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The Rise and Fall of the Self

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Hegel and the Apotheosis of Self as Spirit

The significance of that 'absolute' commandment, *know thyself*—whether we look at it in itself or under the historical circumstances of its first utterance—is not to promote mere self-knowledge in respect of the particular capacities, character, propensities, and foibles of the single self. The knowledge it commands means that of man's genuine reality—of what is essentially and ultimately true and real—of spirit as the true and essential being.¹

Hegel

Writing a quarter of a century after the publication of Kant's revolutionary first Critique, whose ideas were now as established as the slogans of the great political revolution in France, G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831), without Kant's timidity, pursued to the limits the ideas of transcendental idealism, and the significance of the insight that it is we who give structure to our own experience. From Fichte he borrowed the now transformed notion of 'the Absolute', the rejection of the world 'in itself', and the idea that there might be alternative sets of categories—alternative 'forms of consciousness' and forms of life. From Schelling he borrowed (Schelling would later say 'stole') the idea of a dialectic of such forms, developing through time and history with ourselves (collectively) as the authors, and becoming increasingly more adequate and encompassing. According to Hegel, every form of consciousness has its truth, in a certain context and from a certain perspective. But a larger context and broader perspective will show that some forms are more satisfactory, more complete, more 'true' than others. The notion of dialectic was the ideal mean between Kant's too-dogmatic 'deduction' of a single set of categories, and the romantics' free-wheeling 'creative idealism' which made it seem as if any

imagined world might be as real as any other. The dialectic is not so much a method as it is the central idea of Hegel's philosophy, and its purpose, in each of his works, is to demonstrate the ultimate necessity of an all-encompassing acceptance of the self as absolute—which Hegel calls 'Spirit' (*Geist*).

Hegel is the apotheosis of German idealism, and he has been called 'the Aristotle of our post-Renaissance world'. Viewed in itself, outside the historical context and the philosophical tradition in which it was written (a very un-Hegelian thing to do), Hegel's system appears extravagant, extreme, and almost incomprehensible, but viewed as a vision of history and as the culmination of the whole philosophical tradition, it becomes clear that Hegel's ideas were not wild 'speculations' but rather that they formed a careful synthesis of the current internationalism of history and the subjective movement in philosophy that had started with Descartes and Rousseau. Hegel saw the absurdity of scepticism, and the possibility of profound doubt is simply rejected from his system. 'Perhaps', he writes at the beginning of his first great book, 'the fear of error is itself the greatest error.' He accepted the general move of Kant's first Critique, regarding objects as being constituted by consciousness, but he also saw the manifest absurdity of making this an individual matter, as if each of us creates his or her own world; it is consciousness in general that does this, collectively and not individually, through the shared aspects of a culture, a society, and above all through a shared language. But this implies that, though we all strive for mutual agreement (even if this means, at first, imposing our own views on everyone else), our shared concepts are not in fact universal but quite particular and provincial, aspects of the truth but not the whole truth, forms of consciousness rather than—as we would like to think—human consciousness as such. But since Hegel also rejects the idea of a world 'in itself' there can be no 'truth' for human consciousness apart from its own agreement with itself, taking into account not only its many voices and perspectives but also its rich history and multitude of experiences. This explains the complexity of the Hegelian system: it is not merely an argument for the absolute truth but rather an attempt to actually *create* that truth, by moving us all through the history

of human concepts and experience to an 'absolute' general agreement, or at least to the agreement that we should, ideally, all agree.

This enormous ambition also explains an inevitable tension within Hegel's dialectical method. On the one hand, he is keenly aware—as few philosophers had been before—of the variety and seeming incommensurability of human viewpoints and perspectives; on the other, he is striving, as ambitiously as any philosopher of the past, to obtain unanimity and universal agreement, even without any external standard or world to act as an anchor or guarantor of the truth. And like most thoughtful philosophers, Hegel also changed his mind, so that it often seems as if there are two Hegels, and it is not always clear which one is being praised or brought to our attention. There is more than a simple distinction of age between the young Hegel who shared the excitement of the Revolution and reforms in France, and announced the 'birth of a new age' in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* of 1807, and the older, established professor of philosophy in Berlin who wrote: 'when philosophy paints its grey on grey, then it has a shape of life grown old. . . . The owl of Minerva flies only at dusk.'² The younger Hegel was expressing the hope of his age, a brief period in which it looked as if Germany was at last to be united and freed of its still feudal habits, when the principles of 'liberty, equality, fraternity' seemed about to become international realities, and when philosophy was developing an exhilarating new vision of the world. The older Hegel was also expressing the spirit of his age, one of resignation, of acceptance without enthusiasm but nevertheless with a sense of satisfaction that things indeed are as they must be. The younger Hegel saw a world in transition, full of promises; the older Hegel lived through the world of Metternich's 'reaction'. Napoleon and the ideals of the Revolution were dead and buried; the enthusiasm of Kantian and romantic philosophy had turned to academic disputes and professional system-building.

These two Hegels, however, are not to be identified only by their differences in age and the ages they lived in. There were, in a more profound sense, two Hegels all along, from the revolutionary *Phenomenology* to the last dialectical lectures of the late

1820s. One Hegel was a traditional philosopher, very much the follower of Kant in search of absolute truth, a defender of (Lutheran) Christianity, a system builder, and a synthesizer. He conceived of the structure of all his works as a dialectical progression up to and establishing the Absolute, a single idea which encompassed and unified every other idea in the system. In the *Phenomenology* that idea is the idea of universal Spirit; in his later *Logic*, the Absolute idea is God, but ultimately these are the same. This apparent consistency of theme and structure hides a tension, however, between the traditional conservative search for an Absolute, and a radical, largely unacknowledged recognition that there may be no such Absolute, but only the possibly endless diversity of different forms of life and consciousness, each of them relative to and dependent upon its own historical, conceptual, and social epoch. In the *Phenomenology* this latter possibility is given remarkably free rein, and although the book is clearly designed as a kind of demonstration of the superiority of the ultimate stages, it is just as evident that there is much too much material and too many paths taken *en route* for that demonstration to mean very much. It is Hegel, accordingly, who is rightly credited with the discovery of 'alternative conceptual frameworks', at the same time that he is celebrated as the grand master of the Absolute. While not exactly contradictory these two positions sit uncomfortably with one another. Forced to choose, the older Hegel—having the advantage of hindsight—opted for the Absolute (we will see this same schizoid tendency in Hegel's followers, for example Wilhelm Dilthey and Jürgen Habermas).

More than most philosophers Hegel happily acknowledged himself as the product (and also the fruition) of an entire philosophical tradition. In his lectures on the history of philosophy he demonstrated how his ideas followed and were the culmination of the entire philosophical odyssey since the pre-Socratics, but more modestly we can see how he follows and brings to a climax the movement of ideas that begins with Rousseau. Hegel read Rousseau with his friends in college (Schelling and the poet Hölderlin were his room-mates at Tübingen), and his first essays (on the nature of 'folk religion' and

early Christianity) were much in the spirit of Rousseau in their rejection of the authoritarian and corrupting influence of the organized church and theology in favour of the natural simplicity of 'subjective' folk rituals and beliefs. He was also a follower of Kant, though of Kant's writings on religion rather than the material of the Critiques. Kant had argued that religion must be 'natural'—that is, rational—and Hegel develops this idea more rigorously than Kant ever did, ultimately attacking not only Christianity but even Christ himself for appealing to authority rather than reason. But the most immediate and most profound influences on Hegel were Hölderlin and Schelling. Hölderlin seemed to have been the innovator of the group, and he inspired them all with his grand metaphor—drawn from the *Sturm und Drang* poets, from Goethe and Schiller, and, most important of all, from his imaginative reading of the ancient Greeks—of a universal life force manifesting itself in all things, and using them for its own purposes. Unlike the traditional Judaeo-Christian God, however, this spirit had no existence of its own apart from its various manifestations in the world, and yet literally everything is a manifestation of this spirit, from the tragedies of human history to the wonders of nature and the inspirations of a single young poet. Consequently everything has a purpose and a place in the overall scheme of things, whether or not, in the distractions and limitations of everyday life, we recognize this to be so.

We have already seen this image emerge in Schelling's philosophy in his portrait of the living universe, his integration of nature, religion, and human history under the singular scope of the Absolute, and his concept of the 'World Soul' or absolute ego suffusing through each of us, and pervading human history. Schelling began publishing this grand metaphor as philosophy in the 1790s, before Hegel even thought of himself as a philosopher. When he finally did decide to try philosophy as a vocation in 1801, he founded a journal (*The Critical Journal of Philosophy*) with Schelling, and began publishing his ideas. These were so close to Schelling's, however, that he was viewed merely as his disciple, and many years later Schelling complained that Hegel had become famous on *his* ideas. The justice of that charge has often

been debated, since it is not easy to distinguish between cases when one author 'steals' another's idea, or when they both draw from a common source (in this case Hölderlin), or when one develops and perfects an idea that is only implicit or awkwardly expressed by the other. What is clear is that Hegel did not appear out of nowhere but was steeped in a tradition and surrounded by ideas, and that what he did (as Aristotle did in ancient times) was to unify these into a single powerful statement.

Hegel's philosophy, with all its twists, turns, and contradictions, can best be summarized in terms of two of his central concepts: 'Spirit' and 'dialectic'. The religious overtones of the word 'Spirit' are unmistakable and surely intentional, but it is clear that for Hegel—more than for Hölderlin or Schelling—this is a very *human* spirit, even if it encompasses everything else as well. Spirit is more a matter of fellow-feeling and group membership than a religious sentiment as such, much as one might have 'team spirit' or share 'the spirit of '76'. The most obvious and important historical predecessor of Hegel's spirit is Rousseau's General Will, coupled with suggestions of the Christian concepts of the 'Holy Spirit' and 'communion', but philosophically the most immediate predecessors are Kant's abstract notion of 'Humanity', and the French slogan of 'fraternity'. Although Hegel often hints at (and occasionally boldly states) religious themes, the concept of Spirit is employed most often to solve secular and ethical rather than religious problems, especially those concerning synthesis and unity. Spirit is our shared recognition of our mutual interdependence and ultimate collective identity.

This shared recognition is also the culmination of Hegel's dialectic, which is a progression based on conflict and opposition. 'Dialectic' derives from the Greek word for 'conversation', and the idea (exemplified by Socrates in the Platonic dialogues) was that through the confrontation of diverse and opposed opinions the truth will eventually emerge. Hegel saw that the history of ideas could best be understood in this way, but then went on to see that this process could be generalized, and applied to the fields of history and human events, even to the history of science and the development of nature itself. In each case conflict and

confrontation of opposed ideas, concepts, and forms provokes new ideas, concepts, and forms, improved by the process until finally a set of ideas—or a single idea—emerges which satisfies the demands of all participants. According to Hegel the ultimate idea in every instance is the self-reflective recognition of an all-embracing identity. In the *Phenomenology*, this all-embracing identity is Spirit ('the self-recognition of Spirit' is in this sense a redundancy), the full realization (as well as recognition) of the unity of all humanity and the human world, which includes the world of nature as the object of human knowledge.

One of the more frightening implications of the Hegelian system is its extremely diminished role for and conception of the individual. At the end of the preface to the *Phenomenology* he comments:

at a time when the universal nature of spiritual life has become so very much emphasized and strengthened, and the mere individual aspect has become, as it should be, a matter of indifference . . . the individual must all the more forget himself . . . [and] all the less must be demanded of him, just as he can expect less from himself and may ask less for himself.³

Thinking of the historical context—the middle of the Napoleonic Wars—it is easy to see how Hegel could insist that only the larger picture matters, and that within that picture the individual counts for very little. Indeed, 'Spirit' was not just an abstraction Hegel created from the multitudes of actual human beings: he considered Spirit to be palpably real, and saw our concept of the individual as the abstraction—that is, plucked from its social context and given false weight, independence, and importance. Thus the overall vision of Hegel's philosophy is the development of a unified, self-reflective, international, spiritual community, and the promise of the current political situation (in 1807, at the height of Napoleon's power) seemed to make this not just a philosopher's dream but a real political possibility.

It is this enthusiastic expectation that leads Hegel to formulate his well-known philosophy of history. 'Even as we contemplate history as this slaughter bench on which the happiness of peoples, the wisdom of states, and the virtue of individuals have been sacrificed', he writes,⁴ it is clear on rational reflection that these

sacrifices have served some ultimate purpose—not a divine purpose (to be compensated for in the afterlife) but a human, historical purpose which he identifies as the increase and final realization of freedom in the world. To be sure, he does not mean by 'freedom' that 'negative' conception of freedom which simply means 'being left alone'. Desirable as this might be, it is cruel and meaningless if there is no context in which one's actions have any significance, if one has no opportunities, no education, and no sense of belonging and participating in some larger social entity. Hegel means by 'freedom' very much what Rousseau meant by it—identification with the whole, be it 'Spirit' or 'the General Will'. One is never free alone, but only in the context of a free and meaningful society.

Hegel is often viewed as the father of modern totalitarianism on the basis of this 'positive' view of freedom, but to be fair it should be pointed out that the modern concept of 'totality' and its conditions were hardly present in the chaotic and communicatively primitive world of Napoleon and his aftermath, and Hegel surely would have been horrified by the modern states that have borrowed some of his principles. At the time his philosophy of history was a powerful defence of the idea of historical improvement, of the transcendence of slavery and caste systems, and finally of the modern (German and Christian) achievement of consciousness of true freedom 'in the inmost realm of the spirit'. Of course one can always choose to look at history as a slaughter bench. (Dostoevsky writes in his *Notes from Underground*: 'one may say almost anything that one likes about history, except that it is rational. The very word sticks in one's throat.') But Hegel assures us that, 'to him who looks with a rational eye, history in turn presents its rational aspect'. He would not insist on the absurd thesis that history is all for the good, but would only insist that *some* good comes of it all. He would not deny the horrors of history, indeed he witnessed some of them only a few miles from his study. Nevertheless, there was a 'cunning of reason' through history, evidence of a spirit—albeit an extremely wasteful and often cruel spirit—behind the brutal actions and passions of humanity. In a world no longer willing to accept the 'will of God' as a rationalization of tragedy, in which history is all too easily

dismissed as nothing more than 'one damn thing after another', even this small solace is welcome.

We said before that Spirit is the culmination of the Hegelian system, and that in a sense it is even redundant to speak of the self-recognition of Spirit. But in another sense Spirit does not always exist; like freedom, with which it is identified, it must be *realized*. Hegel explains this ambiguity by a familiar analogy with biological growth (one of the ruling metaphors of the dialectic). An acorn grows into an oak tree, and only at the end is it what it 'truly' is; nevertheless, there is a sense in which the oak has existed all along as the acorn, and the mature tree is only the realization of the potential that was in the seed. In the same way humanity has always been spiritual, in the sense that the *capacity* for spiritual growth and self-recognition have always been there, but Spirit 'truly' is what it is only at the end of history (that is, at the completion of this historical mission). To realize ourselves as Spirit is thus both to recognize, and, in so doing, to *make* ourselves into Spirit, into the grand supra-human unity that recognizes the world as ours.

It is clear that Hegel in one sense completes the development of the transcendental pretence, the exaggerated scope and importance of the self (albeit a strictly collective self), and the projection of one's own attributes onto humanity (and the cosmos) as a whole. His model of freedom is unabashedly Christian, spiritual instead of political, and later, when he does provide a political model for freedom (in *The Philosophy of Right*), he follows the barely enlightened model of the Prussian constitutional monarchy. To say that freedom is the goal of human history is to condemn or at least demean those societies that have a different conception of freedom to ours or find some other value more important than freedom (contemporary Iran comes to mind, but even the ancient Greeks, on Hegel's account, were not fully rational). What Hegel means by 'reason' is also closely linked to a very narrow and particular conception of rationality, that notion of all-embracing comprehension peculiar to the German idealists. And what Hegel has in mind by 'history', of course, is a carefully edited sample of the global commotion that has ensued since the advent of *homo sapiens*. He mentions the Orient only to

dismiss it for its 'arbitrariness, savagery, and dimness of passion'. The Greeks (whom Hegel, with Hölderlin, much admired) receive disproportionate attention despite his harsh treatment of them in the philosophy of history, while most of the history of the medieval Church is ignored (Hegel was a Lutheran with a strong bias against Catholicism). The many societies now studied by anthropologists were hardly known at the turn of the nineteenth century, and there is little or no room in Hegel's system for them. One might say that even the underlying image of the dialectic, that vision of a restless, reflective, universal force seeking to express and improve itself, is distinctively 'Western', and hardly universal and essential to human existence.

Early in the *Phenomenology* Hegel tells us that 'the Truth is the Whole', but he also tells us that this should not be taken as a vacuous statement about the universal 'One-ness' of things (his criticism of Schelling's Absolute as 'the night in which all cows are black'), nor should this insistence on the whole (now called 'holism') be separated from the idea that 'the whole' includes history too. To account for truth, then, is to submerge oneself in the history of the concept and the search for truth, as well as to find the perspective from which, or within which, truth can best be comprehended. What 'truth' requires, accordingly, is such a perspective leading to complete comprehension so that nothing is left out and everything ties together. We can appreciate this requirement if we think of Hegel's immediate predecessors and their problems: Kant had an all-embracing philosophy but it was too compartmentalized, separating knowledge and action, and leaving the connection with religion and aesthetic judgement too obscure. Fichte, as Schelling had complained, neglected to account adequately for science and nature in his system. Consequently Hegel, accepting the post-Kantian demand for a system that deserved the name 'Absolute', took 'truth' to be a framework which corrected these deficiencies, and incorporated nature, ethics, religion, and aesthetics in a single grand theory.

Religion plays a key role in Hegel's philosophy, but it is by no means obvious what that role is—or what religion it is either. Hegel's followers on the 'right' (as opposed to the radical followers like the young Karl Marx) tended to take his more pious

pronouncements at face value, interpreting the theological language of the Trinity and the Incarnation quite literally. In terms of structure Hegel's works do tend to culminate in religion (which, in the *Phenomenology* for example, is the penultimate stage to Absolute Knowledge). Hegel studied theology as a student (Tübingen was a seminary), and wrote his first essays on religion in general and Christianity in particular. The significance of Hegel's unabashedly theological language is by no means obvious, however, and when he explains that what the incarnation *really* means is that *every one* of us is Spirit, and Jesus is just a representation (*Vorstellung*), it is clear that this is no orthodox defence of Christianity. Hegel treats of religion not just towards the end of the dialectic but throughout, one of his treatments occurring at an early stage in the guise of 'the Unhappy Consciousness', a rather damning description of religion (Catholicism in particular) as schizoid, slavish, and miserable. Such a religion is a battle of oneself against oneself, not a spiritual endeavour but a particularly destructive form of inward self-consciousness (it is worth noting how well this description fits Kierkegaard's later conception of 'Christianity as Suffering'). On the other hand, Christianity does appear (as 'Revealed Religion') at the end of the *Phenomenology* and the *Lectures on Religion*, but one should add that so does Zoroastrianism, plant and animal worship, and Greek 'art religion', and what Hegel seems to think of as religious sensibility has more to do with his animated philosophical attitude than it does with any of the doctrines or dogmas of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. Finally, while it is true that Hegel studied theology, it is beyond dispute that he generally hated his studies, as his first essays—scathingly critical of Christian dogmatism—demonstrate. It is less likely that he underwent a total conversion in mid-life than that he simply softened his antagonism, and accepted Christianity—as he accepted everything else—within a dialectic that absorbed and went beyond it.

With the exception of the *Logic*, Hegel's works are all concerned with the necessity of a *social* conception of humanity. This seems obvious until one glances back at the history of philosophy. Of course philosophers treat people as social creatures when

they are discussing politics (though even there the presumption of original individuality is quite strong, as in Hobbes's famous portrait of a state of nature in which isolated individuals, finding their lives intolerable, 'nasty, brutish, and short', finally band together to form a social covenant), but when they are discussing the nature of knowledge, consciousness, the self, or religion, they almost always treat the matter as a relationship between the individual and evidence, or reason, or his own self-awareness, or God. The idea that what we know, think, feel, and worship is circumscribed by, much less is a product of, our relations with other people is treated with disdain as popular superstition, as 'heteronomy'. The Enlightenment since Descartes honoured autonomy above all else, and romanticism valued inward feelings and intuitions just because these were untainted by social conditioning and corruption. Rousseau more than anyone else celebrated this sense of the isolated individual in touch with himself and nature, and out of touch with society. True, he developed the most persuasive theory of the social contract, but he did so against a background of a state of nature in which individuals were 'born free and happy' and were 'indifferent' to one another. The idea that there are no individuals in nature, that knowledge, self, and everything else human is a product not of nature but of culture, is an idea that comes quite new to philosophy (at least, to modern philosophy), and it comes, mainly, with Hegel.

One of the best known chapters of any of Hegel's books is devoted to showing that this is so. It is called 'Master and Slave', and occupies an early mid-section of the *Phenomenology*. It is presented without a clear context or purpose, and without any references to other philosophers, or current problems and controversies. He simply tells us the story of two wholly undescribed 'self-consciousnesses' who meet, and almost immediately enter into a fight to the death. Each tries to 'cancel' the other because his consciousness threatens the other's view of himself as free and independent. But each one is also trying to 'prove' himself, and recognizes that the actual death of the other would eliminate the only witness to that proof. So the winner lets the loser live and becomes the master, the loser the slave. The master becomes 'a consciousness existing on its own account which is mediated with

itself through another consciousness'. In the process both of them learn that there is more to life than survival, and that selfhood is a complex of independence and dependency which mere individual existence cannot account for.

The story is presented wholly in the abstract. Hegel is giving us a parable which represents not a particular situation but rather the prototype of *all* human confrontations. It is set, as in Hobbes and Rousseau, in a fictitious 'state of nature', an imaginary reconstruction of what human life might be like in the absence of everything we call 'social', but unlike Hobbes, Hegel does not think that life in such a circumstance would reduce to pure selfishness: pride, vanity, and a sense of status already enter into pre-social conflict. And unlike Rousseau, he does not think that the state of nature produces individuals who are happy, free, and indifferent to one another, much less 'noble savages'. What he suggests is that in the state of nature people are already pre-social and defined by the traits that Rousseau too readily blames on the corrupting influence of society. Human existence is primordially a matter of mutual recognition, and it is only through mutual recognition that we are self-aware and strive for the social meanings in our lives.

The parable develops a fascinating twist, for the master becomes dependent on the slave, not only for his food and comforts but also for his self-image. He is only master in so far as the slave truly regards him as such, but the infuriating residual independence of (other people's) consciousness is notorious, and it is even more infuriating when the other in question does not openly rebel but seems to be going through the motions of absolute obedience. One cannot obtain self-confirmation from a 'yes-man'. As the master becomes increasingly dependent on the slave, and as both of them recognize that this is the case, the power in the relationship shifts until the slave becomes the 'self-existent', and the master the dependent one. As a parable of the origins of society Hegel here lays the groundwork both for his philosophy of history (the progressive realization of freedom), and for his general theory of society and ethics, in which some less confrontational and more stable social arrangement must replace the master-slave relationship. But in this parable too Karl

Marx will find exactly the model he needs to explain the conflict between the economic master and servile classes, and its 'inevitable' resolution.

Hegel's ethical theory is too often seen as subservient to his political views—though the latter are more often understood through their unforeseen consequences in modern German history than through Hegel's own rather moderate opinions. But ethics is, in an important sense, the heart of Hegel's philosophy. His early work on religion tries—following Kant—to understand religious belief and ritual wholly within the secular framework of an ethical theory, to see religion as a vehicle (if not a 'postulate') of morality. The *Phenomenology* has as its largest part a series of explorations of various ethical systems and models (most of which is contained in the long chapter entitled 'Spirit'). The master-slave section initiates what is to become an elaborate dialectical progression of such diverse ethical theories and ways of life as hedonism (the life aimed at pleasure), romantic sensibility (especially the views of Rousseau), the pious life (for example, of a Benedictine monk), the success-motivated life of a businessman or scholar ('the Bourgeois Zoo'), a life defined wholly by one's family, and possibly in conflict with the larger 'civil society' (with Antigone as the tragic example), the sophisticated but hypocritical life of the courtier, life in a revolution (with its consequences in a reign of terror), and the theory of ethics formulated by Kant concerning morality as Practical Reason. The point of the dialectic is, as always, to provide the broadest possible view of ethics and its possibilities, while at the same time making clear what is most essential to morality and the good life.

As we can readily anticipate, Hegel does not accept the Kantian conception of morality. In his early essays, despite the Kantian flavour and his devotion to Kant's philosophy of religion, he had attacked Kant's view of morality—as did Schiller—as overly abstract, cold, and alienating. He argued that the formality of Kant's categorical imperative made it very difficult to apply it to any concrete ethical situation, at least without sneaking in personal evaluations which it was the very point of the moral law to preclude. He particularly objected to the exclusion of feeling and all 'inclination' from moral consideration, recognizing with

Schiller that a good person often acts from impulse rather than from reason, and that someone who acts on the basis of 'duty' may well, even while doing right and exhibiting Kantian 'moral worth', prove to be a wretched character. Most of all he objected to Kant's account of ethics because it lacked any social dimension; it was strictly a relationship between the individual, practical reason, and the moral law. The basis of ethics, Hegel insisted, was not this at all, but rather one's belonging to (as well as being educated by) a particular community of people. Ethics was not a matter of autonomy but (in Kant's terms) heteronomy—of being influenced by other people. Nor was it primarily a matter of rational principle, but part of a life of shared values, feelings, and customs—what Hegel calls '*Sittlichkeit*' (from '*Sitte*', meaning 'customs').

Hegel had argued for the importance of *Sittlichkeit* before he began the *Phenomenology*, and he still accepts it as the basis for all ethics in his book on politics, *The Philosophy of Right*. The emphasis on shared customs turns Kant topsy-turvy; the reason why morality is so important is not because it applies rationality downward from the heavens to particular earthly situations, but because it is a development up from those basic circumstances in which we come to value certain actions and feelings in the first place. It also places the locus of morals not in the universal and necessary laws of reason, but in the particular rules and dictates of the family. This tends to make Hegel's ethical philosophy rather conservative, for unlike those more 'liberal' thinkers who map out a grand rational scheme about the way things 'ought' to be, and try to impose it on existing society, Hegel begins with ingrained habits and expectations, and argues a kind of sanctity for them (Rousseau, interestingly, adopts both the liberal and the conservative approaches, arguing that the family is the basis of all social relationships, and then formulating an abstract but revolutionary theory of the social contract). But Hegel does not think that the dialectic stops there; Kant's overly rational view of morality ultimately deserves a place in a fully adequate ethical framework just as surely as the role of the family and the community.

One of the dialectical devices Hegel uses to show how such a

movement takes place (and must take place) is to interpose the story of Antigone between his account of *Sittlichkeit* and his discussion of the ethical norms of civil society (this appears both in the *Phenomenology* and *The Philosophy of Right*). He takes Antigone (and women in general) to represent the 'divine law' of the family, of mutual affection and loyalty. When her brother is killed in an abortive attempt at a coup Antigone's duty is to bury him in accordance with religious law. But as a traitor her brother is denied burial by the king he sought to depose, and she faces a fatal conflict between her divine family duty and the 'human law' of society. She opts for her duty, and is killed by the State in return, but the point of the play for Hegel is nothing less than the nature of the dialectic as such. Life, history, and philosophy are defined by such crisis points. For the individual who is caught in the crisis there may well be no 'happy ending', but it is on the basis of such tragedies and sacrifices that the dialectic—and human history—moves forward. So understood, Kant's view of morality is an extremely sophisticated version of that forward-reaching tendency, but because it is also too narrow and limited it must be moved beyond as well.

Where does the dialectic go from here? In the *Phenomenology* it moves to the dialectic of religion, which Hegel sees not as the superimposition of Christianity on morals (which he opposes), but rather as the reintegration of *Sittlichkeit* (and the 'divine law') and more abstract conceptions of morality and society. In *The Philosophy of Right* and the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* it moves to a new and enlarged sense of internationalism, a vision of the one self or Spirit that embraces us all, finally recognizing itself in all of us, and ending the conflicts that drive us apart. It is not only the culmination of the transcendental pretence; it is 'the end of history', according to Hegel. But this hyper-inflation of the self marks the beginning of a new era of European history, a reaction in which the premisses and basic ideals of the Enlightenment will come under fire.