

SPIRIT, ESTRANGEMENT AND UNIFICATION : HEGEL'S PHILLOSOPHICO-RELIGIOUS QUEST

The issues concerning Spirit, Estrangement and Unification are the fundamental pre-occupations to Hegel's philosophico-religious quest. The object of philosophy as well as that of religion, for Hegel, is Absolute Truth or God; and it is Spirit that justifies those claims of philosophy and religion. Spirit is, in fact, the unifying agency that connotes the living unity amid the estrangement. Spirit is the living law that unifies the estranged reality so that the latter becomes living. The process of unification and the notion of Being, as Hegel declares, are equivalent; the couple 'is' in every proposition expresses a unification of subject and predicate, in other words, a Being.

The objective of this paper is to formulate Hegel's philosophico-religious quest by developing its key concepts- Spirit, Estrangement and Unification. It is proposed to be achieved in the following manner: Part I : Hegel's exposition of Spirit as the central concept of his philosophico-religious quest, and at the same time, as the locus of both estrangement and unification. I shall basically dwell upon Hegel's early work which has hitherto been neglected. Part II: A critical assessment of the basic charges levelled by Ludwig Feuerbach on the one hand and Charles Taylor on the other against Hegel's doctrine of Spirit.

Before I come to Part I of the paper, I would like to point out that there have been several reactions to Hegelianism, not only in the field of philosophy, but also in the fields of psychology, theology and socio-political philosophy. It is virtually impossible in this short essay to identify all the reactions against Hegel from different schools of philosophy that emerged after the death of Hegel. I have chosen Feuerbach and Charles Taylor for two

reasons, namely, (i) Feuerbach was a pupil of Hegel and he was the first to have come out during 1830 to 1843 strongly against Hegel's doctrine of spirit and its theological bearings. (ii) Among the present-day Hegel scholars, Charles Taylor is the one who tries to interpret Hegel's philosophy during 1975-79 by rejecting Hegel's claim for Spirit. In my attempt to refute the charges levelled by Feuerbach on the one hand and those of Charles Taylor on the other, I shall try to integrate Hegel's philosophico-religious quest on the basis of his doctrine of Spirit.

PART I

Hegel's doctrine of Spirit or *Geist* is central to his philosophico-religious quest. Hegel says, "Philosophy is itself, in fact, worship (*Die philosophie ist der selbst Gottesdienst*); it is religion, for in the same way it renounces subjective notions and opinions in order to occupy itself with God... The object of religion as well as of philosophy is eternal truth in its objectivity, God and nothing but God, and the explication of God... In philosophy, religion gets justification from thinking consciousness."¹

There is perhaps no part of Hegel's philosophy responsible for the origin and sustenance of this faith than his philosophy of religion, and there is no part of his philosophy which the post-Hegelians, including the present-day Hegel scholars, are less willing to accept on its own terms.

The basic issue, I wish to develop, is that the central religious claims of Hegel's philosophy is that we cannot speak of the reality of God without at the same time speaking of selfconsciousness of human mind, nor fruitfully pursue that interrogation itself unless we conceive our activity in doing so as one sustained and made possible by God. I shall argue that the connection of philosophy and religion is the presupposition to Hegel's epistemological quest of absolute knowledge. My thesis is that the locus of absolute knowledge, Estrangement and Unification is the celebrated doctrine of Spirit.

Hegel's Spirit is, above all, a doctrine about the relationship between thought and objective reality. Hegel means by speaking of

Spirit as the mediation or middle point between the Idea (the categories and the Notion which are also known as the truth in the most absolute and objective form) and Nature (the sphere of external existence which the truth is 'about'). The term 'Idea' Hegel designates to the absolute truth. Nature is the term which Hegel gives to that truth as we find it in the outward existence of the world. Spirit, however, is the mode of existence of the whole in which everything which is known is embodied in being. Idea and Nature are dialectical opposites, but Spirit is the unity between them. Hegel's contention is that there is something which is identical neither with the sphere of our thought nor with the objects of our thought. It is the *Geist* which imparts an intelligible form of both these spheres. Spirit is the active synthesis of our consciousness of the world, and what we are conscious of. This is Hegel's epistemological quest too. In epistemology, then, we are concerned with the object of which we are conscious with our consciousness of it. But this is of such a nature that the distinction between what exists *for us* and what exists *in itself* is not a distinction between what is available to us in consciousness and what is not. Both sides of the distinction fall within the grasp of consciousness. In other words, the Kantian distinction between phenomenon and thing in itself is not acceptable to Hegel. The basic question, for Hegel, is how in consciousness we are related to our objects, and when our object is our own consciousness, it is clear that there is no danger that our consciousness should have an existence *in itself* which is in principle hidden from us and separate from that consciousness as it exists *for us*.

In formulating his own position, Hegel applauds Kant's discovery of the 'transcendental consciousness' as the ultimate source of conceptual synthesis. He approves Kant's criticism that consciousness can not be an object of sensibility and hence categories cannot be applied to it. But this is not, Hegel contends, because categories overstep their legitimate limits, but because soul is a living and active being, just as complex as it is self-identically simple. In fact, its simplicity is just as indivisible whole that is constituted solely by the cohesion and inseparability of its diverse traits, aspects and activities. Kant's objections, according to Hegel, are valid but his reasons are wrong ones.

Hegel elucidates two aspects of Spirit; first, that Spirit requires

the distinction of subject and object, and second, that Spirit overcomes the supposed distinction between subject and object. The first is the moment of estrangement and the second is its transcendence or unification. Spirit is, thus, the locus of both estrangement and unification.

Hegel takes over the doctrine from Kant that consciousness is necessarily bipolar and it is part of Hegel's general espousal of the view that "rational awareness requires separation. Consciousness is only possible when the subject is set over against an object."²

Issues and aspects concerning estrangement/unification have been fundamental preoccupations to Hegel's philosophico-religious quest. In his early writings known as *Theologische Jugendschriften* (1790-1800), Hegel first raised the question of estrangement and as his works proceeded, estrangement was destined to play the key concept of his system. I am required to elaborate two questions; first, what are the historical determinants and conditions underlying Hegel's views on estrangement/unification? Second, what is the nature of his concern with the Spirit in this early phase? The significance of these two questions consists in explaining Hegel's fundamental claim that 'philosophy is itself a religious activity'.

To the first question, it can be pointed out that the question of the historical efficacy of estrangement/unification had formed one of the perennial themes of entire German idealism. And, I must add, to anticipate a later discussion, it continued to appear even after Hegel's death especially among the Young Hegelians of 1830s. In his early fragments, Hegel discusses the loss of freedom and unity in the private and social existence in the modern era. "This loss of freedom and unity," says Hegel, "is patent in the numerous conflicts that abound in human living, especially in the conflict between man and nature. This conflict, which turned nature into a hostile power that had to be mastered by man, has led to an antagonism between idea and reality, between thought and the real, between consciousness and existence."³ In the *system fragment*, Hegel furnishes a more precise elaboration of the philosophic import of the antagonism between subject and object, between man and nature. This was an earliest formulation of the concept of estrangement which was destined to play a decisive part in the future development

of Hegel's philosophy. For instance, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), estrangement is expressed in terms of 'Independence and dependence of self-consciousness', in *Science of Logic* (1812-16), it expresses in the process of the deduction of categories, in *Philosophy of Right* (1821), it is manifested in 'rationality and actuality', in the *Encyclopaedia...* (1830), it is expressed in the dialectic of the subject *versus* dialectic of the object. It has to be noted carefully that all these modes of estrangement are located in the Spirit because it is the Spirit that sustains throughout different stages of estrangement.

Just as estrangement is located in the Spirit, similarly, transcendence of estrangement or unification is also located in the Spirit. In his early writings, Hegel uses the term *Geist* (Spirit or Mind) to designate the unification of the desparrate domains and it became the defining characteristic of almost all the issues concerning estrangement and its transcendence. "Mind is essentially the same unifying agency as life—Infinite life may be called a Mind because Mind connotes the living unity amid the diversity... Mind is the living law that unifies the diversity so that the latter becomes living."⁴

What is so remarkable in his early fragments entitled *Glauben und Wissen* is that, "Unification and Being (*sein*) are equivalent; the Copula 'is' in every proposition expresses a unification of subject and predicate, in other words, a Being."⁵ This concept was later on exhaustively developed by Hegel in the *Science of Logic* in the context of the categories of Pure Being and Determinate Being. The distinction and relation between 'being' (*seiendes*) and 'to be' (*sein*) resolves the conflict between being and non-being, between one and many, and so on. The determinate being refers to particular things in the world. But Pure Being is attributable to everything whatsoever. Pure Being is what particular beings have in common and is, as it were, their substratum. Hegel quite often terms the Pure Being as the 'essence of all beings' – the divine essence –and hence ontology and theology get combined.

Hegel also begins by describing the sphere of Absolute Spirit in general as the sphere of religion. Hegel says that one way in which the movement of Spirit can be known is by philosophy whose element is 'discursive thought', just as another way is

religion whose element is 'inward integrity of piety'. John Walker explains, "This total movement through which finite and infinite Spirit are mediated one with the other [is] religion, although it is also the object of religion as it [is] of philosophy in a different mode. There is a highly significant sense, for Hegel, in which philosophy can know about this movement only because philosophy is itself inside it, and only if philosophy knows that it is inside it. The relation of religion to absolute Spirit is not only one of knowing; it is one of being. And if that is true of philosophy, it is only so because the element of philosophy – freely self-mediating Spirit, which knows most adequately about itself and about the world in the medium of philosophy—has been prepared for in the element of religion."⁵ Indeed, in the transitional paragraph which leads from the discussion of religion to the discussion of philosophy in the *Philosophy of Spirit*, Hegel says the same thing.

PART II

It is above all because Hegel considers philosophy to be itself a religious activity and its justification by Spirit and not just because Hegel is a Christian philosopher who occupies himself with religious matters and speaks favourably of the central tenets of Christian belief—that the Hegelians of 1830s and 40s have been overwhelmingly hostile to Hegel. In the present century, the challenge to Hegel's philosophico-religious quest has come not only from critics hostile to Hegel's general project in philosophy such as Karl R. Popper,⁷ but also from writers broadly in sympathy with that project. The philosophico-religious issues Hegel has been criticised by theologians and philosophers alike; by atheists, materialists and orthodox Christians.

It will perhaps be more important for our present argument to discuss those philosophers who are in sympathy with Hegel's general project in philosophy and yet, who have held specific religious claims of Hegel's philosophy to be philosophically indefensible. I want to argue that during Hegel's own life-time the logical disputes in his writings gave rise to two schools which are, to use Strauss's own phrase, known as the Right-wing and the Left-wing Hegelians. There were followers of Hegel who—as if out of respect for Spirit—held Hegelianism as the actual end of philosophizing. These were

known as the Old Hegelians, and shortly thereafter, the Right-wing Hegelians. Opposed to them, there was another group of the followers of Hegel who attempted to develop the spirit of Hegel's philosophy beyond Hegel, even to the point of contradiction. They have come to be known as the Young Hegelians, and afterwards, the Left-wing Hegelians. Old Hegelians, such as, Von Henning, Hotho-Forster, Marheineke, Hinrichs, Daub, Conradi and Schaller, "... preserved Hegel's philosophy literally, continuing its individual historical studies, but they did not reproduce it in a uniform manner beyond the period of Hegel's personal influence. For the historical movement of the nineteenth century they are without significance. In contrast with these Old Hegelians, the designation Young Hegelians... arose."⁸ Young Hegelian movement rests upon the belief that Hegelianism did not die with Hegel. In 1830, all who were to become the central figures of the Young Hegelian school were Arnold Ruge, Feuerbach, Max Stirner, David Strauss and Bruno Bauer. As an identifiable philosophic movement, Young Hegelianism endured for two decades 1828 to 1848. Young Hegelianism can be said to have made one of its earliest appearances in a letter that Feuerbach sent to Hegel on 22nd November 1828. The letter was enclosed along with a copy of his recent doctoral dissertation, *De Ratione, una, universali infinita*, and both testify to their author's indebtedness to Hegel. But Feuerbach took the opportunity to introduce his own perception of imports of Hegelianism. To Feuerbach, Spirit, after having worked for centuries upon its development and completion, has finally revealed itself in Hegel's philosophy. It is now the mission of Spirit, acting through its disciples—the Hegelians, particularly, the Young Hegelians—to rationalize the world. At the initial stage, Feuerbach acknowledges that "the knowledge gained through the study of Hegel should not merely be directed to academic ends, but to mankind..."⁸ However, as Feuerbach's work proceeded, he started levelling fresh charges against Hegel's doctrine of Spirit.

Feuerbach has levelled three basic charges against Hegel's philosophico-religious quest. First, in *Towards a Critique of Hegelian Philosophy* (1839), Feuerbach's criticism of Hegel's Spirit is in fact, based on his own conception of a philosophical materialism. Says Feuerbach, "The Hegelian philosophy is, uniquely, a rational mysticism ...it fascinates in the same measure as it repels ...The reason why Hegel conceived those ideas which express only subjective

needs to be objective truth is because he did not go back to the source of and the needs for those ideas. What he took for real reveals itself on closer examination to be of a highly dubious nature. He made what is secondary primary, thus either ignoring that which is really primary or dismissing it as something subordinate."¹⁰

What is primary for Feuerbach is the material substance existing independently of us but is wholly accessible to our cognition. Feuerbach's materialism is, in fact, based on his radical humanism as found in his major work *The Essence of Christianity* (1841). And this brings us to the second charge against Hegel. He posits the absolute priority of actual human experience, of the directly apprehended world of nature and society in which man lives. His unqualified humanism denies the relevance of the speculative philosophy of Hegel. With his enthusiastic humanism, Feuerbach is opposed to the very concept of philosophy which, according to him, is nothing else but religion rendered into certain ontological and epistemological position. Rejecting Hegel's Spirit, Feuerbach says, "The *absolute* to man is his own nature. The power of the object over him is therefore the power of his own nature,"¹¹ Feuerbach bases his humanism on the foundation of philosophical materialism. In the third charge, Feuerbach, in the *Provisional Theses for the Reformation of Philosophy* (1843), says, "*Spinoza* is the originator of speculative philosophy, *Schelling* its restorer, *Hegel* its perfecter."¹²

Feuerbach's criticism of Hegel's philosophico-religious quest implies the absolute reduction of God to Man, the transformation of theology into anthropology. Feuerbach claims that theological issues would be translated into human issues, and theological criticism would be replaced by social criticism. The question arises : where does Feuerbach get this insight from? Certainly, it comes out from Hegel's general philosophico-religious claim that the reality of God gets its justification from thinking consciousness. Feuerbach concentrates on the nature of human consciousness alone. But where as Spirit or consciousness is the ontology for Hegel, it is simply an attribute to Feuerbach's materialism, simply a product of mechanical interaction in matter. Feuerbach, however, fails to explain how consciousness emerges out of matter. But, for Hegel, Spirit, being the ontology, is capable enough to unify the estranged reality.

Against Feuerbach's charge that Hegel's Spirit is a 'rational mysticism', one may point out that the content of both religion and philosophy is the same, viz., Absolute thought, yet there is no one to one relationship between philosophy and religion. As explained in the Part I of the paper, in the *Philosophy of Spirit*, Hegel develops three modes of Absolute Spirit – Art, Religion and Philosophy – and says that each of these modes enables us to know the totality of the Spirit's life in a different way. The content of Spirit is the Absolute which is *thought*. In Art, this absolute thought, the Idea takes the form of sense content. In Philosophy, it takes the form of thought, so that in philosophy content and form are identical. In Religion, the content is the same, viz., Absolute thought, but the form is intermediate. It is partly sensuous and partly rational. It is what Hegel calls *Vorstellung* – the pictorial or figurative thought. Feuerbach has completely ignored this aspect in Hegel that distinguishes philosophy from religion. Consequently Feuerbach identifies religion with philosophy. Even Feuerbach's criticism of religion fails to furnish an ethical systems that can possibly replace the values developed in religion. Hence, Feuerbach's charges against Hegel's philosophico-religious quest have no sound basis to survive for long.

Among the present-day Hegel scholars, there are very few philosophers who are as qualified as Charles Taylor to write a definite study of Hegel. In his two books, *Hegel* (1975) and *Hegel and Modern Society* (1979), Taylor attempts to defend Hegel's philosophy in the changed intellectual climate in Europe. Taylor has a definite way of looking at the emergence and development of Hegel's thoughts and its relevance to the present-day intellectual requirement. In this *Hegel*, Taylor describes the aspirations of the generation of Young Romantics of the 1790s from which Hegel sprang and against whom he defined himself. The central problem for Romanticism was human subjectivity. Says Taylor, "It concerned the nature of human subjectivity and its relation to the world. It was a problem of uniting two seemingly indispensable images of man, which on one level had deep affinities with each other, and yet could not but appear utterly incompatible." However Taylor criticises, "Hegel's central ontological thesis – that the Universe is posited by a Spirit whose essence is rational necessity – is quite dead."¹⁴ And as R.J. Bernstein points out, "It is to Taylor's credit that he does not flinch from taking the notion of self-positing Spirit as Hegel's most central theme. He boldly attempts to show

that we can make sense of what Hegel is saying without succumbing to the temptation of thinking that Spirit is some non-substantial mystical force or simply a mystified way of speaking about species being or humanity."¹⁵ It is this contention of Taylor that is reflected in the Preface to *Hegel*. Taylor tells that for 'anyone who wants to understand how Hegel's philosophy was authenticated in his own eyes, and, indeed, how this philosophy and its authentication are inseparable for Hegel, the *Logic* remains indispensable.' In the first two hundred pages of the book, Taylor frequently creates the impression that *Logic* is the only 'real candidate for the role of strict dialectical proof'.

Taylor's later work *Hegel and Modern Society* is, in fact, a condensation of his *Hegel*. In order to make Hegel relevant to contemporary philosophers, Taylor has left out the account of Hegel's *Logic* as well as the interpretation of *Phenomenology*, and the chapters on Art, Religion and Philosophy. Hegel, according to Taylor, is relevant for evolving the terms in which we think. "Hegel has contributed to the formation of concepts and modes of thought which are indispensable if we are to see our way clear through certain modern problems and dilemmas."¹⁶ Taylor tries to show how the problems and aspirations of Hegel's times continue through certain modifications into our time. What is central to these problems is subjectivity and freedom. Taylor says, "Hegel's writing provide one of the most profound and far-reaching attempts to work out a vision of embodied subjectivity, of thought and freedom emerging from the stream of life, finding expression in the forms of social existence, and discovering themselves in relation to nature and history. If the philosophical attempt to situate freedom is the attempt to gain a conception of man in which free action is the response to what we are – or to a call which comes to us, from nature alone or from a God who is also beyond nature – then it will always recur behind Hegel's conclusions to his strenuous and penetrating reflections on embodied spirit."¹⁷

We come across a critical study of Taylor's works by Richard J. Bernstein in *Philosophical Profiles* etc. In chapter 5 "Why Hegel Now?", Bernstein takes an occasion to reflect on the resurgence of interest in Hegel among Anglo-American philosophers. The author traces the amount of influence Hegel has exercised on the pragmatic thinkers like William James, John Dewey and others, who sought to clarify and state their own philosophic position over and against Hegel. The author furnishes an exhaustive account of the history

of the influence of and the fight against Hegel in the English-speaking world. The struggle between Hegel's absolute idealism and the analytic Positivistic schools of thought gave rise to certain un-Hegelian and even anti-Hegelian thought. "Hegel's vivid sense of history, and of dialectical struggle by which *Geist* realizes itself, played almost no role for the English idealists. Hegel's *Logic* was considered to be the primary text, not his *Phenomenology* or his writings about Objective Spirit."¹⁸

The above analysis fits with the contention of Taylor towards his interpretation of Hegel. In addition, one may point out that the rejection of the doctrine of Spirit in Hegel is tantamount to the rejection of subjectivity and freedom. It is also not possible to accept the evolution of concepts in Hegel's philosophico-religious quest by rejecting the doctrine of Spirit in that system. This is so because it is, after all, the *absoluter Geist* from which the concepts and categories are, one and all, deduced. It is therefore a self-contradictory claim on the part of Charles Taylor to appreciate Hegel's contribution to the evolution of concepts, subjectivity and freedom, and to reject Hegel's claim for the Spirit. Fact of the matter is that Hegel could evolve the concepts in the process of Spirit's activity to unify the estranged reality. It is only in the process of unifying the estranged reality that Spirit realizes its freedom. Hence, Hegel's claim for the Spirit is indispensable in order to appreciate his contributions towards the evolution of concepts, subjectivity and freedom.

To bring the paper to a close, it can be said that Hegel's philosophico-religious quest rests on his doctrine of Spirit, and, Spirit is the locus of estrangement and unification, and unification and being are equivalent terms. Any attempt to reject Hegel's claims for the Spirit is bound to result in a philosophical short sightedness and inconsistency, whether it is in the case of Feuerbach or in that of Charles Taylor.

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NOTES

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3. Hegel, *Theologische Jugendschriften*, p. 244, quotation from Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul), p. 35.
4. Hegel, *Theologische Jugendschriften*, p. 347.
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10. Feuerbach, L., *Towards a Critique of Hegelian Philosophy* (it appeared in Arnold Ruge's *Hallischen Jahrbuchern*. The passage is taken from its reprint which appeared in *The Young Hegelians*, etc., pp. 121-2.
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12. Feuerbach, L. *Provisional Theses for the Reformation of Philosophy*, reprinted in *The Young Hegelians*, etc., p. 156.
13. Taylor, Charles; *Hegel*, (London, Cambridge University Press, 1955), p. 3.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 538.
15. Bernstein, Richard J., *Philosophical Profiles : Essays in a Pragmatic Mode*, (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1986), p. 165.
16. Taylor, Charles; *Hegel and Modern Society*, (London, Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. xi.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 168-9.
18. Bernstein, R.; *Philosophical Profiles : Essays in a Pragmatic Mode*, etc., p. 145.