

Introduction

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This volume is intended as an introduction and a contribution to the study of Hegel's political philosophy. The subject has been debated rather heatedly for more than a century, and in many languages. The reasons for this are not hard to find.

First, Hegel was an exceptionally interesting and influential philosopher. Born in 1770, he published his first book in 1807 and did not obtain a professorship until 1816. But during the remaining fifteen years of his life his fame spread far and wide, and when he died in 1831 he not only dominated German philosophy but also left his mark on the study of religion and art, on historical studies, and on political thought. After his death he went into eclipse in Germany, at least as a philosopher. But his influence in the other fields just mentioned remained crucial. Among those whose development simply can-

not be understood apart from him are Marx and Kierkegaard. While German philosophers lost interest in him, Hegelianism became dominant in Great Britain and in the United States. Then, early in the twentieth century, when Anglo-American philosophy foresook "Idealism," the Germans rediscovered Hegel. And since World War II interest in Hegel has been growing almost everywhere.

Second, Hegel was an exceptionally difficult philosopher whose interpretation poses monumental problems. Perhaps no other major philosopher is as persistently obscure as is Hegel. There are not merely many dark passages here and there, but almost every page he published requires careful study and reflection before it can be explained with any confidence. Fortunately, he was not particularly prolific; he published four major works: *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, *Science of Logic*, *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, and *Philosophy of Right*. But his students expanded the last two works after his death, adding a lot of material from their lecture notes, and they also published his lectures on the philosophy of history, the philosophy of art, the philosophy of religion, and the history of philosophy—ten volumes in all—always relying on their notes. This material is far easier to read than Hegel's own books, but the texts are not at all reliable. Not only would few professors care to reach posterity by way of their students' lecture notes, but Hegel changed his courses drastically every time he gave them, and his students amalgamated notes taken many years apart and produced a single consecutive narrative. This plan made it necessary for them to supply a lot of their own mortar to fill gaps. Adding further to the confusion, some scholars have come along in the twentieth century and published some of Hegel's early manuscripts that he had refrained from printing. The disparity of all these materials and the obscurity of Hegel's style facilitate widely different interpretations of Hegel.

A miserable cliché says that there are two sides to every question. The implication is that both are equally justified. This is doubly wrong. There are many more than two sides, but not

all views have equal merit. Most views tend to be uninformed and incompetent, while a few have sufficient merit to repay close study. Often none of them appears entirely acceptable after careful examination of the evidence and arguments; but those who take the trouble to evaluate several theories stand a far better chance to come up with a good theory of their own than do those who pay no heed to the literature. Many mistakes can be avoided by reading studies that have corrected them some time ago.

The ten essays that follow do not represent ten sides. There are only six authors of whom four appear twice. Two of these four attack Hegel very sharply, along similar lines, while the remaining writers defend Hegel against a large number of charges. Very roughly speaking, then, we do concentrate on two sides after all; but close study should reveal many interesting differences.

Can we say in the end that all these writers are right, or that in the present state of knowledge it is impossible to say who is right? Neither verdict is tenable. It is not as if all sides agreed about what Hegel actually said and the dispute was mainly about whether he was right. It is actually surprising how little argument we find in these pages about what is right or wrong, good or evil. Most of the disagreements are about whether Hegel did or did not say this or that. And that kind of question can usually be decided by careful scholarship. But in that respect some of the pages that follow are rather disappointing. Indeed, one is sometimes led to wonder whether old errors never die.

THE MARCH OF GOD AND OTHER BONERS

One alleged quotation from Hegel that keeps cropping up in these pages is said to be found in section 258 of *The Philosophy of Right*. The sentence in question, however, is found only in the posthumous edition where it is clearly marked as an editorial addition, based on lecture notes. The editor, Eduard

Gans, explained in his preface that in these additions “the stylistic order, the connection of the sentences, and sometimes the choice of words as well are mine.”

In German the sentence reads: “*Es ist der Gang Gottes in der Welt, dass der Staat ist.*” In his *Hegel Selections* (1929), J. Loewenberg mistranslated these words without even indicating that they came from an “Addition,” as follows: “The State is the march of God through the world.” But even if the German text had *das* (with one s), this neuter pronoun could not possibly refer to *Gang* which in German is masculine. *Dass* is no pronoun at all but a conjunction, and the correct translation is: “It is the way of God with [literally: in] the world that there should be [literally: is] the state.” The point is that the existence of states is no mindless accident but, metaphorically speaking, God’s plan or providence, and it is the philosopher’s task when discussing this institution to discover its reason, its *raison d’être*.

“The march of God in the world, that is what the state is,” writes Knox in his generally admirable translation, and Hook echoes this version. But this interpretation is also totally untenable; it founders on the facts already mentioned. Incidentally, *gehen* means *go*, and *Gang* means *way*; and the importation of *march* speaks for itself.

This misquotation is first encountered in the following pages in Carritt’s initial reply to Knox (see page 36). It is followed by several more quotations in the same paragraph, and most readers probably would not notice, and Carritt himself may have overlooked, the fact that none of these proof texts was published by Hegel himself.

The first comes from *System der Sittlichkeit*, written by Hegel around 1802, five years before he published his first book and about twenty years before the appearance of *The Philosophy of Right*. This “System” was first published as a whole by Georg Lasson in 1913, in Hegel: *Schriften zur Politik und Rechtsphilosophie* (2d rev. ed., 1923). The sentence about “The absolute government” quoted by Carritt is found

on pp. 483f.—and in context does not mean anything like what Carritt takes it to mean. In his introduction, Lasson had explained: “This is followed, under the title ‘the absolute government,’ by the description of a form of government that could most nearly be designated as theocratic—the rule of the priests and the old. . . . Real governments are discussed only in the next chapter about ‘general government’ ” (xxxix f.).

Or take the last quotation in that paragraph, taken from Lasson’s edition of Hegel’s lectures on the philosophy of history. Again a totally misleading impression is given to the reader, as will be evident immediately when we cite the first sentence that has been omitted in the middle. (The omission is duly marked by three dots.) “Those who in ethical determination and thus nobly resisted that which the progress of the idea of the spirit made necessary are superior in moral worth to those whose crimes would have been transmuted in a higher order to become means that would implement the will of this order.” Hardly a stylistic gem, but sufficient to show that Carritt’s proof texts do not say what he takes them to say. For further discussion of this idea, see the last essay, below.

It would not be feasible to offer at this point a catalogue of errors. Sooner or later many claims in these pages are challenged, some only in the final essay. But anyone who perseveres to the end and then, after the last chapter, goes back to some of the preceding attacks might find that an interesting experience.

NATIONALISM

The article on “Hegel and Nationalism” is very informed and illuminating but contains one striking error that is interesting enough to be briefly considered here. Hegel was even much less of a nationalist than Avineri suggests in the second paragraph of section V, when he says: “Now, it is true that the formal division of the *Philosophy of History* into oriental,

Greek, Roman, and Germanic periods points to the interpretation of epochs characterized each by a different dominant nation.”

This concession is perplexing. Hegel divides history into three, not four, eras, and not one of these is characterized by a dominant nation. “Oriental” means for Hegel the whole realm from China and Japan to Mesopotamia and Egypt; the Greeks and Romans he lumps together, and even if he did not it would be far from clear that either the ancient Greeks or the old Romans could be considered a nation; and the Germanic peoples who inhabit Protestant northern Europe are obviously not a nation.

HOOK’S FINAL REJOINDER

Hook’s final attack on Hegel’s “apologists” poses a difficult problem for the editor. To omit this statement would seem unfair and unjustifiable in a volume devoted to controversy; but letting it stand as the last word does not seem right either and would be unfair to Hegel and his “apologists.”

To some extent the problem is solved by including at the end of this volume two earlier articles in which some of Hook’s points are discussed at length. But he raises many other points that are not discussed elsewhere in these pages. To hunt down every issue and offer, as it were, a school solution in the end would be out of keeping with the spirit of this series. But a word about the nature of controversies seems entirely appropriate.

Ideally, the opponents in an intellectual discussion should be concerned above all to illuminate the issues and to bring to light the truth. In fact, there is always the temptation to develop a vested interest on one side of a debate and to try to score off one’s opponents, even to destroy them—not only their arguments but their credibility and reputation.

Sidney Hook’s rejoinder goes rather far in yielding to this temptation. In the very first sentence he compares his opponents to “circle-squarers.” Any reader who might have wondered whether Avineri’s expertise on Hegel did not perhaps

exceed Hook's is thus advised to think of Hegel's "apologists" as a bunch of nuts, while Professor Hook reminds us that he had made "no startling claim." Nobody had said that his claims were startling. The question raised by Avineri was whether Hook had repeated "some of the misconceptions which have bedeviled this discussion in the past two generations." Hook begins by setting aside the question whether these old charges against Hegel might deserve to be given up. Instead we are given the impression that Hook is a very sober and unemotional man who is opposed by some irrational extremists.

But by the end of section 2, Hegel is charged with "the most specious reasoning that ever disgraced a philosopher" and his writing is "nauseating." In section 4 "Hegel's ignoble behavior" is mentioned—but strong language is substituted for evidence. In the following section Hook calls Avineri's procedure "intellectually scandalous." By section 5, J. F. Fries has been turned into a liberal (for some quotations from his political writings of that period see section 5 of the last essay in this volume) and we are told that "Hegel sicked the police on to Fries." Hook has said this more than once without substantiating his charge. There is more of the same, and in section 7 "Hegel is the very model of a small-minded, timid Continental conservative." Small-minded indeed!

That Hegel was timid is proved eventually by a quotation from a letter to a friend in which Hegel said that he was *ängstlich* and loved *Ruhe*—that he was anxious and loved peace and quiet. Heaven help him had he said in a letter that he loved the clang of battle! Surely he was not timid as a thinker.

In the end Hook admits that Hegel's insights are independent of his personality—but concludes by saying once more that his personality was not "very admirable." Why this concern to blacken Hegel's admittedly irrelevant character? Professor Hook sounds like a district attorney, not like a philosopher. At that, he sheds little light on Hegel's personality. Having tried in my *Hegel* to offer among other things a portrait of the man, I shall not say another word here about his character or life.

LIBERAL OR CONSERVATIVE?

There is another issue with which Hook is greatly concerned, and some of the other writers in this volume also touch on it. This is the question whether Hegel was a liberal or a conservative. Since none of the combatants offers any definitions of these notoriously ambiguous terms, the question strikes me as rather pointless. It seems that the participants in this debate consider it good to be liberal and bad to be conservative, and that they disregard the awkward fact that these labels have different meanings in different countries and at different times.

“Liberal” rabbis in Germany between the first and second World Wars were distinguished by the very stance that marks “conservative” rabbis in the United States: observing the dietary laws and the Sabbath, conducting their services entirely in Hebrew, and having men and women sit separately during services. Both occupied the center between orthodox Judaism and Reform.

In England the two labels bring to mind two political parties, and a Conservative of the sixties may well favor policies considerably to the left of those advocated by the Liberals a few decades earlier. In the United States the two terms have no clear application at all, although a great many professors made a point of being “liberal” before the radicals of the late sixties did their best to make “liberal” a dirty word.

From the following pages we gather that Paine and Jefferson were liberals, but we are left in the dark about Washington, Madison, and Hamilton whom neither label seems to fit very well. And how would one establish that Paine was a liberal rather than, say, a radical? (Paine is mentioned once by Pelczynski and not at all by Avineri, but Hook discusses him at length to suggest that he was a liberal while Hegel was not.) And was Jefferson a liberal regarding revolution? Was he a liberal about slavery? Was not Hegel much more liberal than Jefferson about slavery?

Such "ism" words are an impediment to philosophic thought and historical understanding. *Philosophy begins beyond "isms."*

BACK TO HEGEL

Whoever wants to know what Hegel's political philosophy really was, must in the end go back to Hegel himself and read above all *The Philosophy of Right*. But Hegel is far from easy, and many readers get lost and do not know for what to look. This volume of controversy may add a dimension to the study of Hegel. It should alert students to issues and problems and bones of contention that they might otherwise overlook. And it may help scholars, too, by showing them what can be said, and actually has been said, against interpretations that had seemed reasonable to them.

Sometimes debates like these are depressing. But they also explode the prejudice that scholarship is bound to be lifeless and dull. Or that scholars are not human—all too human.