

Hegel's Critique of Hellenic Virtue

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The ethical order of the ancient Greeks Hegel sometimes calls 'true spirit', thus opposing it to the morality which remained with a division of the rational and the natural will. In Hellenic 'Sittlichkeit' the unity of this division was known in the family and the state — the substantial ends by which individuals were principally moved — but not subjectively in the form of free or rational self-consciousness. Through the ethical virtues individuals find relation to these institutional ends: passions and desires, social relations are converted from an indeterminateness, in which is implicit the radical contrariety known afterwards in the Stoic and other forms of the moral will, to the form of a limit or mean. The mean when it has acquired the stability of a 'hexis' or habit is then the end or form which is realized in ethical action. Through the agreement of these many ends with their reality the virtuous man comes to know himself as the practical reason which relates and orders them, remaining one with itself or its own end in this activity.

Practical reason operates, as Aristotle says, in the contingent or that which can be otherwise than it is. In this activity, in the ordinary life of the members of the family or state, the moving end present in these institutions is not fully disclosed. The knowledge of this end is the primary interest of Greek religion and of the poets and other artists through whom this religion received its full expression.¹ What is learned in the 'religion of beauty', as Hegel calls it, and is in the end destructive of it, is how the self-conscious freedom which is the nature of the Olympian gods becomes actual in heroic virtue and comic laughter.² The extremes of good and evil which the moral virtues limit and contain appear in the conflicting absolute ends of family and state. The self-consciousness which is capable of these extremes is at once the complete realization of the religion and ethical life of the Greeks and its ruin in a self-consciousness for which the ethical substance can no longer retain its concreteness.³

Plato might propose to save the 'polis' from this disintegration into a multitude of free individuals. But philosophy was itself another form of the same subjective freedom which in sophistry he saw

1. So already from Homer: Achilles can only resume that relation to the army which his virtue requires when the limits both of that virtue and of his rebellion against its demands have been exposed: so with Odysseus in relation to the virtue of the family.

2. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (*Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 9, p. 391, foll.)

3. *Ibid.*, p. 260.

to endanger the state. What Greek institutions had been he and then Aristotle more accurately might know in thought; they were powerless to oppose the general transition from the old ethical order to a society where men lived principally in their private interests. It was idle to think of the restoration of an institutional order in which men would find their end unless that order should contain the subjective freedom which had emerged inevitably from the first or immediate ethical order of the Greeks.

To Hegel, looking back at the course of a long history, it was evident that this restoration could only be on the foundation of a new religion, in which the Judaic belief in an absolute divine origination of the natural and human — the principle which Plato brought into view philosophically — should be completed by the subjective principle which the Hellenic polytheism gave birth to but could not accommodate. This Christian belief when in due course it became formative of a practical and historical order would be found able to sustain the strongest division of a realm of particular interests from the political good. This realization in the historical and finite form of the Christian belief defined theologically in the ancient church Hegel found to have reached a certain completeness in his own time. The idea of institutions in which individuals were free and had their true 'paideia', which had first occurred to Plato, might now be said to be actual.

That there was in the Greek religion and institutions a need to bring forth and make actual the subjective freedom implicit in them was a knowledge quickly lost to philologists and philosophers after Hegel's time. The moment at the end of the great revolutions of the eighteenth century when civil society could be known as integrated into the state was followed by a new revolution which has only reached or approaches its term in our time. Divisions of quite another form than before occurred in the relation of individual freedom to the state and other institutions. The study of Hellenic institutions reflected the interests and assumptions of the new revolution and Hegel was outside the argument. There might be a conservative or a democratic or the existential interest of a Nietzsche in the virtue and institutions of the Greeks; none attempted to collect these fragments into one view and to ask with Hegel about their common moving principle.

The concept of freedom found in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* — subjectively the integration of the rational individual or person with his natural particularity, objectively this freedom as realized through family, civil society and state — appears to be quite submerged in the new revolution. The rights of the person or rational individual

— the existence of his freedom, as Hegel defines right⁴ — were only realized by the discipline and education of the fundamental institutions by which the natural or particular will became known as comprehended in the universal, where individual and particular interests were allowed their free development; but this particular freedom was subject to the sovereign will of the state, in which relation the individual might know the completion of his subjective freedom. Hegel's comments on the Hellenic family and state are in the light of this concept. Whether they are true is a question about this measure, whether it is merely his invention and theory about right and freedom or, as he thought, the reason actual in the institutions of his time. Then further for us it is a question whether and in what way this concept of freedom continues and is present in contemporary institutions.

A. The Source of Contemporary Difficulties with Hegel's Critique

In the revolution which set in shortly after Hegel's death European institutions assumed a form so remote from that described in the *Philosophy of Right* that the relation of the new form to the old has to the present time been very little understood. Already to Marx in his unfinished commentary on the *Philosophy of Right* the Hegelian state appeared, not as that in which the freedom of individuals was realized, but as an idea in which they were alienated from their real freedom. The revolution meant for Marx that the former distinction of civil society from the state was obsolete and had in principle passed away. The same assumption was present generally in the passing of political power to at first a restricted part, then to all the members of civil society.

What was primary was taken to be individuals in their particular interests. The state remained, but not as before. The relation of individuals to it was divided: partly it should be their servant and be guided by public opinion, partly in it their national particularity had its centre. The monarch might remain or his function in the constitution be replaced by a president. Nationalism as an immediate felt unity of a linguistic and cultural community replaced the political virtue of the Hegelian state. A conservatism, whose basis had shifted from religion and a secular order built in its image to community of race and language, might compete with the liberal and socialist forces of society. So far as there was an integration of state and society it was not, as for Hegel, in a rational political good which

4. "Dies, dass ein Dasein überhaupt, Dasein des freien Willens ist, ist das Recht." *Philosophie des Rechts*, Einleitung, sect. 29. As to what the free will is, the subjective principle of the concrete freedom presupposed in contemporary culture, sections 4-28 of the same introduction.

contained and ordered the rights and freedoms of society, but in an immediate form. For the common principle of this final revolution, as it takes itself to be, in all forms is the individual immediately free in his particularity, the existential individual. In him the rational and natural will are concretely united, as in the Hegelian concept of freedom, but in an immediate and natural form.⁵ For this reason the realization of this principle is divided: either society should have its centre in the national community or the state should go over to the society which, beyond capitalistic competition, is to serve the individual in the whole extent of his interests and desires.

The extreme forms, in which the nature of this division is most clearly seen, are what is called 'fascism' or the like, and in the other direction 'socialism', whether Marxist or democratic, in general the welfare state. The opposition between the two is of the immediate unity of a natural and particular community, which would retract or prevent the emergence of the division of society, and the endlessly remote unity in which the division should be overcome. The conflicts proceeding from these opposed realizations of the new revolutionary principle have been a large part of the history of the twentieth century.

Along with these extremes there has been the more moderate democracy where the relation of state to society has been mediated by a plurality of parties, where the active sovereignty of the state is exercised by the leader of the party of the majority or of a coalition of parties. But this form tends to the same polarization — to a separating of linguistic and cultural communities from a technological society which knows no national boundaries. And the other component of the technological society is the individual endowed with pre-political rights to all its benefits. In North America where linguistic communities are not the heir to a history of political independence the division does not harden into the former European opposition of fascism to liberalism and socialism; similarly this opposition tends to be weakened as European national communities are drawn into a common economic society.

There belongs also essentially to the free individual of the contemporary revolution an attachment to older concepts of freedom, to former beliefs and institutions. These are at the same time assumed to be superseded in contemporary freedom and are desired as containing a substance and truth forgotten and submerged

5. Among many expositions of this principle, Marx, *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte*, III (*Werke*, Lieber v. Furth, Vol. 1, pp. 637-65). On the nature of the general cultural change which set in the 'forties of the last century, F. L. Jackson, "The Revolutionary Origins of Contemporary Philosophy", *Dionysius*, 1985.

in the revolution. Peoples hold longingly to what is called their culture, even when this has been stripped of its rationality and original meaning and is said to rest on natural distinctions of race and language. The revolution may be allowed to be right in both these attitudes: it has left behind it abstracter forms of freedom so far as its principle is implicitly concrete; it is dependent on the past and must seek to recall it so far as its principle is undeveloped and its historical mediation lost. Thus, for example, the contemporary doctrine of rights goes beyond the rights sought in earlier revolutions to the unlimited range of particular desires of the individual. But rights can have only such reality as institutions and the virtue of individuals afford. The nationalistic and technological institutions to which the revolution gives birth are found as much to oppose as to realize the rights of the existential individual. Individual rights, as they are now taken, conflict first with one another: the abstract equality of men and women, on the one side, and a spiritual difference without which there can be no family; social equality generally with the rights of linguistic and cultural groups; the division between the right of the individual to comprehensive social programmes and economic and technological necessities; between rights and the universality essential to law; etc. The resolution of these conflicts exceeds the limits of a democratic sovereignty, exercised by a prime minister or the like, which is at most a provisional arbiter of their opposing demands. Where sovereignty assumes instead the form of a nationalistic 'Führer' or of the secretary of the communist party, if there is a resolution, it is through irrational violence and police oppression.

There is thus present in the states and societies of the nineteenth century revolution an intrinsic tendency beyond themselves to a principle in which the elements of their constitutions might support, not impede and frustrate one another. Such was the function of 'the good' in Plato's ideal polity, of the 'imperium' of the Roman magistrate, and so variously in the later tradition. It is not therefore from an antiquarian interest that many have found in Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas and others polities which might in some measure correct the deficiencies and aberrations of our own. Our nostalgic relation to former institutions thus appears as in truth the desire to give to the institutions of the present revolution their proper form.

To what form our democratic and socialistic institutions tend, what their aberrations and deficiencies are, is not easily known. The evils of the time may be ascribed to technology, to the remoteness and excessive power of bureaucracies, or to other causes. The most interesting and important proposal is that political thought and practice took a wrong course at the beginning of the modern

age, to which time may be traced the origins of the expansive society of contemporary liberalism and socialism, which should satisfy the endless desires and interest of its members.⁶ There is however in this proposal the difficulty that it allows one of the primary elements of contemporary politics — the existential — to stand, while the separation of the individual from an abstract technological will is to be retracted. But the two appear rather to be forms of the same principle. The existential individual is beyond the laborious, competitive spirit of the Lockean revolution, as also the right of the individual to the fruit of the technological society is not thought as in an older capitalism to be conditional on work done.

The argument may seem to have moved a distance from the question what Hegel thought of Hellenic virtue and political institutions. But the force of his criticism is lost if it be interpreted from one or other of contemporary positions. It is sometimes asked, for example, whether Hegel in political philosophy belongs more with the ancients or with the moderns — to which there is not a simple answer. Or Hegel may be assimilated to Marxism or to some neo-idealism. Or again his philosophy may be virtually equated with a Neoplatonism which has recurred as a contemporary position. The peculiar relation of the Hegelian philosophy to the politics of the contemporary revolution is rather that it shows as unified the elements which are in them most strongly divided. The opposition of a technological society to the individual who would have an ordered concrete freedom which did not go over to the abstract division of technology and the unbounded release of desires and passions — to comprehend this opposition is the end of the Hegelian state, the form the Platonic good there receives.⁷ The Hegelian state again is neither fascistic nor socialist, but draws into one end national particularity and the subjection of capitalist competition to the good of the individual.⁸ The result of this unification is present in contemporary institutions: in what distinguishes the contemporary from earlier doctrines of individual rights; in the assumption that the technological society is complete in itself, has absorbed the state; again in the thought that the state might be complete without disruption into the technological society. The result is present in the divided elements of what was there inwardly united. The relation of the two is not directly comprehensible, but is discovered in the tendency already described in contemporary

6. The importance of this assumption, common to Neo-Thomists, Leo Strauss in political philosophy, and many others — and having its roots much earlier — is that it expresses truly the principal division in contemporary culture.

7. E.g. *Philosophie des Rechts*, sections 256-58.

8. *Ibid.*, sect. 257.

institutions to restore to actuality a forgotten and desired tradition of former institutions and virtues. In this context Hegel's criticism of Hellenic 'Sittlichkeit' can be considered outside the distortions of contemporary philosophical and political dogmas.

B. Hegel's Criticism of Hellenic 'Sittlichkeit'

The myth of Prometheus as presented in the trilogy of Aeschylus explains how economic interests were contained and controlled by the Hellenic state. There was a consciousness of the limits of the 'technai' or productive arts, that the benefits they brought to humanity awakened also new desires indefinitely, to which they could never give a complete satisfaction. The knowledge that 'technitai' as such were thus involved in an external necessity where there was no freedom (since in Aristotle's formulation the end of 'techne' is not in the maker but in the product) permitted the subordination of the economy to the state, of the servility of work to the freedom of 'praxis'. Economic life had its dignity not in itself, but through this subordination. In the image of Prometheus work might appear to serve and liberate humanity, but this universal end was not in truth actual in the economy but only in the state and the family.

For the Greek political philosopher the greatest difficulty was not how the economic realm might be ordered to the general good but rather in the relation to the state of that part of the political community which was capable of virtue. The love of honour, which animated that part to the service of the state, might collide with the nearer private interest of the citizen and obligations to his family. Plato perceived rightly that the condition on which the political good could be primarily operative was that both family and the ambiguity latent in the love of honour should be transcended in it.⁹ He perceived further that precisely this requirement awakened the sophistic self-consciousness which radically imperiled the political community, tending to dissolve it into a multitude of atoms.¹⁰ For sophistry has in it the pure relation of the individual to the universal in an immediate subjective form, and the knowledge of the good is the same relation as objective and underlying all other distinctions and ends.

9. *Republic*, V: that the state depends primarily on the good Plato brings into view by a dialectic which undoes the hypotheses that it rests on the family or on the wealth and independence of a military-political class.

10. The provisions (*Rep.*, 537D-540C) against the study of dialectic by the young, for whom the end of art is their individual freedom and not the good, are necessary because dialectic and sophistic are alike a power over contraries and easily confused. *Sophist* is about their separation. Their relation is stated precisely by Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 2, 1004b, 17-26.

The problem, unresolved as Aristotle thought in Plato's political dialogues, was how the good could exist determinately in the soul and in institutions and not so directly and abstractly confront the sophistic subjectivity. Polities in which power was with the many, the rich, or concentrated in the arbitrary will of a tyrant were for Plato simply false polities. But then to the question who should rule he was obliged to answer that it must be the wise, as legislator or as actual ruler or in some relation of the two. To this the Aristotelian objection was that it was not shown how this wisdom could exist in human passions and interests and order them to the good it knew.¹¹ The ruling part in Plato's polities was above the classes, not as in actual Greek states, centred in one or other class. In Aristotle's best polity the virtuous would rule, those, that is, for whom the good in the subjective form of their own rational freedom was directive of the passions as informed by the moral virtues.¹² The relation of the laborious class, those who lived not for their rational freedom but in external ends, to the state would be servile in accordance with the argument of Prometheus.

Aristotle showed how the good might be actual in the best constitution and more imperfectly in others, which might be the most the 'ethos' of a people could bear. But the political realization of the good was subject to the limits long since exposed by the poets. In the virtues the integration of rational freedom with the passions of the soul through the mean was unequal to the extreme conflicts of good and evil in the relation of the individual and the family to the state.¹³ The ordering of the soul and the state found in Aristotle's practical writings is not exposed to sophistry. In the Aristotelian practical virtue subjective freedom is not abstract, as for the sophists, but is operative in the whole content of the passions. But here the radical division of self-consciousness from all particular relations of the soul to the world is near at hand in the knowledge of the limits of the practical. For Aristotle as for Plato true freedom is in the end found only in philosophical thought, and there Aristotle does not remain with a measuring and limiting of the passions in relation to the good but knows a radical unity of thought with its objects. In the Aristotelian 'noesis noeseos' the Platonic good is actual and concrete.

On this principle, as it came into view also in the presentations of the dramatic poets and entered the general consciousness of the time, rests the division of society from state, of the whole range

11. *Ethica Nikomachea*, A, 6.

12. E.N., Z, 2.

13. The dialectic of this relation, Hegel, *Phän.*, pp. 251-60. On a like argument rests the subordination of the practical life to the theoretical, e.g., in E.N, K, 8-9.

of particular interests from the political good. Particular interests on this basis are no longer natural simply but, as belonging to the free individual, acquire the form of rights.¹⁴

Once this division had occurred in the Hellenistic world and, already implicit in the older institutions of the Romans, had emerged in the subjective culture of the Empire, the relation of individuals to the political good could no longer be that of the 'polis' and the virtue which had been its subjective principle. Polybius already discerned in some measure that the polity appropriate to these new conditions must be that of the Romans.¹⁵ The developed form of this polity under the Empire was a relation of the political good as embodied in the emperor to the rights of free individuals as defined by the Roman civil law. The subjective principle of this polity could only be an abstract Stoic virtue which presupposed an inner reconciliation of nature and reason but could realize this unity only formally. The 'Sittlichkeit' of the 'polis' had vanished. To restore it, if that could be thought of, would require that the separation of the free individual from the substantial life of the political community should be undone. Or if one should stay with this separation and discern in it not only the loss but also the beginning of a fuller freedom than that of the 'polis', it might be asked whether the relation of the free individual to the state and other institutions might not regain the lost concreteness. To Hegel it appeared that this development had taken place. Here the logic of it will be indicated very briefly.

What we know as the problems of the technological society were present in an inchoate form in the institutions of the Roman Empire. There had taken place, as one can read in the writers of the early Empire, an unbounded release of passions and individual interests whether from an older Roman discipline or from the various traditions of the conquered peoples. Political philosophy Hegel would not divide into an older Hellenic form and that of the modern period, but find the beginnings, or at least the problems, of modern political thought already in the Roman Empire.¹⁶ His estimate of the government of the Empire is very much that of Augustine, who asks when was the ideal polity of Cicero's *Republic* ever actual — the community unified by the adherence of its members to law and the common good as determined by it.¹⁷ The Roman state

14. Hegel, *Phän.*, p. 260 foll.

15. *Histories*, I, 3.

16. *Philosophie der Geschichte*, Roman world, sect. 3, chapters 1-2. So also the division in *Phän.* between true and alienated spirit, where the turning point is the abstract right of the person as recognized under the Roman Empire.

17. *Civitas Dei*, Bk. II, chap. 21.

recognized the rights of free persons as defined by the civil law, but had not the power to give effect to these rights. It might pacify the nations, but did not have in the imperial cult a centre which could unify passions and interests with reason and the law. The Platonic good had, one might say, only a formal and abstract existence.

The cause of this impotence is to be found in the subjective culture of the time which knew the radical division of free personality from nature but not an actual unity and concretion of the two. The society of the time, if one may so designate the many persons in their particular interests, was not the civil society of the older modern period where the universal in the form of utility and the moral will moved effectively in private interests. That older modern society presupposed a modern state in which the privileges of the feudal estates had been in principle subdued and abrogated. That subjection in turn could not be thought of unless among peoples whose fidelity to the good or to the sovereignty of the state was concrete, comprehending the division of nature and abstract personality. The Roman state did not know this total fidelity, but from its institution had rested on an abstract and antagonistic relation of people and aristocracy. In the common corruption of people and aristocracy the emperors might maintain the unity of the state but could not supply another virtue than that found in the Roman tradition.

The conditions were not present in the Empire for any further development and integration of society and state. It did not suffice that the Empire was converted to a new religion whose principal belief was the sought integration of reason and the natural will.¹⁸ For this principle to have a political reality the beginning must be in a natural disposition towards another form of virtue, through which, attachment to the good being total and personal, a community might be able to sustain and order the extreme division of the rational and natural will. A beginning of this further development beyond the institutions of classical antiquity Hegel finds in the western Middle Ages. The elements of a polity were there the good in the form of a monarchy to which was owed a personal fidelity and a society which, tending to the same concreteness, fell into the opposition of a feudal aristocracy to the towns. Out of this deeper conflict of classes than the Greek 'polis' or the Roman 'res publica' could have sustained, there developed over some centuries the modern state, centred in a monarchy which had drawn this turbulent society into one political community. In the community

18. Hegel, *Phil. Gesch.* (*Werke*, 1840, vol. 9, p. 408 foll.)

thus constituted the good for the first time could have reality in the legal or abstract rights of persons.¹⁹

This unification of the feudal state is presupposed in the political philosophy of the older modern period. There is not only for this philosophy a setting free of human passions and interests but also a strong and effective political unity. The Platonic good exists here in the form of a monarchy by divine right. The moving interest of a society already subjected to this sovereign principle is that the good should be the end for the moral or reflective self-consciousness, that the natural will should not only be broken to obedience to law and the common good but that the division and conflict of the will should be for a subject which knew the division as its own. The objective form of this moral virtue was the civil society or external state of the older modern period. Some political writers, among them Locke, might ask only how the state could be brought under the control of society. Rousseau might again carry the development of society to the point where it absorbed the state into itself. The true tendency of the argument was not however to reduce the good to the subjective form of conscience and the moral will but rather to impart to the good a fuller realization than that of legal rights, to take into the state the right of individuals to find their way freely to the political good through the conflicting universal and particular ends of society. The nature of this society was abstractly conceived by Hobbes as brutal competition. By others it was seen as the free capitalist economy, or in the French revolution as abstract equality, or by Kant and Fichte as absolute moral freedom. The historical result of the argument, which contains these various positions, is the contemporary state, which is no longer taken as opposed to society and moral or subjective freedom, but as constituting one whole it, however this unity may be understood.

C. The Principle of the Contemporary Political Order

The rights which everyone now assumes to pertain to individuals are not only the legal rights first expressed in the Roman civil law, nor only the rights of the moral subject won in the revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but include also the right to economic security, in general to the whole fulfillment of the natural will. However imperfect the realization, the assumption and demand are present that society should serve the rights of individuals thus comprehensively conceived. Implied in these common assumptions is a concept of the good which exists not only as the absolute sovereign of the older modern period, nor

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 482-84.

as utility and equality, but is a sovereignty which has converted economic and social freedom to the service of the individual concretely taken. Conversely, for the individual the political good is a universal end which in its realization contains the particular goods of individuals and classes and also the resolution of the conflicts occurring among them. The principle in which Plato saw the only resolution of the evils of the human race would not be accessible only to the philosopher and the wise king but would penetrate and inform the interests and passions of the political community even to the deepest conflict of good and evil in the moral will. Not only a universal class thought capable of virtue could be moved by the good, but also those confined to the special labours of civil society. Since also there had here come into existence a concrete unity of reason and nature, of the universal and the natural individual, the ruinous conflict of family and state which in Hellenic antiquity had first revealed the nature of free individuality could now find a resolution within the ethical institutions of family and state.

The logic of the institutions in which individual rights as now understood might be realized is given in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. The family exists not only in the unqualified devotion of an Antigone to the souls of her blood relatives in the house of Hades, but the universal end of natural individuals is chosen freely and the relations of husband and wife, of parents to children, of these to one another and to their parents are the content of the good in its first or immediate form. In civil society occurs the radical division of reason and the natural will, of what is known as united in the family. There is thus in society not only a setting free of limitless desires and interests, of the opposition of good and evil in the soul, but also an intrinsic tendency beyond this division. A pluralistic society with many assertive, competing points of view is thus amenable first to an equalizing justice, then to a concrete unification of the universal with the natural will at the point of its extreme self-concentration and evil. By that correction the division of technology from the concrete interest of the individual is transcended.²⁰

In Plato's politics the ruling power was to be freed from the special interests of classes. The difficulty then occurred how the ruling part could be in the state. How this uncorrupted independence of the ruler could move effectively the classes to the realization of the good is shown in Hegel's concept of the state. The good is to be made the freely chosen end for the members of civil society. Because this work is in Hegel's argument virtually accomplished by the family and the correction of private and class interests in

20. *Ph.R.*, sections 250-56.

civil society, the constitution of the state has only to articulate this result. The opposition of sovereignty to civil society which had caused the revolutions of the past two centuries was over. State and society were united in the sense that the state could contain the division of society, its economic and class conflicts, but this as overcome through the intrinsic tendency of society. The political good existed first immediately as the monarch. Then this immediate relation to the people as divided into a judiciary and a public administration reflected the whole range of interests of civil society. This developed relation of state to people was not that of a bureaucracy as now understood, that is of an abstract political will to the interests of individuals. The sovereignty as particularized into administrative and judicial bodies in Hegel's state does not fall into the division of civil society, is not related to the people as external and alien, but would only give actuality to the unity of interests which the intrinsic movement of society has discovered to its members. Those who hold office in these bodies, if they may be compared with the part of the 'polis' capable of virtue, have only another virtue than the members of civil society generally in the sense that they are the part most able to appropriate and articulate in universal form the education imparted to all in family and civil society.²¹

The corruption of the state, the confusion of particular goods with the general political good, inevitable in ancient democracies, might be corrected in states which had learned the lessons of the American and French revolutions. Parliament must first be seen to represent not economic interests as such or a shifting superficial public opinion. Its members should rather be such as could participate in the conversion of society to the concrete and humane standpoint of the state. For this reason Hegel would have them chosen by bodies not only involved in economic and professional competition but which had need also to know a subordination of competition to the concrete good of their members. Secondly, the legislative part must not be supposed in the Lockean tradition to be the primary element of the constitution but the whole constitution in its universal aspect; and legislation must be seen as no less the work of the sovereign, Plato's living, actual law, and of the knowledge and experience of the administrators than of the houses of parliament.

The institutions of the *Philosophy of Right* can appear to us more remote than Plato's *Republic* and *Laws*. We assume the result of Hegel's argument in our concept of rights, in the demand that somehow technology be contained and humanized, in the belief that there

21. Such is the argument of *Ph.R.*, sections 260-320.

is a practical good in which competing interests can be resolved and unified freely. The logic and the historical mediation of Hegel's conclusion we have forgotten. The relation of the good or a sovereign principle to contemporary institutions is seen more simply and directly where it first appears philosophically in Plato's polities. The Hegelian state we cannot easily dissociate from the fascistic, socialist and liberal polities of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, from the dissolution of the older European state into these divided and opposed forms. Sometimes the evils of recent times are ascribed to the intense rationality of the earlier modern period. The cure is thought to lie in returning to a more immediate and respectful relation to nature. But such explanations are partial at best, since they are from the standpoint of an existential individuality itself the product of the older modern culture.

At the same time it is not to be denied that the contemporary polities whose evils we know are derived from the older European state. The relation of that state, described by Hegel at the point of its full development, to contemporary polities is briefly thus: the unification of interest which that state had attained to in its institutions through a long historical development it could not maintain as an immediate national community. This immediacy, here in the form of the existential individual and the corresponding institutions, is a moment of spirit. In religion and the other forms of absolute spirit this moment and the thought which knows the good can be held in one relation. It belongs to the finitude of historical institutions that this reversion to immediacy at the point of a completed development appears as a loss of what was accomplished. For this reason Plato and Aristotle thought the movement of history to be an endless recurrence from the 'telos' achieved to a primitive beginning. The relation of contemporary institutions to the older state is not intelligible by that classical paradigm: the existential or immediate aspect has not the status of a new beginning, but the older institutions and virtue continue in it and operate as moving end. What has to be removed to clarify the relation may be illustrated by Hegel's teaching, not far in this from Plato's, that the essential cause of wars is an obscuring of the good when states fall into the form of immediacy; war is a purgation which destroys the assumption that immediate and natural interests are primary and not the universal good. The European state as all other states he saw to be subject to this evil. In this view the condition on which the cessation of such evils, which Plato sought in the knowledge of the good, would be possible is that this purgation not be left to the violence of war but the subordination of the existential moment to the explicit, developed idea be held in thought.

The conditions are present in which that idea might be known as actual. The unmeasured irrational will of the nationalistic or fascistic state has given way to opposed forms of an unlimited technological society. There at least the supposition that an immediate concreteness is possible is destroyed. Only the assumption that authoritarian and liberal technology are different systems and not an opposed emphasis within the same system obscures the contradiction present here as in the older civil society between the particular good of individuals and an abstract common good. Particular political communities must either be destroyed in this system or recollect that the subsumption under the state of what is logically the same as the technological society belongs already to their tradition. That recollection would bring to light the idea of a concrete good — the principle of a world order consisting not of opposed universal societies but of states which knew themselves as sovereign, but as particular sovereignties. So far as the Platonic good might thus appear as unitive of the primary divisions in contemporary polities Hegel's criticism of Hellenic institutions would have to be thought necessary and true.

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