

HEGEL AND THE RISE OF SOCIAL THEORY

HERBERT MARCUSE

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with Supplementary Chapter

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TO

MAX HORKHEIMER

AND THE

INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL RESEARCH

Preface  
> ) ceo c-

THE content of a truly philosophical work does not remain unchanged with time. If its concepts have an essential bearing upon the aims and interests of men, a fundamental change in the historical situation will make them see its teachings in a new light. In our time, the rise of Fascism calls for a reinterpretation of Hegel's philosophy. We hope that the analysis offered here will demonstrate that Hegel's basic concepts are hostile to the tendencies that have led into Fascist theory and practice.

We have devoted the first part of the book to a survey of the structure of Hegel's system. At the same time, we have tried to go beyond mere restatement and to elucidate those implications of Hegel's ideas that identify them closely with the later developments in European thought, particularly with the Marxian theory.

Hegel's critical and rational standards, and especially his dialectics, had to come into conflict with the prevailing social reality. For this reason, his system could well be called a negative philosophy, the name given to it by its contemporary opponents. To counteract its destructive tendencies, there arose, in the decade following Hegel's death, a positive philosophy which undertook to subordinate reason to the authority of established fact. The struggle that developed between the negative and positive philosophy offers, as we have attempted to show in the second part of this book, many clues for understanding the rise of modern social theory in Europe.

There is in Hegel a keen insight into the locale of progressive ideas and movements. He attributed to the

Ameri-  
can rational spirit a decisive role in the struggle for  
an

vil

## Vlll PREFACE

adequate order of life, and spoke of 'the victory of  
some  
future and intensely vital rationality of the American  
nation . . .' Knowing far better than his critics the  
forces  
that threatened freedom and reason, and recognizing  
these  
forces to have been bound up with the social system  
Europe had acquired, he once looked beyond that conti-  
nent to this as the only 'land of the future/'

In the use of texts, I have frequently taken the  
liberty  
of citing an English translation and changing the  
trans-  
lator's rendering where I thought it necessary, without  
stipulating that the change was made. Hegelian terms  
are  
often rendered by different English equivalents, and I  
have attempted to avoid confusion on this score by  
giving  
the German word in parenthesis where a technical term  
was involved.

The presentation of this study would not have been  
possible without the assistance I received from Mr. Ed-  
ward M. David who gave the book the stylistic form it  
now has. I have drawn upon his knowledge of the Ameri-  
can and British philosophic tradition to guide me in  
se-  
lecting those points that could and that could not be  
taken for granted in offering Hegel's doctrine to an  
Ameri-  
can and English public.

I thank the Macmillan Company, New York, for grant-  
ing me permission to use and quote their translations  
of  
Hegel's works, and I thank the following publishers for

authorizing me to quote their publications:  
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Publishers, Longmans, Green and Co., Charles H. Kerr  
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My friend Franz L. Neumann, who was gathering ma-  
terial for his forthcoming book on National Socialism,  
has  
given me constant advice, especially on the political  
phi-  
losophy.

#### PREFACE IX

Professor George H. Sabine was kind enough to read the  
chapter on Hegel's Philosophy of Right and to offer  
valu-  
able suggestions.

I am particularly grateful to the Oxford University  
Press, New York, which encouraged me to write this book  
and undertook to publish it at this time.

HERBERT MARCUSE  
Institute of Social Research  
Columbia University

New York, N. Y.  
March 1941.

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## PART I

### The Foundations of Hegel's Philosophy

#### Introduction

##### i. THE SOCIO-HISTORICAL SETTING

GERMAN idealism has been called the theory of the

French Revolution. This does not imply that Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel furnished a theoretical interpretation of the French Revolution, but that they wrote their philosophy largely as a response to the challenge from France to reorganize the state and society on a rational basis, so that social and political institutions might accord with the freedom and interest of the individual. Despite their bitter criticism of the Terror, the German idealists unanimously welcomed the revolution, calling it the dawn of a new era, and they all linked their basic philosophical principles to the ideals that it advanced.

The ideas of the French Revolution thus appear in the very core of the idealistic systems, and, to a great extent, determine their conceptual structure. As the German idealists saw it, the French Revolution not only abolished feudal absolutism, replacing it with the economic and political system of the middle class, but it completed what the German Reformation had begun, emancipating the individual as a self-reliant master of his life. Man's position in the world, the mode of his labor and enjoyment, was no longer to depend on some external authority, but on his own free rational activity. Man had passed the long period of immaturity during which he had been victimized by overwhelming natural and social forces, and had become the autonomous subject of his own development. From now on, the struggle with nature and with social

organization was to be guided by his own progress in knowledge. The world was to be an order of reason.

The ideals of the French Revolution found their resting place in the processes of industrial capitalism. Napoleon's empire liquidated the radical tendencies and at the same time consolidated the economic consequences of the revolution. The French philosophers of the period interpreted the realization of reason as the liberation of industry. Expanding industrial production seemed capable of providing all the necessary means to gratify human wants. Thus, at the same time that Hegel elaborated his system, Saint-Simon in France was exalting industry as the sole power that could lead mankind to a free and rational society. The economic process appeared as the foundation of reason.

Economic development in Germany lagged far behind that in France and England. The German middle class, weak and scattered over numerous territories with divergent interests, could hardly contemplate a revolution. The few industrial enterprises that existed were but small islands within a protracted feudal system. The individual in his social existence was either enslaved, or was the enslaver of his fellow individuals. As a thinking being, however, he could at least comprehend the contrast between the miserable reality that existed everywhere and the human potentialities that the new epoch had emancipated; and as a moral person, he could, in his private life at least, preserve human dignity and autonomy. Thus, while the French Revolution had already begun to assert the reality of freedom, German idealism was only occupying itself



with the idea of it. The concrete historical efforts to establish a rational form of society were here transposed to the philosophical plane and appeared in the efforts to elaborate the notion of reason.

The concept of reason is central to Hegel's philosophy.

#### THE SOCIO-HISTORICAL SETTING 5

He held that philosophical thinking presupposes nothing beyond it, that history deals with reason and with reason alone, and that the state is the realization of reason. These statements will not be understandable, however, so long as reason is interpreted as a pure metaphysical concept, for Hegel's idea of reason has retained, though in an idealistic form, the material strivings for a free and rational order of life. Robespierre's deification of reason as the supreme is the counterpart to the glorification of reason in Hegel's system. The core of Hegel's philosophy is a structure the concepts of which freedom, subject, mind, notion are derived from the idea of reason. Unless we succeed in unfolding the content of these ideas and the intrinsic connection among them, Hegel's system will seem to be obscure metaphysics, which it in fact never was.

Hegel himself related his concept of reason to the French Revolution, and did so with the greatest of emphasis. The revolution had demanded that 'nothing should be recognized as valid in a constitution except what has to be recognized according to reason's right.' \* Hegel further elaborate

rated this interpretation in his lectures on the Philosophy of History: 'Never since the sun had stood in the firmament and the planets revolved around it had it been perceived that man's existence centres in his head, i.e. in Thought, inspired by which he builds up the world of reality. Anaxagoras had been the first to say that Nois governs the World; but not until now had man advanced to the recognition of the principle that Thought ought to govern spiritual reality. This was accordingly a glorious mental dawn. All thinking beings shared in the jubilation of this epoch.' 2

In Hegel's view, the decisive turn that history took with

i Ueber die Verhandlung der Wurttembergischen Landstande, in Schriften zur Politik und Rechtsphilosophie, ed. Georg Lasson, Leipzig 1913, p. 198.

\* Philosophy of History f trans. J. Sibbree, New York 1899, p. 447.

## 6 THE FOUNDATIONS OF HEGEL'S PHILOSOPHY

the French Revolution was that man came to rely on his mind and dared to submit the given reality to the standards of reason. Hegel expounds the new development through a contrast between an employment of reason and an uncritical compliance with the prevailing conditions of life. 'Nothing is reason that is not the result of thinking.' Man has set out to organize reality according to the demands of his free rational thinking instead of simply accommodating his thoughts to the existing order and the prevailing values. Man is a thinking being. His rea-

son enables him to recognize his own potentialities and those of his world. He is thus not at the mercy of the facts that surround him, but is capable of subjecting them to a higher standard, that of reason. If he follows its lead, he will arrive at certain conceptions that disclose reason to be antagonistic to the existing state of affairs. He may find that history is a constant struggle for freedom, that man's individuality requires that he possess property as the medium of his fulfillment, and that all men have an equal right to develop their human faculties. Actually, however, bondage and inequality prevail; most men have no liberty at all and are deprived of their last scrap of property. Consequently the 'unreasonable' reality has to be altered until it comes into conformity with reason. In the given case, the existing social order has to be reorganized, absolutism and the remainders of feudalism have to be abolished, free competition has to be established, everyone has to be made equal before the law, and so on.

According to Hegel, the French Revolution enunciated reason's ultimate power over reality. (He sums this up by saying that the principle of the French Revolution asserted that thought ought to govern reality. The implications involved in this statement lead into the very center of his philosophy. Thought ought to govern reality. What men think to be true, right, and good ought to be realized in

## THE SOCIO-HISTORICAL SETTING 7

the actual organization of their societal and individual life. Thinking, however, varies among individuals, and the resulting diversity of individual opinions cannot provide a guiding principle for the common organization of life. Unless man possesses concepts and principles of thought that denote universally valid conditions and norms, his thought cannot claim to govern reality. In line with the tradition of Western philosophy, Hegel believes that such objective concepts and principles exist. Their totality he calls reason.

The philosophies of the French Enlightenment and their revolutionary successors all posited reason as an objective historical force which, once freed from the fetters of despotism, would make the world a place of progress and happiness. They held that the power of reason, and not the force of weapons, will propagate the principles of our glorious revolution.' \* By virtue of its own power, reason would triumph over social irrationality and overthrow the oppressors of mankind. 'All fictions disappear before truth, and all follies fall, before reason/ A

The implication, however, that reason will immediately show itself in practice is a dogma unsupported by the course of history. Hegel believed in the invincible power of reason as much as Robespierre did. 'That faculty which man can call his own, elevated above death and decay, ... is able to make decisions of itself. It announces itself as reason. Its law-making depends on nothing else, nor can it take its standards from any other authority

on  
earth or in heaven.' 8 (But to Hegel.  
reason cannot grasp, -  
ernal reality unless^ reality has become rational in  
itself j

3 Robespierre, quoted by Georges Michon, Robespierre et  
la guerre  
revolutionnaire, Paris 1937, p. 134.

\* Robespierre in his report on the cult of the Etre  
supreme, quoted by  
Albert Mathiez, Autour de Robespierre, Paris 1936, p.  
112.

5 Hegel, Theologische Jugendschriften, ed. H. Nohl,  
Tubingen 1907, p.  
89.

## 8 THE FOUNDATIONS OF HEGEL'S PHILOSOPHY

This rationality is made possible through the subject's  
en-  
tering the very content of nature and history. The ob-  
jective reality is thus also the realization of the  
subject. It  
is this conception that Hegel summarized in the most  
fun-  
damental of his propositions, namely, that Being is, in  
its  
substance, a 'subject/ The meaning of this proposition  
can only be understood through an interpretation of  
Hegel's Logic, but we shall attempt to give a  
provisional  
explanation here that will be expanded later. 7

The idea of the 'substance as subject\* conceives  
reality  
as a process wherein all being is the unification of  
con-  
tradictory forces. 'Subject\* denotes not only the  
epistemo-  
logical ego or consciousness, but a mode of existence,  
to  
wit, that of a self-developing unity in an antagonistic  
proc-  
ess. Everything that exists is 'real\* only in so far as

it oper-  
ates as a 'self through all the contradictory relations  
that  
constitute its existence. It must thus be considered a  
kind  
of 'subject\* that carries itself forward by unfolding  
its in-  
herent contradictions. For example, a stone is a stone  
only  
in so far as it remains the same thing, a stone,  
throughout  
its action and reaction upon the things and processes  
that  
interact with it. It gets wet in the rain; it resists  
the axe;  
it withstands a certain load before it gives way.  
Being-a-  
stone is a continuous holding out against everything  
that  
acts on the stone; it is a continuous process of  
becoming  
and being a stone. To be sure, the 'becoming\* is not  
con-  
summated by the stone as a conscious subject. The stone  
is changed in its interactions with rain, axe, and  
load; it  
does not change itself. A plant, on the other hand, un-  
folds and develops itself. It is not now a bud, then a  
blos-  
som, but is rather the whole movement from bud through  
blossom to decay. The plant constitutes and preserves  
itself  
in this movement. It comes much nearer to being an  
actual

See Hegel, Phenomenology of Mind, trans. J. B. Baillie,  
London (The  
Macmillan Company, New York), 1910, p. 15.  
T See below, pp. 63 ff., 1\*3 ff.

## THE SOCIO-HISTORICAL SETTING 9

'subject\* than does the stone, for the various stages  
of the  
plant's development grow out of the plant itself; they  
are  
its 'life\* and are not imposed upon it from the

outside.

The plant, however, does not 'comprehend\* this development. It does not 'realize\* it as its own and, therefore, cannot reason its own potentialities into being. Such 'realization\* is a process of the true subject and is reached only with the existence of man. Man alone has the power of self-realization, the power to be a self-determining subject in all processes of becoming, for he alone has an understanding of potentialities and a knowledge of 'notions.\* His very existence is the process of actualizing his potentialities, of molding his life according to the notions of reason. We encounter here the most important category of reason, namely, freedom. Reason presupposes freedom, the power to act in accordance with knowledge of the truth, the power to shape reality in line with its potentialities. The fulfillment of these ends belongs only to the subject who is master of his own development and who understands his own potentialities as well as those of the things around him. Freedom, in turn, presupposes reason, for it is comprehending knowledge, alone, that enables the subject to gain and to wield this power. The stone does not possess it; neither does the plant. Both lack comprehending knowledge and hence real subjectivity. 'Man, however, knows what he is, only thus is he real. Reason and freedom are nothing without this knowledge.\* 8

Reason terminates in freedom^ and freedom is the very existence of the subject. On the other hand, reason itself exists only through its realization, the process of its being made real. Reason is an objective force and an objective reality only because all modes of being are more or less

modes of subjectivity, modes of realization. Subject and

Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie, ed. J. Hoffmeister, Leipzig 1958, p. 104.

## 10 THE FOUNDATIONS OF HEGEL'S PHILOSOPHY

object are not undered by an impassable gulf, because the object is in itself a kind of subject and because all types of being culminate in the free 'comprehensive' subject who is able to realize reason. Nature thus becomes a medium for the development of freedom.

The life of reason appears in man's continuous struggle to comprehend what exists and to transform it in accordance with the truth comprehended. Reason is also essentially a historical force. Its fulfillment takes place as a process in the spatio-temporal world, and is, in the last analysis, the whole history of mankind. The term that designates reason as history is mind (Geist) which denotes the historical world viewed in relation to the rational progress of humanity the historical world not as a chain of acts and events but as a ceaseless struggle to adapt the world to the growing potentialities of mankind.

History is organized into different periods, each marking a separate level of development and representing a definite stage in the realization of reason. Each stage is to be grasped and understood as -a whole, through the prevailing ways of thinking and living which characterize it, through its political and social institutions, its science, religion and philosophy. Different stages occur in the realization of reason, but there is only one reason, just as



there  
is only one whole and one truth: the reality of  
freedom.  
'This final goal it is, at which the process of the  
world's  
history has been continually aiming, and to which the  
sac-  
rifices that have ever and anon been laid on the vast  
altar  
of the earth, through the long lapse of ages, have been  
offered. This is the only final aim that realizes and  
fulfills  
itself; the only pole of repose amid the ceaseless  
chain of  
events and conditions, and the sole true reality in  
them/ 9

An immediate unity of reason and reality never exists.  
The unity comes only after a lengthy process, which be-

Philosophy of History f pp. 19-80.

#### THE SOCIO-HISTORICAL SETTING 1 1

gins at the lowest level of nature and reaches up to  
the  
highest form of existence, that of a free and rational  
subject, living and acting in the self-consciousness of  
its potentialities. As long as there is any gap between  
real  
and potential, the former must be acted upon and  
changed  
until it is brought into line with reason. As long as  
reality  
is not shaped by reason, it remains no reality at all,  
in the  
emphatic sense of the word. Thus reality changes its  
mean-  
ing within the conceptual structure of Hegel's system.  
'Real' comes to mean not everything that actually  
exists  
(this should rather be called appearance), but that  
which  
exists in a form concordant with the standards of  
reason.  
'Real' is the reasonable (rational), and that alone.  
For ex-

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