

book reviews

POLITICS AND EPISTEMOLOGY IN HEGEL'S «PHENOMENOLOGY»

J.N. Shklar, *Freedom and Independence: a Study of the Political Ideas in Hegel's «Phenomenology of Mind»*, Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. XV, 216.

by
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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 literature 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 certainty through the senses and their immediate objects towards a perfectly adequate («absolute») understanding of the meaning of the entire human experience. This *ex post* ordering of history's raw material, which claimed to find a dynamic necessity in our cultural past, unifying it as a teleological design in terms of lower and higher levels of philosophic comprehension, ordered to the final abolition of any division between subject and object, man and his world, did not intend to leave outside its grasp any field of the human endeavour. Accordingly, the political forms generated in history also came into purview.

For Prof. Shklar, the fundamental political achievement of mankind, as Hegel saw it, had been the ancient Greek city-state,

whose flower of perfection was Periclean Athens. The polis was a harmonious totality, in which the private interests of its citizens were intimately fused with the purposes of the whole, in an ethos of extroverted worldliness placing the highest premium on collective culture, i.e. on the unifying customs unconsciously transmitted through the generations. The individual Athenian could never have conceived himself in conflict with the demands of a public authority legitimated by traditional law and religion. The private sphere never crystallised into a petty realm of egotistic concern strictly delimited against the polity. The particular subject lived in and by the whole, and the whole allowed scope for the most splendid fruition of individual genius as servitor and carrier of the popular civilisation.

This bright universe, in which private man found himself in a humanised nature and felt at home in a political order he experienced as the product of the activities of each and all through the ages, was not, nevertheless, destined to be, qua objective order, an eternal conquest and terminus of humanity's ascent. The Greek world carried within itself the seeds of its own disintegration.

The fusion of the universal and the particular realised in Athens was not, to Hegel's mind, based on rational self-awareness. The citizen adhered to the polity in a spontaneous, instinctive way. He was socialised in the medium of age-old traditions that were simply taken for granted, affectively affirmed, but in no way tested against a standard of thought external to them. No reflective distance between an independent rational subjectivity and the collective unconscious was allowed in the Polis. Freedom to the Greeks was immediate belonging to a universal, transindividual substance. The essence of their culture was an aesthetic appreciation of this spontaneous unity with their natural and social environment, a «religion of beauty».

Consequently, the death-knell of the Polis was sounded at the moment when the independence 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 assent to the conventional wisdom of the πολλοί, and stress the primacy of the rational rules resident in the spirit of the Wise subject. Thus, he undermined the foundations of his custom-based community. The Polis put Socrates to death, yet the irruption of rationalistic individualism into the closed «ethical substance» signalled the beginning of the downfall of that spontaneously harmonic togetherness.

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 owner enshrined in Roman law, with its dominant ideologies of Stoicism and Scepticism; the feudal states, based on a struggle between private wealth and public service; pre-revolutionary France, in which the money power of the rising bourgeoisie has already corrupted the feudal institutions, and reason has undercut the claims of a transcendent faith; finally, the world of the French Revolution itself, in which the radical independence of the isolated subject runs riot, to put an end to all semblance of self-subsistent rationality in the feudal order, without, however, being able to erect a new totalising political framework; all these forms of social and intellectual disrepute are necessary derivatives from that fateful occurrence, the dissolution of the spontaneous, natural integrity of the Greeks.

Hegel looks back on Athens with profound nostalgia. He shares the admiration for the Hellenic spirit that captivated the German intellectuals of his generation. The Greeks enjoyed a cheerful happiness, an effortless harmony in representation and feeling that had been forever lost by a mankind fallen prey to fragmentation (the public vs. the private realm; the «here and now» vs. the beyond).

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 *Phenomenologie des Geistes*.

images describing the irreversible in the decline of Hellas testify to this¹. Hegel is equally mourning over the loss of the moment of pristine integrity, and the sorry spectacle of the unhappy man of his own age serves to redouble his sublime, dignified sense of loss.

Prof. Shklar is eager to point out that Hegel is not in this connection intending 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 antique «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 conquered, but at the highest summit of self-conscious reason, integrating 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 yearning 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 unable to offer theoretical guidelines for an institutional arrangement conducive to the realisation of that hope.

It is only 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 und der Staat*: its 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 theoretical state can be administered as an antidote. The *PhG* is an «elegy for Hellas», whose loss is an everpresent wound in the spirit.

This is, in principle, Prof. Shklar's reconstruction of the political movement in the *PhG*. It is a valuable achievement filling a noticeable gap. In the process of articulating the «elegiac» interpretation she has also managed to shed new light on some riddles that have long divided students of Hegel.

Her discussion, for example, of the famous «master and slave» dialectic clearly stresses the dimension of a self-diremption internal to the Ego, the absolute prius and locus of all dialectical development in the tradition of idealism, as the root cause for the conflict. This cautions against an oversimplifying, crudely sociological («marxist») analysis alleging that Hegel somehow possessed a «presentiment» of the «truth» that class-struggle is the foundation of the human collectivity.

1. cf. *PhG*, Baillie translation, pp. 753-754.

Even more illuminating is, further, Shklar's discussion of the enigmatic chapter in the *PhG* entitled: «Self-conscious Individuals as a Community of Animals».²

This is a section that has occasioned the most contradictory commentary. For J. Hippolyte, for example, it depicts the world of the isolated, egocentric bourgeois intellectual of the postrevolutionary era with its cult of the romantic genius pursuing his art for its own sake and ultimately disintegrating into empty haughtiness and outright deception.³ For G. Lukacs, on the other hand, here we have a stunningly accurate description of the social reality of early capitalism, with its mass of independent small producers meeting at the marketplace for the purpose of exchange in a process of economic interdependence.⁴ Shklar quite adroitly establishes that the *Sache selbst*, the real fact, the objective cause, for which the self-subsistent individuality, whose only value is self-expression, pretends to be sacrificing itself, is encompassing enough to function as the abstract expression of material as well as mental labour. This is a significant contribution to the analysis of this especially abstract passage in Hegel, the extreme ambiguity of which did not deter the various commentators from putting forth their views as self-evident truth.

I wish to supplement this presentation of *Freedom and Independence* with a few critical reflections, which, however, do not in any way detract from its outstanding accomplishments. Prof. Shklar herself conceded in the Preface to her book that she was attempting an interpretation of only one part of one work in the Hegelian corpus. From this the question immediately arises as to the connection of the political moment, which she chooses to explore, to the overall metaphysical framework of the *PhG*, and beyond that to the Hegelian vision as a completed system, to which, as we know, the *PhG* was meant as an «Introduction». Shklar does provide an overview of the complete argument in the *PhG*, in which the supra-spatial teleology of absolute knowledge shaping the design is emphasised. In the relevant chapter («A Topography of the Phenomenology») the political concern is integrated into the overarching intent of ultimate subject-object fusion. But when the spotlight shifts to matters more narrowly political the embeddedness is in danger of being neglected.

Any tearing away of the political element from its metaphysical environment has significant consequences. There is no question but that if we restrict our gaze to the political movement [Polis (unity) → post-Greek division (unhappy consciousness) → atomised present, unstructured social chaos] then the prevailing disposition is elegiac. Hegel is here rationalising the col-

2. *PhG*, Baillie translation, pp. 419-438.

3. cf. J. Hippolyte, *Genèse et structure de la phénoménologie*, Paris, 1946, pp. 286-308.

4. cf. G. Lukacs, *Der junge Hegel*, Berlin 1967, pp. 589-590.

lapse of Hellenic integrity, under conditions of contemporary alienation. This hopelessness of the present intensifies the nostalgic, Hellenocentric mood.

And yet, if, going beyond politics, we consider the *PhG* as a coherent metaphysical statement about the character and potentialities of the human knowing faculty, as a process of appropriating the revealed absolute in thought, from the initial overcoming of raw externality, as consciousness discovers the emptiness of its supposedly richest reservoir of knowledge in the objects of sense, on to the final exaltation of the power of reason to leap beyond vanquished objectivity, which has now been tamed for good within the confines of a universal synthetic scheme, and render perfectly transparent the inner structure of the cosmos, then we realise that the backward-looking recollecting mood, that the political sphere exudes, is merely one moment in a more general thrust, which is indeed anticipatory, albeit drawn from epistemological and not political sources.

In the Preface to the *PhG* Hegel expressly announced that he viewed his epoch as «a birth-time and a period of transition». He envisioned a «new world» dawning upon the human spirit, an era that would break with the divisive habits of thought bred by the «culture of reflection», in order to produce a new body of knowledge based upon the reconciling principles of the absolute philosophy, already in 1806 announcing a new vision of the ὄντως ὄν as self-moved subject.

This dawning of a new age is, hence, not a political but a philosophical image, one that was repeatedly made use of by Hegel in the late works as well, where its affinity with the final systematisation of the absolute he thought he had achieved is quite explicit.⁵ The French Revolution has totally disorganised the social substratum. The outward push of consciousness to remodel externality according to the rational principle of the 18th c. («utility») has not gone beyond reckless fury and mindless destruction («terror»). It cannot engender the new substantialities needed for reintegration. In the midst of the ruins consciousness takes a flight beyond political engagement, retreating into its inner sanctuary. There it discovers the spark of moral reason. And from this the moral *Welf-anschauung*, the sublime environment of Kantian self-legislating subjects emerges. This transition signifies the migration of the «world-spirit» to a «new land», the land of its final and highest fulfillment, the land of philosophical contemplation, subjectivity and the truth of idealism. This is the land called Germany in worldly terms.

Hegel believed that the rise of German idealism signalled the final stage in the spirit's ascent to absolute knowledge. The architect of this revolutionary movement was the great Kant. Hegel, of course, did not

5. cf. Preface to first Edition of the *Encyclopedia*, Leipzig 1920, p. 4.

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 *ex hypothesi* 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 pedagogy, an attempt to reorient 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 full richness of a rationalised cosmos in his soul. This is a *περιπαγωγή 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 gnosological, 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 passionate 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 «Volksgeist» 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.

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 Wittgensteinian 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 Bidney 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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