



On the Social Implications and Context of the Hegelian Dialectic

Paul Gottfried

Journal of the History of Ideas, Vol. 41, No. 3. (Jul. - Sep., 1980), pp. 421-432.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0022-5037%28198007%2F09%2941%3A3%3C421%3AOTSAC%3E2.0.CO%3B2-T>

Journal of the History of Ideas is currently published by University of Pennsylvania Press.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/upenn.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is an independent not-for-profit organization dedicated to and preserving a digital archive of scholarly journals. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

ON THE SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS AND CONTEXT OF THE HEGELIAN DIALECTIC

BY PAUL GOTTFRIED

Marxist interpreters of Hegel have often viewed his thought as a kind of antechamber leading beyond itself into the more resplendent world of their own set of truths. The Italian Hegelian, Raffaello Franchini, has charged his Marxist contemporaries with "making Hegel serve as a John the Baptist to Marx."¹ Although this metaphor may not be without merit, an even more apt comparison can be made between Marxists reading Hegel and early Christians perusing the Old Testament for clues about the advent of Christ. Marx himself had already spoken of the need for a radical revision of Hegel, for interpreting the forces of struggle present in human affairs from the standpoint of men's material needs and not, as Hegel had supposedly done, from the vantage point of an absolute being reflecting on its own creation.² These efforts at correcting Hegel have been enthusiastically carried forward both by communist functionaries in Eastern Europe and by Marx's latter-day disciples in Western universities. Where Hegel wrote of "being" or "essence," such reinterpreters see neither a category of logic nor a predicate of absolute consciousness but rather the result of the material condition of a specific age.

Where Hegel described the alienation of absolute being from its own hidden self, the Marxist reinterpreters substitute the self-estranged working class in a capitalist society. Where the dialectic referred to conceptual polarities, they invoke their higher historical consciousness and give priority to material forces and social interests. Finally, where Hegel wrote of "the mediation and overcoming [*Vermittlung und Aufhebung*]" of conflicts, his Marxist reformers choose to find justifications for violent revolution.³

While their treatment of Hegel as only a partially enlightened precursor of Marx has taken various forms, Marxist critics of Hegel have

¹ Raffaello Franchini, *Le Origini della Dialettica* (Naples, 1961), 320.

² On the implications of this demand first made in Marx's *The Poverty of Philosophy* see Karl Löwith, *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche* (Stuttgart and Zurich, 1950), 151-53, 301-04.

³ Two easily accessible essays that help explain these exegetical tendencies are Lewis Feuer, "What is Alienation? The Career of a Concept," *New Politics*, 1 (Spring 1962), 116-34; and Sidney Hook, "Dialectic in Social and Historical Inquiry," *Journal of Philosophy*, 26 (1939), 365-78. For an example of the type of interpretation criticized above, though less tendentious than the writings of Marcuse, see Jean Hyppolite, *Studies on Marx and Hegel*, translated by John O'Neill (New York, 1969).

also displayed a particularly strong interest in the dialectic. Marx himself had considered it the issue which made his differences from "that great thinker" most dramatically apparent. Writing in the epilogue to the second edition of *Capital* (1873), he sets out to explain the limits of Hegelian thought with the following judgment:

My dialectical method is basically not only different from that of Hegel, but is also the opposite of it. For Hegel, the process of thought which he transforms into an independent subject under the name of the idea, is the demiurgos (creator) of reality, which is only the external side of it. For me, on the other hand, the ideal is nothing more than material transported to the human brain.

I have criticized the mystical side of the Hegelian dialectic for thirty years during which time it was all the rage. . . . All the same, I have remained a convinced disciple of that great thinker and have, here and there, even played about . . . with his own mode of expression.⁴

Marx's attempt to liberate the Hegelian dialectic from its "mystical side" would help produce that ultimate fusion in his work between the principle of struggle and a supposedly scientific materialist view of change. His enterprise would also serve as a model for those of his disciples who sought to present man's history as the outcome of social conflict and yet saw Hegel as at least dimly anticipating their idea. Herbert Marcuse, for example, affirms the need to turn to Marx for a true understanding of the Hegelian dialectic. For him, as for Marx, the concept in point offers a guideline for revolution. Thus, he announces in the preface to *Reason and Revolution*: "Dialectical thought starts with the experience that the world is unfree; that is to say, man and nature exist in conditions of alienation, exist as 'other than they are'."⁵ He then goes on to assert that "Freedom is the innermost dynamic of existence, and the very process of existence in an unfree world is the 'continuous negation' of that which threatens to deny freedom." Hegel allegedly taught that man must master his alienation in order to be happy, that to achieve happiness man must first create "a state of the world' in which the individual persists in inseparable harmony with the whole." Nonetheless, Hegel became increasingly "pessimistic" about the possibility of realizing this vision. In the end, he made his peace with "the established state of affairs" by consigning freedom to "the realm of pure thought."

According to Marcuse, Marx rejected this "idealism by default." Using dialectic against Hegel, he began "driving reason itself to recognize the extent to which it is still unreasonable." In the process he abjured much that Hegel had taught. He insisted that economic forces and material interests rather than spiritual consciousness were the ultimate determinants of historical change. Still, Marcuse assures us that Marx's rein-

⁴ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Ausgewählte Werke in Sechs Bänden* (East Berlin, 1974), III, 165.

⁵ See the preface to Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, new ed. (Boston, 1960), xii.

terpretation of the dialectic “was not a shift from one philosophical position to another, nor from philosophy to social theory, but rather a recognition that established terms of life were reaching the stage of their historical negation.”⁶

Marcuse leaves us with the portrait of a potentially radical Hegel and draws back from the full social implications of Hegel’s dialectical thought. Marcuse’s picture may be given some semblance of plausibility by calling to mind Hegel’s own political odyssey. In his youth Hegel had cheered on the armies of the French Revolution. Exulting in their conquests over kings and priests, he saw in them the victory of human reason over social privilege and religious obscurantism; later he praised Napoleon (“the World-Spirit on horseback”) also as the bearer of the revolutionary legacy of freedom. His assessment seemed to have been little affected even by the subjugation of his fellow Germans to the French invaders.

Only in 1817, after most of his major philosophical works had been written and after the defeat of Napoleon, did Hegel go to Berlin as a professor of philosophy. There he became more critical of liberal reform and began to pay tribute to the institutional structure of the Prussian government. Nonetheless, even if Hegel underwent a change in his political views, one might still hesitate to view Marx as an accurate interpreter of his teachings. Franchini asks pertinently whether Marx had a right to regard himself as “a convinced disciple of the great thinker” while “considering everything he produced save for the dialectic, as arrant nonsense.”⁷ Would even granting Hegel’s youthful enthusiasm for the French Revolution and the evidence of his lifelong admiration for at least some of its political achievements prove that his philosophy sanctions revolutionary activity? It is even problematic that Marx was in any serious sense perfecting Hegel’s thought simply because both viewed conflict or opposition as essential for human progress and change.

After all, Marx denounced the Prussian constitutional monarchy (which Hegel had considered the highest manifestation of the Absolute in history) as a politically dishonest and socially oppressive government. And he ridiculed as a “fantasy” the Absolute Subject, which was the object of Hegel’s philosophical study, while viewing philosophy itself as less important than revolutionary practice.⁸ On the other hand, Marx’s claim to being a true disciple might be defended in another perspective not entirely alien to non- and even anti-Marxist Hegelians. Marx never asserted that he was following Hegel literally in formulating his historical outlook. What he claimed was to have borrowed Hegel’s method and, occasionally, his terminology. It is a matter of historical record that Marx’s admiration for the dialectic was the basis of his identification with

⁶ Ibid., xiii.

⁷ *Le Origini della Dialettica*, 323.

⁸ See Marx’s critical comments on Hegel’s *The Philosophy of Right* in *Die Frühschriften*, ed. Siegfried Landshut (Stuttgart, 1953), esp. 33-40, 117-22.

Hegelianism. But, was such identification different from the qualified endorsement other famous exponents of Hegel bestowed on him with an equal amount of reservations? For example, Benedetto Croce, Italy's most illustrious Hegelian and a fervent anti-Marxist, proclaimed the need to save the dialectic from Hegel's historical determinism. Croce's student, Franchini, expressed admiration for the same dialectic while chiding its inventor for "preferring metaphysics to a methodology."⁹

These and other considerations can be raised in defense of Marx's claim to being a loyal disciple of Hegel. It is not our object to pass ultimate judgment on this question. What does concern us is whether the most persistent Marxian justification for Hegel's association with European radicalism, his dialectic, was conceived by him, as it was by Marx, as a theoretical defense for revolution. On the textual evidence available, it would seem hard to demonstrate the premise. Nor do I find proof for a contention first made more than a century ago in the writings of the German liberal, Rudolf Haym. According to Haym's view, there are two sorts of dialectics in Hegel, one belonging to his youth and stressing his openness to cultural and political change, and the other characteristic of his Berlin period and having a purely ornamental function in justifying conservative institutions.¹⁰

Hegel's writings can, in fact, be used to support a thesis in some ways opposed to the one given above. Briefly stated, it goes as follows: the political conservatism of his later years, so abundantly evident in a work like *The Philosophy of Right* (1820–1821), was integrally related to his construction of the dialectic in such earlier writings as *The Difference Between Schelling's and Fichte's Systems of Philosophy* (1801) and, more particularly, *The Science of Logic* (1812). In the 1801 book, Hegel turns a defense of his then more famous philosopher friend, F. W. G. Schelling, into an occasion for offering his own philosophical opinions. He announces with assurance that the "transcendence of opposites is the highest interest of reason," for philosophical or speculative reason unlike "mere understanding" leads beyond the fleeting surface of the phenomenal world to the structure of harmony behind it.¹¹

Hegel observes that the need for philosophy becomes apparent precisely when "the power of unification disappears from human life and polarities (*Gegensätze*) have lost their living relationship and reciprocal effect."¹² The true philosopher aims not at a widening of conflict; what he aspires to do is to uncover the link or "living relationship" between opposing forces through a form of intelligence which gives coherence to both concepts and sensory perception. Speculative reason, to which Hegel here refers, reportedly has its origin in the Absolute which shapes nature and human intellect alike. In both spheres, "the real and ideal," the Ab-

solute reveals itself as pure activity, and whether it takes the form of men's free intellectual decisions or operates through nature as a "chain of necessity," the Absolute remains essentially the same throughout. All opposing forces are to be viewed as interdependent moments in the outpouring of its content. Reason, which both reflects and expresses the "endless activity of becoming and producing," unites "whatever is divided, and reduces any absolute cleavage to a relative one conditioned by pristine unity."¹³

Again and again, in his putative defense of Schelling, Hegel characterized seemingly antagonistic forces as interdependent aspects of the Absolute. This concern with the organic character of reality was already present in Hegel's early writing and almost seems to clash there with his youthful enthusiasm for revolution. According to Theodor Häring, the Hegelian distinction between conventional and speculative views of life had profoundly conservative political implications. Hegel was rejecting the customary form of perception characteristic of the Enlightenment which "viewed things in isolation from each other, abstractly." In its stead he was proposing the kind of philosophical view which reveals all existents "concretely, in the living framework of a people and ultimately of the world spirit."¹⁴ Although some announcement of this alternate perspective was already made in his writings of 1801, it was not until *The Science of Logic*, almost ten years later, that Hegel perfected a dialectical instrument to show the ramifications of speculative thought. In *The Science of Logic* he tries to expose Reason in its apparently "endless activity of becoming and producing." In the process he constructs concepts which serve as a partial bridge to his final political statement in *The Philosophy of Right*.

Perhaps it might now be helpful to turn to the dialectical mode of reasoning and to the *Logic* where this instrument of thought is most fully developed. The basic categories here considered—relating to quality, quantity, relationship, and modality—generally coincide with those which Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason* had seen as the preconditions for empirical judgments. While Kant, however, believed that his categories were all operative in such judgments of perception, he viewed each category, at the same time, as a discrete and self-contained concept of the understanding. On this point Hegel, who freely admitted his debt to Kantian idealism, set his face against the master. The categories inherent in the understanding of phenomena were not simply to be "compiled" as they might be in the preparation of an encyclopedia. Of greater importance was to grasp the "living relationship" animating concepts so that unity

¹³ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁴ Theodor Häring, *Hegels Lehre von Staat und Recht* (Stuttgart, 1940), 14-15.

and plurality, reality and negation, and the other Kantian categories would be understood for what they actually were, interlocking moments in the self-determination of the Absolute.¹⁵

The concepts that Hegel explores in his works are shown to relate to each other through negation and identity alike. This type of demonstration dominates his *Logic*, beginning with the opening triad, as being and non-being are made to produce the synthesis of becoming. Since Hegel wishes to consider “mere being” at its highest level of abstraction without the intrusion of empirical qualifications, he starts by defining his term through the exclusion of its apparent opposite, non-being. Nonetheless, on second thought, this exclusion cannot be justified since reflection shows our idea of being to be derived from its antithesis, non-being, and vice versa. Thus, both concepts must be considered interdependent, and because they refer back and forth to each other, being and non-being are also defined by Hegel as identical. But their relationship is not exhausted at this juncture, for both abstractions continue to exclude as well as to coincide with each other.¹⁶ Metaphorically speaking, “they pass in and out of each other” with such restless motion that the very impermanence of their relationship gives rise to their synthesis, becoming. W. C. Stace, commenting on Hegel’s view of being and non-being, concludes: “The distinction between them has vanished in their identity. They have collapsed to unity. But the unity is concrete because it still contains the differences preserved in it.”¹⁷

The precariousness of the concrete unity achieved would soon lead to a dissolution of becoming. New opposing forces would take its place, and a succession of syntheses would emerge only to break down under the impact of their destructive content. The entire *Logic* can be said to articulate the emergence of the Absolute Subject moving through the contradictory relationships latent in the categories to reveal its activity.

The first part of the *Logic* is devoted to the concepts of being, all of which, like “mere being,” present themselves as “abstract and indeterminate, and are unmediated [by other concepts].”¹⁸ Hegel characterizes the categories of being—such as those relating to quality and quantity—as solitary and self-sufficient; the use of philosophical reflection, however, soon exposes their interdependence. By the end of his discussion of being, the relationship between absolute quantity and absolute quality will be made to provide the transition to a new stage of the *Logic*, the sphere of essence. Quantity and quality seem so indissolubly related that neither term can exist independently of the other. Thought then demands that these categories be paired with each other.¹⁹ Having moved beyond their appearance of separateness, Hegel next examines their essential character, or interior structure, as “a chain of mediations.” The categories of essence

¹⁵ *Werke*, V, 52-54.

¹⁶ *Werke*, V, 61-65; VIII, 187-91.

¹⁷ W. T. Stace, *Hegel*, new ed. (New York, 1955), 222.

¹⁸ *Werke*, V, 72.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 445-56.

—e.g., identity and difference, form and content, cause and effect—are all viewed as “married” to others through which their identity has been determined from the outset. Each member of the pair is reflected in the other, and each, while opposed in some way to its mate, is also called upon to “mediate” the conceptual existence of the other.²⁰

The sphere of essence will follow being in yielding to a more profound understanding of conceptual relations; this occurs in the third part of the *Logic* which advances beyond essence to the doctrine of the notion. First, being had dealt with “immediately present,” or unmediated, categories such as “mere being” and “mere nothing.” The study of essence passed beyond the seeming isolation of the categories of being to the structure of interrelatedness present in the dialectic. With the emergence of the “notion,” we are at last made to grasp the absolute reciprocity of all stages of thought, now seen as a unitary process of movement.²¹ Hegel introduces the notion apropos of some comments on cause and effect, the last two categories discussed under essence. Because cause and effect are interchangeable concepts in our view of the natural world, they enable us to understand absolute reciprocity, the principle of the notion. The notion places before us a kind of movement in which ideas and forces collapse into unity even while remaining discrete, as Hegel put it, “a free and substantial power existing for itself and a totality in which every moment is also the whole.”²² Like the Absolute Subject whose consciousness it reflects, the notion is free by virtue of its self-determination. Nonetheless, the unity of the notion is achieved not at the cost of rescinding the moments of its past development but rather by affirming their presence as identical with itself.²³

Hegel defended his dialectic as a methodology in the context of his metaphysics. In the introduction to the *Logic*, he warned repeatedly against the danger of “simply compiling” conceptual categories. Neither in logic nor in sensory perception was it possible to get beyond unrelated concepts and impressions without the aid of speculative reason.²⁴ Hegel attributed to reason his view of the world as an interrelated and dynamic whole. He also argued that his dialectic was not concerned exclusively with abstractions but, above all, with the “concrete and real.”²⁵ While it sought to comprehend the relationship among concepts, the dialectic served, at the same time, to provide an integrated picture of sensory experience. The “concreteness” of his methodology was shown by his attempt to substitute for “the mere abstract or formal unity” of an older logic one that revealed the living interaction of specific qualities.²⁶ This method depended for its success on uncovering the identity of what

²⁰ *Werke*, VI, 84-86.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 243, 269.

²² *Werke*, VIII, 307.

²³ Stace, *Hegel*, 221-28.

²⁴ On Hegel's defense of his own epistemology, see Quentin Lauer, *Hegel's Idea of Philosophy* (New York, 1971), 15-67.

²⁵ *Werke*, VIII, 176.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 177.

seemed mutually exclusive predicates. It aimed at proving that all contradictory relationships led beyond themselves to a unified vision of reality.

Hegel's methodological and thematic stress on the integration of opposites affected his concept of the synthesis. The Hegelian term for this critical moment in the dialectical process is "*Aufhebung*," and while this German expression may allow for such renderings as "rescinding" and "abolishing," English translators have generally opted for the word, "sublation." This translation conveys the true sense of the Hegelian dialectic which carries over, rather than abolishes, the polarities necessary for the creation of a particular synthesis.²⁷ *The Science of Logic* teaches that the dialectic does not move irreversibly from thesis to antithesis to synthesis. Actually, the relationships of all three terms are subject to mediation, while the terms themselves only exist with reference to each other. These qualifications should help differentiate the kind of dialectic which Marx and his defenders support from the dialectical reasoning constructed by Hegel. For Marx believed a revolutionary society would resolve all serious human struggle by abolishing the dialectic of social conflict. However, according to Karl Löwith, whatever its historical appeal, this exaltation of revolution is not to be confused with the Hegelian dialectic. "For through his casual modification of 'Aufheben' into an act of annihilation," writes Löwith, "Marx distinguishes himself methodologically and in principle from Hegel, even while taking over his categories."²⁸

It is my contention that *The Philosophy of Right*, along with the moderate conservatism it represents, is profoundly consistent with Hegel's dialectical logic. On this point I shall take my cue, ironically enough, from Marx who criticized Hegel for making politics a function of logic. "It is not the philosophy of right, but logic," wrote Marx in his mid-twenties, which "is the true interest [of *The Philosophy of Right*]." For this work deals not with "thought embodied in political characteristics but rather with political characteristics that evaporate into abstract ideas." In sum, Hegel's "philosophical study does not yield the logic of the matter but rather the matter of logic is what is alone of philosophical significance."²⁹

Marx's critical comments merit serious attention. Whatever else *The Philosophy of Right* is about, it is certainly concerned with illustrating Hegelian logic. Compiled from lectures delivered at the University of Berlin between 1818 and 1820, Hegel's observations on political philosophy were given during alternate semesters with courses on the *Logic*. What further confirms the connection between the two works is the opening sentence of Section 31 in *The Philosophy of Right*. As if alluding to something recently taught, Hegel lets us know: "The method, as in *The Science [of Logic]* where the notion develops out of itself and is only an

²⁷ For a remarkably lucid discussion of this topic, see J. N. Findlay, *Hegel: A Re-Examination* (New York, 1962), 65-79.

²⁸ *Von Hegel Zu Nietzsche*, 302.

²⁹ See *Die Frühschriften*, 33.

immanent evolution and bringing forth of itself, . . . is here presupposed as demonstrated in the *Logic*.³⁰ This point needs stress in view of the tendency of many Hegelians, and not only of Marxist ones, to treat Hegel's perceptions about politics independently of their philosophical framework. Although often tried, this approach can only be ventured at the price of weighty sins of omission. After all, the first seventy pages of *The Philosophy of Right* deal almost exclusively with metaphysics and ontology. When Hegel at last (in Section 33) offers a table of contents for his remaining series of lectures, he refers to his entire project as an attempt to trace "the stages in the evolution of the idea of the will free in and for itself."³¹ He seeks to do this, moreover, by revealing as best he can "the specific qualities in the evolution of the notion," to wit, by describing the Hegelian Absolute manifesting itself as will in political society while, at the same time, remaining subject to the categories of the *Logic*.

Society itself has supposedly evolved in accordance with the expanding self-consciousness of the Hegelian Absolute. This cosmic power informs the human mind and makes its presence known in thought and history. The tool by which its activities are made rationally intelligible is in both cases the "speculative mode of perception." Through this mode one comes to understand the dialectic "as the moving principle of the notion" inherent in the Absolute, and thus it is possible to analyze the political life as the product of "the spirit in its freedom."³²

The statements quoted help set *The Philosophy of Right* into the conceptual context which Hegel himself devised for it, a framework shaped also by the social and political changes which marked his age. First, the French and Industrial Revolutions and, then, the general movement of continental governments back toward more traditionalist positions after 1815 all bore witness, in Hegel's view, to his own dialectic in operation. The restored monarchies were required to temper the otherwise turbulent spirit of change, yet they themselves were forced to come to terms with the very revolutionary ideas they set out to contain. Hence, the famous observation made at the end of Section 273 in *The Philosophy of Right*:

The principle of the modern world is freedom of subjectivity, viz., that all essential aspects belonging to the intellectual totality should develop themselves and receive their due. From this standpoint it is idle to ask which form, monarchy or democracy, is better. One may only say that the forms of all political constitutions are defective which are not able to contain within themselves the principle of free subjectivity. . . .³³

For Hegel the post-revolutionary era was now faced with one of the most critical challenges in the history of civilizations: an apparently widening gap between past and present. Religious and intellectual liberties

³⁰ *Werke*, VII, 84.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 87.

³² *Ibid.*, 80, 84.

³³ *Ibid.*, 430, 440.

were coming increasingly to prevail in most parts of the West due, or so Hegel believed, to the combined effects of the Reformation and the French Revolution. The ascendancy of the bourgeoisie and industrial capitalism was, meanwhile, reducing economic ties to shifting contractual arrangements and individual choices. According to Joachim Ritter, the phenomena described made Hegel believe that “[modern] civil society stands in a disjunctive relationship with regard to tradition.”³⁴ That this “disjunctive relationship” could and was being overcome is an assumption basic to *The Philosophy of Right*.

There we read that constitutional monarchy represents most fully the rational will of the Absolute reflected in the political life of mankind. The government thus praised is also referred to as a *Rechtsstaat*: a polity under laws equally applied to all citizens or subjects. Its juridical structure aims at upholding such corporate institutions as the family and church which are deemed ethically beneficial for society. Hegel believed that historical circumstances favored the growing autonomy of such corporate authorities.

The factory system was gradually liberating the family from its former bondage to a household economy. While holding no brief for the seaminess of early industrial life, Hegel maintained, nonetheless, that one of the benefits was to have made the household a focal point for leisure and cultural growth.³⁵ The evolution of religious tolerance also increased the family’s spiritual influence, for the growing identification of religion with private conscience made it part of the individual’s non-political corporate associations. In effect, the family rather than the state increasingly determined its members’ ecclesiastical affiliations. Ritter warns against equating subjective freedom with idle self-indulgence, for the liberty which Hegel refers to is one which flows out of the totality of the individual’s “religious, ethical, esthetic, and personal relations.”³⁶

The church, family, and humanistic education are all supposedly necessary for the proper exercise of subjective freedom. Through their inculcation of a sense of tradition, Hegel hoped to see bridged the distance between the Industrial and French Revolutions and the older European society which preceded them. His ultimate optimism with regard to reconciling these worlds seems linked to his dialectical thought. *The Philosophy of Right* characterizes the dialectic as the “animating principle of the notion.” It asserts that the “higher dialectic of the notion requires that each determination be interpreted not only as a limit and opposing force but that out of it there arise a positive content and result by which it [the dialectic] alone is shown to be development and immanent prog-

³⁴ Joachim Ritter, *Subjektivität* (Frankfurt am Main, 1974), 27.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 30-34; and Hegel’s treatment of marriage and the family (Sections 158-169 of *The Philosophy of Right*), *Werke*, VII, 307-23. ³⁶ *Subjektivität*, 32.

ress."³⁷ This definition of the notion in terms of its dialectical character is a theme dominating the final quarter of the *Logic*. *The Philosophy of Right* will take it up again particularly in discussing the state. The state here is to political consciousness what speculative logic is to philosophy. Both embody the highest forms of differing modes for perceiving the Absolute and grasping its dialectical and organic process of movement. Hegel describes the state as "the realization of the ethical idea" while making its existence as such hinge on its ability to protect individual freedom and the general welfare alike.

Like the notion presented in the *Logic*, the good state is one which mediates the stresses and integrates the moments of its own coming into being. According to Hegel, the Protestant constitutional monarchy is the regime best suited to achieve this unity of its parts.³⁸ He identifies this form of government with the Prussian state of his time and credits it with safeguarding individual and corporate liberties because it represents the political community as a whole. Critics of Hegel have ridiculed such praise of the Prussian state as an act of political servility. Having been called to a chair of philosophy at the University of Berlin by the Prussian minister of education, Hegel, it has been argued, tried to improve his position by flattering his employers.³⁹ Such a view overlooks the fact that the Prussian government of 1817 was something other than the military despotism to which the popular stereotype has reduced it. A government of generally uniform laws for all classes, it was endowed with an extraordinarily impartial judiciary and a high degree of religious and academic freedom. Since 1806 Prussia had undergone a number of social and political reforms, culminating in the abolition of serfdom and of guild restrictions on trade, and in a modest though largely unsuccessful attempt at representative government. Although the momentum of these changes would start to be reversed by 1819 as a result of the King's growing fear of radical nationalism, the condition in Prussia at the time of Hegel's arrival still seemed sufficiently heartening to warrant his praise of its ordered liberty.⁴⁰

The type of political blend which he cherished in Prussia and, perhaps to a lesser extent, in England and other Protestant constitutional monarchies consisted of medieval and modern elements alike. Although Hegel affirmed the political value of both aristocracy and primogeniture, he also furnished elaborate defenses for the principle of meritocracy. And while unsparingly critical of the "rationalist obsessions" and the violence spawned by the French Revolution, he never ceased to praise the idea of individual liberty which he believed had gained its greatest impetus from the Protestant Reformation and the French Revolution.⁴¹ Surely his view of the state was more shaded than many of his critics have been willing

³⁷ *Werke*, VII, 84

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 184.

³⁹ For a provocative treatment of this subject, see T. M. Knox, "Hegel and Prussianism," *Philosophy* (January 1940), 51-63.

⁴⁰ A generally cogent interpretation of Hegel's relationship to the Prussian state

to concede. We know, on the one hand, that he considered the state the bearer of an ethical mission and advocated intervention by its leaders in economic and social conflicts. But Hegel was equally explicit in denying government, except in time of grave national emergency, the right to dispossess any class or group. Although the state expressed a more unified, and consequently higher, will than any single interest which it embraced, "each stage of the dialectic had its own right in relation to every other."⁴² The state, which emerged out of the twilight of civil discord, was only empowered to regulate and mediate; beyond these functions, its normal powers were not to be pushed. For like the Absolute Subject and the notion, the state existed to hold together, without abolishing, the past stages of its own history.

The purpose of this paper has been to call into question an apparent misunderstanding about the nature of Hegel's dialectic. By focusing on this concept in his writings, I have tried to show the difficulty of equating it with a call to revolution, Marxist or otherwise. At the core of his dialectic lies the persistent hope of mediating polarities and reconciling opposites. Neither task is peculiar in the context of Hegel's total thought either to *The Philosophy of Right* or to his so-called Berlin period. Whether or not his view of the Prussian regime was historically accurate, the philosophical concepts through which he presents his picture of the good state stretch back into an earlier phase of his intellectual development. The lectures contained in *The Philosophy of Right* do no violence either to the dialectic or to speculative logic. On the contrary, they offer a fully consistent application of both, as treated particularly in *The Science of Logic*, to questions of political significance. It was with justification that Hegel pointed to a conceptual continuity between the *Logic* and *The Philosophy of Right*. As we noted, he explicitly mentions this connection in the early parts of the latter work. Moreover, in the spring of 1820, in his preface to the same writing he indicates the need to study the *Logic* for an understanding of his "scientific method."⁴³ He hastens to add that the work at hand will not contain an exposition of this method since his earlier treatise already provides for that. On the basis of our investigations, it would appear that Hegel was right in making this assumption.

Rockford College.

is Eric Weil, *Hegel et l'Etat* (Paris, 1950). My single reservation about this work concerns its tone which is obtrusively apologetic and which may result from Weil's inability to take Hegel's conservatism seriously. Unlike Weil, I believe that Hegel did move sharply to the Right in his politics. I would also contend that his conversion proceeded quite logically from his dialectical thought.

⁴¹ Although somewhat overstated there, this point is made with considerable erudition in Shlomo Avineri, *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State*, reprint (Cambridge, England, 1974), esp. 221-39.

⁴² *Werke*, VII, 83.

⁴³ *Werke*, VII, 12.