

BOOK - REVIEW

G.W.F.Hegel, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, (tr.) Leo Rauch. Cambridge, Mass., U.S.A. : Hackett Publishing Company 1988. Pp. xvi + 106.

This translation of handwritten lecture notes gathered by Hegel's students is presented here as a posthumous *History of Philosophy* together with an Appendix taken from Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. The English translation as given by Leo Rauch is commendably clear and readable. At times there may be some question as to how to render certain key concepts from the German, e.g., *Aufhebung* or *Geist*, but altogether the translation flows smoothly into an English idiom that makes for pleasurable reading.

We are given a fairly straightforward account of Hegel's notion of the unfolding of history in the light of World Spirit. In brief, Hegel believed that history may make use of the many irrational drives unleashed by the major actors on the world stage in order to achieve history's goal, an even higher rational peak to which humanity constantly strives even in the presence of a great deal of suffering. Hegel is concerned, not with actual examples from history, but with world history as such, a history for which there can be no textbook reference. In history we might almost say that we are looking for an intellectual rather than a factional representation of what has transpired in the past. Paradoxically, history is historical content with facts omitted, infused with the spirit of historian. The writing of history is meant to have a morally admirable influence for good upon the present. What is required is a world history that is philosophical in nature including the history of law, art and religion, the application of speculative thought to the selective events from whatever the past may have to offer.

In the writing of history it is taken as a presupposition that none other than reason rules the world, an observation first made by Anaxagoras. World history has from the start been rational in its course and the actualization of reason rather than chance has furnished the very content of history. World history is said to be solely the product of creative reason. Hegel at the outset makes clear that although physical nature impinges on world history, it is Spirit that is the substance of history,

lending a concrete reality to both nature and the affairs of mankind. Spirit, to be effective, must become manifest in the consciousness of selfhood truly in the spirit of freedom for all human beings. The free demonstration of Spirit in consciousness becomes largely the story of the interests, the needs and the passions of all sentient creatures in existence as they work toward an ideal which cannot be other than rational., for it is emphasized almost continuously that Reason is the ruler of world history and is ever immanent in the unfolding of history.

The entire business of world history builds toward the universal goal of bringing the concept of Spirit to fulfilment in the self-consciousness of life. Spiritual development is a necessity, while freedom is taken as whatever appears in the conscious will of individuals in accordance with their manifest interest. The will of World Spirit is projected into the aims and achievements of outstanding heroic individuals such as Caesar or Alexander the Great who make their appearance on the stage of history, although the individuals themselves may well be sacrificed along with their aims to the ongoing march of events. Yet, by virtue of the divine in him, the individual is an end in himself, requiring an intrinsic and responsible moral commitment, which for Hegel is a commitment working toward the ideal of a rational and total fulfilment for humankind.

It is maintained by Hegel that whatever is ultimately rational in world history must be achieved by means of human knowledge and the will, that is, that human knowledge rather than isolated events alone must be considered to be the materiality of history itself. The human will must needs be a rational will, brought to its fulfilment and reaching its ethical totality within the limits of law and the secular state. The State constitutes the genuine ethical life. Hegel goes so far as to say that only within the state is the realisation of freedom achieved, and it would seem that we find here an overemphasis on the role and importance of the State, all of which is quite characteristic of Hegel's ethical and political philosophy. Exemplified in the laws of the State is the divine Idea, the objectification of Spirit. Ethical life achieved through one's duty to society and the State is to be carried out as if it were one's second nature. Only by this means can any progress be made toward the attainment of true freedom. In and through Statehood is manifested the culture of a nation wherein Spirit comes to consciousness by way of religion. Religion is taken as that wherein a people appropriate to itself definitively whatever

it holds to be true and of ultimate worth. The State rests upon religion insofar as individuality is seen as a positive aspect of World Spirit, and therein lies the consciousness of true freedom in selfhood. The nature and structure of the State must not differ from the objectives of the shared religion of a people. At the same time it must not be forgotten that history provides abundant evidence that mankind bears the capacity for not only change, but for development toward spiritual perfectability.

History cannot reveal itself in its intrinsic universality, it goes without saying, except as history makes itself known to a consciousness that is aware of itself. Yet, it may be noted, historical investigation in respect to the events of history and the verification thereof is in a sense redundant, for what are taken to be the events of history can only be verified against what are presupposed to be the empirical facts themselves. Narrated history must begin with the first events of history that are properly considered to be of historical worth, to the exclusion of those segments of the past that are left to be clothed in nothing but silence. Whatever may be achieved in world history through the Idea of Spirit moves for Hegel, it may be observed in passing, on a much higher level than that on which morality exists, where the term 'morality' refers to the private sentiment or conscience of the individual. To be thus convinced is to spare ourselves the trouble of asking whether we as human beings may have made any improvement through the course of history on a moral level, as it were, redundantly. World history, Hegel believes, is concerned with making a record of the actions of the Spirit of a people while at the same time abstaining from making only specific or even factual judgments concerning such actions.

Culture in the form of poetry, philosophy and art in the interests of Reason, it is maintained, can only reach its full development in the life of the State, a freely determinate Reason which, nevertheless, sets limits for itself. Self-consciousness in accordance with Reason amounts to moral freedom for the individual where individuality is renounced in order to achieve moral worth. World history is the unfolding of a form of spirituality through time in a restless succession of human activities bringing to fruition those interests, hopes and fears that are of critical human concerns.

Empires and civilizations change and decay, and Eastern people especially have grasped the important truth that death in outlasting life

can only lead to new life. As with the Phoenix, fresh life constantly emerges from the ashes of destruction, and a purer and more worthy selfhood is elevated and transfigured into new forms of life, forms which persist in the laws and institutions of a people. For Hegel the whole of world history is simply the manifestation of the eternal Idea, an immortal Spirit, not at some remote time in the past or future, but essentially in the present, even though Spirit may appear (or not appear) to have left behind it some trace of the lingering past. Hegel is saying that various stages of history are negated only to rise in answer to a more self-reflective, comprehensive and universal level of spirituality.

*The Philosophy of History* indeed unfolds in typical Hegelian fashion. History becomes not simply a narrative account of the activities of individuals or nation states over the centuries, but the drama of unfolding events is seized upon as the vehicle to demonstrate the thesis that Absolute Spirit not irrationally proves its universal worth in the development of human affairs. Although the secular world does not by any means entirely conform to the Spiritual, where Spirit is taken to belong to the dimensions of the Eternal, the ongoing March of world history may still be said to be the actualisation of universal Spirit. The Idea of World Spirit is continuously active in the lives of individual mortals, in their participation in world affairs and in their drive toward individual happiness and fame.

In summary, Hegel's main thesis has been that history is said to be a configuration of World Spirit in its progress toward a free ethical self-consciousness, with the main focus on the formal realization of the Absolute Idea in the service of the nation state.

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