.

The state, therefore, may be said to represent a synthesis of the moral life of the family and the freedom of civil society; without destroying either, the state expresses both at the higher level. The state guarantees the individual's freedom, while at the same time the individual owes it a moral duty. As in Rousseau, conforming one's will to the General Will means obeying one's own higher self. It is the state that protects the freedoms of civil society and provides the framework within which individuals can develop into full moral beings.

Family relations are instinctual, while the autonomy and contractual relations of civil society are conscious, although morally neutral. They are both means by which the individual achieves self-realisation. It is through the state that the final stage of that self-realisation is achieved in which the individual consciously identifies himself with a higher purpose and is thereby fully developed and fully free. Hegel saw in the state a social integration and unity at a higher level, one that embraced the differentiation and variety of modern society in a way that was not possible in the more homogeneous Greek city-state or in Rousseau's somewhat unrealistic ideal.

Hegel saw his philosophy as completing the process by reconciling the individual to the state and to history by demonstrating their underlying rationality. The modern state, Hegel insisted, was rational, as was the process of its creation through history. Part of this development was

conflict between states, which, especially in the extreme form of war, was a necessary part of the state establishing its identity and unity. Beyond this Hegel foresaw no further development, such as the system of universal peace envisaged by Kant. In a sense history just goes on, while in another sense it is over. Hegel's picture of reality is highly dynamic, yet all the restless movement apparently comes to a dead stop with Hegel's philosophy. Furthermore, philosophers are supposed to sum up a world that is passing, whereas Hegel appears to be presenting a permanent truth.

The end of history is thus problematic in Hegel's own terms. There is, however, much else that is open to criticism from other points of view. The dialectic is now difficult to take seriously. It is not really a kind of logic, as Hegel claims, but a metaphysics that makes sweeping and rather vague generalisations about ultimate reality – and about both physical nature and human history – that can never be tested.

More controversially, Hegel is blamed by some (most notably Karl **Popper** in *The Open Society and its Enemies*) for contributing to state worship and the development of totalitarianism. Certainly extreme German nationalists, such as von Treitschke, and some of the theorists of Italian fascism were influenced by Hegel; nonetheless, the charge is generally unfair. Hegel offers a synthesis of positive and negative freedom involving both service to the nation and the freedoms, diversity and pluralism of civil society. Constitutional monarchy is advocated, while the populist authoritarianism of the Jacobin is firmly rejected.

Hegel is a controversial figure, though undeniably a major influence on modern thought. In addition to his influence on the right of the political spectrum, he has been a major influence upon the left. This is most obviously true of **Marx** and later Marxists, such as the Frankfurt School (see **Herbert Marcuse and the Frankfurt School**), but it is also true of anarchists, such as Proudhon, and ecologists, such as Murray Bookchin. Hegel was also a significant influence on liberalism through T.H. **Green** and others. The most recent manifestation of Hegel's influence on political thought comes in the communitarian movement with writers such as Alasdair MacIntyre and Charles Taylor.

Further reading

Primary sources

Hegel's Political Writings, ed. Z.A. Pelczynski (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964).

Elements of the Philosophy of Right, ed. A.B. Wood and H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

HEGEL AND THE HEGELIAN CONTEXT OF MARXISM

GEORG WILHELM FRIEDRICH HEGEL

Hegel led a very unexciting life for a thinker who was such an inspiration to his contemporaries and successors. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century social and political thought are unthinkable without Hegel, yet Hegel's own life (1770–1831) did not come into much contact with the great events he lived through and commented on. The one exception is the famous occasion when Hegel saw Napoleon—the world soul on horseback—at Jena in 1806. Prussia's defeat at the battle of Jena established French hegemony in Germany. That hegemony only lasted a few years. Nevertheless, it was Jena and its aftermath that made Germany one of the key players in world history in Hegel's sense.

Nearly all of Hegel's life was spent as a teacher and a scholar. He was brought up a Protestant in the relatively liberal south German atmosphere of the Duchy of Wurttemberg, and he was a student at Tübingen (1788–93) when the Bastille fell. From then on, Hegel's own life can be seen as a paradigm of the responses and reactions to the French Revolution of liberals all over Europe: the initial enthusiasm for Reason and Liberty; the doubts beginning with the establishment of the French republic and then quickening with the execution of the king and queen; the hostility to the wars of conquest, and then the full nationalist reaction when Napoleon conquered nearly the whole of Europe.

While all this was going on, Hegel was quietly climbing the academic ladder. He spent some years as a tutor, then was appointed at the University of Jena (1801) where he completed *The Phenomenology of Mind* (1807), thus setting the agenda for the study of the history of culture for a very long time to come. After that he spent eight years as a rector of a *Gymnasium* (1808–16) at Nuremberg; he got married and finished his great work on logic. There followed a chair of philosophy at Heidelberg and later (1818–31) at Berlin. We are told that as a lecturer he mumbled, which is odd, considering that some of his works were put together posthumously from lecture notes taken by high-minded students who were members of the Prussian officer corps. His great work, *The Philosophy of Right*, appeared in 1821.

Hegel's Christianity was always eccentric, and it is hard to pin down. Some

argue that Hegel's theology (in so far as he had one) is the way into his politics, while others argue the reverse. Hegel was taken in his own day (and especially by the radical Left Hegelians) to be a supporter of Hohenzollern rule in Prussia, and it is true that he was translated to his chair in Berlin University to combat dangerously liberal tendencies among its teachers and students. Hegel, however, is nothing if not a constitutionalist, and Prussia had not even become a constitutional monarchy when Hegel died in 1831.

Hegel has the reputation of being a 'difficult' thinker in the English-speaking world, and it is easy to see why. Hegel speaks the language of German Idealist philosophy, which is at the same time technical and slippery in translation. Nobody denies the influence of Hegelianism on the development of Marxism, though there are disputes about the extent to which Hegelianism can still be detected in Marxism as a finished product. This question of how influential Hegel was on Marx has had the unfortunate tendency, happily now beginning to be reversed, of making people think that Hegel is only interesting to the extent that he influenced Marxism. Hegel's political theory, it is sometimes said, was seen and seen through by Marx in his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, and this in its turn has led to the view that Hegel on his own isn't up to much. Hegel is in fact a much tougher thinker than this view would have us suppose. What follows in the next section is an overview of Hegel's political thought as a whole which bears in mind that Hegel leads to Marx, but which still tries to give Hegel his due as a thinker in his own right.

HEGEL'S VIEW OF HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS

As a philosopher, Hegel is interested in how the thinking mind actually views the world. Philosophy is about mind, what Hegel calls 'the thinking view of things', and so he is interested in the history of human consciousness. The mind is there for understanding the world outside the self, while that self is still part of the world which the mind seeks to understand. Hegel thinks the mind really does *try* to grasp the world outside the self. Mind is active. It does not wait for sense impressions queuing up at the fingers' ends or at the eyeball to ask politely for admission to the mind. The mind reaches out to make the world coherent. And Hegel means the world as a Whole. Hegel is an Idealist; he thinks that an Idea of the world presents itself to mind, or is created by mind, *as a Whole*. Thinking minds are full of impressions from the outside, and the more a mind is a thinking mind the more it will go after those impressions, but mind's real job is to organise these impressions into a coherent whole. In a sense, we have a view of the whole *before* we have a view of the parts of the world because the mind which reaches out to understand the world is a whole mind already.

Hegel thinks it is a mistake to suppose that we build up a view of the world bit by bit, as if we were mapping a landscape. We may pretend we do that, but we do not. As a

theorist of knowledge, Hegel is poles apart from the English empiricist tradition following Locke which holds that we build up a picture of the world gradually as the senses provide more and more sense experience, so that the more experienced adult, 'having seen more of the world', has a fuller picture of the world 'out there' than is possible for the relatively inexperienced child. Children can't know the world as adults know it, and advanced civilisations know the world better than primitive peoples. The triumph of the Lockian scheme is science, which patiently builds up knowledge of the world and organises it into a body of tested and reliable theory. This science contains all the sciences as we know them: natural science, social science, the science of history and political and economic science. Hegel does not think that we look at the world like that. He thinks that the child has a view of the world as a complete view (children 'live in a world of their own'), and so does the adult. The moderns have a view of the world as a whole, and so did the ancients. These views of the world are internalised. There is no 'out there', with an existence independent of the observer, which these internalised views of the whole world can be compared to and judged true or false. Views of the world are simply different. The World as it is experienced by human consciousness is the picture of the world a man carries about with him in his own head. Cultures differ because members of a culture carry round in their minds a view of the world which is different from the view carried round by members of a different culture.

It follows that the World is Mind, if all we have is a self-made (or a culture-made) view of what goes on 'out there'. The 'out there' becomes a metaphor for the 'in there' which is Mind. It follows, therefore, that all understanding, philosophically conceived, is Self-Understanding. When we attempt to understand anything about the world, what we are in fact trying to do is to fit new experience into a view of the whole which already exists in our minds. Of course, this must mean that our minds change, and Hegel knows that the child's mind is not the adult's mind, nor is the mind of the ancient world the same mind as the mind of contemporary man. Mind develops, but does not develop in the way that, for example, a map of the sea-bed is developed: one moment we know what *this* bit is like, but not *that* bit. The development of mind is not 'taking away from ignorance', or shining a light where before there was darkness. Of course, taking away from ignorance happens, otherwise positive science would be impossible, but this Hegel thinks is not the same as a change of Mind. Mind does in fact change gradually (and Hegel will later give a set of cogent reasons why changes of Mind should never be hurried), and these changes are cumulative, but Mind changes as a landscape changes. A landscape changes gradually, so that we are hardly aware of each little change. We know it is altering, but at each moment of change the landscape is still a whole and therefore still recognisably itself. Cumulative change over a period ultimately becomes qualitative change, the moment at which we say: but it's *all* changed. Landscapes can even change overnight, but that is only a metaphor. What we really mean is that one last change has completed a transformation which has in fact been going on for some time. For us, a Whole can quite suddenly become a different Whole. Hegel thinks that a culture can change like that, or a constitution, or a political or social system. Even the world of learning can change overnight in this sense. Some books can change the intellectual landscape of a subject. They don't just 'add to the subject', as most books do—another

electoral study, another commentary on Hobbes—but change the whole shape of an area of enquiry. When that happens, we know that we are confronted with a different Whole.

These Wholes, views of the world, Hegel calls ‘real’. They are Ideas of the world, and that is why we call Hegel, and those who think like him, Idealists. Ideas of the world are real because they are the only things which we can be sure we really have. The only thing we can be really certain about is that we carry a picture of the world as a whole inside our own heads.

The question then arises: What do we do with these ideas of the world when we know we’ve got them? The answer is that ordinary men do not do very much with their ideas of the world (with the one possible exception of their religious observances). Hegel would say that the proper work for thinking men is trying to understand the world, which, as we have seen, means understanding what they carry around inside their own heads. What, then, does understanding these ideas of the world mean? We already know what it cannot mean. It cannot mean comparing a view of the world to the world outside the self, because no world exists beyond our idea of it. Ideas of the world are an internalisation of the ‘out there’; they are not a photograph, or an approximation, and these ideas are literally all we’ve got, or all we can be sure we’ve got. What we can do with these ideas depends on what we *want* to do with them. Hegelian men are not passive creatures. Their minds reach out to grasp the world, and they have a will, and this will is a will to understand what it is to have a view of the world, and a will to understand particular views of the world, including one’s own.

According to Hegel, one of the things men want is to feel at home in the world, to be easy with their view of it. Men feel uneasy when they do not feel at home in the world of which the self is a part. This feeling of not being at one with the world Hegel calls ‘alienation’ (*Entfremdung*). A feeling of being at one with the world is what Hegel thinks characterised the ancient world at its best, especially the world of the ancient Greeks. The best of the ancient Greeks were whole men. They lived without fear (except the fear of death). They embraced the world, and so were not narrow. Of course, that did not mean that they were always happy. Odysseus was a man of sorrows, but the world of Odysseus contained every requisite for human fulfilment. It would never have occurred to the ancients, at least before they invented philosophy, to want another world. They knew about other worlds, Rome in the West and Persia in the East, for instance, but they knew that ‘the good life’ could only be lived in a properly constituted *polis*. If the world of the Greeks was good enough for the gods to share, then it was good enough for men.

The ancient world was a whole world, and while that world was whole there was not any real point in thinking self-consciously about it. It was only when the wholeness of their world was challenged by the new experience forced upon it by Alexander’s conquests in the East that philosophers like Plato and Aristotle began to ponder their own world’s real meaning. Philosophy, the thinking view of things, is always a bad sign for a world, because it signals that a world has had its day. The weakening of Hellas caused by the Peloponnesian War in the days before Plato, and the threat that the *polis* would become a sideshow to Alexander’s new-fangled multi-racial world empire, *caused* philosophy. The very existence of philosophy, and later of philosophical change, is always a sign that things in the world are changing, and philosophy, coming *after* change

occurs in the human landscape, cannot put life back into a dying world. As Hegel famously says in the Preface to *The Philosophy of Right* (1821):

Philosophy comes too late to teach the world what it should be. When it paints its grey on grey, a form of life has already grown old, and in grey on grey it can never be made young again. The owl of Minerva takes its last flight when the shades of twilight have already fallen.

HEGEL ON THE FUNCTION OF PHILOSOPHY

If philosophy cannot breathe life into a dying world by making recipes for the future, then what is philosophy to *do*? Hegel answers the question of what philosophy can do through a critical commentary on what philosophy has tried to do in the past and failed to do. The process of the dissolution of the ancient world set men on the path of thought. As Nietzsche was later to say, Socrates taught men to question their desires. Men began a kind of uneasy introspection, the beginnings of that 'unhappy consciousness' which was to figure so prominently in Stoicism and later in Christianity. When they began to question themselves, men began to think that they had possibilities within themselves which living in the world could not satisfy even in principle. Alienation is not human unhappiness, though unhappiness of a particular kind can be a sign that alienation is happening. The alienating moment comes when men become aware that even if they could have everything the world has to offer, they would still not be satisfied. In the ancient world, not everybody had been satisfied, and one class, the slaves, had served as the means which made the good life possible for free citizens, but at least the possibility of human fulfilment was *there*. To fail to live the good life was to have been unlucky, or to have missed an opportunity, or to have accepted the second best, or to have been lazy. We only have to read a few pages of Aristotle to realise how strenuous the good life was. The ancient claim to virtue was literally to be good at being good. To keep on being fit for goodness required practice. Without the constant exercise of it, goodness can become rusty, but in the ancient world the possibility of living the good life was at least there.

What is a man to do in the world of the unhappy consciousness? In it, there is no life which is whole and good. Nothing which a man does will wholly satisfy him. There are always the consolations of religion, but the religion of an alienated world will always be an other-worldly religion. Man comes to separate his God from the world. From now on there is to be no happy sharing of the good things of life by both gods and men. God confronts a wicked world. He becomes a judging God, the terrible Jehovah of the Old Testament, a God outside life and who disapproves of it. (A perfect image of this is certain forms of devil-worship in the Middle Ages: the Creation has become so corrupted that the only way God can get back into his own is in the guise of the devil. Therefore you worship the devil on the chance he might be God himself.)

How, then, does philosophy cope with this alienated world? In the past thought has typically coped with an alienated world by utopian dreaming. Men have looked at the world and have used their thoughts to judge it: *this* is what the world is like, *that* is what

it ought to be like. Philosophy has been doing something like that since Plato's day, confronting a hostile world and remaking it in the image of its own thoughts. Philosophers have been trying to teach the world what it should be. Hegel believes there is a certain truth in utopianism, but that it is not the truth which the dreamers suppose. The fact that philosophers have felt constrained to paint pretty pictures of an ideal world is proof that consciousness is dissatisfied with its own world. Utopianism's error is to mistake cause for effect. Alienation is philosophy's cause, but philosophy of the utopian kind cannot even begin to bring about the end of alienation. The critical philosopher looks at his own contemporary world and sighs for a better. Rousseau did this before the French Revolution, but what Rousseau failed to understand was that his sighs for a better world were a sign that his own world was in fact beginning to crumble. The very act of trying to understand a world, and then questioning it, is only possible when a world is complete, and to say that something is complete is to say that it is over: a life is only complete at the moment of death. This accounts for the form which utopias nearly always take: they are their authors' own worlds turned upside down. Thomas More's Utopians make their piss-pots out of gold, and the most gaudily dressed among them are the servants while the big-wigs are plainly dressed. A utopian dream is its own complete world turned on its head, but to be able to see his own world turned on its head, the creator of a utopia has to be in a position to see his own contemporary world as complete, and whole, and therefore about to pass away. Utopian dreams are dreams about the improvement of worlds at those worlds' last possible moments. Philosophy in this sense comes after; it is an effect and not a cause.

As a cause, philosophy is usually a disaster. Utopian philosophy tries to breathe life into a dying world. The French Revolution in its radical phase tried to bring a social order back to life by turning it on its head, and to do that the Jacobins had to use the Terror. Terror is the only weapon available to revolutionaries because only fear can lead men to think the right way up after they have been socialised by the world to think the wrong way up. It must never be forgotten that for Hegel the world is not just an *out there* in which an *I* operates. The world is already *my* world. I act in the world as it appears to me, and I literally cannot know how to act in a world which is not mine. (And that is another reason why utopias are worlds turned upside down: utopian worlds are meant to be recognisable in a topsy-turvy way.) Revolutionaries notoriously want to 'change the world', which clearly means changing what goes on inside my head. This cannot be done by reasoning, because what goes on inside my head *is* reason. My mind has been spending its life constructing the view of the world which I happen to have. Without reason, the only weapon is the Terror. All revolutions, Hegel seems to be saying, are excessive, and necessarily excessive. Utopian philosophy is not, however, wasted. It signals change, though it misunderstands its own function when it tries to direct change.

Not all philosophy is of this utopian, world-changing type. Some philosophy is frankly reactionary, and a reactionary philosophy was especially attractive after the excesses of the French Revolution. Utopian philosophy is at least rational, though it finally misunderstands the function of reason as philosophy. Utopian philosophy is philosophy making a mistake. Utopians condemn the world because it is not like the new world they have constructed in their own heads, therefore the world is not rational enough.

Reactionaries, those German romantics for instance who longed for a return to the world before yesterday when nobody had heard of Rousseau or of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, affirm and glory in the world because it *is* irrational. The reactionary accepts the world as it is, and the more senseless the world appears to be the more he loves it. Ancient customs, institutions developed by accident, chance historical survivals, throw-backs and missing links are cherished because they are ancient, are accidental, and have survived. That is what lends them enchantment. Any unbiased observer can see that what is being admired here are the surviving fragments of a vanished world. A world of accidental survivals cannot be a real world because it can no longer be made whole. The fragments have no coherence, and to try to construct a whole world out of them is not so much mistaken as ridiculous. What makes it irrational is not a mistake about the function of thinking so much as a wilful failure to understand that a world has passed away. To pretend that the French Revolution and Napoleon have not happened is an irrational closing of the mind to the world which presents itself to it.

So if philosophy is not to be utopian, and not to be reactionary, what can it do? What is the mind's job? Philosophy is the thinking view of things, so what is philosophy to think *about*? Hegel's answer is to say that the mind's job is to understand itself and the forms which it has taken in the past. The mind's job is to plot and understand the process of its own development from where it began to where it is now. This is a vast programme, because it amounts to no less than a whole history of philosophy.

THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

Hegel thinks about history on the grand scale. The history of philosophy is the account of the great world-historical changes of mind. It is the philosopher's special task, and so it is worth asking how the philosopher's mind differs from the minds of ordinary men. Hegel has a tendency to speak of all minds as if they were the same, but this cannot really be true. The World-as-Mind which presents itself to the mind of the philosopher and to the mind of the ordinary man is the same world, so what can the difference be between the mind of the philosopher of history and the mind of an ordinary man? It is easy to see what the difference is not. It is not that the philosopher of history knows more about the world and its past than others; that might be the difference between a learned man and an ignoramus, but it is not the difference Hegel is trying to pin down. Still less is it a difference in knowledge about how the natural processes in the world work, because that is what distinguishes the man of science from the layman. Rather, what distinguishes the philosopher from others is that the Philosopher has an *Idea* of the interconnectedness of things over long passages of time.

But how can the philosopher be sure that he has such an Idea when there are things about the world which the historian or the scientist knows that he does not? Plainly, there must be a criterion of importance which tells the philosopher what he must know and what he can safely leave to one side. Hegel thinks that the study of history, philosophically conceived, involves the development of a special skill which enables the

philosopher of history to distinguish between what he calls 'Horatian gold' and 'mere externality'. 'Mere externality' is the dross of history, things which just happen or happen by chance. 'Horatian gold' is buried in the dross, and it is the philosopher's special job to sift through the dross, discard it, and what is left is the gold he had been looking for all along.

What could this high-sounding project entail and how could it be carried out? Hegel in fact thinks that the march of history itself makes the job easier because history does its own sifting of the dross. How, then, does the dross get washed away so that only the real stuff of history is left? Hegel thinks that the stuff of history is plain for the philosopher of history to see when an epoch has passed away. What a particular historical epoch has it in it to be only becomes apparent when everything about that epoch except its spirit has disappeared, in the same way that you can only see the bones of something after the external flesh has perished. What survives from one historical epoch into another is what was real about it. What was true about one epoch in history is most easily seen and identified when it appears later in an epoch which is not its own. For Hegel, what survives from one epoch to the next never dies, but it stands out most clearly in different surroundings, a plant if you like in a different garden, in different soil, surrounded by different plants, but still recognisably itself, even though effectively it has become something different in order to be recognisably itself in the same way that a plant transferred from one soil to another becomes in some senses a different plant.

These survivals from one epoch to the next are what give history its continuity and coherence, what keeps history moving. What, then, distinguishes one historical period from the next? As an Idealist philosopher Hegel has to say an Idea, and that Idea is always an idea of freedom. What constitutes a world-historical era is the prevailing idea of freedom which was possible in it, but not an idea of freedom narrowly conceived. Hegel thinks an epoch's idea of freedom informs and is informed by everything else of importance in that epoch, so for the idea of freedom we should read in the modern idiom a particular culture, including but not confined to a political culture. For Hegel, there are only really three great world-historical epochs: the world of the ancient despotisms; the world of the classical city-states, and the modern period which is Christian Europe leading to what he will call Constitutional Monarchy. In the ancient despotism, say Persia, only the despot was free, and Hegel thinks that his own time is about ripe for Constitutional Monarchy (which he sometimes refers to as 'Germanic') in which all men can be free. Epochs change when they have developed to their full potential, when they have become what they have it in them to be within their own limitations. Of course, men living in their own time, and even the philosophers among them, cannot see their own limitations, so each epoch presents a view of itself to itself as a finished and eternal truth. Aristotle's *Politics*, for instance, is the most complete account we have of what it was like to live in an ancient *polis* because it comes near the end. Perhaps Aristotle even knew this himself (though the city-state lasted as a caricature of itself for a lot longer), but he cannot know or acknowledge anything else. As Hegel says, you might as well ask a man to jump over the Colossus of Rhodes as ask him to jump over his own time.

The history of philosophy becomes the philosophy of history because a distinct pattern makes itself apparent in the process of historical change itself. History does not stand

still, nor does it move at random. Hegel thinks that these great world-historical changes of mind are leading somewhere, and that something is guiding them. In the *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* Hegel says that the Sovereign of history is Reason. He appears to be saying that reason is both the motor-force of history and the means by which history is to be understood. How can this be?

HISTORY AND DIALECTIC

The history which reason investigates is not ordinary history, which concerns itself with everything which happened in the past, but that special kind of history which deals with how one world-historical epoch shades into another. If Reason is to be the Sovereign of history that must mean that it is Reason which causes the great historical changes, and if Reason is to be both the force for change in history and the means by which history is understood, then it must be the case that history and the investigating mind of the philosopher work in the same way. Hegel calls the motor-force of history, and the way the philosophical mind works, dialectic. History's rules, and mind's rules are dialectical rules. The rules of historical change and the rules of intellectual method are the same. Dialectic operates in individual minds and in what minds set out to investigate. This may be massively tautologous, another way of saying what Hegel already thinks, that the world *is* Mind: two things which act in the same way must be the same thing, or two different ways of looking at the same thing. Dialectically operating minds can be perfectly attuned to the understanding of historical dialectic.

Everything we said above about Plato's dialectic applies to Hegel's idea of dialectic, and we would do well to remind ourselves just how complex the idea of dialectic is when it applies to what goes on in a single, finite mind, let alone when it is applied to the whole process of world history from the beginning. Dialectic in the investigation of something has the following six characteristics:

- 1 Dialectical investigation proceeds by stages, and at each stage of the argument a position is advanced which is presented as a finished truth.
- 2 Nothing is ever wholly true or wholly false. Nothing is wasted because a position needs its contradiction to move on to a higher stage of synthesis.
- 3 Because nothing is ever wasted, because everything is incorporated into the higher stages of argument, it follows that the nearer to truth dialectical argument gets, the more comprehensive the truth being offered becomes.
- 4 Truth comes from the process of argument itself and is not introduced from the outside.
- 5 Because truth comes out of the process of argument, it is not invented but discovered, not created but grasped.
- 6 There are no short-cuts to truth in dialectical argument, and for dialectical argument to work the participants have to recognise that each stage is necessary. Dialectical argument will not be hurried.

Hegel thinks that the historical dialectic works like that.

- 1 An idea of freedom arises in a society which is its prevailing idea of freedom until it is contradicted by a new idea of freedom. This new idea of freedom becomes a blend, a synthesis, of old and new ideas, and it too has its day until it in its turn is challenged and a new idea of freedom blending old and new emerges to take the world into another historical epoch. The process continues, Hegel thinks, until Absolute Freedom is reached, corresponding to truth in ordinary dialectical argument. Like truth, Absolute Freedom both is internally consistent and exists without contradiction—no new idea of freedom emerges to challenge it.
- 2 Any idea of freedom incorporates all past ideas of freedom. We have no reason, therefore, for being scornful of the past, or even particularly superior, and certainly not smug. If we patronise the past, the future is likely to do the same thing to us.
- 3 But there is progress, because through dialectic freedom becomes both more comprehensive and more comprehensible, which means that more and more people are capable of understanding freedom and therefore of being free.
- 4 Freedom is at first dimly perceived, while at some time in the future it will have emerged clear, ready for all to see. But the process cannot be hurried. Freedom comes out of the historical process, so every stage in its development is necessary. Freedom, therefore, is an affirmation of the historical process, not a denial. Therefore, all revolutionary attempts, like the French Revolution, to abolish the past in favour of a completely new future are doomed.
- 5 Freedom comes out of the historical process, therefore it follows that it was really there the whole time. Rousseau, therefore, cannot be true; freedom is not invented out of someone's head.
- 6 There can be no short-cuts, so attempts to storm heaven are a waste of blood. A revolution is an attempt to see too far ahead, guesswork, and the French revolutionaries got it very badly wrong. Instead of Reason, Liberty and the Rights of Man, they got the Terror and Napoleonic despotism.

FREEDOM DEVELOPING TO ABSOLUTE FREEDOM

Hegel's theory of history is progressive: more and more people are coming to understand what freedom is and more and more people are actually coming to enjoy freedom as the form of the state changes. But Hegel still has to deal with the sceptic who might say: It is one thing to say that the world is freer today than it was yesterday, but how can we be sure that the world is going to be freer tomorrow than it is today? In particular, the sceptic might be tempted to ask *where to look* to find out whether there is this general improvement in mankind's lot. And in a philosophy of history like Hegel's there is a special problem. Hegel seems to be saying that we can never know the present, let alone the future, in the way we can know the past. We may be able to read the signs of the future in the present, but that is an enterprise fraught with the difficulties associated with utopianism, which Hegel criticises on precisely the grounds that utopianism always and necessarily reads the future wrongly. And suppose, further, that by commonsensical standards the present seems to be worse than the past, so what of the future? And how

does this affect ordinary men? Philosophers of history may be temperamentally inclined to take the very long view, but what about the rest of us? Hegel hedges. We may take consolation in religion: the march of freedom is also the march of God.

Hegel calls God Reason in Process. By this he means that God is not outside the world judging the world. God is not an Old Testament god, turning up from time to time to judge a world of which he disapproves. In the words of the hymn, 'God is working his purpose out as year succeeds to year.' God is in the world and is the essence of the process by which the world progresses, but it is not just by living in God's world that we receive the grace of His approval. God puts us to the test from time to time (one of the things we pray for is that God will not put us to the test, lead us into temptation, too often). One of the ways God tests us is that from time to time He tests our faith in His ultimate purpose, and He does this by making a generally progressive world temporarily disagreeable to see if we can keep our faith in his Providence. That is what Hegel means by the famous phrase 'the Cunning of Reason': God tests us in ways at which we can only guess. In part, the idea of the Cunning of Reason comes from the older traditions of Jewish and Christian messianism. What we suffer now has a purpose in an end which we can now only dimly perceive. As the good book tells us, there will come a day when all will be made plain. The suffering of the Children of Israel will make sense on the day on which they enter the promised land; the suffering of Christians will make sense at the moment when they enter heaven. Hegel differs from these messianic visions because his is not a 'big bang' theory. Deliverance does not happen all at once; there is no 'moment' of entry into the promised land or heaven, no miraculous moment of revelation. God does not do it all at once, either in His own person at the Second Coming, or in its secular equivalent, the French Revolution. Hegel's God is eminently Protestant. He does His work thoroughly and steadily as the ages unfold.

FREEDOM AS MEMBERSHIP OF RATIONAL STATE

God may be testing the faith by temporarily obscuring some future good, but where do we look for that future good? Hegel's answer is unequivocal: the locus of man's present and future freedom is the state. It is here that Hegel's political thought can be tricky for those brought up in the Anglo-Saxon tradition to believe that the state is the locus of constraint and that society is the locus of freedom. In the Lockian tradition, men are members of society and of the state. As members of society men are spontaneously and naturally free to pursue their self-chosen ends, and as members of the state men are obliged to obey those laws which exist so that citizens do not pursue their ends by such illegal means as theft, assault or murder. Society is the locus of freedom and the state is the locus of constraint, and liberalism is a set of arguments about just how much constraint is necessary for men to pursue their self-chosen ends without causing actual harm to others. Freedom and law are two jealous antagonists, as Bentham said, and it is no good pretending otherwise. For the utilitarians, as for Locke, all the state may do is constrain, and liberals will watch the state as a constraining mechanism every inch of the way.

Hegel does not look at the state like that. Though he knows the liberal position and even has some sympathy with it, Hegel is one of the first thinkers to begin to think beyond liberalism almost before liberalism itself had become a recognised and complete political, social and economic doctrine. We have already seen that Hegel accepts that worlds change. He accepts that the French Revolution was what Marxists were later to call a bourgeois revolution, which means a revolution in the name of Lockian natural rights, and therefore a revolution in the name of liberal, free society coming out of the remnants of a seigneurial past. Hegel also accepts that the French Revolution has had an irreversible effect on Germany. Not to accept that would be to fly in the face of all reason; the dismantling of the *ancien régime* is now far advanced even in backward Germany. Men now live in what Hegel calls Civil Society, a form of society in which men may choose to live any life they please, provided only that they *can*. Civil Society is feudal society's opposite. In feudal societies, men are supposed to live the same lives their fathers led: serfs passed on their serfdom as an inheritance to their children. Hegel is too good a historian to believe that feudalism lasted unchanged till the storming of the Bastille and then disappeared in a moment, but he does think that the French Revolution signals that the old order is definitively over, and that the future belongs to bourgeois society, which means factories and parliaments.

The Lockian liberty of Civil Society is the liberty of buyers and sellers, and one of the commodities which will be on sale will be labour. It was his observations of what happens to sellers of labour (coupled with more than mere acquaintance with the political economy of the Scottish Enlightenment) that made Hegel look at Civil Society with a slightly jaundiced eye. Bourgeois society was the sphere of what Hegel calls rights, not Right. The freedom of bourgeois society he describes as 'unimpeded activity', and he claims that Civil Society is concentrated on the 'particular', not the Universal. In the unimpeded activity of buyers and sellers in bourgeois society, Hegel noticed that the sellers of labour often do particularly badly (he is not so concerned that the buyers of labour do particularly well). There is a tendency for a 'rabble of paupers', what was to become the famous 'industrial reserve army' of Chartists and Marxists, to accumulate at the bottom of Civil Society. What could the freedom of Civil Society mean to them? Hegel accepts that Civil Society is freer than the society of the *ancien régime*, but it is plain to him that Civil Society cannot universalise freedom. Membership of the rabble of paupers may change, as men go into and out of it as they find and lose buyers for their labour, but the group itself remains, what in the modern idiom could almost be called an underclass.

Why does that matter to Hegel? It matters because of the connection which Hegel insists upon between freedom and rationality. For Hegel, freedom is not a condition which you can be in whether you realise it or not. Part of the mind's progress since men began to think was the progress of the consciousness of freedom, which meant that more men were becoming free and could understand what being free meant. How could this mean anything to a class intensely concerned with where its next meal was coming from? Freedom moves from particularity to generality, until it stumbles over the Hegelian underclass. In the ancient despotisms, only the despot was free, so that the only way for a subject to dream of freedom would be to dream of becoming despot himself. Slaves in

ancient cities might have dreamt of becoming free men and owning slaves themselves, but slaves there would always be. The modern world's claim to modernity, according to Hegel, is that it holds out the hope that all men can be free, but how can this be with a rabble of paupers at the bottom of the social heap?

Hegel's way out of the difficulty comes when he begins to ask himself what it was about previous epochs of world history which meant that in them freedom could not universalise itself. His answer always comes down to the fact that in previous epochs there was no separation between state and society. In the ancient cities, the citizens were the rulers, and part of rule was keeping down the slaves. To be on top in the ancient city was to be on top politically, and economically and socially. Freedom was the cause of an intense competition between slaves and free men which free men were meant always to win. The world of bourgeois society separates the state from society. There are no longer any stately constraints on what kind of life a citizen might live. All liberalism rests finally on that distinction. Hegel thought, though, that men at the bottom of the pile did badly out of the separation between state and society. What was to be done about them?

The answer was obvious: if Civil Society could not universalise freedom, then that only left the State. The State, then, must be the locus of true freedom in so far as true freedom can be realised at any particular time. Only the State is capable of concerning itself with the Universal, not the particular. The State has to rise above the selfish striving of Civil Society, and to be able to do that it must be as separate from Civil Society as it can possibly be because the State must be able to take a very high-minded view of Civil Society.

THE SEPARATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY FROM THE STATE

What does the rather grandiose phrase 'separation of the State from Civil Society' actually mean? It is really an attack on amateurism in government. Mixing society and the state means that rulers come out of society because of their position in it. Local government by JPs in England in Hegel's day is an obvious example. Those who were socially at the top of the pile were chosen to exercise the function of rule in that society. In this sense, all premodern forms of rule were amateur, especially rule in feudal societies where the functions of boss and ruler met in the feudal lord, so that it was impossible to distinguish between the two roles of economic and social, and political superiors. Adam Smith had argued some sixty years before Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* was published, that, in modern commercial society with its increasing divisions of labour and increasing business efficiency, rule too should be professionalised. The militia had had its day; from now on the very model of a modern state was to be the Prussia of Frederick the Great. That position is fully worked out in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, with its plea for rule by a scholarly and socially objective bureaucracy serving a constitutional monarch advised by estates of the realm. Being separate from society, the bureaucracy can take a very long view, and the king, being king by hereditary right and constitutional legitimacy, need fear no competitors for his crown, so that he too is above the selfish competition of Civil Society.

Hegel thinks that the present does not abolish the past but completes it. Modern constitutional monarchy is not the abolition of medieval or divine right monarchy, but its completion. What Hegel seems to be saying is that constitutional monarchy is monarchy thought out by rational men for whom hereditary succession alone is not enough to make a man king. Constitutional monarchy re-founds an old institution on a rational basis. The same is true for other social institutions and customs. These are not abolished but thought out again. Families do not cease to be families because men have thought out what family life actually means, and customs are not abolished when they are transformed into rationally thought-out law. The modern world in Hegel's language becomes more 'self-conscious'. Mind is its own age reflected in thought, but modern men have history to help them. By reflecting on what has gone before, the modern mind can become more conscious of itself by knowing what it is different from. Mind does not abolish the past but builds on it. In a sense, men had always known that: even Plato realised that the world of the Homeric poems was over, and that in the future the Homeric hierarchy of kings, heroes, ordinary men and slaves would have to be re-argued from scratch.

In a more self-conscious age, law must share that self-consciousness. Hegel describes law as 'the World of Mind brought out by Itself', by which he means that it is no longer enough that the king should simply will something to turn it into law. Law must be rational, reasonable and thought out. Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* is not a law-code but an account of the grounds for a rational theory of law. Hegel thinks that the modern state is rational because constitutional monarchy invites our understanding. The modern state's claim to our loyalty is not simply dynastic, traditional, or sentimental, though Hegel does not despise these types of claim, and it might still be true that most men are only capable of seeing their loyalty to the state in these terms. Rational men, and especially philosophers, are different. They can look at the world and see that it is right.

THE STATE AND FREEDOM REVISITED

It can still be objected against Hegel that he has shown how the state is rational, but failed to convince us that, in being rational, it has universalised freedom. And in what does this freedom consist? It is a notorious problem in Hegel that he can say on the one hand that the state is rational to the extent that it realises freedom, and on the other hand that the state as an end has supreme right over the individual whose supreme duty is to be a member of the state. Whatever that sounds like, it does not sound to liberal ears like freedom at all. Hegel has been accused of being a 'cock crowing on the dunghill of servility', and it has to be said that on freedom he is hard to pin down.

Perhaps the best approach to Hegel on freedom is to regard his theory of freedom as a philosophical commentary on the epoch of the French Revolution and its aftermath, particularly in Germany. Before 1789, Germany was little more than a geographical expression. There were over three hundred German states, duchies, free towns, seigneuries, towns ruled by bishops, as well as the larger states like Prussia, Bavaria, Saxony and Austria (which was itself a patchwork of different jurisdictions). The effect of the French Revolution was to rationalise the German state system as the smaller states

were incorporated into the larger. Hegel was enthusiastic about the French Revolution, which broke out when he was a student at Tübingen, but, as with many another intellectual, what began as enthusiasm ended in disillusionment. But Hegel never lost the initial inspiration that the Revolution was made in the name of reason and liberty. After the Restoration in 1815, Hegel found himself in a quandary, caught between the sentimental reactionaries, who wanted a return to what was left of Germany's feudal past, and the romantics who thought that the Revolution signalled the end of all restraint whatsoever. Hegel wants to steer a middle course between the two: on the one hand he wants to argue that there is a case for the state, but on the other hand he wants to argue that there is a case only for a certain kind of state. To do this, Hegel has to argue that there is some point to being part of the world. Hegel thinks that all revolutionaries reject the world in its entirety and want to begin again. He also thinks that this enterprise is as doomed as trying to regain virginity.

In the Introduction to *The Philosophy of Right*, Hegel takes up the problem of how we can be free while recognising restraints in his theory of the Moments of the Will. Hegel says that there are three moments of the will which desires to be free. The first moment Hegel calls 'pure abstraction', the moment when the will wants to free itself completely from the world's constraints. This, Hegel thinks, is only a single aspect of will, though it is easy to mistake it for the whole will. Examples of the will as 'pure abstraction' would be Hindu mystical asceticism, where the will truly seems independent of the world which surrounds it, or Jacobinism, in which the whole of previous history is discarded in favour of a virginal re-beginning. In the first moment of the will the Understanding is not, properly speaking, active in history, for it is by definition indeterminate, not tied down, 'pure mind'.

The second moment of the will is a moment of 'determinacy'. This represents the moment when the will recognises that pure abstraction is an absurdity because it prevents the man whose will it is from taking part in history by existing empirically as a fact, taking part in events, and institutions. Indeterminacy was a denial of the whole world of objects, of the world outside the self. Determinacy is the desire of the self-conscious individual to act *in the world*. So how does indeterminacy become determinacy? How does the thinking individual overcome his alienation from the world outside himself, what Hegel calls 'action in the service of reason'? The moment of determinacy consists of more than the desire for biological survival and more than just accepting the world as it is. The original negation of the world is replaced by a desire to be 'of the world', what Hegel calls the 'negation of the negation', or echoing Fichte, the 'finite or particularisation of the ego'. It implies that the original negation of the world by 'pure understanding' is itself negated by a desire to re-enter the world of human existence.

How is this to be done? Hegel says through 'singularity', the merging of the two moments of the will. Will, he says, makes itself 'objective' by seeking to repossess what had once seemed to be an alien world, which in simpler language means working to possess objects, or simpler still, property. Men seek to negate the separate existence of the world of objects by possession, and possession is coercive in the sense that possessors need the protection of the state's law to confirm them in the possession of that without which they would not be part of the world at all. Possessions bind us to the world of other

men, and work allows us to make our impression on the world,

It is easy to see here what Hegel does *not* mean by freedom. He sets his face against any idea of freedom which means mere caprice. Of course, he seems to be saying, the world of objects impinges on human consciousness, the Hindu ascetic in his cave possibly excepted, but free will does not consist of being able to do uncaused or unpredictable actions. Freedom in the sense of unpredictability would be called madness or eccentricity or negation of the self ('he is not himself today'). Freedom is not the expression of that which is different in each of us, which is not that different anyway, but on the contrary the expression (echoes of Kant) of that which in us is universal. At best, freedom as eccentricity or caprice is to be found in Civil Society, not the State.

It is through the rationally pondered law of the State that men become free because they recognise in the State their own aspirations writ large. In this sense, the State is 'objective will', will freed of all selfishness and egocentricity. Law as compulsion is therefore freedom realised, as far from the hotch-potch of conflicting selfish wills which go to make up Civil Society as it could possibly be. Of course, this acceptance of the State entails an acceptance of the State's own limitations at any particular moment in the State's development. What the State is, is really the maximum amount of freedom which is possible at any given time, and to expect more is to expect the State to jump over the Colossus of Rhodes. Hence the Hegelian aphorism that 'freedom is the recognition of necessity'.

THE STATE DIFFERENT FROM ITS INSTITUTIONS

It is easy to mistake the State's institutions for the State itself. The State needs its institutions, the bureaucracy, estates and monarchy in order to function, but, properly speaking, the State is all-of-us, but all-of-us thinking about ourselves in a way which is different from the everyday way. Hegel makes a very useful distinction between everyday morality and Sunday morality. On Sundays, we put on our moral Sunday best, go to church, and pay allegiance to a morality which is higher and purer, but not substantially different from, the morality of the workaday world. Hegel wants us to think of all-of-us as the State like that. The ordinary world of Civil Society is a world of conflicting wills, controlled by law, no doubt, but none the less conflicting. The State is the moment when we stand back from our ordinary selves and think of ourselves as having a single will, all dressed up in our Sunday best.

THE HEGELIAN CONTEXT OF MARXISM

When Marxists talk about the history of socialism, they tend to give the deliberate impression that because socialism is really Marxism, it follows that the invention of socialism comes *after* Hegelianism. We therefore do well to remind ourselves that socialism was being invented in France and England while Hegelianism was being invented in Germany. It should not surprise us, then, if Hegelianism and early socialism

addressed themselves to much the same problems (and indeed Hegelianism is sometimes called 'Prussian socialism'). Of course, it was not Hegel who made Marx a socialist, but it was Hegel who turned Marx into the kind of socialist thinker he eventually became. Marxism was to share with Hegelianism a concern for alienation, for the socially disruptive nature of capitalist individualism and for the nature of the modern state, and Marxism in its formative stages was largely a critique of Hegel's view of all three.

What Hegel hated about traditional religion, especially Catholicism, was its otherworldliness and consequently its affirmation of this-worldly alienation. The Catholic view of the human condition as it comes out of St Augustine (and is only modified by Thomism) accepts the alienation of man from his true nature as a given of human existence. The burden of sin is permanent until death or the Second Coming. Man's true nature lies in his union with God before the Fall, and in heaven after death. This alienated human nature also alienates men from their fellow men because sinful men live uneasily with their fellow sinners. Dents in this gloomy version of human living had been made by certain kinds of Protestantism. Living in a godly commonwealth, for instance, might make the salvation of souls more likely, but the alienating burden of sin was still there. Strictly speaking, in this view of things, there was not much to human history. All the great events were either in the past—Creation, Fall, Redemption through the life of Christ—or in the future—Christ's eventual return to judge the nations. Some human communities were better than others, and God had permitted them to survive and even to prosper, but on the whole human existence was conditioned by events over which men had no control. Hegel offered a way out of this trap by suggesting that the alienated condition of man had a genuinely historical dimension to it. Men had not always been equally alienated from their fellows, and the historical process, properly understood, showed a tendency to make those improvements in human living which would be pleasing in God's sight. In the ancient Athens of Pericles, the distinction I/We did not have the force it was later to have, and the march of freedom through the State as God's march meant that one day, perhaps even soon, men would come to live in a society whose level of self-consciousness and self-understanding was such that they could begin to enjoy some of the Absolute Freedom which Hegel always indentified with God. Hegel owes a good deal of his theory of history to Enlightenment theories of history as progress, but what was really new was that Hegel was able to tie God so centrally into his scheme.

Marx was an atheist, but he retains the Hegelian idea that alienation is a historical category, capable of a genuinely historical explanation, and therefore capable of changing, perhaps drastically, in the future. Marx's own explanation of Christianity owes to Hegel a contempt for its other-worldliness as an attempt to reconcile men to the inevitability of an alienated human existence, but Marx will look for the causes of that alienation in the processes of capitalist-industrial production in a way that Hegel never did. For Hegel the Idealist, alienation results from a wrong way of looking at the world and not from the material conditions in which men earn their daily bread. Reason is even more cunning in Marx than in Hegel. Hegelianism had always had the problem of explaining away an unprogressive present in the cause of its general contention that things are getting better, and this was done by arguing that God temporarily obscures future good in order to test the faith. Marx goes one better. He says: look into the present

mess itself, and you will see the bright future in the dreadful now. Industrial capitalism in crisis is not a pretty sight, and it has horrifying effects on the working class, but, properly understood, industrialism's future lies with socialism, not capitalism.

The disruptive effects of capitalist individualism are plain to see in Hegel, especially in the famous paragraphs on Civil Society in *The Philosophy of Right*. Marx shares with Hegel the view that the French Revolution signals the ushering in of a new kind of social and economic order whose chief characteristic was going to be economic and social individualism. The career would be open to the talents as men were invited to compete with each other. Marx was greatly encouraged by the young Engels' *Condition of the English Working Class in 1844* to look at the chaos of the Manchester cotton industry in slump to see where the future lay. It lay in Manchester, not London; in social and economic conditions, not politics; in Chartism properly understood, not in liberalism; in the reports of the factory inspectors, not Royal Commissions. Hegel's 'rabble of paupers' in Civil Society becomes in Marx the proletariat with the threat of unemployment hanging permanently over their heads. An increasingly divided society, with workers and employers shaking their fists at each other across the class divide, is what the future has to offer, a dialectical contradiction which cannot be mediated by the state for ever. Something has to give, and Marx thinks that the future belongs to the proletariat once it becomes conscious of itself and its historic task in a way which more than echoes the Hegelian idea that rational men will come to be self-conscious about their place in a properly constituted state.

It is over the question of the neutrality of the State that Marx really begins to part company with Hegel. Hegel thought that the State, if separated from bourgeois society, could really be a neutral umpire in the conflicts which would necessarily arise from bourgeois society's 'unimpeded activity', that is to say its uncompromising individualism. A State which provided good education for everybody, which fixed maximum prices and minimum wages, and which made provision for the deserving poor could keep the conflicts arising out of bourgeois society permanently on the back-burner, so that they were not dialectical contradictions at all. The very existence of the State was proof that a society recognised the alienating effects of capitalism and was responding to them in a positive spirit. Marx cannot think like that. For him, Hegel's solution to the problems of capitalism is nothing short of a farce. Marx makes Hegel's theory of the State stand for the modern state in general. In one sense the modern state is separate from society because it does not attempt to regulate economic life in detail, but in another sense the State is profoundly of its own time because it attempts to mediate dialectical contradictions in favour of those who run the present, which can only mean the bourgeoisie. The central insight which Marx shares with early socialists like Saint-Simon and Robert Owen is that in capitalist society the bourgeoisie only *appears* to be in control of the economy—otherwise why would there be booms and slumps?—while it really does control the State in the sense that it never occurs to the state to do anyone else's business. It was his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (1844) and his close observation of the British state during his long exile in England which enabled Marx to see that the claims to neutrality for the modern state were fraudulent. The modern state might possibly be separate, but it was certainly not neutral.

Marx's critique of Hegel begins from the end of Hegelianism, the theory of the State, and works backwards towards a fundamental critique of Hegelian Idealism. For Marx, Hegel's theory of the State does not solve the problem of class conflict but on the contrary institutionalises it. Hegel's constitutional monarch will have estates to advise him, and these estates will be based on social divisions: agricultural, industrial, and a third estate. What is that if not the institutionalisation of aristocracy, bourgeoisie and the rest? The problem of the bureaucracy is even more obvious. Where is that bureaucracy to be recruited from? Scholarly and high-minded bureaucrats will either represent the interests of the class from which they come, or, more likely, will come to think of themselves as a fourth estate with a class interest of their own. Far from mediating class conflicts arising out of Civil Society, Hegel further complicates the conflicts of Civil Society by adding extra class interest to it. Far from taking a detached and universal view of Civil Society and so overcoming the social aspects of alienation, the existence of the Hegelian state is the proof that alienation does in fact continue to exist. How could it be otherwise, when Hegel's state institutionalises class divisions and adds the bureaucracy as another particular, not universal, class to Civil Society?

HEGEL AND THE YOUNG HEGELIANS

Both Marx and Engels began as Young Hegelians, and it might be useful to ask what it was which attracted them to Hegel in the first place. In a very general sense, the Young Hegelians were attracted by Hegel's claim to have 'realised' philosophy and to have overcome the latent tension between thought and the world. This tension had taken many forms in the history of philosophy—as the tension between ideas and experience, for instance, or between thought and action, or between spirit and matter, or between philosophy and reality, or between God and the world. Plato thought that the world was a shadow and that only philosophy was real. Christians believe that the world is a tissue of vanities and only God is real. Rousseau thought that the world betrayed an idea of justice, and so on. What all these ways of looking at the problem of the relationship between philosophy and the world have in common is that they use thought to *judge* the world: what *is* is what *ought not to be*. Socrates failed to bring philosophy down from the heavens to be realised among men. All of these views posit an ideal world outside ordinary human sensuous experience and contrast the world of experience to it.

Not Hegel. God is 'Reason in Process'. God is in the world and marching with it, not outside judging it. Gradually and dialectically, ideality becomes reality. Part of what the world *ought to be* is realised in what *is*. Hegel had apparently solved the most tricky problem of all, the relationship between the world of philosophy and the world of experience, and that is what attracted the Young Hegelians and in particular Karl Marx. It was only later, under the influence of Ludwig Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity* (1841), that Marx and Engels began to realise that Hegel had merely substituted one crucial problem for another. Hegel might have explained the relationship of ideas to reality, but he failed to offer any satisfactory answer as to which was primary—ideas or the world.

The question of primacy matters a great deal, because for Marxists everything else hangs on it. If Hegel is right, and thought conditions life, then solutions to the problems of human living are a matter for thought, or of looking at the world aright. The world is explained in terms of ideas, and in Hegel's case the ideas are ideas about freedom developing dialectically from the beginning. Human problems, then, can be substantially solved in consciousness. If, on the other hand, life conditions thought, then thoughts can only be changed by changing human circumstances, what Marxists call *praxis*. (A more sophisticated Marxism adds that the relationship of ideas to the world is itself dialectical.) The Idealist position leads to a certain political quietism in Hegel: the world has to wait for ideas to change, and it has to wait a very long time for these changes in ideas to penetrate the consciousness of ordinary men. Ideas of freedom are realised in the State, and because the process by which ideas change is slow, changes in the State must be slow too. There is a lot of waiting around implied in Hegelianism.

But suppose life conditions thought and suppose a life that is changing very quickly. Then both life and thought can change quickly, which means *everything* can change quickly. In this perspective Hegelianism denies its own premises, because it is at once a response to a rapidly changing world and a denial that the state can change very quickly with it, and perhaps Hegel came to think that because he over-concentrated on the political at the expense of the economic, or in Marxist language, on superstructure at the expense of basis. Perhaps Hegel was active as a political thinker just too soon to realise how quickly capitalism could change the world while at the same transforming itself. By 1850 it had become a commonplace that ten years' change in bourgeois society was worth a century's change in feudal society because feudal society could not change itself. Surprising things could happen to the state in a world where the pace of economic and social change was so rapid; at some time in the future the state might even disappear.

Another way of looking at the connection between Hegelianism and Marxism is to ask what it was that allowed such a revolutionary style of thinking as Hegel's dialectic to be used to come to such tame political conclusions. Hegel's Prussia was not even a constitutional monarchy in Hegel's own lifetime. Marx and Engels have no doubt that, properly considered, the Hegelian dialectic dissolves all dogmatism. Hegel's great service as a historian of philosophy was to show how closely thought is attuned to its own time. It is not necessary to refute all past systems of philosophy in order to argue a philosophical position in the present. After Hegel, all that had to be done with philosophical systems from the past was to show that they were so attuned to their own time that with the passage of time they became redundant. What is true of ways of looking at the world is also true of how the world is organised. Forms of the state, like forms of thought, have had their day. According to Marx and Engels, Hegel saw this but failed to have the intellectual courage to think the matter through to its end. If the Roman republic was 'real' in its day and so was the Roman Empire after it; if the French monarchy was 'real' before 1789 and so was the French republic after it, then what is the point of stopping at the Prussian monarchy and saying that it will be eternally 'real'? Surely the dissolution of all forms of dogmatism in philosophy through the dialectical method implies the dissolution of all forms of dogmatism about the State. There lay Hegel's great mistake, in founding a system of politics at all.

But if Hegel's philosophy, and the form of the State which it defends, is to end up on the scrap-heap of history, then where does history itself end? The clue lies in Hegel's philosophy itself, in the idea of a universal class. Hegel had vainly hoped that the universal class would be his bureaucracy of high-minded and scholarly officials whose title to rule would be Weberian expertise. Not so, says Marx, because the bureaucracy either represents the class interest of the class from which it was recruited, or constitutes itself as a class with an interest in its own right. Therefore the Hegelian bureaucracy cannot signal the changeover from the particularity of Civil Society to the Universality of freedom or, what comes nearest to it in a still imperfect world, the Hegelian state. Where, then, is the class to be found which can be truly universal? Where is the class which can universalise itself because it needs no eternal dialectical opposite to give itself consciousness of itself as a class? That class can only be the proletariat, because, while the proletariat needs conflict with the bourgeoisie to make it begin to feel its identity as a class, that identity once established, there is no reason why everyone should not eventually become a proletarian. In doing this, the proletariat would abolish itself as a class, there being no other class against which the proletariat would need to form its own consciousness. Divided humanity would become humanity again, and truly human history could properly begin.

NOTES ON SOURCES

Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, ed. T.M.Knox (1942 and various reprintings), is essential reading, especially the Preface. Duncan Forbes's edition of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* (1975) contains an excellent introduction. There is a useful collection of Hegel's *Political writings* (1964), by Knox and Pelczynski. H.Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* (1963), and S.Avineri, *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State* (1972), are outstanding commentaries. C.Taylor, *Hegel* (1975), is also first-rate. R.Plant, *Hegel* (1973), is a very good introduction. Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, vol. 2, is good, knockabout stuff.