J.N. Shklar, Freedom and independence: a study of the political ideas in Hegel's "Phenomenology of mind"

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Study of the Political Ideas in Hegel's grasp any field of the human endeavour. Ac­

PhG levels of philosophic comprehension, or­

Phenomenology of Mind», J.N. Shklar,

New York: Cambridge University Press,

POLITICS AND EPISTEMOLOGY IN

HEGEL'S «PHENOMENOLOGY»


Professor Shklar's book on the Phenomenology of Spirit* has performed a valuable service. It has systematically brought out the core of the political ideas in Hegel's massive masterpiece. And it has done so with vigour and eloquence. The PhG has long been considered as a «non-political» work and, as a result, what Freedom and Independence is attempting has been consistently neglected in the litera­

ture dealing with Hegel's political thought. In his PhG Hegel tried to reconstruct the journey of consciousness from a naive, natural level of primitive intellectual cer­
tainty through the senses and their im­
mediate objects towards a perfectly ade­quate («absolute») understanding of the essence of their culture was an aesthetic ap­preciation of this spontaneous unity with the medium of age-old traditions that were

Consequently, the death-knell of the Polis was sounded at the moment when the inde­

pendence of the subject, as the carrier of a rational principle in itself, began to assert itself against the traditional conception of freedom, the immediate identification of the private and public spheres. This process found its world-historical symbol in the person of Socrates. He was the first to reject unquestioning assimilation to the conventional wisdom of the πολισθέντης, and stress the pri­

macy of the rational rules resident in the spirit of the Wise subject. True, he under­

mined the foundations of his custom-based community. The Polis put Socrates to death, yet the irruption of rationalism individuated into the closed «ethical substance» signalled the beginning of the downfall of that spontaneously harmonic to­

gathered.

The necessary demise of Greece brought about the eclipse of the public ethos. The private realm consolidated its autonomy. The individual became absorbed in his self-seeking pursuits. Society was gradually transformed into an aggregation, a «dust»- composed of narrow, egotistic bourgeois. The substantial majesty of the public whole lost its immediate touch with the citizen, to become a vacuous, hostile beyond. And a whole array of ideologies of introspection, or, to use J. Hippolyte's phrase «strategies of retreat» arose to rationalise existence in an alienated universe. The Roman Empire, based on the principle of the atomic property of man enshrined in Roman law, with its dominant ideologies of Stoicism and Scepti­

Hegel looks back on Athens with pro­

found nostalgia. He shares the admiration for the Hellenic spirit that captivated the German intellectuals of his generation. The Greeks enjoyed a cheerful happiness, an ef­

forbearance in representation and feeling that had been forever lost by a mankind fallen prey to fragmentation (the public vs.

Hegel knows how to delineate with breathtaking strokes the wide strides of cold necessity in the downfall of humanity's sunny youth. But he is not merely the rationaliser ex post. He is also a master in penetrating his subject-matter, exposing the salient features of its dynamic, following the pulsating flow of its being, living along within it. His feeling and passion are thus brought into full play. The vibrantly poetic

*Hereafter referred to as PhG from the German Phanomenologie des Geistes.
images describing the irreversible in the decline of Hellas testify to this. Hegel is equally pessimistic over the loss of the moment of pristine integrity, and the sorry spectacle of the unhappy man of his own age unable to double his sublime, dignified sense of loss.

Prof. Shklar is eager to point out that Hegel is not in this precise sense extending his image of Greece as a «utopia», a scheme slated for imminent realisation. In 1806, at the time Hegel was writing the PhG, he is not any more proposing a resurrection of antiqute «virtue» as the remedy for post-revolutionary alienation. History is an inexorable movement forward. Athens is an ideal only in the general sense that it represents a desirable fusion of the universal and the particular, albeit it achieved a finite, natural form thereof; this unity is to be reconquered, but at the highest summit of self-consciousness, only on the basis of its own self-modeling. The moment of reflection that Hellas lacked.

Coupled with this, the Hegel of 1806 does not perceive any actual political form that could pretend to answer the yarning for reunification, which the Revolution exacerbated to the most extreme peaks of anguish. And yet, as Shklar rightly insists, the hope for recovery cannot be abandoned. If it were, then man’s journey would have reached its end in a fit of nihilistic self-deprecation. The problem is that Hegel is here unwilling to offer theoretical guidelines for an institutional arrangement conducive to the realisation of that hope.

It is in this precise sense that the PhG can be considered a non-political, more accurately a non-statist work, as F. Rosenzweig has argued in his classic Hegel and den Staat: his examination of contemporary reality reveals a thorough liquidation of political substantiality with no signs of regeneration. Hence Hegel’s glance remains riveted to our Hellenic past, recollecting a bitter process of political dissolution, to which no actual or ideological solution has been found. It is an «elegy for Hellas», whose loss is an everpresent wound in the political the embeddedness is in danger of complete liquidation. This problem is that Hegel is here unable to offer theoretical guidelines for an institutional arrangement conducive to the realisation of that hope.

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accept the principles and conclusions of the Kantian teaching. The PhG teems with slashing attacks against its hopelessly analytic spirit. But in any case Hegel recognised that Kant, despite the fact that he made it an hypothesei impossible to carry out the project of subject-object unification, did, nevertheless, posit it as an inescapable yearning of pure reason, an «endless task» necessarily engendered in the course of analysing the dynamics of the «transcendental unity» of the Ego.

Kant stubbornly based his revolutionary conception on a strictly subjective basis, severing «our» (limited) understanding from the objective laws governing the universe «in itself». Hegel saw it as his vocation to suppress this spurious separation, to reunite consciousness and its object in a system of integral reason, which is not an impossible Ought but a tangible spiritual reality accessible to the individual by means of adequate philosophical instruction.

The PhG is precisely such a paedagogy, an attempt to orient the average human being away from the abstract analytical principles of formal logic that have up to now shaped his mode of thought towards a higher intellectual existence: he is encouraged to burst the dams of tautology in order to inundate the in itself, and to receive, in turn, the freshness of a rationalised cosmos in his soul. This is a περιαγωγή ψυχής in the most eminent Platonic sense. This is the supreme goal that the PhG announces, a goal going far beyond the limited aspiration to a rational political order. Its essence is thoroughly gnoseological, the outcome of an immanent criticism of the transcendental principles of Kant, a spiritual consummation internal to the German idealist mind.

The driving anticipation of such a completed system of reason is the key emotion permeating the PhG, and it finds its highest expression in that passionate masterpiece, its Preface, a text that is markedly de-emphasised in Freedom and Independence. The young philosopher is greatly excited for having discovered the absolute rules, which will now inevitably, as he sees it, push man along to a perfect understanding of his existence in a transparent universe. The elegy for the lost harmony of Hellas has thus been overcome by a doxology to dialectical reason conquering the elusive absolute on the basis of the rule of synopticity, which again was first enunciated by Plato. The poetic images of the Preface, as well as the rapturous concluding lines of the PhG, create the emotional atmosphere for that leap of human subjectivity into the infinity of the cosmic One. The elegy to the Hellenic past is aufgehoben, in the strictest Hegelian sense, by the fervent paean to the German-Hegelian future.

Hegel’s political insights must be firmly placed within this metaphysical scheme. Only thus can we effectively combat an ever-present temptation to elevate the political moment to supreme dominance in the system. Prof. Shklar’s preoccupation with the politics of the PhG may have made a bias in this direction unavoidable, as evidenced by her unquestioned readiness to identify Hegel’s «Volkgeist» with Montesquieu’s «esprit des lois» with its predominantly objective, political flavour. But Hegel’s political concepts, even his powerful state as constructed in the Philosophy of Right of 1820, participate in a higher metaphysical movement, whose telos is not the self-subsistent perfection of a rational political community, but a spiritual world of cosmic reconciliation based on the healing principles of absolute reason.

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A DICTIONARY OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

I am most gratified by the review of my book A dictionary of the social sciences published by Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd and I appreciate being given the hospitality of your columns for answering the two major objections raised by Helen Papachristou.

The first objection is that I omitted a few but important terms such as «capitalism», «socialism», «liberalism», «Marxism». I was forced to establish criteria for the inclusion and exclusion of terms. As the social sciences have survived the Wittensteinian onslaught of P.G. Winch (1958), the Positivismusstreit of the 1960’s, and repeated attacks on their scientificity, it is important to try to establish law-like generalizations which employ terms which are rigorously defined. It was clear that the terms enumerated were too vague for this purpose and they were therefore rejected. The term «Marxism» was rejected because Marxism is a Weltanschauung and is broader than sociology.

The second objection is that certain writers who should have been attributed to certain definitions were omitted. These omissions were deliberate and there were good reasons for them. Where a term or a concept was in common use and was used by many leading writers, it was considered misleading to mention the classic author. In many cases a semantic shift had occurred since the term’s introduction. Many forms of alienation have been distinguished since Karl Marx’s use of the term, for example, by C. Wright Mills. G. Lukacs used the term «reification» not in the sense used by Sidney and by many philosophers of science, but in the sense of false consciousness. The term «imitation» is in wide use by psychologists and I did not wish to associate it with Tarde’s theory of imitation. A lot of work has been done since the time of Adorno, by Eysenck amongst others, on the authoritarian personality and various types of authoritarian personality have been distinguished.

HUGO F. READING

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183