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GEORG WILHELM FRIEDRICH HEGEL
LECTURES ON THE PHILOSOPHY OF
WORLD HISTORY
INTRODUCTION: REASON IN HISTORY

Cambridge Studies in the History and Theory of Politics

EDITORS

MAURICE COWLING E.KEDOURIE

G.R.ELTON J.R.POLE

WALTER ULLMANN

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INTRODUCTION: REASON IN HISTORY

translated from the German edition of Johannes Hoffmeister by

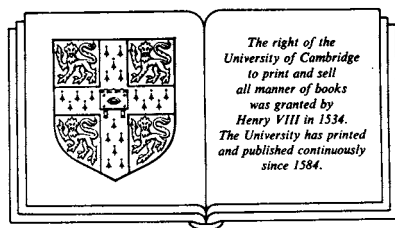
H. B. NISBET

Professor of German, University of St Andrews

with an Introduction by

DUNCAN FORBES

Fellow of Clare College, Cambridge



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INTRODUCTION

1. The Cloud of Unknowing and *die Sache selbst*¹

The English reader is given here a translation not of the whole of Hegel's philosophy of history, but of Johannes Hoffmeister's edition of Hegel's own Introduction to his lectures on the philosophy of world history. Since for Hegel philosophy is the science without presuppositions, through and through self-critical, and thus a self-developing whole or circle whose end is its beginning, any introduction to any section of it can only be a preliminary sketch of what is to come in the light of the whole. Hegel's Introduction therefore contains his whole philosophy in epitome.

There is no danger in this for those who know the other main texts. But because the philosophy of history is by far the easiest of these – Hegel himself seems to have thought of these lectures as a popular introduction to his philosophy – it is liable to be used as a substitute rather than an introduction, especially as a substitute for the *Philosophy of Right*, and one suspects that much of the misunderstanding and misrepresentation of Hegel has been due to this.² It contains the notorious phrases about the state being the divine Idea on earth, reason ruling the world and so on, which have been made to mean precisely the opposite of what Hegel intended. Even those who have spent years of suffering as well as enjoyment on this mountain can slip badly at times, and this should be sufficient warning to those critics and quick-reading, quick-judging able men – from whom God defend the history of ideas – who, taking a quick look through the telescope, usually someone else's, feel competent to lecture the crowd, always ready to enjoy the deflating of large balloons,

¹ I am not using this term with Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* in mind (*Das geistige Tierreich... oder die Sache selbst*) but in the hope that it can mean simply the heart of the matter or "the real Mackay". Another heading for this section could be "The philosophy of life and love and the dead critics".

² Cf. Walter Kaufmann, *Hegel*, p. 15. "The *Philosophy of History* is probably Hegel's best known book; but in the more demanding sense of that word, it is scarcely 'known' at all..."

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on the iniquities of a system which they have not begun to understand properly. And there are the sly innuendoes of otherwise learned men, which are difficult to nail because the nature and depth of the ignorance involved cannot be properly established. It is not easy to gauge how much of the old Hegel legend still survives; judging by the remarks still liable to be made by highly placed academic persons it is by no means defunct, even in the most scholarly circles. But an Introduction of this sort cannot put this right; one must take a lot for granted and hope for the best.

Another difficulty is that Hegel's philosophy of history is nowadays generally regarded as the prime example of what philosophy of history is not, without being adequately understood. Those who do philosophy of history in the contemporary analytical style do not fully understand Hegel – why should they? Those who know Hegel do not as a rule care for his philosophy of history, and do not think it worthy of intensive study in the light of modern developments – to appreciate it properly, moreover, one would need to be something of a historian and a historian of history as well. The qualities demanded are not likely to be combined these days.

So Hegel's philosophy of history is largely unexplored, and indeed, in spite of the enormous literature, one is tempted to say the same for the whole of his mature philosophy. Nothing like the amount of detailed thorough scholarship which has been expended on his early writings, up to and including the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, has been used for most of this century to illuminate the texts of his maturity. This is brought home by the fact that it is precisely the philosophy of history that raises some of the most crucially difficult central questions – perhaps the most crucial and difficult of all – in connection with Hegel's mature philosophy, which in a sense transcends time and historical specificity and yet is tied down to its own age; the philosopher cannot “leap over Rhodes”; he can only describe what is given; indeed, “Science”, that is Hegel's philosophy, is only possible at all, *Spirit* or *Geist* is only able to be fully self-conscious, as the result of the culmination of a process in time in the Europe of Hegel's day. Thus philosophy is limited and tied down, and yet unlimited and free-ranging; able to survey the whole of reality, it is final and closed in one sense, wholly open in another, in a way that is not easy to grasp. For the philosophy of history is not simply a temporal ladder to “Science” which can be dispensed with once one has arrived, if the result includes the process of getting there, both logical and historical – otherwise why should the philosopher bother with history at all, since that is not an eternal recurrence? There must be a philosophy of history for

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Geist to be fully self-conscious, but this can only become explicit at a certain point in time. And in one sense this point is the fullness of time, but in another sense it is not, because it is not the end of history, and some commentators are fond of drawing attention to those passages which show Hegel pointing towards an unknown future and the possibility of further developments even in philosophy. To take refuge in the Logic alone and ignore the historical manifestations of Spirit; alternatively, to historicize the whole philosophy¹ is to shirk the issue in one way or another. Somehow Hegel's Absolute has to be comprehended as a unity of finite and infinite, in which the finite and contingent are necessary as such to the philosophy which "overcomes" them.

This can be gone into no further here.² Enough has been said to suggest that all the classical misunderstandings of Hegel are due to failure to get as far as the point where the difficulties begin; they all seem to have one root cause: viz., failure to really grasp the central idea of identity in difference, what Hegel calls the 'Notion' (which modern translators prefer to call the 'concept', because 'notion' gives a misleading impression of cloudiness or vagueness; on the other hand it must be always remembered that a very peculiar kind of 'concept' is involved). Every kind of seriously mistaken interpretation of Hegel seems to spring in one way or another from the belief that this philosophy of the Absolute involves the absorption of reality in the Idea: it is an "absolute idealism" which "resolves", meaning abolishes, the contradictions of existence, absorbs the other phases of reality into the Absolute in such a way that they are rendered meaningless and "unreal". But if this were so, there would be no reality left at all. The principle of negativity is given full play, and finally "overreached" in an affirmation that will therefore be total, but for that very reason "overreached" does not mean abolished.

What is required therefore is some understanding of what Hegel meant when he said that the basis of "Science" was pure self-recognition in absolute otherness, or that the true infinite was the unity of itself and the finite, or that identity was the union of identity and non-identity (an earlier form of this was that union was the union of union and non-union), and the clue to this is provided by his claim that the content of his philosophy is Christianity. This in fact is the most direct route to the heart of Hegel's philosophy (and its central difficulties); it has the advantage of

¹ See, for example, K. Löwith, *Meaning in History*, p. 58: "since he transposed the Christian expectation of a final consummation into the historical process as such, he saw the world's history as consummating itself".

² The reader is referred to Emil Fackenheim, *The Religious Dimension in Hegel's Thought*.

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allowing one to dispense with labels like “romantic” or “child of the Enlightenment”, which probably do more harm than good and are certainly in the initial stages of understanding wholly misleading; and, as is now well established and well known, it happened to be Hegel’s own route to philosophy in so far as that emerged out of his double quest for the true and the historical Christianity and for a living religion. Christianity as false religion was a flight from the world, a pathological symptom of a society and a consciousness divided against itself; Christianity as true religion, the Christianity of Hegel’s mature philosophy, was the union of divine and human, in which the divine remained wholly divine but for that needed and was dependent on the human, and the human remained fully human but for that needed and depended on the divine. Christianity was the perfection and completion of religion because in Christianity God fully reveals himself as the union of finite and infinite. Philosophy is the wholly rational expression of this truth. Spirit finds itself in its other, and is a perpetually re-enacted process of seeking and finding itself in its other which cannot mean abolishing the otherness of the other: the other must remain other for Spirit to be at all. As Hegel wrote in one of his early fragments, Reason is analogous to love; both go out and lose themselves but also find themselves in the other, in the Not-I.¹

Whatever philosophers and theologians may think of this, it is clearly wrong to regard Hegel’s philosophy as a variety of transcendental, reality-behind-appearance metaphysic, or optimistic pan-rationalism in the eighteenth-century mode (“reason rules the world”) reflected in philosophy of history as a unilinear progress, or a kind of cosmic Toryism (“the real is the rational”), or a closed super-system of reasoning deducing the whole of reality from arbitrarily asserted *a priori* first principles by the use of the only too famous formula, never in fact used by Hegel, of thesis–anti-thesis–synthesis, shunning experience and rendering superfluous the work of the natural scientist and historian. Views of this kind, commonly held, miss the whole point of Hegel’s philosophy, which is precisely that it does *not* shun or in any way devalue the objective world, of fact and contingency and finitude, the historian’s world and the natural scientist’s world and the world of every-day experience; its whole object is to show how necessary all this is to the life of Spirit. If reality, which is not just substance but active subject as well, is a perpetually re-enacted process of self-realization, and the result includes the process, then Spirit’s other, which is necessary to the process, must always remain

¹ See H. S. Harris, *Hegel’s Development*, p. 143, and elsewhere.

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other – its being “overreached” by Spirit means just that. This is a point which Emil Fackenheim insists on again and again: “...the entire Hegelian philosophy, far from denying the contingent, on the contrary seeks to demonstrate its inescapability”; “The system can *be* comprehensive of the world only by means of total self-exposure to it”; “Hegel asserts an Understanding which confronts, analyses and keeps separate facts, not merely *beside* a Reason which speculatively unites them but rather... *within* a Reason empty without it”; “Hegel’s life-long endeavour was to find the Absolute not beyond, but present *in* the world, the world in which men suffer and labor...”; “The Absolute, if accessible to thought at all, is accessible only to a thought which remains with the world of sense, not to a thought which shuns it in ‘monkish fashion’.”¹

Hegel’s philosophy can be seen as an exhaustive working out, in ever-increasing fullness and complexity, of every possible variation, each growing out of its predecessor, on this theme of the unity of universal and particular. Any manifestation of the one contains and needs the other, which, if it is denied, will assert itself as alien, as, to give just two examples, the neglected universal stands over against the wholly selfish self of pure hedonism as an alien “fate” which is yet its own, and the neglected particular self reasserts itself in the wholly “self-less” man so that in reality, ‘art for art’s sake’ means art for Jones’ sake, the ‘pure’ scholar is wholly selfish, etc.; and this is the negativity which is the principle of dialectical progression.

Hölderlin, who was Hegel’s close friend, wrote, towards the end of *Hyperion*, “Wie der Zwist der Liebenden, sind die Dissonanzen der Welt. Versöhnung ist mitten im Streit und alles Getrennte findet sich wieder”,² and this has been regarded as a suitable motto for the dialectic. If so, it must not be taken to mean that love and reconciliation and harmony abolish pain, strife and separation, but only their meaninglessness. Spirit’s “pathway of despair”, of self-diremption and self-overcoming, is not solely a temporal process; if it were, either it would never be complete (and “Science” accordingly impossible) or else it would be completed once and for all (but Spirit is perpetually active, always alive – death for Hegel means the absence of opposition, the absorption of the particular in the universal).³ Pain, suffering, conflict, the contingent

¹ *Op. cit.* pp. 4, 18, 19, 79, 80. Cf. p. 107. Spirit’s conquest of the contingent and finite “requires the persistent reality of what is conquered by it. For this conquest is a ‘result’ which is nothing but the perpetually re-enacted ‘process’ of conquering it”.

² “The dissonances of the world are like the quarrels of lovers. Reconciliation is in the midst of strife, and everything that is separated finds itself again”.

³ *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, §§ 375–6.

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and the particular in all its particularity remain; there is no love, harmony, reconciliation, true unity or true universality without them. This is the most profound meaning of the ‘concrete universal’, inspired by Christianity and inconceivable without it. Seen from this central point, Hegel’s philosophy looks very different from the ‘idealist system’ scorned by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, misunderstood by Feuerbach, Marx and countless others, and presented as ‘Hegelian’ by the British and American Idealists. It is one of Hegel’s most constant themes from his earliest writings onwards, that all varieties of reality-behind-appearance metaphysic and religion are pathological, a symptom of alienation in man and society which must be *aufgehoben*. But that does not mean simply done away with: alienation is Spirit’s self-alienation, the negation of Spirit is ever present. It is profoundly mistaken therefore to think that the serenity of Hegel’s philosophy means the final resolution of conflict or that the “overcoming” of negation means the abolition of suffering and contingency and otherness. This would be precisely the sort of night in which all cows are black which Hegel said his philosophy was not, and which he himself presented in his lectures on the history of philosophy as marking more primitive phases of philosophical insight.

This, then, is the truth grasped by Reason; this is the ‘rationality’ of the universe; this is how ‘reason’ rules the world; this is the ‘rationality’ of the idea of the modern state: it contains the strains and tensions and conflicts of the world of self-seeking individuals which destroyed the simple, undifferentiated unity of the Greek polis, negates its negations. The state which such a Spirit creates for itself must be a pluralistic state, which allows the particular, the private quest for self-satisfaction, full play, but not to the extent and in such a way that it defeats or destroys itself; a state in which freedom is a concrete living reality, not an abstract ‘right’, or mere ‘ought’; a state in which the universal and particular sides of the will are in harmony, an organic unity of differences, and the greater the differentiation, the greater the unity. Similarly the World-Spirit or *Weltgeist* would be neither “real” nor rational, if it were what it is so often taken to be: a wholly supra-empirical, supra-individual objective entity, or super puppet-master.

Clearly the Reason that rules the world is not the reason of the ordinary rationalist, for that is more properly called the ‘Understanding’, and the truths of Reason are opaque to the ‘Understanding’, the sort of thinking that is especially appropriate to natural science and history, that must analyse and separate: “everything is what it is and not another thing”. What is rational and true or “adequate to its notion” is what has brought

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forth, developed and “overcome” its inherent contradictions, that is, contains them in “might” and “love”¹ and is mature, in an individual or truly civilized state. It is something that has objectified itself, brought itself forth; it cannot be true to itself otherwise – indeed the pith and marrow of Hegel might be said to be contained in the Gaelic proverb, “if it is in, it will out”.² That is the truth in the description of Hegel as one of the most anti-metaphysical of philosophers.³

By the same token the philosophy of the Absolute is absolutely open to experience, “tough-minded” in William James’ sense, as empirical as any empiricist should wish, which is why so much of its content is now closed to us. It is not a question of Feuerbach or Marx or anybody else “rescuing” sense experience from its “humble place” in Hegel, or standing his philosophy right way up, but sense experience, in itself and as such, the most immediate and therefore most abstract form of experience, cannot be the full truth about reality, and if one tries to make it so, the result is self-contradiction. The same holds good for every partial, more or less abstract form of experience. None of them by itself is able to make the world fully intelligible; they all negate themselves in the attempt to do so. But if we are thereby provided with one of the world’s most fully stocked medicine chests of scepticism and mental and moral hygiene, nevertheless all the rungs on the ladder of experience which ends with philosophy are rungs *in* the ladder of philosophy, and that means that they are all in themselves perfectly valid, necessary aspects of truth.

It is wrong therefore to think of the dialectic as functioning as a process of logical demonstration or deduction in a closed system. This could be called ‘vulgar Hegelianism’. The best example in English is the well-known and otherwise not unhelpful exposition by W. T. Stace. Stace is worried by what he regards as logical lapses or breaks in the chain of reasoning. But the dialectic is not like that at all. It was the result of Hegel’s desire “to think life”; it is a way of thinking concretely and seeing things whole, whose conclusions cannot be proved or disproved, but which can be seen to be more or less true to life; its purpose is to provide insight. The only way to appreciate it or understand what it is to watch it at work. And one must watch intelligently and without pedantry (which

¹ See Hegel’s *Science of Logic* (trs. Johnston and Struthers), II, p. 237.

² “If it is in, it will out, as the Gaelic old-word says”. Neil Munro, *The Lost Pibroch*.

³ J. N. Findlay, *Hegel, a Re-Examination*, p. 348. “despite much opinion to the contrary, Hegel’s philosophy is one of the most anti-metaphysical of philosophical systems, one that *remains* most within the pale of ordinary experience. . . .” One should, however, read Fackenheim, *op. cit.*, in order not to oversimplify the issue.

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is not possible to anyone in a hostile, fault-finding mood), because although Hegel insisted that “Science” was wholly public and a discipline of thinking, and talked of “the seriousness, the pain and labour of the negative”, nevertheless his philosophy is best approached in the spirit of Plato’s, as something that is in danger of being destroyed or distorted if it is written down. Hegel in fact was extremely reluctant to publish; he only published two *books*, because the *Encyclopaedia* and the *Philosophy of Right* are compendia for courses of lectures. The present edition of the introductory lectures on the philosophy of history has the advantage of bringing home the fact that so much of Hegel’s philosophy was talked, not without humour and anecdote and personalities and contemporary reference – Haldane’s “dry man” is quite wrong – and also constant tacking and changes of course.

Croce has good things to say about the “Bacchic delirium” which for Hegel is the movement of reality. “Reality seems mad, because it is life: philosophy seems mad, because it breaks up abstractions and lives that life in thought. It is a madness which is the highest wisdom, and the true and not metaphorical madmen are they who become mad with the empty words of semi-philosophy, who take formulas for reality, who never succeed in raising themselves to that clear sky whence they can see their work as it really is...”¹ More recent exponents of the dialectic have insisted that it must not be approached with unintelligent rigidity.² Kaufmann makes much of the influence on Hegel of Schiller’s *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*,³ and the theory of freedom as ‘play’, and Müller quotes Hegel’s description of the Reichenbach Falls, written about the same time as the publication of Schiller’s *Letters*, as an anticipation of the dialectic of the mature philosophy, in which Hegel delights in the spectacle of “free play” (*das Bild eines freien Spieles*).⁴ Indeed Hegel’s description of the Falls is as good a *Vorstellung* or pictorial representation of his philosophy as one is likely to find, though he does not seem to have used it himself as such. The artist, he says, cannot

¹ *What is Living and What is Dead of the Philosophy of Hegel* (trs. Douglas Ainslie), p. 29.

² G. R. G. Mure, *The Philosophy of Hegel*, p. 38. The reader “must not be tempted by the display of triadic notation to ask if dialectic has the cogency of mathematical deduction. It certainly has not, but the comparison is inept. . . In deduction one false step ruins the argument. If dialectic errs it is because its freedom degenerates to a capricious and arbitrary movement. . . There is no possible external test of dialectic, no applicable rule of formal logic. . . What matters is whether Hegel’s general conception of spirit is justified, and whether he shows a deeper insight than other thinkers into man’s nature and destiny.”

³ *Op. cit.* pp. 46–58.

⁴ G. E. Müller, *Hegel, Denkgeschichte eines Lebendigen*, p. 79.

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is its own self-movement” and “the true is the whole” and “its own becoming”, and philosophy a circle, so that nothing ‘comes first’, except for purposes of exposition, and there is no *a priori*, and the Idea has no existence apart from the world of experience, any *a priori* scheme of history would be a non-entity and inconceivable. And as has been seen, in the full circle of experience, the ‘Understanding’ in natural science and history as well as the ‘common sense’ view of the world, the “vulgar consciousness” in the light of which we daily live, have their vital roles to play and are in no way rendered superfluous or disvalued by Reason or philosophy, that “Science” which views the whole in the light of the whole. The historian’s world in all its phases and modes and varieties of historical explanation is, as such, absolutely intact, philosophy of history presupposes it, as philosophy of nature presupposes natural science. But did not Hegel attack Niebuhr, one of the fathers of modern scientific historiography? He did so because he was so anxious to champion the historians on their own ground that he failed to appreciate the value of Niebuhr’s reconstruction of early Roman history; he thought that Niebuhr was sacrificing the documentary evidence to *a priori* subjective intuition, thus illegitimately interpreting the past in the light of the present. And not only did Hegel have a respect for and appreciation of fact, an insatiable appetite for sheer information in every subject, that is almost unique in the history of philosophy, but, as has been seen, his philosophy is such that sheer fact and contingency are given a unique philosophical status; ‘Reason’ is such that ‘Reason in history’, properly understood, must, among other things, mean precisely that grasp of the particular fact and appreciation of the uniqueness of historical individuality which Hegel has been accused of lacking, regarding them only as steps to a pre-ordained goal.

Croce however would have none of this. He was so anxious to take up the cudgels on behalf of “actual history” and the professional historian, that the insight shown earlier in his book, when he explains why it is grossly misleading to describe Hegel’s philosophy as “optimistic”,¹ fades when he comes to the application of the dialectic in history. He sees Hegel’s idea of history as operating on two mutually exclusive planes – the plane of empirical fact and that of *a priori* speculation – and therefore as self-contradictory. Hegel himself, he says, divides history into “reflective”

¹ *Op. cit.* pp. 58–9. “Hegel cancels neither the evil nor the ugly, nor the false, nor the vain: *nothing could be more alien to his conception of reality, so dramatic, and in a certain sense so tragic.* What he sets himself to do is to understand the function of evil and of error; and to understand it as evil and as error is surely not to deny it as such, but rather to strengthen it.”

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and “philosophical” history, but you cannot have two different methods for the same set of facts; one of them must be rendered nugatory and meaningless, so that Hegel’s “various declarations of the great respect due to actual fact” are a fraud, although “Hegel never dared to declare the empirical and positive method altogether erroneous so that it could be wholly replaced by the speculative method” (p. 169). In effect “he had to negate, as he did negate, the history of the historians” (p. 138).

But Croce, like the professional historians, thought that “philosophical” history in Hegel means *a priori* history, “history of a second degree”, having “the character of an *a priori* construction”, “a *history already complete* which needs only to be clothed in names and dates”, or “nothing but a rough anticipation of what is given by actual history” (see Chapter 7). The wine of historical fact is poured into previously existing bottles, and if most of it spills over, as Croce thinks it does, then it is not ‘real and rational’ and doesn’t matter (p. 145). The historian in fact is being asked to hand over his work to the philosopher to be revised and completed, and he rightly rebels. “It is just as if a painter or musician were told to consign to the philosophers his picture or his score when he had completed it, so that they might raise it to the second power...” (p. 138). Croce’s powerful criticism has obviously been very influential, but what it amounts to is a failure to sustain and deepen his understanding and appreciation of the dialectic when he comes to Hegel’s philosophy of history. He writes as though there were a hard and fast line in Hegel between the realm of actual historical fact and that of *a priori* philosophical deduction, and in the final analysis this misunderstanding may be traced to his belief that Hegel’s philosophy “resolves religion into itself and substitutes itself for it” (p. 71). Thus he supported the instinctive reaction of the professional historians with a more sophisticated version of the fundamental error previously noted.

Hegel’s account of the three kinds of history at the beginning of his lectures on the philosophy of history is well known. What is not perhaps so well known is that it is an interesting example of the dialectic in action, as anyone familiar with Hegel’s treatment of any other subject would expect, though the dialectical movement is not so obvious here as elsewhere, perhaps because it has been rather blurred in the processes of editing (and translating). To ignore it is to miss the point of much of what Hegel says, but it can be roughly reconstructed, and a free and abridged version would run somewhat as follows.

The first, most primitive (that is logically primitive) kind of history, “original” history, is barely history at all in so far as it represents an

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immediate unity between the historian's consciousness or *Geist* and the *Geist* of what he is describing; this sort of contemporary history is necessarily limited. When this sort of chronicle, seen at its most sophisticated in Thucydides, is extended to meet the need for a view of the whole history of a people or even for a history of the world, we get the first primitive phase of what Hegel calls "reflective" history, "reflective" in so far as now the historian's consciousness and what he is describing have fallen apart; the past is now outside and different from the historian's consciousness, past and present are separate spheres and the past has to be consciously retrieved and made present in a way that doesn't happen in "original" history. This is therefore the phase of "mediacy", the special province of the 'Understanding'. At the first, most unsophisticated stage of "reflective" history, which is still very close to "original" history, when a historian like Livy, for example, aims to present an account as circumstantial as that, it is the *Geist* of the historian's present that prevails and the result is no more than a one-dimensional extension of "original" history backwards in time. But "reflective" history proper means abridgement; here we have another meaning of 'reflection', when one reflects and tries to understand, and the 'Understanding' is the great epitomiser (*der Verstand ist der mächtigste Epitomator*). In its most primitive and immediate form this sort of "reflective" history, which one can also see in Livy, is so abridged as to be wholly lifeless, a dry and abstract record of events, qualitatively undifferentiated. But at the other extreme, the effort to immerse the reader wholly in the past by heaping up antiquarian detail is lifeless in so far as it is wholly particular: there is nothing universal, no unifying principle in such mere catalogues. Antiquarian detail as an end in itself, the study of the past for its own sake, ceases to be history and comes into its own in the historical novel. Sheer antiquarianism, and its nemesis, for the attempt to 'live' and make the reader 'live' in a past regarded as wholly alien by putting lots of pieces of it together in a manner that is necessarily wholly external and mechanical ends in a dead pedantry,¹ can be taken as providing the dialectical transition to the next stage of "reflective" history, viz., "pragmatic" history. All historical writing is pragmatic in so far as a past is present in a mind which gives the events a unity which they do not possess in themselves, so that the past is *aufgehoben*: taking it up into the present means that it is abolished as sheer past, whatever antiquarians may try

¹ Presumably the *Geist* of the historical novel, what is alive in it, is not truly historical, and what is historically accurate in the historical novel is not truly alive. What belongs to the present and what belongs to the past never cohere in a living unity.

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to think. But nemesis follows the attempt to make it wholly present and of general import: the pulsing life of the present spurns the pale, powerless generalizations that are the 'lessons' of a past that can never be exactly similar or truly relevant, and the reader, bored by these general reflections alleged to be of universal validity but which must in fact differ from writer to writer and from age to age, turns back with relief to sheer chronicle, which has no particular point of view. "Critical" history, the next logical step and a reaction against utilitarian history or pragmatic history as such, is not so much history as a preliminary history of history; it prides itself especially on extracting more from the records of the past than is apparently contained in them, but carried to the point where subjective fancies are substituted for historical data, it is simply another way of importing the present into the past; the so-called "higher criticism" ceases to be properly historical or critical. *Spezialgeschichte*, the final phase of "reflective" history, is an abstraction from the living whole of a culture or cultures of a single topic for historical study, as in constitutional history or legal history or the history of art, or science or religion, etc. In so far as this apparently 'external' approach, when properly pursued, however, yields the inner connection or *leitmotiv* of events (*die innere leitende Seele der Begebenheiten*), and in so far as its point of view is general, it forms the transition to the third stage; philosophy of history, the realm no longer of the 'Understanding', but of Reason. The point of view here is no longer abstract and special, as in the highest stage of "reflective" history, but truly concrete and universal; in philosophy of history past and present are re-united, but no longer as in the immediate, unreflective unity of "original" history. *Geist* is ever present and has no past, yet it comes to full self-consciousness in history; it is ever the same, but, as manifested in each unique *Volksgeist* or culture, ever different.

Critics however like Croce cannot see why the dialectic has to proceed beyond "reflective" history, for what does philosophical history do which cannot be done by "reflective" history? The answer is nothing, *qua* history. The situation is much the same here as in the *Philosophy of Right*, where critics like M. B. Foster¹ can see no need for the transition from "civil society", the dialectic of which, like that of "reflective" history, moves from a world of fragmentation and particularism to a kind of unity, which is not, however, that of philosophy, to the "state". This transition, argues Foster, Hegel only brings about in the sinister interests of the ruling class. In "civil society" everything necessary for the realiza-

¹ *The Political Philosophies of Plato and Hegel*.

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tion of *Sittlichkeit* (objective ethical life), and in “reflective” history everything necessary for true history are said to be already present; the progress of the dialectic means the superseding and destruction by philosophy of the possibility of democracy and the historian’s history respectively.

And the answer to the objection applies in both cases: neither at the level of “reflective” history, nor in “civil society”, both of which are fragmented worlds of the ‘Understanding’, is the universal “seen in the light of the universal”. The administration of justice in “civil society”, for example, can only be an end in itself from a pragmatic point of view; however well administered it cannot be always or truly just: it is, however, necessary to the proper functioning of the whole, and in time of war, for example, many aspects of it may have to be dispensed with; however, what appears arbitrary, external and unjust at the level of “civil society” will not be so when seen in the light of the whole. When I view the administration of justice, which as such is the universal (the law) applied in my particular case, in the light of the whole, I can see that it cannot be an end in itself, that in time of crisis, for instance, it may have to be suspended in the interests of the state and therefore in the final analysis in the interest of the freedom maintained by the state. “Civil society” is therefore “the state as envisaged by the ‘Understanding’.” Its freedom cannot be the last word about freedom in the state.

Similarly, in “reflective” history every historian has more or less consciously and adequately a ‘philosophy of history’, some preconceived ideas without which he cannot function as a historian at all. They are necessary hypotheses, and there may be as many of them as there are historians, and one cannot be said to be any more true than another at this level. Which is the point made by modern analytical philosophers of history. Mandelbaum, for example, in *The Problem of Historical Knowledge*, is anxious to show that an empirical philosophy of history is impossible and a contradiction in terms. This is Hegel’s point, and it brings out the sceptical and analytical side of the dialectic which the critics are prone to overlook. The dialectic shows that history as such cannot be ‘useful’; the past as studied by the historian has no ‘lessons’ – Hegel’s saying to this effect is well known.

In the realm of “reflective” history the history of *Geist* as the realization of freedom is just one more hypothesis among many. As such it is purely formal and abstract and its content is purely arbitrary. There is nothing to decide which particular version of the history of freedom or which particular ‘philosophy of history’ is true – any criterion of truth will appear to be a universal imposed arbitrarily from without, with no

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generally recognized or public claim to be in any way superior or qualitatively different from any other. This is the true historian's attitude, *qua* historian, to the philosophy of history, but the historian's experience, as such, is not the last word about the whole of experience (in art, religion and philosophy, the sphere of Absolute *Geist*, history and historical development as such cease to have importance or meaning), and historians who act as though they were claiming that it is simply fall to quarrelling among themselves: the assertion is self-negating; what was a useful working hypothesis becomes a menace to the discovery of the (historian's) truth. And this is the negation which philosophy negates. 'Completing' "reflective" history does not mean negating it, but negating its negations; in the same way, the state negates the negations of "civil society", a world of self-interest which in itself, regarded as an absolute, is self-destructive. The true historical content of the philosophy of history is not therefore solely a matter for "reflective" history as such.

Only philosophy can provide the true 'notion' of freedom which 'reflective' history as such cannot comprehend, that is, it provides the content of the idea of freedom (and therefore the content of the philosophy of history), because to think freedom philosophically, that is concretely, not abstractly, is to think the organized life described in the *Philosophy of Right*, viz. the 'Idea' of the modern democratic state in which alone freedom can be fully realized and the claim of modern man to self-realization and self-satisfaction made any sort of reality. (And it is already some sort of historical reality because otherwise it could not be thought by philosophy, where merely describes the given, and cannot describe something which does not exist.) This gives one the criterion of truth lacking in history as such and the content without which the philosophy of history as such is purely formal and abstract. A history of freedom at the level of "reflective" history might be a history of 'totalitarian freedom', or of anarchism; it is open to all the manipulated interpretations and newspeak of the men of 1984 or anybody: its content is wholly arbitrary. A true history of freedom presupposes the philosophy of *Recht*, and philosophy of history is the logical conclusion of that. The history of freedom cannot be divorced from the political organization and law and the idea of law without which freedom is a mere abstraction and unreal. (To say that for Hegel, true freedom "in typical idealist fashion, is possible only through discipline"¹ is just silly, either, a pale relic of the

¹ W. H. Dray, *Philosophy of History*, p. 70. A remark which spoils one of the better attempts by a modern philosopher of history to give a brief account of Hegel's philosophy of history.

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old nonsense about Hegel being “anti-liberal”, or a timid half-conscious professorial bow in the direction of some noisy but mindless ‘permissiveness’. Only if one is an anarchist can one reject Hegel’s philosophy of the state, and Hegel himself in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* shows what logical and moral absurdities the anarchist gets into if he thinks his beliefs right through.)

This means that the philosophy of history will *not* be universal history or world-history as that is conceived by the ‘Understanding’: viz., everything in the bag, but highly selective, and it is badly off target to criticize Hegel’s philosophy of history for being selective,¹ or for treating the whole of history as though it were ‘political’, which was Collingwood’s main criticism.² “The moral”, wrote Collingwood, “is that political developments should be conceived by the historian as integrated with economic, artistic, religious and philosophical developments, and that the historian should not be content with anything short of a history of man in his concrete actuality.” Although Hegel was not doing history *qua* historian, this in principle is what his philosophy of history is, even if his lectures on the history of art, religion and philosophy formed separate courses. But in the lectures that are called “the philosophy of world history”, Hegel is dealing with the ground of these activities, without which they are impossible, hence the “central position of the state”, which Collingwood objected to and called an “anachronism”. But Hegel’s idea of the state is comprehensive, like Aristotle’s, and a philosophy of history in which it is central, or rather fundamental, is not “political” in the sense criticized by Collingwood, but a history of civilization. (To be more precise, a history of civilization, from one point of view, of civilizations, from another – a synthesis, as some would describe it, of ‘rationalist’ and ‘romantic’ historiography.) And since Hegel’s philosophy is not the ‘idealist’ photographic negative, which Marx thought he was developing into a true picture, and since “civil society”, which incorporates what Hegel called the “system of needs”, is an essential aspect of the ‘Idea’ of the modern state, and therefore of freedom properly conceived, Hegel’s philosophy of history, in principle at any rate, incapsulates and postulates a materialist or economic interpretation of history.

And if the task of the philosopher is to think experience concretely

¹ It is also fashionable to display one’s broadmindedness by criticizing Hegel for being arrogantly Europo-centric or Western-orientated. The latest example is W. H. Walsh in *Hegel’s Political Philosophy, Problems and Perspectives* (ed. Z. A. Pelczynski). But isn’t Hegel’s perspective broadly the right one? Or at least should one not wait until world history has shown its hand a bit more clearly?

² R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, p. 122.

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and to describe the given, the philosophy of history cannot be an *a priori* scheme, thought out prior to observation of the facts and the work of the historian as such. The *Geist* of modern man, his claim to freedom, is real enough, and must have come about in history. Hegel does not say that this was ineluctably necessary, but that it can be seen to have happened. This is the “outline” or “skeleton plot” which W. H. Walsh says must be an *a priori* deduction.¹ But this “outline”, surely, is precisely what is most obviously and palpably given to observation? Men know and have and want freedom as they once did not, just as they know and have and want electricity as they once did not. This fact or event or process *is* the meaning of history: the fact is the meaning. One could object to the way in which Hegel presents the details of this development, though one should always remember that it is wrong to think of the dialectic as a rigid pattern of ultimate and unchangeable truth.

Hegel was concerned in the *Philosophy of Right* and in the philosophy of history with the inherent ‘rationality’ of the modern state and of world-history respectively; in neither case was he, so to speak, simply photographing the facts. The *Philosophy of Right* is not a description of any one actual state, although it is full of empirical detail, but of the inherent rationality of the modern state as such. In both cases one has a rational ‘deduction’, or logical core, with a great deal of empirical content. The difficulty therefore does not concern the ‘outline’ or ‘skeleton plot’ or sheer logic of freedom but, since the dialectic is neither wholly deductive nor wholly inductive, how far into empirical detail must the philosopher venture? How does one draw the line, and where, between what is an object for philosophy (like the state, which clearly is) and what is not (like Jones’ red hair, which clearly is not)? The jury, for example, is part of the rational state; but philosophy is not concerned with its size or composition. The decision seems arbitrary. But if the ‘truth’ of philosophy is the ‘truth’ of a portrait, not of a photograph, then to some extent what goes in, the empirical content, cannot be guided by any rigid, mechanical rule. The dialectic is essentially flexible, though there is a hard core: the logic of freedom.

Obviously there has been a development as a historical fact in man’s consciousness of freedom, though to regard this as akin to a rationalistic idea of progress does scant justice to the depth of Hegel’s insight and subtlety of his analysis. In describing it in detail, the philosopher is wholly dependent on the historian, and the state of contemporary historical knowledge, which will grow and alter and also reflect changing social

An Introduction to Philosophy of History (1951), p. 151.

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conditions etc., as Hegel was very much aware. The empirical detail therefore of the philosophy of history must be regarded as tentative and subject to change. Detailed criticism of the content of Hegel's philosophy of history seems for this reason somewhat otiose. It is based on a misconception of what a "unitary view of history" means in Hegel. There can, of course, be only one philosophy of history, as there can be only one philosophy of the state, because there cannot be alternatives to reality, but the detailed pattern is subject to change in conformity with the basis of fact provided by the professional historians or political scientists (or for that matter the philosopher himself *qua* professional historian or political scientist in so far as that is practicable). There is more than one pattern of the philosophy of history in Hegel's own work, especially if one takes into account the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the writings prior to that. Hegel with his insatiable appetite for information was apt to delve deeply into the empirical realm of observed fact, thereby dangerously extending his lines, in so far as he was dependent on the state of knowledge in his day, though for thus showing his appreciation of what Croce calls historian's history he has had nothing but abuse from the historians themselves, because they have regarded as a menace to their profession what is really a compliment. The more genuinely concrete a philosophy is, the more dead wood it is presumably fated to carry as time and research proceed, and the more purely antiquarian knowledge is required to properly appreciate and understand it. One of the difficulties in understanding Hegel, especially the philosophy of nature, is precisely that he was so deeply immersed and well informed in all the sciences of his time. Critics of the philosophy of history do not, as a rule, possess enough knowledge of the history of history and other sciences, or the historical imagination, to be able to make the necessary allowances; e.g., if anthropologists had discovered the 'state' among primitive peoples, still a somewhat controversial matter, Hegel would presumably have had to begin with them. As it is he begins with the East, and the development of freedom is given a geographical East–West movement. This sort of thing, emphasis, for instance, on the role of world-historical individuals, natural to someone who had lived under the shadow of Napoleon and admired him, for reasons usually misunderstood, belongs to the flexible, adjustable sector of the philosophy of history. And this belongs to the body of the lectures, so that anyone wanting to judge how far the dialectic applied to history did lead to new insights must go to them (and the full, critical edition has not been translated from the German). As in the *Philosophy of Right* so here, one must go behind the empirical description to the inherent

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rationality, or see the latter in the former, to distinguish what is living and what is dead in Hegel's account.

And if freedom and the idea of the modern state are in some sense objective realities of the modern world – they could not be thought by philosophy otherwise – then to this extent and in this sense the process of world-history relevant to the philosopher is complete, and the argument that a philosophy of history is impossible because history is open-ended, and therefore no human being can survey the whole scene, does not apply. The philosopher can survey the whole scene of the development of freedom; though this does not mean anything so absurd as that history comes to an end with Hegel.

Nearly all modern writers who discuss the nature of historical thinking feel obliged to take issue with Hegel, and some are more adequately equipped to do so than others. Thus W. H. Dray, for example, is aware of the difficulties involved in Hegel's alleged *a priorism*, but he ends up subscribing to a version of the "two level" interpretation.¹ Hegel does not show *in general*, he complains, that the passions of individuals are such as to bring about a situation in which there can be a dialectical development of Spirit. But what Hegel does is what numerous thinkers in the previous century had done, that is, point to two 'facts': on the one hand the progress of civilization; on the other the prevailingly selfish passions of men, so that something like what Hegel called the "cunning of reason" has to be posited as an explanation. Dray's short account is fairly full; more often the references to Hegel in recent writers are too brief and cryptic to be worth attempting to answer. Thus Danto in his *Analytical Philosophy of History* says that Hegel never asked what was the significance of the Absolute's final self-awareness, or if he had, he would doubtless have moved to a quite different sense of 'significant' than that applied to the ordinary events of history.² W. B. Gallie accuses Hegel of monstrously distorting the ideal of generous-mindedness which he glimpsed to meet the needs of his system.³ After a survey of the literature one is left wondering why modern philosophers of history bother with Hegel at all. Mostly they only muddy the waters of interpretation without advancing the cause of the philosophy of history.

¹ *Philosophy of History*, p. 81. "The Hegelian account of history recognizes two levels at which the course of events can be described, each with its own kind of mechanism. The two levels, however, never really mesh."

² A. C. Danto, *Analytical Philosophy of History*, p. 14.

³ *Philosophy and the Historical Understanding*, pp. 225–6.

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3. Hegel and the political theorists

An adequate grasp of Hegel's idea of the state as the realization of the concept of freedom has until quite recently been an esoteric rarity. It was suggested earlier that the most fundamental cause of all the misunderstanding is the failure to appreciate properly the "religious dimension" of Hegel's philosophy, its heart and centre in his idea of Christianity. If one knows what Hegel means by "divine" one can see that his "deification" of the state means just the opposite of what it is usually taken to mean, and that MacIver's view of Hegel's state as "a sort of God whose thoughts are not our thoughts and whose ways are not our ways",¹ for example, is for Hegel quite literally a kind of blasphemy. It is blasphemy for a Christian to think of God as in any way unknown, a concealed object acting on mankind from without in a manner humanly unknown and unknowable. This constitutes the unholy alliance of rationalist agnostics and pietists (like Ranke, one might say): both think of God as an unknowable object. The 'totalitarian' interpretation of Hegel's political philosophy, according to which the state is said to be all-in-all and the individual nothing, has not as a rule gone deep enough nor realized that such a view is made totally impossible by the religious ground of his whole philosophy so that his rejection of it could not possibly be more sincere or deep-seated.

And the 'Idea' of the state, its 'rationality' properly understood, quickly disposes of the many varied accusations that Hegel's theory of the state endorses nationalism, relativism, and *Machtpolitik*. The state is the "overreaching" universal, which both needs and makes possible the particularity of the *Volk*, the unique culture of the 'nation' (which is an unfortunate word in this context, unless one realizes that it applies to the Greek *polis*, for example: 'culture-state' would be less apt to mislead than 'nation-state'), as it needs and makes possible the private satisfactions of the individual of "civil society", at the same time curbing the self-destructive excesses of self-seeking particularity in the light of principles of universal validity. Any 'nationalism' which is wholly particular is thus one-sided and self-destructive, like the self-seeking particularism of "civil society" in itself and as such.

It was because Meinecke failed to understand what he called Hegel's "philosophy of identity", in which he thought "the irrationality and uncleanness of historical reality as a whole" was "mere dissonance, which

¹ R. M. MacIver, *The Modern State*, p. 450.

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is resolved in the (ultimate) harmony”, and “all the rich and variegated activity of history re-interpreted as being merely the play of marionettes... guided by a higher hand”, that he could see Hegel as an unholy compound of Machiavellian *raison d'état* and *Historismus*, the “doctrine of individuality”, for whom national power was the supreme aim of the “deified” “supra-individual entity” of the state, whose right was all-in-all.¹ Meinecke historicized Hegel’s philosophy: Hegel “reinterpreted the concept of reason, from being the static force it was before, into the fluid developmental process of historical humanity”; he equated the actually existing with the rational, so that “everything, absolutely everything”, served to promote the progressive self-realization of divine reason.² Meinecke’s complete failure to see the universal, natural law side of Hegel’s philosophy vitiates his whole powerful-seeming denunciation of it as the evil culmination of Machiavellism.

But history is only the temporal and objective dimension of Spirit’s self-realization; the philosophy of history is itself a stage in the dialectic. *The Philosophy of Right* does not in fact end with the state. The achievement of freedom in the rational state is not an end in itself; the political/moral freedom possible in the state is only a relative freedom: the sort of “manly, moral freedom” which Burke said must be limited in order to be possessed. It is a one-sided freedom, the freedom of *Geist qua* objective, not the absolute freedom of Absolute *Geist*, that is, the realization of truth in art, religion and finally and fully in philosophy. There must, therefore, be a transition from Objective *Geist* to Absolute *Geist*, and this is provided by world-history, the arena in which states achieve their self-hood as individuals and the recognition by others which individuality implies. Accordingly we move from the “Idea” of the rational state to the arena of world-history, in which states meet their doom, where their finitude *qua* particular nation-states is made manifest, a finitude and particularity brought home to man’s consciousness by the fact of war. The “earthly God” is seen to suffer the fate of everything mortal and finite in what appears at first glance to be a realm wholly given over to the play of the contingent and the unforeseen. International law between sovereign states is no more than an “ought”; there is no higher court of judgment than history – the world’s court.

It has been argued that Hegel finds himself in a logical dilemma at this point because any mere “ought” represents a retrogression after the

¹ F. Meinecke, *Machiavellism* (trs. by Douglas Scott of *Die Idee der Staatsräson*), pp. 355, 363, 367. But see the whole chapter on Hegel.

² *Op. cit.* pp. 363, 349. Carlo Antoni followed Meinecke. See *L’Historisme* (French trs. by A. Dufour), pp. 64–75.

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ethical synthesis achieved by the rational state,¹ but this is to forget that the synthesis is not final: the unity of universal and particular achieved in the state is logically and empirically precarious in so far as the state belongs to the world of contingency and empirical fact. History as the world's court is not called in to mend a break in the progress of the dialectic: it is an essential and typical aspect of it; a typical example of the "labour of the negative", leading to a truer unity, a higher spirituality. The state's finitude in history forms the dialectical transition to Absolute *Geist* as the death of the animal organism is the transition from Nature to Subjective *Geist*. The onward march of the dialectic demands not, as Russell thought, a World-State, because such a thing does not exist and cannot be an object for philosophy, but a falling apart once again of universal and particular, subject and object, and this happens in world-history, where on the one hand we have the actions of states and individual historical persons promoting an end which was no part of their intention, and on the other, that end itself. It is fully in accord with the dialectic that Spirit, on its way to the absolute freedom of full self-consciousness, should plunge into another phase of self-diremption; "let itself go" into the world of contingency and particularity and externality and unfreedom; and find itself again in this world, the world of Volney and Gibbon, of *Les Ruïnes* and the dissolution of states and empires, of Shelley's *Ozymandias* and the chorus in *Hellas*, which is seen to be not just that but a transition to another, truer, phase of freedom and life more abundant. Universal and particular fallen apart, we have a world of particular states, each with its own unique *Geist* and culture, externally related, with no principle of unity, apparently, other than the purely formal universality of the "*Sollen*" of international law. And in war the particular individual is wholly absorbed in and by the universal (the state) and sacrifices his private satisfactions and self in whole or in part. In this self-sacrifice, as in the death of the physical organism, the universal triumphs over the particular, only death is now filled with a meaning lacking at that purely natural level of experience.

And when all the variety and individuality of the world of *Historismus* is seen to be also the working out of a single process, the universal (the *Weltgeist*) appears to stand above the ethos of particular nations and the particular passions of world-historical individuals, and direct them, through the "cunning of reason", to its own end, unknown to them, as though it were separate and apart, a transcendental object. And that is how it must appear to the 'Understanding', but since the diremption of

¹ H. A. Reyburn, *Hegel's Ethical Theory*, chapter XIII.

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Spirit is a self-diremption, this cannot be the truth of the matter. If the Absolute is wrongly conceived as supra-individual object, *a fortiori* the *Weltgeist* is no such thing. It is *Geist*, the human spirit, in history, in its process of self-realization in time; the temporal dimension of Spirit's coming-to-be and being; it is the critics, using the one-dimensional 'Understanding', who are guilty of 'reification', seeing the *Weltgeist* as an external object.

The *Philosophy of Right* ends, not with the state, but with the higher right, the higher justice of world-history, and this does not mean the justification of the historical process as such and with it the sanctification of state power as such, the criterion of judgement being the mere survival or success of the state, but what is "rational and real" in that process, viz., the development of freedom. It is in this sense that world-history is a 'court' delivering 'judgement' according to a 'law', which is not the law of self-preservation and *Machtpolitik*, but belongs to *Recht*, as world-history is a section of the philosophy of *Recht*. Everything else is not *wirklich*, not 'real', not alive in the world, but so much lifeless husk deprived of Spirit. This applies to anything that stands in the way of the *Geist* of modern man, which is the 'reality' which the philosopher describes and cannot overleap, and would apply therefore to the Restoration, in so far as it did so. That is why it is inept to describe Hegel as a conservative or even conservative,¹ let alone as a kind of official apologist of the Restoration, unless one means to assert that everyone who is not an anarchist is 'conservative'.

Marx, at least, knew what he was doing when he undertook the criticism of Hegel's philosophy of the state, and curiously enough it was Marx who first refuted or anticipated later refutations of the 'totalitarian' interpretation of Hegel's idea of the *Rechtsstaat*. This was because in his critique of the state in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* he was attacking the idea of the *Rechtsstaat* as such, and trying to show that the modern democratic state is a contradiction in terms: "true democracy" and the state are incompatible.

¹ As a great many have done and do. G. A. Kelly's account of Hegel in *Idealism, Politics and History* is vitiated by the notion of Hegel as "a conservative". As a corrective one could read Jacques d'Hondt, *Hegel en son temps*.

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Coda: Marx's critique of Hegel's "Philosophy of Right" and the emergence of a new legend

With Marx's critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*¹ another Hegel legend emerged, according to which not the state but "civil society" is all in all, the state being a mystical idea of unity veiling the empirical reality of the divisions of bourgeois society, and Hegel's philosophy is the owl of Minerva which appears at dusk to survey and sum up a civilization that has had its day. This interpretation has been endorsed by some modern scholars and is seen for instance in Shlomo Avineri's *Hegel's Theory of the State*.²

Marx's object was to demolish the idea of the modern democratic state as such by showing how it is illogical and inconsistent, as any true account, and Hegel's account was true in an important sense, even if "upside down", was bound to be, because it was the product of an alienated society. That is, Marx thought that if he could destroy the logic of the connection between the logic and the empirical content of the *Philosophy of Right*, he would have destroyed the logic of the modern state. And the commentators, Hippolyte, Rubel, Avineri, Kamenka and O'Malley, for example,³ seem all more or less agreed that Marx succeeded in showing that Hegel does not manage to deduce his empirical content satisfactorily from his logical premisses: his own logic breaks down. In fact this happens less frequently than the commentators appear to suppose.⁴ That however is not the important thing. The important thing is that to suppose that there should be strict logical links in the movement of the dialectic is to miss its real meaning and significance and value as a device to enable one to think concretely about the state, freedom, etc. As has been seen, the whole point about Hegel's dialectic as a device of philosophical explanation is that it is *not* a process of rigid logical deduction: it moves freely, it is to be used flexibly, its purpose is to provide insight and understanding of the human condition. Free interpretation

¹ An English translation of the complete text was published by the Cambridge University Press in 1970: *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'* by Karl Marx (ed. Joseph O'Malley).

² See my review of Avineri in *Cambridge Review* (March 1973).

³ J. Hippolyte, *Etudes sur Marx et Hegel*, p. 128. M. Rubel, *Karl Marx, essai de biographie intellectuelle*, ch. III. S. Avineri, *The Social and Political thought of Karl Marx*, pp. 28–30. E. Kamenka, *The Ethical Foundations of Marxism*, ch. 4. J. O'Malley, *op. cit.*, Introduction.

⁴ For example, Hegel's deduction of hereditary monarchy is usually misunderstood.

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of the *Philosophy of Right* is in the spirit of the dialectic; rigidly strict interpretation violates it. And a strict interpretation, looking for logical lapses, being a misunderstanding of the dialectic, will not be powerful criticism either of Hegel's method or of what he is describing, in this case the modern state as such. It is Marx's great mistake to treat the logic of Hegel's account of the state as something brittle, broken up by formal contradictions; so that even if some of Marx's shells do fall on Hegel's rather exposed front-line, they are liable to miss the rational reality which on a more free, but perfectly legitimate interpretation, i.e. legitimate according to the spirit of the dialectic, constitutes Hegel's reserve line. There is a rationale of the modern state behind the front line onto which Marx directs all his artillery. And Marx's whole purpose is to criticize the modern *Rechtsstaat*; in criticizing Hegel he thinks he is doing this, but his critique is such that even when he has apparently played havoc with Hegel's alleged contradictions, the deeper rational meaning of the modern state suggested by Hegel's dialectic still stands. And therefore Marx's own alternative of "true democracy" is not established by a genuine critique of the modern state.

The fact is that Hegel's front-line is more advanced than it need be, beyond the sheer logic of freedom and into the region of actual empirical fact. This is the fascination of the *Philosophy of Right*, but there was the risk of incorporating institutions which, though they were a norm of civilized society in Hegel's day, might be difficult to defend in a rationale of the modern state as such. In his search for empirical content, Hegel's linking of logic and actuality was liable to feel the gravitational pull of contemporary European norms too strongly, and the more empirical actuality is incorporated, the greater the risk of rationalizing the merely contingent and laying oneself open to the charge of political conservatism. Obviously the philosopher has to be guided by the actually existing, if he cannot "leap over Rhodes"; equally obviously he cannot surrender to it wholesale, as he would if he were to be a political gazetteer or almanack, photographing the political institutions of any one particular state, unless of course that state was an exact representation of the rational state. And no actual state was.¹ And since Hegel was describing the inherent rationality or essential logic of the existing situation of modern post French-revolutionary civilization it is misleading to talk of his subservient attitude to existing political institutions unless one is very clear what one means by that. "He is committed *a priori* to the principle that the empirical

¹ Those who think that Prussia has have only to compare the *Philosophy of Right* with Prussian institutions at that time – or lack of them.