The Meaning of `State' in Hegel's Philosophy of History

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THE MEANING OF 'STATE' IN HEGEL'S
PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

I

There is an aspect of futility which attends every attempt to offer an
account of what Hegel meant by such terms as 'state' or 'freedom' which
does not accord with the dominant interpretation. That Hegel is generally
considered to be a rationalizer of statism and despotism is too well known
to require documentation, and one writer has gone so far as to find in Hegel
a "program of fascism". Yet there is so much in Hegel's writing which
simply cannot be made compatible with the standard interpretation that
one can only wonder why its upholders so rarely bother to take account of
it. One might imagine that anyone who would seek to criticize Hegel's
political philosophy would have some passing acquaintance with his Philosophy of Right and would have discovered for himself that Hegel advocated
parliamentary government, limited monarchy, and trial by jury, none of
which are compatible with the views he is supposed to hold. So evident
must this be to any unbiased reader, that T. M. Knox's paper of twenty
years ago in which all this is summarized should seem to be merely hammering away at the obvious, yet the fact of the matter is that it has made hardly
any impression on the dominant view. In like manner, the critics seem
oblivious to the fact that when one pares away the many historical errors
in which it abounds, Hegel's early essay on "The Positivity of the Christian
Religion" contains a moving plea for liberty of conscience, and that what
he says about the Chinese and Roman despotisms he describes in the Philosophy of History could not have been said by one who admires that
kind of polity.

The obvious rejoinder to the above would be to offer a number of Hegel's
well-known statements which seem to indicate that in the end his was an
advocacy of the subordination of the individual to the state. Thus, we
find him saying: "The rational end of man is life in the state, and if there
is no state there, reasons demands that one be founded." (PR §75 addition).4

3In his Early Theological Writings, tr. by T. M. Knox with an Introduction by
4Parenthetical references given in the text preceded by the letters "PR" are to
the sections of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, tr. with notes by T. M. Knox, Oxford, 1949.
Similarly, such references preceded by "PH" are, first, to the pages of Karl Hegel's
dition of Hegel's Philosophy of History (i.e. Hegel's collected works, vol. ix, second
edition) and, secondly, to those American editions of the translation by J. Sibree which
have 457 pages.
“Man must . . . venerate the state as a secular Deity . . .” (PR §272 addition). “The intrinsic worth of courage as a disposition of mind is to be found in the genuine, absolute, final end, the sovereignty of the state” (PR §328). And to these quotations from the *Philosophy of Right* may be added the following from the *Philosophy of History*: “It must . . . be understood that all the worth which the human being possesses—all spiritual reality, he possesses only through the state. For his spiritual reality consists in this, that his own essence—Reason—is objectively present to him, that it possesses objective and immediate existence for him. Thus only is he fully conscience; thus only is he a partaker of morality—of a just and moral social and political life. For Truth is the unity of the universal and subjective Will; and the Universal is to be found in the State, in its laws, its universal and rational arrangements” (*Werke*² ix.49. Eng. Tr., p. 39).

On the face of it, these assertions, and the many others which could easily be added to them, seem to constitute a strong indictment of Hegel and to establish the claim of the traditional interpretation. But this is so only on the mistaken assumption that Hegel used ‘state’ in the way that most of us ordinarily do, namely, to refer to the political organization and control of a people.

It is perhaps only reasonable that most readers of Hegel’s writings should assume that when he writes of “the state” he means what the rest of us do, but this does not absolve them of the obligation to seek an interpretation of his use of the term that is consistent with those of his views to which reference has been made in the first paragraph. Careful readers of Hegel’s own writings will actually discover an attempt to distinguish explicitly between the state and the political order. Thus, in the *Philosophy of Right* he can say of something that “it is the organism of the state, i.e., it is the strictly political state and its constitution” (PR §267), which shows at least that the state and the political state are not the same thing. And in the *Philosophy of History* (pp. 536-7, Eng. Tr., p. 448) we find “Government is primarily the formal execution of the laws and the maintenance of their authority: in respect to foreign relations it prosecutes the interest of the State; that is, it assists the independence of the nations as an individuality against other nations; lastly, it has to provide for the internal weal of the State and all its classes. . . . Thus the State involves a body of abstract principles and a practical application of them”. Hegel then goes on to talk about the rôle of legislature and executive in the application of the principles of the state, but it is clear from what I have quoted that the state is something other than the government. We shall see that Knox is right when he says that “the state proper is the totality of human life so far as it is the life of moral beings united in a community by tradition, religion, moral convictions, etc.”. His immediately added “Failure to realize this has been responsible for numerous misrepresentations of Hegel’s position and his attitude toward ‘the state’” is entirely justified.

*Translator’s note 9 to PR § 267, p. 364 f.*
In what follows, an attempt will be made to elucidate the meaning of ‘state’, for the most part from the Philosophy of History, which, at least in my opinion, is rather less ambiguous about it than the Philosophy of Right. I shall make no real attempt to offer an account of Hegel’s theory of freedom beyond passing remarks when suitable, but any treatment of that subject must certainly rest upon some view of his use of ‘state’. Nor is it to be part of the purpose of this paper to offer an account of the development of Hegel’s views, but its interest being restricted to Hegel’s later and influential writings. Finally, in attempting to defend Hegel against certain of the charges that have been levelled against him and in admitting that I find much that is sound in his conception of the relation between the individual and the social, I hope that I will not be taxed with those of his views that I do not hold. His dialectical and essentialistic method, the hypostasis of spirit and the organismic conception of society are certainly not acceptable to me. Nor is Hegel’s preference for monarchy and his view that war is ennobling. (Since I have no reason for believing him to have been mad, however, I have no difficulty in persuading myself that whatever he may have thought of war one hundred and fifty years ago, he most likely would have found nothing ennobling about the kinds of war we are now capable of waging.) Though his most “profound” conclusions are usually beyond belief, Hegel’s understanding of the socio-cultural and of its effect upon the individual seems to me sufficiently interesting to be worth disentangling from the morass of his metaphysics and his terminology.

II

We have seen above that “the State involves a body of principles”, and we must now make clear what this means. Perhaps the following passage from the Philosophy of History (p. 62, Eng. tr. p. 50) will be helpful in this regard: “The general principle which manifests itself and becomes an object of consciousness in the State—the form under which all that the State includes is brought—is the whole of that cycle of phenomena which constitutes the culture of a nation. But the definite substance that receives


It could be argued that monarchy is not really essential to the Hegelian polity notwithstanding his frequent recurrence to it. Such an argument would be based upon the fact that Hegel defends monarchy, not for itself but for what he thinks it can effect. But since that may be effected in other ways, one may suggest that Hegel has confused what may be a functional requirement of society with one of the class of possible institutional means for meeting it. Cf. Robert K. Merton, Social Theory and Social Structure, Glencoe, Illinois, 1949, p. 34 ff. Hegel had no experience of any state of the type which he could approve which was not monarchical.

Durkheim’s views on these matters are usually similar to Hegel’s, and while his writings are encumbered by a misleading terminology which has resulted in his having been charged with errors of which he is innocent, he is at least free of both the dialectic and the absolute—“Hegel without the Hegelian apparatus”, in the felicitous phrase of Aron Gurwitsch.

*Bildung.
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the form of universality and exists in that concrete reality which is the State—is the Spirit of the People itself. The actual State is animated by this spirit, in all its particular affairs—its Wars, Institutions, etc.’ Earlier (p. 61, Eng. tr. p. 49), we read: ‘We observe . . . an essential union between the objective side—the Idea—and the subjective side—the personality that conceives and wills it. The objective existence of this union is the State, which is therefore the basis and centre of the other concrete elements of the life of a people—of Art, of Law, of Morals, of Religion, of Science’. We are not here concerned with Hegel’s opinions on history and will say only enough about them to make clear the sense of the passages just quoted. Hegel held that in human history there is reflected the development of the world spirit and that each stage of this development takes place through the instrumentality of a world historical people whose national or folk spirit is the reflection of the point at which the world spirit has arrived at the given moment of history. In his view, each new stage in the development of spirit represents an advance over the previous, particularly with respect to freedom and rationality. But this aspect of his philosophy of history cannot be considered here. What is of greater relevance here is that Hegel is not content merely to talk vaguely about the succession of national spirits but, rather, attempts to describe them: in each case he seeks to elucidate the ‘body of principles’ which is characteristic of a given folk spirit.

Without concerning ourselves with the many methodological difficulties their work involves, it may be useful here to make at least passing reference to writings of the configurationist cultural anthropologists, if for no other reason that that people who claim to be mystified by Hegel seem to have no difficulty in understanding them. Configurationism is the view that the culture of a people is not simply an indiscriminate grab bag of culture traits but, rather, is systematically organized on the basis of fundamental ideas or themes or principles which are pervasive in the given culture. Ruth Benedict’s attempt to illustrate this in descriptive sketches of three primitive cultures is perhaps the best known example of configurationist anthropology, but this school has included anthropologists such as John Gillin, Clyde Kluckhohn and M. E. Opler, to mention but a few, and such philosophers as Northrop and Feibleman. Benedict tried to show that in art, religion, social relations and orientation toward the universe, the people of a community have not only a commonality of culture, but a culture in all the parts or aspects of which is reflected the same pattern or style or ethos. Cultures ‘differ from one another not only because one trait is

16‘Ethos’ in the sense of Gregory Bateson in Navon, Cambridge, 1936.
present here and absent there, and another trait is found in two regions in two different forms. They differ still more because they are oriented as wholes in different directions. They are travelling along different roads in pursuit of different ends, and these ends and these means in one society cannot be judged in terms of those of another society, because essentially they are incommensurable.”

“This integration of cultures is not in the least mystical. It is the same process by which a style in art comes into being and persists. Gothic architecture, beginning in what was hardly more than a preference for altitude and light, became, by the operation of some canon of taste that developed within its technique, the unique and homogeneous art of the thirteenth century. . . . What has happened in the great art style happens also in cultures as a whole. All the miscellaneous behaviour directed towards getting a living, mating, warring, and worshipping the gods, is made over into consistent patterns in accordance with unconscious canons of choice that develop within the culture. Some cultures, like some periods of art, fail of such integration, and about many others we know too little to understand the motives that actuate them. But cultures at every level of complexity, even the simplest, have achieved it. Such cultures are more or less successful attainments of integrated behaviour, and the marvel is that there can be so many of these possible configurations.”

In like manner, what Benedict discusses as underlying patterns Kluckhohn considers as the philosophical premises of a culture. Thus, he says that “the logic (that is, the manner of interpreting relationships between phenomena) of all members of the human species is the same. It is the premises that are different. Moreover, the premises are learned as part of a cultural tradition.” I do not wish to exaggerate the similarities or minimize the differences between the views of the writers mentioned above, but I do think that their work suffices to show that there has been in recent times a very lively interest in the ways in which “cultural wholes” are held together or the manner in which a style of thought and feeling may pervade the total life of a people.

The passage from Hegel presented in the opening paragraph of this section of the paper is to be understood as an attempt to say the same kind of thing, though, to be sure, his attempt is made in the context of a theory of history most anthropologists would eschew. Thus, when Hegel talks of “the form under which all that the State includes” he does not intend to talk about the normative primacy of the political organ of society, but rather

17Benedict, op. cit., p. 206.
18Ibid., p. 43 f.
19Kluckhohn, op. cit., p. 358; his italics.
the patterning of the elements of a culture—albeit not of all cultures but only those of world-historical peoples— informed by that body of immanent principles which gives the culture its distinctive tone.

In Hegel’s view, “A State is an individual totality, of which you cannot select any particular side, although a supremely important one, such as its political constitution; and deliberate and decide respecting it in that isolated form. Not only is that constitution most intimately connected with and dependent on those other spiritual forces; but the form of the entire moral and intellectual individuality—comprising all the forces it embodies—is only a step in the development of the grand whole—with its place pre-appointed in the process; a fact which gives the highest sanction to the constitution in question, and establishes its absolute necessity” (PH p. 57, Eng. tr. p. 46). What justifies a constitution, then, is not that it exists or that the political authorities have the power with which to enforce it, but rather that it is the constitution which is logico-meaningfully required by that “individual totality” which is the state in question. Thus, “the constitution of any given nation depends in general on the character and development of its self-consciousness”. “A constitution is not something manufactured; it is the work of centuries, it is the Idea, the consciousness of rationality so far as that consciousness is developed in a particular nation. . . A nation’s constitution must embody its feeling for its rights and its position, otherwise there may be a constitution there in an external way, but it is meaningless and valueless” (PR §274 and addition). Without stopping to wonder how this last sentence may be made compatible with the rationalization of despotism, we may observe that the relationship between the political organization of a people—as reflected in its constitution—and the other facets of its life and feeling and thought seems precisely the same as it is according to the anthropologists mentioned above. Whatever be the reasons for which one might wish to reject Hegel’s socio-cultural holism, it is certainly clear that his conception of this relationship precludes his construing the political order as an instrument for effecting the caprice of a tyrant.

In his Philosophy of History (p. 58, Eng. tr. p. 47), Hegel says that “The State is . . . the embodiment of rational freedom, realizing and recognizing itself in an objective form”. On the same page we read that “The State is the Idea of Spirit in the external manifestation of human Will and its Freedom”. Proponents of what has been called “the Hegel myth” will no doubt see in the first of these sentences another instance of what they take to be Hegel’s perverse use of ‘freedom’ according to which one is said to be free when one accepts the limitations of one’s station and obeys whose who are placed in the positions of power. But such an interpretation will simply not do, particularly since it is now evident that ‘state’ will not

21In Sorokin’s sense of the term; see his Social and Cultural Dynamics, vol. i, New York, 1937, pp. 18 ff. and 22 ff.
bear the interpretation it must have if the proponents of the myth are correct. For when he uses the term 'state' it is Hegel's intention to indicate precisely that phenomenon for which more recent writers use the word 'culture'.

When Hegel says that the state is the "embodiment of rational freedom" or the "external manifestation of human will and freedom" he is in effect stating that it is in the state that the spirit of a nation finds its expression. And this is only another way of saying that the style of a people's life is expressed or embodied in its culture. The frequent reiteration in his work of the relation which obtains between the state, on the one hand, and art, religion, philosophy and morality, on the other, is simply intended to give expression to the view that it is especially in these aspects of a people's culture that that which is most characteristic of its spirit may be revealed. And this is a far cry, indeed, from the claim that he intends that these spheres of human interest and activity are to be subordinated to the ends of those who wield the political power, if not actually used as instruments for their being effected. The state is the empirical manifestation of spirit, a point which is not particularly different from that of recent authors who think of a culture as expressing or embodying patterns or ideals of one sort or another. It is, of course, the case that in Hegel's thought all this is bound up with a philosophy of history which would not be acceptable to these writers, though, in order to concentrate on the meaning of 'state' I have not bothered to discuss it. Thus, when it was observed above that when Hegel says that the character of the state establishes the "absolute necessity" of the political constitution, I was satisfied to point out that this means that the kind of political order which prevails in a society is a consequence of the spiritual-cultural pattern it was intended to express, without bothering to deal with the historical-metaphysical necessity which is involved in Hegel's view of this. In his conception, history is not a fortuitous sequence of occurrences, but, rather, a necessarily determinate development. Since each step in the unfolding is necessary, so likewise is the particular spirit, hence culture, of the world-historical people of the moment. Hence the necessity of the political constitution of the people in question is of a two-fold kind. But this does not affect our main point, that since for Hegel 'state' does not refer to the political organization of the society, nothing he says about it can be taken as a rationalization for despotism. The fundamental principle of despotism is caprice, and the caprice of neither ruler nor ruled can be justified in Hegelian terms.

It is not difficult to see that the Hegelian conception of the state may be easily extracted from the context of his philosophy of history and its necessitarian developmental character. To be sure, it then ceases to be Hegelian,

23Thus the claim—in A. L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions, Cambridge, Mass., 1952, pp. 19, 24 and 26—that Hegel had no interest in culture, since the word 'Kultur' is not to be found in the German original of his Philosophy of History and 'Zivilization' only once, is entirely mistaken.

24What Popper calls "historicism"; see his The Poverty of Historicism, Boston, 1957.
yet it does enable us to observe that a certain conception which has been very influential in the history of social scientific thought has clear roots in the writings and lectures of Hegel. And it is not without its amusing side to discover that any number of writers who consider themselves hard-headed empiricists for whom it is entirely in order to make snippy remarks about Hegel and what he has to say about culture, are themselves trying to defend a conception of the relation of the individual to the socio-cultural which is in most ways quite like that of Hegel.\textsuperscript{26} In any event, we shall consider certain further aspects of what Hegel says, particularly the still unexplained notion that the state embodies or manifests freedom, and we shall do so without reference to Hegel's particular views on the development of history.

It is simply mistaken to say that for Hegel freedom means obedience and to see in this an anticipation of the semantical principles of the Orwellian world of 1984. It is, of course, true that his idea of freedom is intimately connected with his conception of the state, but since this latter is not the political order it is not possible to speak here of obedience. Indeed, we shall see that Hegel intends by 'freedom' pretty much what most of us do, but he has been concerned to consider the forms of the experience of freedom whereas most writers have simply paid the matter no heed. It is interesting to note that while Hegel has immersed his consideration of the state in the context of a metaphysics of history which few would care to accept, his understanding of freedom is entirely psychological and singularly free of metaphysics. And this, notwithstanding the fact that Hegel's discussion of freedom is couched in a very metaphysical terminology.

To state it briefly, for Hegel the experience of freedom has two requirements, a subject and what he calls "ethical substance" (PR §§142-157). A good deal of philosophical writing on freedom tends to focus almost exclusively upon the former, and readers of Hegel have tended to be unprepared for what he says about the latter and have inclined to interpret his words so as to lose subjectivity entirely.\textsuperscript{26} But while this does grave violence to Hegel's intention, it is not really surprising, for the interpretation which then emerges is fairly of a piece with the usual understanding of Hegel's 'state'. But he does say that "Subjectivity is the ground wherein the concept of freedom is realized" (PR §152, remark). And he adds: "The right of individuals to their particular satisfaction is also contained in the ethical substantial order, since particularity is the outward appearance of the ethical order—a mode in which that order is existent" (PR §154).

\textsuperscript{25}A recent example is Philip Bagby, \textit{Culture and History}, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1959.

\textsuperscript{26}One must wonder at the strength of such perversity, and it is worth noting that while it is frequently claimed that the Greek city-state was Hegel's ideal, those who make the claim seem oblivious to the fact that he often pointed to what was for him its most serious limitation, its incapacity to assimilate the principle of subjectivity. Once that principle was introduced—Hegel thinks through the work of Socrates—the Greek world became transformed and corrupted, not because of the undesirability of subjectivity but because of limitations he takes to be inherent in the Greek city-state. Cf. the discussion of "The Greek World" in PH; PR remarks to §§185 and 206; and Bernard Bosanquet, \textit{The Philosophical Theory of the State}, London, 1931, 4th ed., p. 254 f.
Furthermore, "The essence of the modern state is that the universal be bound up with the complete freedom of its particular members and with private well-being. . . . Thus the universal must be furthered, but subjectivity on the other hand must attain its full and living development. It is only when both these moments subsist in their strength that the state can be regarded as articulated and genuinely organized" (PR §260 addition). Except for these references to the universal, to which we shall turn our attention shortly, there seems little here to which one may take exception. Freedom is subjectively felt or it is not experienced at all. And, clearly, if it is not experienced it does not exist.

But Hegel goes on to observe that "The right of individuals to be subjectively destined to freedom is fulfilled when they belong to an actual ethical order, because their conviction of their freedom finds its truth in such an objective order, and it is in an ethical order that they are actually in possession of their own essence or their own inner universality" (PR §163). Just before this, he says that "the habitual practice of ethical living appears as a second nature" which, put in the place of the initial, purely natural will, is the soul of custom permeating it through and through, the significance and the actuality of its existence" (PR §151). In addition to these, and many similar passages, we may call attention to quotations already given on the relation of freedom and the state. This is relevant because the "state" of the Philosophy of History and the "ethical substance" or "universal" of the Philosophy of Right point essentially to the same kind of phenomena. And when Hegel keeps insisting upon the importance of ethical substance in considering freedom, when he says that one can be free only in the state or through participation in an ethical order, he does not intend to subvert the integrity of the subjectivity he has just been establishing. He intends, rather, to turn from subjectivity in order to attend to the conditions under which the experience of freedom is to be had.

Indeed, before dealing with the character of these conditions, it is worth noting a very important characteristic of the Philosophy of Right generally, namely, that Hegel does not offer it as a contribution to normative ethics or politics. This is stated quite firmly in the preface, and I am not able to find anything in the book which leads me to think it anything other than what its author intended, a partly speculative, partly descriptive account of the social order happily informed by a profound insight into the relation between the individual and the socio-cultural content of his life. Those who read him in light of Bradley's Ethical Studies, the normative political conservativism of which is reflected in frequent admonitions to the individual to sacrifice himself to the common good, or through Marx, who has virtually lost the individual and subjectivity, may tend to lose sight of this. But it

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27 A term which anthropologists have used of culture.
28 The difference between the exposition in this book and the form of a 'doctrine of duties' lies solely in the fact that, in what follows, the specific types of ethical life turn up as necessary relationships; there the exposition ends, without being supplemented in each case by the addition that 'therefore men have a duty to conform to this institution'" (PR § 148 remark).
is not Hegel's purpose to tell his readers what to do, but rather, at that point of the book to which our present attention is directed, to describe what is involved in the experience of freedom.

One cannot very well talk about freedom except to mean that human beings are or are not free, and there is something to be said for thinking that subjective awareness is part of what freedom involves. Philosophical writers about freedom have tended to direct their attention exclusively to the individual, and have virtually ignored the context of his experience. We are told, then, that a man is free when he can do as he pleases or when he is unfettered by external restraint and such like. And these discussions have been further complicated by speculations over the consequences for freedom of universal determinism—whatever that may mean—or of God's foreknowledge of human action. But it seems often assumed that each man confronts his given situation having before him all the logically possible alternative actions which the situation permits. Upon consideration of all of these, an intelligent agent would choose that course which would best suit his purpose, and failure to realize the chosen course might be explained by the nomo-logical impossibility of its realization, the incompetence of the agent, or the possible factor of external restraint. The trouble with this account, however, is that it is false to the reality of the choosing situation. One is not confronted by all of the logically possible courses of action, but only by the comparatively small number defined by the socio-cultural context of the agent's life. One's hopes, desires, aspirations and willings do not occur in abstraction from social life. It is the state or the ethical substance, in the sense that we have seen that Hegel intends by these terms, that provides the content of one's will. But these are not alien contents, a restriction imposed externally, for the individual's "spirit bears witness to them as to its own essence, the essence in which he has a feeling of his self-hood, and in which he lives as in his own element which is not distinguished from himself" (PR §147). Translating this into language more familiar to our own day we discover that Hegel has simply anticipated present-day interest in the internalization by people of the values of their culture. In one sense, to be sure, this puts a restriction upon the individual's will, since it limits the options that he has in practice, but it does this without in any way impinging upon his freedom, for since he does not in fact will what it never occurs to him might be willed, there is no experience of restraint.

It is necessary to insist that this is presented as an account of how things are, and not as they necessarily ought to be. When Hegel says that "The bond of duty can appear as a restriction only on indeterminate subjectivity or abstract freedom" (PR §149), he is not about to offer what he has just derided in his remarks to the previous section as a "doctrine of duties". He simply does not believe in the reality of indeterminate subjectivity, which would be a subjectivity without content, a pure will without a determinate content or which might be filled with any content. In the Hegelian dialectic there is a moment which is the standpoint of abstract freedom, but it is a standpoint which must be immediately negated as incapable of
subsisting by itself. It is the standpoint of the subject's awareness of his freedom as his own, but the specific form or character of that awareness is something other than the awareness itself and is presupposed by the awareness. In other language, I am not free *simpliciter*, confronting all the logical possibilities of my situation, but free to enjoy that which characterizes freedom in the society in which I live. Were I suddenly to find myself under conditions in which what were formerly for me real possibilities could no longer be realized, then I would in a clear sense cease to be free: I would not have to be physically restrained to feel that my possibilities were limited. From the standpoint of indeterminate subjectivity they are always limited, for I am one who finds his real possibilities in one socio-cultural world and in no other. But, as we have seen, that standpoint is not to be found in the world of experience.

The ethical life, then, defines both freedom and obligation, and Hegel's discussion of it is one which reveals his understanding of the sociality of human existence. It is this which gives the meaning to Hegel's assertion "that in duty the individual finds his liberation; first, liberation from dependence on mere natural impulse and from the depression which as a particular subject he cannot escape in his moral reflections on what ought to be and what might be; secondly, liberation from the indeterminate subjectivity which, never reaching reality or the objective determinacy of action, remains self-enclosed and devoid of actuality. In duty the individual acquires his substantive freedom" (PR §149). The point of this passage depends on the meaning of 'duty'. It would be an illicit imposition upon the text to say that it means an obligation to obey superiors, and we have seen that the remarks to the preceding section deny that Hegel intends to offer a doctrine of duties. Rather, the point is that duties are part of the ethical life and, having been duly enculturated, we ordinarily know what our duties are immediately and without reflection. They are part of the context of our life as they could never be were subjectivity indeterminate. There is no appeal here to conformity. This becomes clear from the remarks on virtue in the following section: "When virtue displays itself solely as the individual's simple conformity with the duties of the station to which he belongs, it is rectitude", which is to be understood as "mere rectitude". He goes on to say, in the remark to this section: "In an existing ethical order in which a complete system of ethical relations has been developed and actualized, virtue in the strict sense of the word is in place and actually appears only in exceptional circumstances or when one obligation clashes with another". In ordinary circumstances, however, one acts in accordance with one's obligations, or perhaps ignores them, but without being in doubt about them.29

29This consequence of the internalization of the ethical life has also been discerned by the moral intuitionists, but since moral intuitionism, like culture-bound moral philosophy generally, assumes the standpoint of indeterminate subjectivity, it has sought to explain what it has discerned by appeal to a moral sense. In like manner, his realization that moral pronouncements are ordinarily based upon intuition rather than reflection, led Moore to the view that good is a Platonic form. It would be interesting to consider whether or not all objectivist ethics presupposes the standpoint of indeterminate subjectivity.
What Hegel says about the ethical life is surely confirmed by countless investigations of social scientists, yet it must not be thought that he was blind to the importance of the outstanding individual who could see beyond the limitations of his time and place. "A nation's constitution", he observes, "must embody its feeling for its rights and its position, otherwise there may be a constitution there in an external way, but it is meaningless and valueless. Isolated individuals may often feel the need and the longing for a better constitution, but it is quite another thing, and one that does not arise till later, for the mass of the people to be animated by such an idea. The principle of morality, of the inner life of Socrates, was a necessary product of his age, but time was required before it became part and parcel of the self-consciousness of everyone" (PR §274 addition). In Hegel's opinion, as emerges from the discussion of "The Greek World" in the Philosophy of History, this was not an idea that the Greek spirit could assimilate, and it was, therefore, contributory to its dissolution. In his view, the principle of morality did not flourish until the modern world. But it is important to see that Hegel does not lose sight of the exceptional person nor of the fact of his possible contribution to new developments.30

III

I have tried to show that when Hegel talks about the state it is his purpose to talk about the culture of a people, and not about its political organization. The Philosophy of History is an attempt to rationalize the main course of human history in terms of the working out through time of principles which were implicit from the start. This historicistic conception of history is sometimes spoken of as the self-realization of the idea and sometimes as the fulfilment of the world spirit. In any event, Hegel conceives this as involving successive reflections of the world spirit in the national spirits of a comparatively small number of world-historical peoples. In each of these the empirical manifestation of its spirit is its state.31 It is not possible within the limits of a paper to show that, for each of the successive world-historical peoples, when Hegel purports to characterize its state he presents an account of the pattern of its culture, for this would require a detailed recapitulation of what is already contained in the text of the Philosophy of History itself, surely a needless expenditure of time and effort. Interested readers will find it easiest to return to the text itself. The Philosophy of History is, thus, an attempt to offer an account of the progressive evolution of culture which, in Hegelian terms, is at the same time an account of the development of the forms of freedom. At virtually every stage of history there are distinct ways of being free, a point which is, I think, intelligible in view of our discussion of the ethical life.32 This is again complicated by the necessitarian character of the progress of spirit.33 Hegel speaks of the historical unfolding of spirit as a theodicy—cf. PH 20; Eng. tr. 15—and it is that which gives the sense to his well-known assertions that the state is the divine on earth. It certainly cannot be understood as the Hegelian version of the divine right of kings theory for this is simply not in keeping with his point of view.
Hegel believes that each step in the development of these forms is more rational than the previous, and so it would seem that one could determine as between any two such forms which is preferable or objectively an advance over the other. Yet such a determination could never justify the imposition of the one upon a people which finds its freedom in the other. "What Napoleon gave to the Spaniards was more rational than what they had before, and yet they recoiled from it as from something alien, because they were not yet educated up to its level". At this point he adds a sentence which I have quoted before: "A nation's constitution must embody its feeling for its rights and its position, otherwise there may be a constitution there in an external way, but it is meaningless and valueless" (PR §274 addition). Thus, what is more rational in absolute terms does not of necessity conduce to freedom, and it is simply not possible to say that Hegel justifies the imposition of so-called higher forms of civilization on people of lower ones.

There is, then, a form of freedom proper to each stage of the development of freedom. Hegel's metaphysics of history limits the possibilities open to man even more strongly than would ordinary cultural relativities, for he holds not only that the specific culture a person has internalized defines the real possibilities which are open to him, but that the order of the development of world-historical cultures is metaphysically determined. Thus, one may suspect, it is not simply that I do not choose or consider something or other which the bearer of some foreign culture may well choose because it is not available to me but is to him, but rather before the emergence of this or that world-historical culture or state that which its members choose was not available to be chosen at all. This limitation of possibilities, however, imposes no restraint on freedom. And this is in no way paradoxical, for freedom is not a metaphysical problem but a subjective experience. Hegel sees the history of man as the history of the development of the capacity to be free, to be self-conscious, to recognize the worth of subjectivity, but at every stage of that development men are free only so long as that subjectivity which is theirs remains inviolate.