

HEGEL'S INTERPRETATION OF CHINESE HISTORY

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BY

ALEXANDER LO. B.A. (Hons)

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AUTHOR: Alexander A. Lo, B.A. (St. John's College, US)

SUPERVISOR: Professor M. Vitkin

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ABSTRACT

In the Philosophy of History, Hegel argues that the empire of ancient China constitutes the beginning of history. While "the end of history" as a fundamental problem has been commented on extensively in 20th century Hegel scholarship, "the beginning" has been relatively neglected. This thesis is an attempt to fill an existing gap. It examines Hegel's interpretation of Chinese history in the context of his political and historical philosophy as a whole. It argues that his interpretation proceeds from the vantage point of western modernity. While modern ethical life, according to Hegel, is characterized by the dialectical relationships between the family, civil society, and the state. Chinese ethical life does not differentiate beyond the ethical substance of the family. The Chinese state is modelled on the structure of the family and ethical-political duties are defined in terms of filial obligations: moral subjectivity and autonomy which precede modern ethical life are lacking in Chinese culture. Because of the non-differentiation of the Chinese ethical substance, Chinese history is essentially static or non-dialectical, on Hegel's view. In the last two chapters, this thesis attempts to determine the insights as well as the limitations of Hegel's account of China in the context of the fundamental changes which modern China has undergone and is still undergoing.

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To Rose

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART ONE THE END OF HISTORY: THE WEST The Modernity of Hegel's Interpretive Standpoint

INTRODUCTION	1
Chapter	
I. HISTORY AND MODERNITY	
a) From Theodicoea to Philosophy of History	10
b) From Spiritual History to Political History	17
II. SPIRIT AND THE STATE	29
a) Abstract Right, Concrete Right, and Free Personality	32
b) Autonomous Subjectivity	47
c) The State as Objective Spirit	61
PART TWO	
THE BEGINNING OF HISTORY: THE EAST Hegel on the Chinese	
I. HEGEL'S INTERPRETATION OF CHINESE HISTORY	75
II. THE HISTORICAL STATUS OF MODERN CHINESE HISTORY	93
III. CONCLUSIONS: SOCIETY EAST AND WEST	108
NOTES	120
BIBIOGRAPHY	126

"The History of the World travels from East to West, for Europe is absolutely the end of History, Asia the Beginning" (Hegel, 1956:103).

"[T]he result of the investigation we are about to pursue; a result which happens to be known to me, because I have traversed the entire field" (ibid.. 10).

INTRODUCTION

In 20th century Hegel scholarship, particularly with Alexandre Kojève's Introduction à la lecture de Hegel and Ritter's Hegel and the French Revolution, such themes as the end of history, the modern age, and the modern western state have taken on central importance. In this context, the problematic of "the end of history" is essential to the determination of the nature and legitimacy of western modernity.

If "the end of history" is a fundamental issue, "the beginning of history" should also be essential to an understanding of Hegel's historical and political philosophy as a whole; Hegel claims that his philosophy captures, in thought, the totality of human experience, and totality must somehow entail such notions as "beginning" and "end". This is because what is only implicit at the beginning already contains what is to become explicit at the end, when it is able to

actualize itself fully for what it is potentially. To study the beginning of history is already to study what history is to realize finally as its telos. But the student of history, i.e., the philosopher, is only able to ascend to such a standpoint at the end because what history is potentially is unknown to someone whose perspective is limited to the first stage (or even the intermediate stages) of historical consciousness. (As an example, an infant in itself does not know that it is potentially a speaker. Its potential to speak is only for us, since as speakers, we know the actual features of a speaking subject. This is the meaning of the phrase frequently used in the Phenomenology, "in itself or for us".)

In the first chapter of the Philosophy of History, Hegel argues that ancient China constitutes the beginning of history. While "the end" has been commented on extensively, "the beginning" has been relatively neglected in Hegel scholarship. Except for Karl Wittfogel's 1931 article, "Hegel Über China", and Young Kun Kin's 1978 essay, "Hegel's Critique of Chinese Philosophy", which primarily deals with the legitimacy of Chinese philosophy, there has been no sustained treatment of Hegel's interpretation in the literature, despite numerous references to Hegel's text by non-philosophers, mainly historians of China (e.g.,

Balazs's La bureaucratie céleste and Peyrefitte's the Immobile Empire.) It is therefore a relatively open field where one can directly confront Hegel's text without the mediation of an overwhelming existing literature.

Be that as it may, it is not possible to understand adequately Hegel's text on China without a knowledge of his overall historical and political philosophy. His historical interpretation of China logically follows from his philosophy as a whole. It is this logic which I wish to explicate in this thesis. If we read Hegel's text on China outside of the context of his philosophy, his interpretation would appear to be a series of interesting but highly dubious observations, without a central or underlying theme. At worst, in this politically sensitive time, the reader may find Hegel condescending or perhaps racist, thereby overlooking whatever insights Hegel may have had into world history in general and Chinese history in particular.

Accordingly, the following thesis is divided into two main parts. In part one, I examine in some detail Hegel's political and historical philosophy as it is presented in the two central texts of his mature period, the Philosophy of Right and the Philosophy of History. In part two, I examine Hegel's interpretation

of Chinese history as an application of his mature political theory. With this exercise, I hope to throw light on several issues in Hegel's philosophy, and historical interpretation in general: 1) the self-understanding of the political standpoint of the present (i.e., the inherent rationality of modern western social and political institutions, according to Hegel); 2) the interpretation of the past from the standpoint of the present and the interpretation of one culture by another: China happens to be a special case where its past and present are indistinguishable, on Hegel's theory. As a result, cross-cultural examination in the present is also historical interpretation. Let me elaborate briefly on these points in their specifically Hegelian context.

1) The Present Standpoint

In matters of historical interpretation, the standpoint of the interpreter is as relevant as the interpretation itself. Any historical event admits of diverse interpretations from different perspectives. Out of this plurality of standpoints, is there a privileged (i.e., absolute) standpoint such that it would grant us access to a definitive understanding of historical events -- and of history itself?

Hegel claims that there is such a standpoint, but it is one that is intrinsic to history, not outside of it. He argues that this standpoint is the consummation of a process, namely history itself. History, rightly understood, is philosophy. History as philosophy is that which discloses its own meanings. Hegelianism is the knowledge of history which has become conscious of the (historical) conditions of its own knowing. It is the absolute standpoint of totality, at the end of history, as history reaches its telos and so is in a position to recapture its previous experiences in order to render a full account in Hegel's philosophy.

Now, if philosophy is an account of human experience as a whole, then political philosophy is an account of the whole of human experience in the political-ethical realm. Because history is always political history for Hegel, the history of western modernity is intimately connected with the concept of the western state, that is, both the conception and the praxis of the state. (The word "history" in the following essay is always used according to Hegel's political understanding, that is, history as interpreted by Hegel from the ethical-political standpoint of western modernity.) Hegel argues that the modern state -- as the dialectical endpoint of

political consciousness -- realizes the telos of history, viz., freedom. Put in another way, the modern state is the concrete embodiment or realization of freedom. It is from this perspective that Hegel proceeds to interpret Chinese political history, i.e., the history of Chinese government as the history of a despotic state. If we recall here what Hegel says about what is implicit at the beginning and what is explicit at the end, then his argument that political history is really the history of freedom is not so surprising as it may appear to be at first sight: freedom is already implicit in despotism, but the despot and the slave do not yet realize it.

2) The Interpretation

Since Hegel interprets "the beginning" from the standpoint of "the end", his interpretation is necessarily conditioned by the logic of the modern western standpoint as he has articulated it in his political theory. By contrasting the beginning with the end, Hegel contrasts substance with subjectivity. If the former is conceived as positivity, the purely given, the latter is understood as negativity, the negation of the given as well as the final reconciliation of the two. Chinese "history" is

essentially static and non-dialectical insofar as it is dictated by "the principle of substantiality": substance is still unmediated and so history, as the unfolding of spirit towards self-realization (that is, concrete freedom in the political-ethical realm) is yet to begin. This is the underlying meaning of Hegel's paradoxical statement that Chinese "history" is non-historical. If the telos of political history is freedom, then the Chinese state cannot but remain always the same, that is, despotic and unfree. In other words, it exists as something outside of the subject and confronts him as an unmediated outside force.

Hegel's interpretation of the Chinese state as despotic is intended to be descriptive, not normative. It is not an implied criticism, but an account of what is: Chinese "history" is what it is because it does not develop. Here we touch on a central theme in Hegel's political thought. For the mature Hegel, the task of philosophy is not to criticize, but to explain (and to accept) what has already occurred. There is therefore no question of (social and political) change guarded by philosophy (Hegel, 1967:12-3) Political theory cannot provide instructions as to how a citizen should act, what a state should be like: it shows how actualized political phenomena are to be understood. It is Hegel's position that we must learn to see the historical

conditions of the present as necessary and inevitable. This position admits of two possible interpretations: 1) history has reached its end and has realized its telos in Hegel's time. Therefore to understand the present as the result of the past is to understand the history of the world; 2) The task of philosophy is to reconcile with the present: "To comprehend what is, this is the task of philosophy, for what is, is reason." "The actual is the rational and the rational is the actual" (ibid., 10-11). In the first case, the future naturally does not hold any interest for philosophy (since it can only be "more of the same", so to speak); in the second case, the philosopher must refuse speculations as to how spirit might unfold in the future -- for that would imply unreason in the present because history is the progressive realization of Reason.

It is at this point that I switch from interpretation to critique. In part two, chapter two, I try to engage in a kind of Hegelian speculation beyond the texts of Hegel. I examine the possibility of extending the category of dialectical history to modern Chinese history after Hegel's death in 1831. This new period, inaugurated by its confrontation with European imperialism, ended China's long period of self-imposed isolation. Historically, it constituted a radical break

with its past. Could this be a new configuration of the spiritual contents of the Chinese nation in relation to world history? What would be its implications for the Chinese state, which in its substantiality, is characterized as despotic? Hegel has argued in his early political articles, "the Constitution of Germany" and "the Internal Affairs of Württemberg", that individuals and institutions become obsolescent when they try to hold on to political principles outstripped by historical events. Is it now possible, at the level of historical objectivity -- at the level of social and political institutions (objective spirit) beyond the subjectivity (subjective spirit), noble and heroic, of a few lone dissenting voices -- to negate the given, politically understood as the negation of despotism?

PART ONE
THE END OF HISTORY: THE WEST

CHAPTER I
HISTORY AND MODERNITY

a) From Theodicoea to Philosophy of History

"That the History of the World, with all the changing scenes which its annals present, is this process of development and the realization of Spirit -- this is true Theodicoea, the justification of God in History. Only this insight can reconcile Spirit with the History of the World -- viz., that what has happened and is happening every day, is not only not "without God", but is essentially His Work" (Hegel, 1956:457).

In Book 11 of the Confessions, St. Augustine presents his famous puzzle on time: time is only because it is not. In the three divisions of time, the past is no longer and the future is not yet. Only the present is. But it is not always, for then it would not be temporal but eternal. Time is present only because it moves on to become the past. "It is only because it is not to be." Time is only "because of its impending state of not being" (Book 11, Ch. 14; emphasis in the original text).

The state of "not being", or becoming, is the characteristic of time. But in the three divisions of time, the present is privileged because the past and

the future are something and not nothing only in relation to it. The present has an enormous weight because, as Augustine goes on to define past and future in chapters 18 and 20, the three divisions of time are really the present of past things, the present of present things, and the present of future things. Time exists nowhere else but in the mind: the past is mind recollecting in the present, the future is mind expecting in the present, and the present is mind perceiving in the present (Ch. 18).

While St. Augustine invokes God in his prayer for an answer to his puzzle on time, Hegel calls forth Spirit in his philosophical account of history. Spirit is to Hegel's philosophy of history what God is to the history of the temporal world according to the Christians (Hegel, 1956:19-20). In his philosophy of history, Hegel appropriates the privilege of the present for "spirit" (Karl Löwith, 1991:209). Spirit has the same characteristics as time: it cannot be but is only by becoming. Like time, it unfolds, and at each moment, when it recollects, it shows that past events -- its experiences -- have been leading towards the present as their telos. Spirit has all the stages of the past within itself. If history is the present's recollection of things past, then spirit is the recollection of its own previous experiences -- for

history is the unfolding of spirit. Therefore, when we are studying the great epochs of world history and see in them the series of shapes in which spirit has shown itself, we are dealing with the present, even though we are engaged in the study of the past (Hegel, 1977:492-3). The task of philosophy as the philosophy of spirit is always to deal with the present because only the present is real or actual: "...to enjoy the present, this is the rational insight which reconciles us to the actual..." (Hegel, 1967:12).

According to Hegel, the telos of the unfolding of spirit is freedom. This idea is actually first expressed in the Christian idea of sin in nature. If the philosophy of spirit is also a philosophy of freedom, this is because the very notion of spirit in its original Christian form already involves a conception of liberty. As the Christians have conceived it, nature is sin for man, and so he must transcend what is purely and immediately given, i.e., his nature. His freedom (from sin) -- his liberty -- consists in his struggle to transcend mere nature (Kojève, 1988:535-6). This opposition is not external but internal. In other words, it is that which opposes itself to itself or negates itself to become its other. The other of nature is spirit; it is in the division of the given into its otherness that we find the

opposition between nature and spirit (ibid., 530, 536-7). Culture and society are the spiritual products of historical man who struggles to transcend the given, i.e., mere nature.

The Christian motif in Hegel's philosophy and the importance of the present find their expressions in the cryptic statement: "Here is the rose, dance thou here" (Hegel, 1967:11; see also Löwith, 1991:14-16). The rose is reason, and the philosopher who finds joy in reason -- who dances to reason -- will find it in the present. A few sentences later, Hegel goes on to say that the rose as reason is found only "in the cross of the present." Here, the inherent rationality of the present is equated with the cross of Christianity. From the phrase "the cross of the present", it is clear that Hegel conceives of his major task as the reconciliation between philosophy and Christianity, that is to say, between the rose and the cross, between reason and suffering. The spirit of Christianity, understood philosophically, is the spirit of Hegel's philosophy of history. From Hegel's privileged standpoint, at the end of history, he is able to recognize as rational all the seemingly irrational elements, evils, and sufferings in history.

The task of philosophy is to reconcile us to the present. To achieve such a reconciliation is to

learn to see the course of world history -- the unfolding of spirit -- as a rational process and its telos as freedom (Hegel, 1956:17-18). In other words, everything that has happened in history, however violent and irrational in appearance, works towards the concrete realization of freedom. If one examines the development of history from the appropriate, Hegelian standpoint, one will discern this rational plan at work: "To him who looks upon the world rationally, the world in its turn presents a rational aspect. The relation is mutual" (ibid., 11). Philosophy, properly understood, will show us how Spirit manifests itself in historical events and how it strives to reach its goal or telos in all its activities and past experiences. This is what Hegel means when he says that the philosophy of history is "a Theodicoea -- a justification of the ways of God" (Hegel, 1956:15): the only aim of world history is to see freedom "realized and fulfilled; the only repose amid the ceaseless change of events and conditions, and the sole efficient principle that pervades them. This final aim is God's purpose with the world... the Nature of His Will -- that is, His Nature itself -- is what we here call the Idea of Freedom; translating the language of Religion into that of Thought" (ibid., 20).

We have briefly surveyed the temporal form of spirit and its origin in Christianity. But form is nothing without content; there is no time unless it is filled -- with events or happenings. The contents of historical time are the peoples, the nations, religious movements, their conflicts, their rise and fall, their successes and failures. For spirit shows itself in the spiritual contents of peoples and nations, in their customs and beliefs, in their religions, in their systems of knowledge such as language, science, and philosophy as well as in their social labour and political institutions and constitutions (ibid., 18). The nations of world history are therefore governed by spirit, and their spiritual contents -- language, government etc. -- are the media in which spirit shows itself. History, the temporal process through which freedom is realized, is therefore schematized as a series of phases (the shapes of spirit), a series which begins with the Orientals, who conceived themselves in abstract harmony with nature, and ends with the Europeans for whom spirit has realized itself objectively in free ethical-political institutions (objective spirit).

In the Oriental realm, spirit and nature are indistinguishable. Unlike the Christians, the Chinese do not strive to transcend nature but to live in

harmony with it. The people are therefore non-historical if we set in opposition nature and history. They only have an abstract conception of freedom -- only one is free, i.e., the despot or the emperor (Hegel, 1967:220-1). With the Greeks, we have the first manifestation of freedom. But because of the unity of their ethical life, in which the entire life of a free citizen is equated with his public life, an absolute distinction has to be made between free men and slaves (and women, we may add). Domestic work and social labour are performed exclusively by slaves and servants. Therefore, only some men (the citizens) are free (ibid., 221). With the Romans, the self-consciousness of private individuals is set in irreconcilable opposition to the abstract universality of the state. [1] This conflict leads to a corruptive rabble, on the one hand, and the heartless, self-seeking nobles, and later the emperors, on the other (ibid., 221-2). Formally, all Roman citizens are free. But the decadence of the emperors turn even free citizens into slaves. Both the Greeks and the Romans lack the true spirit that is necessary for the realization of concrete freedom. For the Greeks and the Romans, an individual is free because he is recognized as a citizen and a person, along with the corresponding rights of citizenry and property. Freedom is therefore

external, dependent on recognition by others. Spiritual subjectivity, the prerequisite of concrete freedom, only comes about with the rise of Christianity and the triumph of the Germanic races over a decaying Rome (ibid., 222). With it, the freedom of the individual is realized by his own conscience, by his own free will. In other words, all men are capable of being free. The freedom of the will is not contingent on external recognition; even a slave can be free in his own will, a notion of freedom that would be completely unintelligible to the Romans and the Greeks (Arendt, 1978:64). The freedom of Christian subjectivity comes to be actualized concretely in the modern period, first with the Reformation and then with the French Revolution. Freedom is finally realized as civil rights, and the modern state becomes the concrete embodiment of freedom. (In chapter two, from subdivisions 'a' to 'c', we will examine in detail the dialectics of right.)

b) From Spiritual History to Political History

One may ask why it was Hegel and not someone else before him who made this discovery, i.e., the rationality of history which has laboured throughout the ages towards the realization of freedom. Spirit is

the present, and the spirit of the age is the achievement of the spirits of the preceding ages (Löwith, 1991:201). Yet, the spirit of the modern age is different from all the other ages before it. The young Hegel had announced the news to the world in his lecture at Jena in 1806:

"Gentlemen! We are in an important epoch, in a fermentation, where Spirit has made a great advance, has surpassed its former shape and has acquired a new one. All the masses of ideas and concepts which have been current up to now, the bonds of the world, have dissolved and collapsed among themselves like a vision in a dream. This new Spirit -- philosophy is expected to be the first to welcome its appearance and to know it, since all the others, in their powerless resistance, are trapped in the past, and the masses, for the most part, are not even aware of its appearance. But philosophy, in knowing it as what is eternal, must pay homage to it" (Quoted from Kojève, 1988:7).

The historical achievement of spirit culminates in the modern era and those who have been attentive to the pulse of historical life are privileged to be witnesses to this achievement. It was only from the standpoint of the modern world that Hegel was able to survey the whole of history in its rational aspect: "[T]he result of the investigation which we are about to pursue... happens to be known to me, because I have traversed the entire field" (Hegel, 1956:10).

The fact that Hegel can proclaim freedom as the telos of history means that history has come to an end in his age, in the modern era -- at least history as it is understood by Hegel. For totality, from beginning to end, is only accessible to the one who stands at the end of the process. One possible way to interpret "the end of history" is to understand the Idea of the state as having realized itself finally in the ethical life of the modern state. In other words, Hegel's political philosophy is the understanding of the state as spirit in its objective form in which "the final aim, God's purpose with the world", is realized, (ibid., 19-20). It is a political interpretation of the Christian conception of freedom. As Hegel writes, "'True philosophy leads to God' and the same is true of philosophy and the state" (Hegel, 1967:12). Freedom is realized concretely in the development of the modern ethical-political state, and it is the development of the state which has reached an end in the modern era. What then is the nature of political history and of the state such that it is possible for Hegel to proclaim the end of history?

The word "history", like the word "politics", has many meanings. In their equivocations, they are very similar, and this is not an accident of language (Aron, 1987:23). To narrow down the range of meanings

of "history" in Hegel's usage, it is clear that he always means political history, and he likes to compare it with religion: "The state is the divine on Earth." "The march of God in the world, that is what the state is" (Hegel, 1967:279). In the Introduction to the Philosophy of History, Hegel argues that "it is the State which first presents (the) subject-matter that is not only adopted to the prose of History, but involves the production of such history in the very progress of its own being" (Hegel, 1956:61). An idea is only as good as its expressive power, in its ability to realize itself (Hegel, 1977:6). The Idea of freedom is only as good as it is able to actualize itself in history -- in social practices and in political institutions. Thus, in the Philosophy of Right, Hegel writes that "genuine truth (the Idea of freedom) is the prodigious transfer of the inner (abstract conception) into the outer (concrete realization), the building of reason into the real world, and this has been the task of the world during the whole course of its history. It is by working at this task that civilized man has actually given reason an embodiment in law and government..." (Hegel, 1967:167; my emphasis). "The development of the state to constitutional monarchy is the achievement of the modern world... the history of this genuine formation of ethical life (of the state) is the content

of the whole course of world-history" (ibid., 176). From these passages, it is clear that political history is essentially "state-history", the history of the evolution of the Idea of the state -- if by "Idea" we mean, following Hegel, both the conception and the praxis (i.e., the actualization) of the conception itself (Hegel, 1956:18; Hegel, 1977:6).

If the history of the world is the progressive realization of freedom (Hegel, 1956:19), then there is an intimate connection between freedom and the state: freedom is essentially a political concept. As such it cannot be divorced from the Idea of the state. "The State is the Idea of Spirit in the external manifestation of human Will and its Freedom. It is to the State, therefore, that change in the aspect of History indissolubly attaches itself; and the successive phases of the Idea manifest themselves in it as distinct principles" (ibid., 47). What Hegel wants to show is that "state-history" (= political history) is nothing but the history of freedom: "Freedom is nothing but the recognition and adoption of such universal substantial objects as Right and Law, and the production of a reality that is accordant with them -- the state" (ibid., 59). The various shapes of the state in history are the successive embodiment -- "concretization" -- of the different grades of freedom.

The state is freedom incarnate: to the state, from its most despotic to the freest type, there corresponds freedom from its most abstract to its most concrete shape. The realm of freedom is the historical-political realm. [2]

The section on self-consciousness in the Phenomenology of Spirit argues that the recognition of one (the master/ruler) results from the fiercest life-and-death struggle and that it is a condition of slavery for those who recognize the master but who are not reciprocally recognized by the master. In Hegel's version of the state of nature (the state of human affairs prior to the formation of the state), the desire for recognition, the desire for the desire of the other, results from the confrontation between individual consciousnesses without the mediation of social-political institutions (Hyppolite, 1961:241). The result of that confrontation leads to the institutionalization of the relationships between opposing consciousnesses, namely, slavery. The first human dialectical struggle therefore inaugurates human history through the establishment of a political institution. The state at the beginning of history is necessarily despotic, where total power is its essential characteristic.

The recognition of all, on the other hand, is the legal or constitutional recognition of civil rights, liberties and duties. In other words, desire is no longer in its raw and undeveloped form, but is raised or sublimated to the level of rationality. The citizens, in Hegel's sense, recognize the rational basis of their own political recognition. In other words, they are capable of rational insights and so do not need to be threatened with force by an all-powerful state. The political education and enlightenment of mankind consist in the gradual abolition of slavery as a political institution and by extension the realization that despotism is incompatible with concrete freedom and rationality, the recognition of all instead of one:

"Thus existing in a State, slavery is itself a phase of advance from the merely isolated sensual existence -- a phase of education -- a mode of becoming participant in a higher morality (Sittlichkeit, not Moralität) and the culture connected with it. Slavery is in and for itself injustice, for the essence of humanity is freedom; but for this man must be matured. The gradual abolition of slavery is therefore wiser and more equitable than its sudden removal" (Hegel, 1956:99).

The different degrees and kinds of recognition of state power and authority correspond to the different shapes in which the Idea of the state appears

in history: "Every indeterminate grade between (slavery) and the realization of a rational State retains -- as might be expected -- elements and aspects of injustice" (ibid.). Thus, in regimes of the earliest times, only one is recognized as free, i.e., the king or the emperor. In others, only some are free, but in the highest grade which the state can assume, all are recognized as free (ibid., 18). Here Hegel redefines the traditional political classification of the state as either monarchy, aristocracy, or democracy in terms of its underlying principle, the historical evolution of state power towards freedom:

"The East knew and to the present day knows only that One is free; the Greek and Roman world, that Some are free; the German World (i.e., the European world) knows that All are free. The first political form therefore which we observe in History, is Despotism, the second Democracy and Aristocracy, the third Monarchy (i.e., constitutional monarchy)" (ibid., 104).

The traditional classification is based on the original meaning of the Greek word "politeia", the regime of the polis under which the rulers and the mode of exercise of their authority are determined, as well as the way in which the city is organized and co-ordinated accordingly. Hegel criticizes the traditional classification of regimes in terms of quantity: "(P)urely quantitative distinctions... are

only superficial and do not afford the concept of the thing" (Hegel, 1967:176). Such a classification as Aristotle's in the Politics (1279a 26-1279b 10) cannot perceive the underlying historical principle because even Aristotle, the most profound of the Greeks according to Hegel, cannot go beyond the Greek conception of freedom as the freedom of some. This is why, according to Aristotle, some men are natural slaves (1254b 15-35).

Here we see that the notion of recognition is closely related to political consciousness. A given regime is constituted as such because it is recognized as such by the whole community: "The state exists... immediately in custom, mediately in individual self-consciousness, knowledge, and activity, while self-consciousness finds in the state... its substantive freedom (Hegel, 1967:155; my emphasis). Political consciousness is integral to the constitution of the state. If this is not so, constitutions are nothing but pieces of paper. The constitution of a people must accord with their historical and political experience; it must be recognized by them (ibid., 178, 286-7). Aron puts it well:

"Consciousness of reality is integral to reality itself... [T]he political domain presupposes a minimum of consciousness of this domain. In every [political]

collective, the individuals are expected to know approximately who the leaders are, how they are chosen and what the mode of exercise of their authority is. All political regimes presuppose on the part of the individuals that they [the individuals] have awareness of these regimes. We will not be able to live in a democracy... if the citizens had not a minimum of consciousness of the rules according to which the regime functions. Political knowledge is the development of political consciousness coeval with politics itself" (Aron, 1987:25).

The history of freedom, i.e., the history of the Idea of the state, is also the historical experience of consciousness in the political domain. The state is the embodiment of consciousness. In other words, it is spirit. Qua spirit, it is objective in the sense that it unites the subjective elements of the citizens in the form of objective institutions and concrete social practices. It is therefore objective spirit. "The state is mind on earth and consciously realizing itself there... Only when it is present in consciousness, when it knows itself as a really existent object, is it the state" (Hegel, 1967:279). This is what Hegel means when he says that "the essence of spirit (or mind, geist) is Freedom", and that "the perfect embodiment of spirit (is) the state" (Hegel, 1956:17). The state is not only the political regime alone, but the community, the social whole itself, within which the regime constitutes only a sector.

Insofar as it is objective spirit, it embraces the entire community because all the sectors of society, along with all their antagonistic forces, are reconciled in the body politic of the state.

Something is free when it is not dependent on or influenced by other things. Spirit is free because it is its own determination. "Spirit... may be defined as that which has its centre in itself... This is freedom exactly. For if I am dependent, my being is referred to something else which I am not... I am free, on the contrary, when my existence depends on myself" (Hegel, 1956:17). Spirit determines its own destiny by determining the spirits and destinies of nations. Its final destination (= Bestimmung = destiny = determination) is the ethical Idea, i.e., the ethical state which is the concrete realization of freedom. Spirit achieves its most concrete realization in the modern world, in the modern state.

Two momentous events make this possible: the Protestant Reformation and the French Revolution. Between them, they define the modern era. The Reformation declares that all men are equal before God, and each is free in his conscience. (We shall examine this issue in sub-section 2b.) The Revolution actualizes these principles of freedom as civil rights, i.e., abstract and concrete rights. (We shall presently

turn to this problem.) Hegel shows, as we shall see in the following, how the dialectic of right leads to the conception of the state as objective spirit -- the rights of "subjectivity" and "personality" as they are translated into the concrete institutional practices of the modern state, the embodiment of freedom.

"Not satisfied with the establishment of rational rights, with freedom of person and property, with the existence of a political organization in which are to be found various circles of civil life.... 'Liberalism' sets up in opposition to all this the atomistic principle, that which insists upon the sway of individual will; maintaining that all government should emanate from their express power, and have their express sanction. Asserting this formal side of freedom -- this abstraction -- the party in question allows no political organization to be firmly established. The particular arrangements of the government are forthwith opposed by the advocates of Liberty as the mandates of a particular will, and branded as displays of arbitrary power. The will of the Many expels the Ministry from power, and those who had formed the Opposition fill the vacant places: but the latter having now become Government, meet with hostility from the Many, and share the same fate. Thus agitation and unrest are perpetuated. This collision, this nodus, this problem is that with which history is now occupied, and whose solution it has to work out in the future" (Hegel, 1956:452).

CHAPTER II

SPIRIT AND THE STATE

This passage is found in the last pages of the book in the section on the French Revolution. Four decades after the storming of the Bastille, the revolutionary fury that was unleashed into the world had yet to play itself out. This was the revolutionary situation with which history was confronted and which

it had to resolve in the future. Ritter has written that "[f]or Hegel, the French Revolution is that event around which all the determinations of philosophy in relation to its time are clustered, with philosophy marking out the problem through attacks on and defenses of the Revolution. Conversely, there is no other philosophy that is a philosophy of revolution to such a degree and so profoundly, in its innermost drive, as that of Hegel" (Ritter, 1982:43). Echoing Ritter, Habermas writes that "Hegel elevated revolution to the primary principle of his philosophy." However, "Hegel's philosophy of revolution is his philosophy as the critique of revolution" (Habermas, 1974:121). Hegel's philosophical task is twofold: to separate the historical principles of modernity which the Revolution had actualized from the subjective (and therefore destructive) excesses of the revolutionaries. Or as Habermas puts it, Hegel's task is "to conceptually legitimize the revolutionizing of reality without the Revolution itself" (ibid., 123). It is philosophy's task to help restore order to modern political life, an ethical-political life that will satisfy the just and legitimate demands that lie at the basis of revolutionary fury.

The principles of modernity which the Revolution realized are the rights of bourgeois or

civil society (bürgerliche Gesellschaft), classified under the categories of abstract and concrete rights, and of subjective morality or conscience. Hegel's political theory is an attempt to integrate these individual rights into the ethical life of civic community and the state such that they are objectively respected and reflected in the actual practices of social and political institutions (Hegel, 1967:132-3, 160-1). However, when the modern state and society are not well-constituted, when the rights of the individual are asserted at the expense of the interests of the community and the state -- that is to say, according to the principle of 'liberalism', when state and society are viewed as nothing other than the protection of the individual's right, property, and safety (ibid., 156) -- we can have nothing but the continuation of the revolutionary situation and civic unrest. This is the meaning of the passage quoted at the beginning of this chapter. The series of dialectical sublation in the Philosophy of Right -- from abstract right, through morality, to ethical life -- is the process of integration of modern individual rights leading up to the ethical formation of the modern state. Hegel therefore takes up the challenge of modern history, namely, to repeat once again, to undermine the

Revolution but to satisfy its demands for justice and respect for rights.

a) Abstract Right, Concrete Right, and Free Personality

The notion of property right (or abstract right in the Philosophy of Right) is so ingrained in our consciousness and conduct in everyday life that we scarcely pay any attention to it. Because it is so pervasive and is constitutive of the very intersubjective basis of western bourgeois society, we are not always aware of the layers of hidden presuppositions. Yet, according to Hegel, the idea of free possession marks the momentous transformation of western society and the birth of modern consciousness -- from the unequal feudal relationship between lord and vassal to the equal relationship between persons, each with the same intrinsic right of property:

"The principle of free possession however began to develop itself from the protective relation of feudal protection; i.e. freedom originated from its direct contrary. The feudal lords or great barons enjoyed, properly speaking, no free or absolute possession, any more than their dependents; they had unlimited power over the latter, but at the same time they also were vassals of princes higher and mightier than themselves..." (Hegel, 1956:384).

In serfdom, "... a man's body (was) not his own, but the property of another" (ibid., 407). In modern

society, "as person, I possess my life and my body, like other things, only in so far as my will is in them" (Hegel, 1967:43). The will can only impose itself on external things, not people. My body and my life are the most immediate external embodiment of my will, that is, without the mediation of labour (ibid., 39-40, 43). Their possession by another person would be an infringement of my will and properties. Such an infringement would involve a clash of wills (ibid., 67-8). The struggle between opposing wills is to establish the "right" of the mighty; it directly subverts the right of personality, which presupposes equality. The recognition of right is essential here because "my inward idea and will that something is to be mine is not enough to make it my property" (ibid., 45). A vassal in feudal time could work on a thing, but his effort and will did not make it his property. He had control of his bodily movements, but his body and his life did not belong to him. It is crucial that the embodiment of my will, the thing, is recognized as mine by others. The reciprocal recognition of individuals as persons is the basis of equality between modern individuals as bearers of rights. "(P)roperty is the embodiment of personality... It essentially involves the capacity for rights... The imperative of right is:

'Be a person and respect others as persons" (Hegel, 1967:45, 37).

The right of property demarcates a sphere within which its validity holds, i.e., the sphere of externality. A person is free to pursue what he will, i.e., to impose his will on "what is immediately different and separable from him" (ibid., 40). "What is immediately different... is the external pure and simple, a thing, something not free, not personal, without rights" (ibid., my emphasis). This is the right of personality. It is the freedom of the will which asserts itself in the pursuit of external things as properties. (Needless to say, not all external things can be imposed upon, e.g., the planets and the stars.) Throughout the first part of the Philosophy of Right, Hegel refers to the right of property as abstract right. This is because all determinate contents are abstracted and taken out. "In formal right, therefore, there is no question of particular interests." "(D)esire, need, impulse, casual whim, and so forth" (ibid., 25, 38), all the particularities which drive and determine the natural will, are abstracted: "(E)verything which depends on particularity is here a matter of indifference" (Hegel, 1967:235). Only in civil society, as we shall see below, are particularities actualized and fulfilled -- or at least

they have the (concrete) right to demand satisfaction. Furthermore, the right of property is abstracted from all particular moral concerns, which constitute inwardness, the interior realm: "...my advantage or my welfare... the particular motive behind my volition, (as well as) insight and intention" fall outside the external realm (ibid., 38). (We will examine morality in '2b', the next sub-section.)

In other words, abstract right denotes an "absolutely free will" that is immediate, indeterminate, and contentless (ibid., 37). "In relation to action in the concrete and to moral and ethical ties, abstract right is, in contrast with the further content which these involve, only a possibility, and to have a right is therefore to have only a permission or a warrant" (ibid., 38). Simply put, abstract right is recognized in a person prior to, and regardless of, the use (or the end) to which he puts his property and the impulse which drives him to pursue it -- to claim it as his own -- in his concrete action in civil society. While law restricts the ways in which I can make use of my properties and the means by which I can pursue them -- that is, I cannot infringe on the rights of other persons -- my right as such is recognized unconditionally and absolutely.

In Hegel's dialectical transition of the concept of right, the next stage after abstract right is morality, not civil society or ethical life. This is rather surprising as the connection between property right and social labour (in civil society or economy) is obvious, for it is labour, the particular determination of the will, that transforms an independent, natural entity and makes it the property of a person. Hegel's transition from property right to morality is based on the idea of wrong, that is, the violation of abstract right by a single, arbitrary will. According to Hegel, such an infringement of right is a crime (Hegel, 1967:67-8). The moral sense evolves out of the perpetrator's guilt when he realizes that his arbitrary will contradicts his rational will. As a rational person, in willing to violate the right of another person, he wills the universal violation of all persons with right, including himself (ibid., 70-1). The infringement of the right of another person is therefore self-contradictory and must be annulled. A crime therefore demands either retribution or punishment, without which the wrong deed cannot be annulled (ibid., 71-2). But retribution or revenge could lead to an endless cycle of violence. Only just punishment can be proportional to the crime. As a rational person, the criminal must will his own

punishment. Only then can the individuals involved be reconciled and the cycle of revenge avoided.

As Habermas has pointed out, a right has the force of law, or a wrong becomes a crime, only when that right is codified within a legal framework (Habermas, 1974:127). Also, equitable punishment is only possible with impartial judgement. According to Hegel, this is jurisprudence in civil society. When the principle of rightness becomes known universally, when it is codified and promulgated, it becomes law (Hegel, 1967:134-5). The application of law is the administration of justice in civil society. Its stated purpose is the protection of property: "This right is no longer implicit but has attained its recognized actuality as the protection of property through the administration of justice" (ibid., 134). Only then can a wrong be considered a crime and be justly punished.

While the motivations for the dialectical transition from abstract right to morality are clear, the transition is nevertheless problematic because it separates the rather obvious connection between abstract right and civil society. At the same time, Hegel hints at such a connection between the two in the relationship between crime and punishment.

In fact, Hegel was well aware of the connection between abstract right and civil society -- in

particular the connection between property and labour. He had already worked out their dialectical relationship in such early writings as the System of Morality (Habermas, 1974:127). It is easy to see how, in the particular determination of abstract right, a capricious action could lead to the violation of the right of another person, e.g., theft. The processes of social labour, which are driven by the particularities of needs, desires, and selfish interests, lead to the development of formal rules in order to guarantee the fruits of one's labour, that is, the rules which Hegel reformulates in terms of abstract right and jurisprudence. In other words, the workers and the bourgeois assert their right to possess the products of their own labour and investments, and the institution of jurisprudence and the understanding of abstract right evolve out of their demands for the recognition of right. This is the dialectical relationship between the abstract right of private property and social labour in civil society. The individual, in this transition, develops from the abstract person to the concrete person in civil society (i.e., the burgher or the bourgeois) (Hegel, 1967:122-3). (Historically, the sequence was reversed.) This dialectic, implicit in the Philosophy of Right, is the particular determination of the indeterminate universal will through social labour

in the economy -- through the needs and caprice of the bourgeois. It actually recaptures the history of the West from feudalism to bourgeois society after 1789. We shall pursue this alternative transition in the following.

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Feudal 'rights', which ought to be called 'wrongs' according to Hegel, seemed to have been swept away by the French Revolution overnight. Actually, the destruction of tradition and feudalism was the work of centuries of social labour. According to the Abbé Sleyès, the revolution was carried out by all those in society who performed useful labour (the Third Estate) against those who had lived parasitically on the labour of others, namely, the clergy and the nobles (the First and Second Estates) (Löwith, 1991:239). The Revolution was therefore the assertion of the right of social labour against the privileged or idle classes which had no right to enjoy the fruits of other people's labour. Hegel's political philosophy is in part a legitimation of the rights of bourgeois or civil society, demanded by the Revolution and actualized in the Napoleonic Code.

According to Hegel, the right of labour can only be actualized when an autonomous sphere is

constituted in society such that it is free from interference or infringement. Hegel was among the first social scientists and philosophers to point out the separation of state and society in modern western history and to work out its socio-political implications. For him, this separation is the hallmark of modernity, the moment of liberation of social labour from the yoke of feudalism. It is through this separation that a "space" is constituted, namely civil society, where particularities (i.e., individual desires, caprice, and physical necessities) are set loose outside of state intervention. (Laissez-faire ideology is deeply rooted in this phase of historical development.) Accordingly, in the Philosophy of Right, civil society (bürgerliche Gesellschaft as the free realm of the burghers) is treated as a dialectical moment distinct from the state. [3]

In the chapter on civil society, concrete rights denote the right of labour and capital (sub-division 'a' in Hegel's text), the right of law (sub-division 'b'), and the right of public welfare and professional representation, i.e., the police and the corporation (sub-division 'c'). In the following, we will concentrate on the system of needs, that is, the (concrete) right of labour and capital because the justice system, the police, and the corporation

function according to, and are ultimately dependent on, this central system of civil society. [4] This system is that particular sector of civil society which we may roughly equate with the national economy. It is the realm of arbitrary freedom where particularities are given free rein to satisfy themselves (Hegel, 1967:122-3).

Here, Hegel argues that the atomistic tendency of "liberalism" -- the principle that it is the right of the individual to pursue what he wants and what his desire dictates -- ought to be guaranteed, and that this arbitrary freedom should not be interfered with so long as the person respects the same right in others. "Liberalism" is here understood as a description of how individuals behave when state and society reconstitute themselves as two autonomous realms. It is how civil society understands itself. Therefore, it should not be associated with the other political meanings and values which the term has come to denote. According to Hegel,

"the right actually present in the particular (i.e., the pursuit and satisfaction of one's private needs) requires, first, that accidental hindrances (i.e., crime, discrimination) to one aim or another be removed; and secondly, that the securing of every single person's livelihood and welfare be treated and actualized as a right, i.e., that particular welfare as such be so treated (Hegel, 1967:146; additional parentheses are mine).

As a critic of liberalism, Hegel argues that civil society must be sublated. He wants to give a deeper meaning to arbitrary freedom such that this freedom is not the end but the means (or mediation) to a higher principle. (The mistake of liberalism is to treat this freedom as an end.) Civil society, understood properly, is the means to that end. The task of criticism is not to undermine but to sublimate the position in question, in this case, liberalism. It is to show that the truth of liberalism, the self-understanding of civil society, is limited and one-sided.

For Hegel, to sublimate civil society is to demonstrate the ethical substance of economic activities, to show that the economy is an integral part of ethical life:

"The right of individuals to their particular satisfaction is also contained in the ethical substantial order, since particularity is the outward appearance of the ethical order -- a mode in which that order is existent" (Hegel, 1967:109).

The ethical order of the state is the final moment in the dialectical movement of the rights of property and labour. Hegel's dialectics always follow three phases: the abstract universal, the concrete particular, and finally the concrete universal as the sublation of the two prior moments. In his philosophy of right, the

concrete person, i.e., the burgher or the bourgeois, determined by wants, caprice, and physical necessities, is the first principle of civil society (ibid., 122-3). Since this principle is that of the concrete particular, it is really the second moment of the dialectic. We may take the principle of the unmediated or abstract universal, i.e., abstract right, as the prior moment. The dialectical sublation of abstract right and social labour leads to the concrete universal of ethical life. In other words, as a result of his labour for self-satisfaction, the concrete person recognizes other members of society as equals and he in turn is recognized as such by them. Even though he is driven by his natural will (i.e., caprice, needs) as an egoistic person, he knows that he can only satisfy himself by working with others. Through his cooperation with others, his particularity is mediated: he realizes his social dependence. He thereby becomes socially conscious of the mediated universal dimension of his particularity:

"In the course of the actual attainment of selfish ends -- an attainment conditioned in this way by universality -- there is formed a system of complete interdependence, wherein the livelihood, happiness, and legal status of one man is interwoven with the livelihood, happiness, and rights of all" (Hegel, 1967:123).

In satisfying his selfish demands, he satisfies the demands of society as a whole. This experience is educational in that the person learns that "the principle of particularity passes over into (concrete or mediated) universality, and only there does it attain its truth and the right to which its positive actuality is entitled" (ibid., 124).

This passing over of concrete particularity to concrete universality is effected, according to Hegel (or rather the classical economists), by labour, the means to the satisfaction of needs. Particular interests must be harmonized with the common interests of the community. Adam Smith has shown how the pursuit of selfish ends actually performs a social, beneficial function under laissez-faire capitalism. Hegel appropriates Smith's political economy in his account of the system of needs. But the system of needs is not itself sufficient. It achieves only a limited or formal reconciliation (of the individual and the social, of the subjective and the objective). This is because the system of economic interdependence multiplies the needs of one person by the needs of all the others. One's selfish and private ends are extended and harmonized with the equally selfish and private ends of other persons. Extended particularity is just more particularities:

"(This process) tend(s) to multiply and subdivide needs, means, and enjoyments indefinitely -- a process which... has no qualitative limits -- this is luxury. In this process, however, dependence and want increase ad infinitum" (Hegel, 1967:128-9).

A person who is dependent and full of wants cannot be free. Civil society is still inherently limited and limiting to the individual. The reconciliation of opposing particularities is achieved, but we have not yet reached the stage of the concrete universal, where particular self-interest is harmonized with the universal interest of the state. Nevertheless, what is universal (in a limited sense) about this process is that it is a "social moment" (ibid., 127-8). In other words, it is the moment when the person breaks out of the atomicity of his private needs to the recognition of the needs and demands of society as a whole. Here we can see why civil society is an essential moment in the Idea of the state: it is a process of socialization, the overcoming of the atomicity of personality.

"(U)niversality is the character of being recognized and is the moment which makes concrete, i.e., social the isolated and abstract needs and their ways and means of satisfaction" (ibid.). This process is the basis of equality as well as sociability as it directly involves the demand for the equal right of satisfaction for all members of society. [5] And this is,

ultimately, the social basis of liberty, fraternity,
and equality.

b) Autonomous Subjectivity

The modern notion of property right is the person's freedom to acquire and to dispose of properties as he will -- within legal limits. i.e.. institutional respect for the right of personality. The "property-determination" of the will is the embodiment of the will in a thing external to it. It is predicated by the word 'mine'. The second characteristic of modernity is the moment of the self-reflection of the will back to itself: it is to internalize what is external. Here, the will is no longer embodied in the thing (as property), but in itself. "(T)his reflection of the will into itself and its explicit awareness of its identity makes the person into a subject" (Hegel, 1967:75). namely, a subject whose object is himself (= his will). His independence is assured because it is free from externality and from his dependence on thinghood. Moral consciousness is "this deepest inward solitude with oneself where everything external and every restriction has disappeared -- this complete withdrawal into oneself" (ibid., 254).

This moral standpoint, where the person becomes aware of himself as a moral agent, is a higher stage of freedom than abstract right, which legitimizes the free

disposal of one's properties. This is because an externalized will, a will embodied in a thing, can be coerced:

"In owning property, I place my will in an external thing, and this implies that my will... may be seized in it and brought under compulsion. It may simply be forced in the thing unconditionally, or it may be constrained to sacrifice something or to do some action as a condition of retaining one or other of its possessions or embodiments -- it may be coerced" (Hegel, 1967:66).

By contrast, the moral will, based on inner conviction of what is good and right, cannot be coerced: it is free from externality. As such, freedom makes its first actual (as opposed to abstract) appearance. Here, the actual embodiment of the will is adequate to the Idea of right for the first time. "It is in a subject that freedom can first be realized, since the subjective is the true material for this realization" (ibid., 248). The subject, in his autonomy, bows to no authority other than the freedom of his own conscience. This is the right of morality. "Since man wishes to be judged in accordance with his own self-determined choices, he is free in this relation with himself whatever the external situation may impose upon him. No one can break in upon this inner conviction of mankind, no violence can be done to it, and the moral will, therefore, is inaccessible. Man's worth is estimated by

reference to his inward action and hence the standpoint of morality is that of freedom aware of itself" (ibid.).

The freedom of conscience is summarized by Luther in his famous reply to the German Diet: "Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise." "This is the essence of the Reformation: Man is in his very nature destined to be free" (Hegel, 1956:417). Luther's reply is the reply of the modern man. Subjective freedom is the principle of the modern age. "the new, the latest standard round which the peoples rally -- the banner of free spirit... This is the banner under which we serve, and which we bear. Time, since that epoch, has had no other work to do than the formal imbuing of the world with this principle, in bringing the Reconciliation implicit (in Christianity) into objective and explicit realization" (ibid., 416). "Law, Property, Social Morality, Government, Constitutions, etc., must be conformed to general principles, in order that they may accord with the idea of Free Will and be Rational" (ibid., 417).

But the freedom of the will is still not concrete freedom. The moral subject is only aware of himself as a unit, divorced from the larger ethical concerns of the community, the state proper. Like personality both abstract and concrete, subjectivity is characterized by its atomicity. As evident in the words

'subject' and 'subjectivity'. morality is opposed to objectivity, that is, the world of objective spirit, i.e. of law, constitution, government, and customs. In order to resolve or sublimate this fundamental problem which poses the subjective against the objective, Hegel takes up, as his point of departure, Kant's moral philosophy, which he interprets as the formalization of subjective freedom, the philosophical articulation of an historical principle. For Hegel, the significance of Kant is that he raises this modern principle to the level of philosophy (Ritter, 1982:151-2).

At the transcendental level, Kant's formalization of moral law establishes, a priori, harmony among all rational beings: "I should never act except in such a way that I can also will that my maxim should become a universal law" (Kant, 1985:14). With only the universal law as the object of the will, insofar as it is valid for me, it must be valid for all rational beings. Therefore, moral action and decision can be arrived at by the solitary subject as if it is the only existing consciousness. Because of its universality, the moral law is blinding on all rational beings: it is not necessary to have prior discussions, communication or consent among themselves (Habermas, 1974:150-1).

Now, the possibility of prior harmony only works at the transcendental level, that is, after the abstraction of particular impulse and interest, of consequence and implication, and finally of content (ibid., 151-2; Kant, 1985:14-5). In other words, Kant isolates subjectivity or inwardness from all external and empirical elements and contents. The characterization of the subjective will as that which recognizes only the (moral) law that it itself legislates, which Hegel has called "the great and sublime side" of Kant's philosophy (Ritter, 1982:153), is also its one-sidedness. From the moral standpoint, the universal is always opposed to the particular. "As conscience, man is no longer shackled by the aims of particularity..." (Hegel, 1967:254). As Kant puts it, "I had further noted that this concept of duty (i.e., to obey the universal moral law) does not need to be based on any particular end." Indeed it is necessary to "completely abstract from whatever particular end is adopted" (Kant, 1991:65, 66). On Kant's moral theory, it is possible that no moral action (in the sense of a complete and pure fulfillment of moral duty) has ever been performed in the history of the (phenomenal) world. We can think that there are, but we can never know for certain: "(M)an is aware with the utmost clarity that he ought to fulfill his duty completely

unselfishly. and must totally separate his desire for happiness from the concept of duty, in order to preserve the latter's purity" (ibid., 69). Yet. "I willingly concede that no-one can have certain awareness of having fulfilled his duty completely unselfishly. Such awareness of one's psychological state would involve an absolutely clear conception of all secondary notions and considerations which, through imagination, habit and inclination, accompany the concept of duty. And this is too much to ask for" (ibid.; my emphasis).

Moreover, for Kant, morality is absolutely distinct from law or jurisprudence. "Whenever the question of straightforward legal compulsion of our deeds arises... the law alone becomes (the will's) determinant" (ibid., 65). The sphere of right is the sphere of external action, which is governed by law. It relates to contract, property, civil law etc. Morality, on the other hand, relates to inner freedom and self-legislation. Law is therefore morally neutral. The harmony that is established at the transcendental level leads to the radical rupture between "inner morality and outer reality" and between morality and (positive) law (Ritter, 1982:158-60). Kant's moral theory leads to an absolute separation between the two sides without mediation. It is the heart of the problem for Hegel. To

overcome Kant is to reconcile morality and politics, namely, to restore the ethical basis of modern political life.

Since Kant's moral law excludes "all content and specification", Hegel calls it "an empty formalism", from which "no transition is possible to the specification of particular duties nor, if some such particular content for action comes under consideration, is there any criterion in that principle for deciding whether it is or is not a duty" (Hegel, 1967:89-90). But, since this principle of subjectivity, the ought-to-be, is an historical principle -- "the ground of the modern world" -- it must be an actual principle brought about by historical reality itself (Ritter, 1982:179, n. 5; Ritter is appropriating O. Marquard's interpretation). It remains only to think it through historically -- concretely -- to see that it cannot be in conflict with actuality. Real moral purpose cannot be divorced from the real universal. Therefore, the conflict inherent in Kant's moral philosophy must be located in his conception of the universal, which is falsely differentiated from the real universal, according to Hegel. We need to supersede the abstract universal of Kant in order to reach the real, or concrete, universal of ethical life (Sittlichkeit). Ethical values are realized in the subject's obedience

to the concrete universality of the law of the state (as opposed to Kant's abstract universal moral law). In his obedience to law, the subject becomes the citizen. Conversely, the laws of the state must reciprocally respect the rights of subjectivity in order to be legitimate. In this way, law, which has been consigned by Kant to the external sphere of jurisprudence, regains its rightful moral status. (We will reserve our more detailed discussion of ethical life for the next sub-section on the state.) The dialectical transition from morality to ethical life in the Philosophy of Right is therefore at the same time the sublation of Kant's moral philosophy. [6]

The sublation of Kant's moral philosophy is of profound political-historical significance for Hegel. Kant's moral principles "make the standpoint of ethical life impossible, in fact they explicitly nullify and spurn it" (Hegel, 1967:36). For Hegel, the abstract contentless universal of Kant's moral theory, translated into practice, became the terrorism of Robespierre: "The phenomena which it has produced both in men's heads and in the world are of a frightfulness parallel only to the superficiality of the thoughts on which they are based" (ibid., 33). (Rousseau is also named in this passage as the other guilty party who, along with Kant, was responsible for the popularization

of this philosophically superficial, and therefore historically frightful, view, i.e., the autonomy of the individual's will.) If Kant undermined, at the theoretical level, the ethical foundations of social and political institutions, the Jacobins completed in practice the actual destruction of these institutions during the Reign of Terror (ibid., 227-8). It is therefore an historical imperative to sublimate Kant's moral philosophy so as to restore the foundations of ethical order for modern political life. In this context, it is instructive to examine paragraph 5 of the Introduction in the Philosophy of Right, where Hegel demonstrates the historical connection between Kant and Robespierre.

For Hegel, to think no further than the thought of the abstract universal is to remain at the level of the Understanding. The Understanding is the intellectual ability to distinguish between concepts, e.g., between form and content, the universal and the particular, the subjective and the objective. Its defect is that it is unable to recognize the dialectical relationship between opposites, namely, to see how one term is generated from out of its opposite. It is therefore abstract in Hegel's sense of the word. According to Hegel, Kant is the pre-eminent philosopher of the Understanding. Thus in his philosophy, thinking

and willing are represented as two distinct faculties (even though, ultimately, Kant admits that there is only the whole person who thinks and wills). Thinking is possible with the categories alone. But without intuition, the material representation of space and time, it must remain indeterminate and contentless. Similarly, willing is made possible by the self-legislative formulation of universal laws. According to Kant, this self-legislative activity is pure inwardness abstracted from all phenomenal contents. from both inner (time) and outer (space) intuitive representation, i.e., from one's feelings (or internal states) and from the particulars of the external situation. Hegel characterizes this abstract will as an immediate and indeterminate will: "(It) involves the dissipation of every restriction and every content either immediately presented by nature, by needs, desires, and impulses, or given and determined by any means whatever. This is the unrestricted infinity of absolute abstraction or universality, the pure thought of oneself" (Hegel, 1967:21-2). It is the will that abstracts itself "from everything whatever", "(a) flight from every content as from a restriction" (ibid., 20-1, 22). This is negative freedom. It tries to realize itself immediately -- that is to say, against mediation, against alienating or objectifying

itself in social and political institutions (Hyppolite, 1974:461). It refuses any determinate or positive content. As such, it can be nothing but the "fanaticism of destruction". It can do nothing but destroy "the whole subsisting social order... (and) any organization which tries to rise anew from the ruins" (Hegel, 1967:22). Any attempt at restoring order, at social reconstruction, is automatically suspect because "it is precisely out of the annihilation of particularity (i.e., determinate content) and objective characterization that the self-consciousness of this negative freedom proceeds" (ibid.). This was the meaning of the Jacobin Terror.

Because the abstract universal is pure negativity, in order to give itself content, the will must negate itself as this pure negation: only through objectification and mediation can the "fury of destruction" be avoided in the will's attempt at actualization. The second moment of the dialectic is therefore the particularization of the initial abstract universal (ibid., 22-23). In other words, the moral subject must act positively, that is, to realize a particular moral purpose in action. Instead of abstract goods such as virtue, universal equality and liberty -- for the negative will always "imagines that it is willing some positive state of affairs, such as

universal equality and universal religious life" (ibid.) -- the moral subject tries to realize particular goods through particular actions. But according to Hegel, Kant's moral theory can tell us nothing about whether an action is or is not moral in its execution: it offers no criterion for "the specification of particular duties" (Hegel, 1967:90). Because of the absolute contradiction between the ought and the is, between morality and actuality, the moral standpoint is forever frustrated by imperfect reality, the harsh world outside -- "the ought-to-be" that is not realized.

As a result, the second moment is equally contradictory. It is not yet concrete universality (ibid., 23). In order to give himself ethical content and yet to free himself from particularity, the moral subject, according to Hegel, must act according to law -- as we have said already, not the abstract universal law of Kant but the concrete universal law of the state. Moreover, he must not act under the force of law but only through rational insight, that is, he must recognize his own interest in the interest of the ethical state. In willing the concrete universal, the moral subject becomes the citizen. The good that is aimed at but not reached in morality is finally realized in this free will that is reflected in the

external world, i.e., in the substance and actuality of the state, of ethical life (ibid., 36). This is why, in the two paragraphs (257 and 258) with which the section on the state begins, Hegel writes that the state is "the actuality of the ethical Idea. It is the ethical mind qua the substantial will... the actuality of the substantial will which (the state) possesses in the particular self-consciousness (of the citizen) once that consciousness has been raised to consciousness of its universality" (Hegel, 1967:155-6). In willing the good for himself, the citizen wills the good of the state. Since right is the determination of the free will (ibid., 20), the dialectic of the concept of right is therefore the successive determination of the will: abstract right determines the person, concrete right determines the bürger, moral right the subject, ethical right the citizen: "Every stage in the development of the Idea of Freedom has its own special right, since it is the embodiment of freedom (= the free will) in one of its proper specific forms... Morality, ethical life, the interest of the state, each of these is a right of a special character because each of them is a specific form and embodiment of freedom" (ibid., 34). The will of the citizen is in harmony with the will of the state -- the substantial will, wherein the substance of the individual's will is actualized. The Idea of right

reaches its final determination in the state. It is to the ethical life of the state that we now turn.

c) The State as Objective Spirit

If the task of philosophy is to comprehend what is, then political philosophy as the theory of the state is not to conceive an ideal state but to comprehend the state as it is. It is not "an attempt to construct a state as it ought to be", but to "show how the state, the ethical universe, is to be understood" (Hegel, 1967:11). "What is rational is actual and what is actual is rational" (ibid., 10). The state in its actuality must be rational. In other words, it must be in accord with the Idea of right. Right as Idea is actualized only in the ethical state which has sublated -- overcome and preserved -- the right of personality, the right of morality, and the right of citizenship. Only the state which has dialectically sublated, not suppressed, these rights can claim to be the state in its actual ethical form.

But "what is" could mean what is merely existent as well as what is truly actual. It must be more than the merely existent, for what is transitory and accidental is excluded from philosophical interest: the actual is at once existence and essence. Still, Hegel's theory of the state contains a fundamental ambiguity which is derived from the intimate connection

between his philosophy and history. It is not clear whether Hegel had described an actual existing state, or the modern state as it would be if it were to realize the moral and social principles of modernity -- if it were to undermine revolutionary fury while satisfying its legitimate demands for rights. In other words, it is not clear whether or not according to his political theory, history in Hegel's time had effected the actual reconciliation between order and revolution in the modern period. The shape of the state as objective spirit -- described in the Philosophy of Right as the dialectical endpoint of the realization of freedom -- is quite clear; the historical identity of the well-constituted state in Hegel's political theory has been a matter of intense dispute. Which European state, or states, in Hegel's time was actual and not merely existent?

Except for ideological and polemical reasons, I do not believe that it is possible to settle definitively the modern historical identity of the ethical state in its actuality. Hegel himself has written that "in considering the Idea of the state, we must not have our eyes on particular states or on particular institutions. Instead we must consider the Idea, this actual God, by itself" (Hegel, 1967:279). [7] In other words, Hegel's political theory follows

the history of the Idea of the state. It is not based on any particular existing state.

Moreover, it is well known that one of the main historical sources that inspired Hegel's theory of the state was the ancient Greek polis. Just as Machiavelli painted longingly, in the Discorsi, the picture of a mythical idealized Roman republic, so Hegel wrote in admiring terms of his idealized version of the Greek polis (Hegel, 1956:223-4). But he realized that the modern state is a new historical phenomenon, and that the rationality of the present requires that we understand its reason and foundation. We cannot return to the past; rather we need to learn how the past is preserved and sublated in the present -- in the ethical life of the modern state. Hegel's statement, according to which the free will of the citizen consists in harmonizing with the substantial will of the state (i.e., in following the laws and commands of the state) is Hegel's reconciliation between the Greek conception of freedom and the Christian notion of the free will. For the Greeks, freedom is entirely political, as in the distinction between the free citizen and the unfree slave (or the non-citizen in general). For the Christians, the free will is relative to the inwardness of the person such that a slave can nevertheless be free in his subjectivity. The (Greek) political freedom

of the (Christian) will finds its actualization or embodiment in the modern constitutional state. An examination of Hegel's attitude towards the ancients is instructive here -- and not merely of historical interest -- because it is the basis of Hegel's theory of the state. To understand Hegel's political theory is to interpret it as the reconciliation of the ancients and the moderns, and of the Greeks and the Christians.

In a series of lectures on the importance and relevance of classical education, which Hegel delivered as Rector of the Nurnberg Gymnasium between 1809 and 1815, he said that "(a) man must give himself completely to the ancients, receive 'bed and board' from them, in order to absorb their atmosphere, their ideas and customs, even their errors and prejudices, and to become at home in this world, which is the most beautiful that has ever been" (Quoted from Lowith, 1991:291). "The world to which the pupils must be educated is not a private world, but a res publica or polis. Man's place in it is not determined by his individual particularity, but by the extent of his contribution to one of its objective spheres." The humanistic purpose of education is to bring out "the capacity of the individual to participate in public life" (ibid., 293). To this end, the ancients are our model. They enjoyed "the inner unity of public and

private life" in the polis where public interests and private concerns were not yet separated and fragmented, as in the modern world (ibid., 293-4).

In the Philosophy of History, at the beginning of the section on the Greek world, Hegel writes that "[among the Greeks we feel ourselves immediately at home, for we are in the region of spirit." The Greek world "exhibits a concrete freshness of the soul's life." "[I]n a Unity which owed its origin to Spirit", "State, Family, Law, Religion" are in harmony with individuality (Hegel, 1956:223). "... [T]he freedom of the Individual... has not yet advanced to such a degree of abstraction, that the subjective unit is conscious of direct dependence on the general substantial principle -- the State as such" (ibid., 250-1). The life of the individual as free citizen is equivalent to his public life. "It was the right and duty of every citizen to deliver or to listen to orations respecting the management of the State in the place of public assembly, to take part in the exercise of the Gymnasia, and to join in the celebration of festivals" (ibid., 254). The free man as citizen is freed from domestic concerns, the family being the space to which women are confined. Similarly, he must be freed from "handicraft occupations", "the work of daily life" which is required to satisfy particular needs (ibid., 255).

Social labour is therefore "relegated exclusively to a class of slaves" (ibid.; see also Hegel, 1967:221). The ethical life of the state is reflected in the public activities of its citizens. "The Democratic Constitution is here the only possible one: the citizens are still unconscious of particular interests" (ibid., 252). Their interests are the public interests of the state. They live for themselves in living for their city-states. Hegel therefore writes -- and we cannot overestimate the importance of this sentence in understanding Hegel's conception of the Greek polis and of his political theory in general -- "Of the Greeks in the first and genuine form of their Freedom, we may assert, that they had no conscience (Hegel, 1956:253; my emphasis). It was only with the modern historical separation of society and state, when social labour was liberated so as to constitute its own "sphere of freedom", i.e., civil society as economy, that men as men, not only as citizens, were recognized for the first time as free and equal -- in their equality of needs and their freedom to satisfy them. This is the abstract freedom of the modern world distinct from the Greek conception, founded as it was on the identity of the citizen's life with his public life.

When individuals assert their right of conscience and particular interests, the state becomes

antagonistic to them. The unity of ethical life degenerates. Each side asserts its partial right and truth at the expense of the other, and both sides are, as a result, equally abstract and one-sided. When subjective freedom appeared in the ancient world, "it could not manifest itself in Greece otherwise than as a destructive element... It plunged the Greek world into ruin" (ibid., 253). Plato recognized the corruptive influence of subjective freedom but did not realize that it was "the pivot on which the impending world revolution (the spiritual subjectivity of Christianity) turned at that time" (Hegel, 1967:10). "Plato's Republic, which passes proverbially as an empty ideal. Is in essence nothing but an interpretation of Greek ethical life" (ibid.).

Freedom became concrete only with the dawn of the Christian era. The early Christians nevertheless conceived of two worlds, and freedom was rooted in transcendence from the bondage of the temporal world. The eternal, according to Hegel, must be brought back to the temporal, for only this is true (mediated) unity (Hyppolite, 1974:192). This is only possible in the modern era. The modern conceptions of subjectivity and particularity find their roots in the Protestant Reformation and the French Revolution. God and the transcendent world are brought back to this world in

the form of the state as objective spirit: the Idea of the state is "this actual God" (Hegel, 1967:279). The subjective principle which had destroyed the Greek polis is one of the main sources from which the modern state derives its strength (ibid., 161; for full quotation, see footnote 6 below). The modern constitutional state is no longer the simple natural unity of the Greek polis but the mediated unity that combines difference. Hegel did not advocate a return to ancient political life, however much he admired the Greeks since his youthful friendship with Hölderlin. The dialectic of the Idea of right is to reconcile the unity of ethical life, lost since the dissolution of the Greek polis, with the subjective principle of modern life. The time is now ripe for the reconciliation of the two in the modern state.

As Hegel puts it, "(t)he state is the actuality of the ethical idea" (Hegel, 1967:155). Instead of being in conflict with freedom, the well-constituted state actualizes freedom. But, if we are to understand the function and the end of the state as no more than the protection of property and personal freedom, the interests of the individual become the raison d'être of the state. This, according to Hegel, is to confuse the function of civil society with that of the state (ibid., 156). The state can justly demand from the

individual the fulfillment of duties in return for the particular freedom that is guaranteed to him by the state: "... (I)ndividuals have duties to the state in proportion as they have rights against it...Slaves have no duties because they have no rights..." (ibid., 162). These demands, understood as civic duties, must be fulfilled not only as obligations, as something external to and forced upon the individual (as in the case of oriental despotism); rather in the fulfillment of civic duties, concrete freedom is realized.

The state as the community as a whole is spirit in its objective form. The modern individual is shaped by institutions of all sorts, e.g., the family, the corporation. The state is what makes him a citizen, and as objective spirit, it is the highest form of social institution because all the different roles of the individual -- determined by the different social institutions to which he belongs -- are reconciled in his role as a citizen. The political subject or the citizen thinks and acts with the interest of the state (and of the community as a whole) in mind. The laws and practices of the rational state are such that the subject exercises his freedom by conforming to them. In orientating himself in this world of objective spirit, in fulfilling the values of the community, the individual's will is harmonized with the substantial

will of the state. We can call this the intersubjective social fabric wherein a social-political act comes to have a stable meaning (or a set of meanings) for the members of the community. Intersubjective social practices define (the meanings of) social and political institutions and bridge the barriers between the individual and the community, between the citizen and the state -- in short, between the subjective and the objective.

Now, the political regime which Hegel advocates is a constitutional monarchy. According to him, "(t)he development of the state to constitutional monarchy is the achievement of the modern world, a world in which the substantial Idea has won the infinite form of subjectivity. The history of this inner deepening of the world mind... the history of this genuine formation of ethical life(,) is the content of the whole course of world-history" (Hegel, 1967:176). However, he would emphasize "constitution" as much as "monarchy". In the fully developed state, the private, arbitrary character of the monarch has no place in government (ibid., 289). Under such a regime, the executive power and prerogatives of the monarch are constitutionally restricted. The role of the monarch is for Hegel more of symbolic significance (as the apex of government) than of actual political influence: "In a

well-organized monarchy, the objective aspect belongs to law alone, and the monarch's part is merely to set to the law the subjective 'I will'" (ibid.). In the last pages of the Philosophy of History, Hegel writes, "Yet with firmly established laws, and a settled organization of the State, what is left to the sole arbitrament of the monarch is, in point of substance, no great matter. It is certainly a very fortunate circumstance for a nation, when a sovereign of noble character falls to its lot; yet in a great state even this is of small moment, since its strength lies in the Reason incorporated in it" (Hegel, 1956:456). The will of the state is the general will with which the wills of the ruler(s) and of the ruled are in harmony.

Reason is spirit objectified in the government and the various agencies of the state as defined in the constitution (Hegel, 1967:217). An effective constitution must reflect the capacity of a nation for freedom (see p. 15 above). As for the modern state, "the two sides of the constitution bear respectively on the rights and the services of individuals... The principle of the modern state requires that the whole of an individual's activity shall be mediated through his will... (N)owadays respect for subjective freedom is publicly recognized in the fact that the state lays hold of a man only by that which is capable of being

held, i.e., external goods" -- not his own subjective beliefs or freedom of conscience (Hegel, 1967:291-2). In other words, the citizen has the right to satisfy himself as much as he has the duty to fulfill his obligations towards the state. But right and duty are not in conflict in the well-constituted state.

All human communities, irrespective of their particular political regimes or systems of government, have their own distinct sets of social values and codes -- their own mores and manners -- to which their members subscribe and by which they define themselves and experience the world. Is it not the case then that all human communities have to some extent reconciled the subjective and the objective? How then can Hegel speak of that reconciliation as the goal of history, which was only realized, or began to be realized, after 1789, and only in Europe? A clue to this problem can be found in paragraph 257 in the Philosophy of Right where Hegel defines the state at three different levels: the immediate, the mediate, and the actual or the concrete. At the level of immediacy, the state exists as the customs of a people. Hegel sometimes calls it the ethical substance of a people. In communities where individual liberties are not recognized, subjects exist as accidents to the substance of the state. They act out of habit or under compulsion, without rational

insight. As accidents, they can be dispensed with without undue damage to the welfare and the prestige of the state and of the community as a whole. Mediatly, individuals achieve consciousness of their political roles and duties. But it is only in communities whose political regimes are organized in such a way that rights are respected and freedom realized that the substantiality of the state is raised to the level of subjectivity, that is, to the level of full self-consciousness. In such a state, its citizens are free to pursue their own private ends. At the same time, they are fully aware of the interests of the state. In their activities, they harmonize private interests and public concerns. That is the telos of history, and history goes from substance to subject, from bondage to freedom. In the Preface to the Phenomenology of Spirit, Hegel writes that "everything turns on grasping and expressing the True, not only as Substance, but equally as Subject" (Hegel, 1977:9-10). Interpreted politically and historically, it means grasping the evolution of the Idea of the state from abstract freedom (i.e., slavery or the recognition of the right of one -- the oriental despot or the emperor) to concrete freedom (i.e., the modern constitutional state "Hegelianized"). This means tracing the evolution of history from the substantiality of undifferentiated

or total power (oriental despotism) to the differentiation of power and functions of the modern state.

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Modern European history is then the historical circumstances of Hegel's political theory; and the end of political history, as articulated in the dialectics of the Idea of Right in the preceding sections, is the interpretive standpoint of Hegel, from which the philosopher surveys the Whole, for he has "traversed the entire field" (Hegel, 1956:10). In the next part, I wish to travel back with Hegel, to the beginning of history, to the realm of undifferentiated and total power -- the empire of China.

PART TWO
THE BEGINNING OF HISTORY: THE EAST

CHAPTER I
HEGEL'S INTERPRETATION OF CHINESE HISTORY

"Is it always like that in China?"
"Always. For centuries now."
"We don't understand that at all. we
others. You know that..."
"Yes. But we understand. So we can't
understand you when you say, at the same
time. that you don't understand."
The Chinese is silent and then goes on:
"We know absolutely nothing about each
other, and that too, is something to
talk about, and understand..." (Duras,
1992:202-3).

Interpreting China

The first chapter of the Philosophy of History is a philosophical account of Chinese history. Its readers will recognize its peculiar character which is absent in the other chapters on the ancient world of Persia, Greece, and the Near East nations: Hegel writes as if everything that he says about China's ancient past applies equally to its present. The essential characteristics of a people that define their spirit -- i.e., their religion, political and social institutions, their science and language -- have remained the same in the case of China as they have always been in its past. Indeed, Hegel, who identifies

the Chinese empire as the beginning of history (insofar as we have the earliest records of an organized state and government), articulates the essential absence of distinction between China's past and present as the interpretive principle for the understanding of Chinese "history":

"With the Empire of China History has to begin, for it is the oldest, as far as history gives us any information; and its principle has such substantiality, that for the empire in question it is at once the oldest and newest. Early do we see China advancing to the condition in which it is found at this day..." (Hegel, 1956:116; emphasis mine).

I put the word history in quotation marks because for Hegel, in the absence of development in the spiritual contents of a people, there is, properly speaking, no history as such. "Every change is excluded, and the fixedness of a character which recurs perpetually, takes the place of what we should call the truly historical" (ibid.).

Now, in the famous Introduction, Hegel argues that the end, or the telos, of history is freedom (ibid., 39, 41, 48). The principle of freedom depends on the subject's capacity for moral decisions. Sublated ethically, it becomes the citizen's rational identification of his own interests with the interests of the state -- and of the ethical life of the

community (Sittlichkeit) in general (Hegel, 1967:108-110). Hegel therefore argues that the political state at the beginning of history must be characterized as unfree. Its subjects are compelled to obey the laws by force, without insight. Hegel characterizes this state of affairs in China by the principle of substantiality:

"The unity of substantiality and subjective freedom so entirely excludes the distinction and contrast of the two elements, that by this very fact, substance cannot arrive at reflection on itself -- at subjectivity. The Substantial (Positive) in its moral aspect, rules therefore, not as the moral disposition of the Subject, but as the despotism of the Sovereign" (Hegel, 1956:116).

I wish to examine each of these themes in turn against the notion of substance or substantiality: (1) immobility or nondevelopment, (2) absence of moral sense (moral autonomy or subjectivity), (3) despotism (and the absence of civil liberty).

The Immobile Empire

According to Hegel, for the Chinese, spirit and nature are indistinguishable. The East is so immersed in its substantiality that "it wears the appearance of spirituality still involved in the conditions of Nature... since Spirit has not yet attained

subjectivity" (ibid., 112). "In any direction, (the Chinese) is therefore dependent; in religion as well as in other things; that is dependent on objects of nature, of which the most exalted is the material heaven. On this depends harvest, the seasons of the year, the abundance and sterility of crops. The emperor, as crown of all -- the embodiment of power -- alone approaches heaven." "Heaven (Tien) has therefore no higher meaning than Nature" (ibid., 132). [8]

Hegel supports his interpretation by pointing to the common belief among the Chinese: the mutual influence between nature and human affairs. As the contemporary Chinese philosopher Fung puts it, "according to this doctrine, the Five Elements or Powers are five natural forces, each of which has its period of rise and decay. Both natural and human events are under the control of (the cycle of the natural elements)" (Fung, 1983:26, 162). When one element is in decline, another one will replace it. Dynastic cycle therefore follows the elemental cycle of nature: history and nature follow the same laws of Tien. Hegel writes that "(e)ach of the five elements has its genius (i.e., sculptured idol), distinguished by a particular colour. The sovereignty of the dynasty (i.e., the Manchu) that occupies the throne of China also depends on a Genius, and this one has a yellow colour" (Hegel,

1956:133). Chinese "history", barely distinguishable from nature, can only be the immutable repetition of the same, not the kind of dialectical history in which spirit breaks away from nature and progressively realizes itself in higher forms of culture, social institutions, and self-conscious knowledge.

The connection between Nature and Man in the Chinese Weltanschauung is most explicit in the person of the emperor. If the emperor governs well, this will be reflected in the favours and blessings of nature. If not, natural calamities will strike as a sign from Heaven.

"The relation to Tien is supposed to be such that the good conduct of individuals and of the Emperor brings blessing; their transgressions on the other hand cause want and evil of all kinds... If the Emperor behaves well, prosperity cannot but ensue; Heaven must ordain prosperity. A second side of this religion is, that as the general aspect of the relation to Heaven is bound up with the person of the Emperor, he has also its more special bearings in his hands; viz. the particular well-being of individuals and provinces" (Hegel, 1956:132).

Substantiality is therefore the underlying principle of the so-called harmony of Man and Nature. This harmony effectively neutralizes the negating activity of man, that is to say, the negation of nature into its Other (= spirit). The Chinese can only

understand themselves in terms of this harmony; this is the highest spiritual articulation of which they are capable. Like phenomenal consciousness which is always blind to, or has "forgotten", its previous shapes (i.e., its own history), the oriental consciousness is incapable of insight into its own underlying principle (that is, substantiality, or non-history). Only the philosopher who has followed the traces which spirit has left behind in its self-forgotten path can point to this principle and explain its implications in terms of the social and political institutions of the oriental world.

Despotism and the Submersion of Subjectivity

Hegel characterizes the Chinese state as that which in world history is closest to what he has called substance that is not mediated as subject. In other words, it is the single human culture that is closest to immediate substance, i.e., nature. "The circle that remains self-enclosed and, like substance, holds its moments together, is an immediate relationship, one therefore which has nothing astonishing about it" (Hegel, 1977:18-9). The Chinese state is the substance of which its subjects are the accidents; it subsists as an external force completely alien to them (Hegel, 1956:104; Hegel, 1967:105-6, 348). The subjects are

therefore unmediated by or unreconciled with the state. The state has the force of positivity: it appears to the subject as something that is given, like nature which exists prior to him and which subsists externally without him. The "accident" has its raison d'être in the substantial state and yet at the same time, it is wholly dispensable for the despotic state. The substance of oriental despotism is therefore independent of its accidents. The people have no insights into the universal interests of the state and of the community as a whole.

Whereas substance mediated as spirit is the authentic intersubjective social fabric wherein state practices are imbued with the consciousness and free will of the citizens, in oriental despotism, substance is subject only in the will of a single person, the despot or the emperor who rules over the state and the community. The state as (immediate) substance is identical with the absolute sovereign:

"[T]he substance is simply an individual -- the Emperor -- whose law constitutes all the disposition" (Hegel, 1956:120).

"...[S]ubstantial freedom must be distinguished from subjective freedom. Substantial freedom is the abstract undeveloped Reason implicit in volition, proceeding to develop itself in the State. But in this phase of Reason there is still wanting personal insight and will, that is subjective freedom; which

is realized only in the Individual, and which constitutes the reflection of the Individual in his own conscience" (ibid., 104).

The free subject acts by following the dictates of reason, whose legislative force resides in his own free will (i.e., Kant's moral imperative), intrinsic to himself as a subject. On the other hand, the oriental subject is confronted by the governing force as a completely external legislative principle. He has neither insight nor understanding. He is therefore not a citizen in Hegel's sense of the word. He follows only because he has to, compelled by an overwhelming outside force: "Where there is merely substantial freedom, commands and laws are regarded as something fixed and abstract, to which the subject holds himself in absolute servitude. These laws need not concur with the desire of the individual, and the subjects are consequently like children, who obey their parents without will or insight of their own" (ibid.).

Nevertheless, force in the form of the body politic as the state must have its own legitimacy or legitimization if it is to be more than brute force. The legitimizing principle is parental authority, which is to be the model for all other authorities. Thus the sovereign is the Father, the subjects the children, and the state proper (= the community) the family. (As an

example, it is interesting to observe that in Chinese, a good mandarin is referred to as a parental official (fu mu guan).) Social relations, from top to bottom, are defined patriarchally as the five duties (of the state and the family). Hegel quotes from Shu King:

"Five duties are stated... as involving grave and unchangeable fundamental relations. 1. The mutual one of the Emperor and people. 2. Of the Fathers and children. 3. Of an elder and young brother. 4. Of Husband and Wife. 5. Of Friend and Friend" (Hegel, 1956:121).

This legitimizing principle proves to be of great interpretive significance for Hegel. It means that the realms of the private (the family) and the political (the state) are undifferentiated, unmediated by the public realm (civil society as the system of needs, or the economy). (Here I follow the three dialectical moments of ethical life in the Philosophy of Right.) "[L]ike children [they] do not advance beyond the ethical principle of the family circle, and can gain for themselves no independent and civil freedom" (ibid., 123). The substantiality of the Chinese state shows itself here in the non-differentiation of its ethical life. The family is the basis of the state and the emperor justifies his rule not as the (constitutional) monarch, whose subjects recognize him in the discharge of their civic

duties, but as the patriarch of a people who have no clear sense of civic duty and liberty. In the section on the family in the Philosophy of Right, the dissolution -- the negation -- of the family is the beginning of civil society. Family members must be able to break off their ties with their families in order to function as independent members of civil society, to work for a living and to look after their own interests as well as the state's. Independent personality, on the basis of enlightened self-interest, is the foundation of state and society in the West, where ethical life sustains itself by differentiation. In the Chinese state, however, there can be no free personality because the members never go beyond the family. As Hegel puts it, "the substantial basis of family relationships is rather the sacrifice of personality" (Hegel, 1967:39; see also *ibid.*, 112, 115-6). The subjects are therefore not free producers (who labour for themselves in civil society or economy) but are rather children (who work for their families and the state). Because the state rests on the family, it guards itself precisely against the latter's dissociation which is prerequisite to the formation of civil society (and independent personality). Put it another way, the smallest unit on which the Chinese state depends is the family, not the citizen or the

free person, as it is the case in the modern constitutional state.

Just as the the Chinese state is patriarchal, so it is also despotic. If patriarchy legitimizes the state, absolute power maintains it. Just as Montesquieu who characterizes the principle of despotism as fear, so Hegel argues that the effect of despotism is the submersion of subjectivity. [9] A people who are neither free nor autonomous can have no sense of duty, virtue, and responsibility. Hegel has a very low opinion of the Chinese character as the product of patriarchy and despotism. If the Chinese fulfill any official or political obligation, it is out of fear, i.e., the threat of severe penalty. It is in this context that Hegel writes: "It is not their own conscience, their own honour (i.e., the mandarins') which keeps the offices of government up to their duty, but an external mandate and the severe sanctions by which it is supported" (Hegel, 1956:127). But if the mandarins have no sense of honour, the common subjects are even worse:

"As no honor exists, and no one has an individual right in respect of others, the consciousness of debasement predominates, and this easily passes into that of utter abandonment. With this abandonment is connected the great immorality of the Chinese. They are notorious for deceiving wherever they

can. Friend deceives friend, and no one resents the attempt at deception on the part of another, if the deceit has not succeeded in its object, or comes to the knowledge of the person sought to be defrauded. Their frauds are most astutely and craftily performed, so that Europeans have to be painfully cautious in dealing with them" (ibid., 131; emphasis mine).

How did Hegel arrive at a view of the moral character of the Chinese (or rather the lack thereof) diametrically opposed to the moral teachings of Confucianism and the legitimizing principles of the Chinese state? [10] His interpretation of Chinese ethical life seems to be paradoxically confirmed by the moral teachings of Confucius and the Confucians. Confucian moral precepts are singularly well suited for the rationalization of the social institutions of the family and the state. Confucius teaches that "harmony within the family is the root of good government in the state." When he was asked why he did not become a public servant, he replied, referring to Shu Ching (or the Book of History) that filial piety is already a public service (Fung, 1983:64). The notion of filial piety changed over time, from Confucius (551-479 BC) to the Confucians of the Ch'in (225-207 BC) and the Han (206 BC-220 AD) dynasties, who laid the foundation for the eventual triumph of Confucianism over the other competing schools of thought. But its core elements had remained constant enough to support Hegel's analysis of

the Chinese state. Instead of dissolving the family (an essential moment of Sittlichkeit), Confucian moral precepts maintain the family in perpetuity, even when the parents are dead. Confucius insists that mourning for their deaths should not be less than three years (roughly 25 months) (ibid., 63; Hegel, 1956:121). One's filial duties do not end there. One should "serve the dead as one serves the living, and serve the departed as one serves those who are present: this is the height of filial piety" (ibid., 359). The obligations towards one's ancestors are therefore as important as one's obligations in the present. In essence, an individual is always a child, a child of the parents (living or dead) and of the ancestors (Hegel, 1956:122-3).

The neo-Confucians later radicalized this doctrine. For them, the sense of filial duty must be internalized to the extent that a person "should not forget his parents in a single lifting of his feet, nor in the utterance of a single word" (Fung, 1983:358). Every action he does must be performed so that it renews the memory of the parents and ancestors; so that it furthers the reputation of the family; so that it carries on its unfinished business (ibid., 359). In this context, it is interesting to observe that Hegel was able to trace out the logical conclusions of Confucius's teachings as articulated by the later

Confucians. Whereas the ethical qualities of the individual at different stages of Sittlichkeit are necessarily different according to Hegel -- love for the family member; self-interest for the bourgeois; sense of duty for the citizen -- the ethical qualities (= the virtues) of the individual, in the Chinese state at the stage of non-differentiation, are necessarily the same. Thus, for the later Confucians, filial piety is the basis of all other virtues, i.e., true human-heartedness (jen), true manners (li), true righteousness (i) (Fung, 1983:360). The person who has not served his parents well cannot serve the ruler (the state) well, and if he can serve neither the family nor the state, he cannot have a "proper" personality according to the four virtues. To the extent that this radical notion of filial duty is established in the outlook of a person, this outlook must, properly speaking, be characterized as moral -- if by moral we mean the interiority or the constant introspection of one's actions, feelings, and utterances. In this sense, Hegel was simply wrong to say that the Chinese were devoid of subjectivity -- for what is subjectivity, but interiority and introspection?

For Hegel, however, there is another side of morality, namely, autonomy. The first dialectical moment of morality involves the withdrawal of the will

from its external embodiment in the thing (i.e., property). But the internalized will (the moral will) must then act according to the ideal, that is, according to what is right. The autonomy of the moral will is such that it is free to act according to what is right only when it is free from all external pressures, institutional constraints, and therefore family obligations (Hegel, 1967:66, 75-6). The moral subject is completely alone in his autonomy, the dictate of his conscience his only obligation. According to Hegel's criteria, the Chinese subject is never moral or autonomous because his "moral" obligation is always to his family, not to an internal ideal, that is, to the moral law in Kant's sense. Confucius or Kant, family duty or the moral law -- that is the ultimate moral opposition between the modern West and the ancient East. If the subject acts according to what is right from the standpoint of the one, he will appear immoral or absurd from the standpoint of the other. Montesquieu observes:

"It is strange that the Chinese, whose life is entirely directed by rites, are nevertheless the most unscrupulous people on earth. This appears chiefly in commerce... Everyone in China has had to be attentive to what is useful to him; if the rascal has watched over his interests, he who is duped has had to think of his own... [I]n China, deceit is permitted.... [L]et us not compare

the morality of China with that of Europe" (Montesquieu, 1992:321).

A Chinese who cheats his friends and associates in business may appear outrageous to Montesquieu, Hegel, and some 19th century European merchants (perhaps); he may nevertheless do so in the interests of his family business. He may be high-handed, but he is not necessarily immoral from the Chinese perspective. If, on the other hand, he raises his hand to his parent, he would have committed not only a sin but a mortal crime, punishable by death. In Hegel's Europe, presumably it would merely be bad manners.

If one recalls the centrality of the Oedipal myth in western literature and psychology, one can appreciate the awesome (positive) power of the Confucian Weltanschauung to hold out against any internal threat to the stability of the family and the foundation of the state. Filial piety excludes the possibility of parricide (and by extension regicide) even at the symbolic level. Was it an accident that there was never a Charles I or a Louis XVI in China? (Max Weber, criticizing the lack of constitutionality in the government of Germany, once commented that it was unfortunate that the Germans had never chopped off the head of a Hohenzollern.) Was it an accident that the destruction of a dynasty in China was always

replaced by another dynasty, that there was never a complete overthrow of the regime -- Justified on the basis of a different conception of government -- comparable to the destruction of l'ancien regime in the West, at least not until 1911 and 1949, long after China's catastrophic contact with the West? It took the complete destruction of a worldview, a way of life, and the deepest national humiliation -- Hegel and Marx might call it education! -- of the Chinese to bring about fundamental change. According to Hegelian principles, to tear asunder the substantiality at the foundation of a people, it takes "the greatest pain and labour of the negative". The work of the negative, the work of historical man, showed itself in the spiral of wars, civil wars, and revolutions before China was compelled to enter the modern world. In the process, the historical fate of "the immobile empire" was linked up with the rest of the world.

Hegel did not anticipate this eventuality. He was only concerned with the past and the present, not with the future. He wrote at a time when China was still isolated from the West. A decade after his death in 1831, the thundering sounds from the cannons on British gunboats announced the beginning of the first Opium War and the end of China's long isolation. The student of Hegel and China is compelled to ask: Does

the history of modern China invalidate Hegel's interpretation? Could its unfolding be accounted for according to Hegelian principles? To answer these questions is to recognize the historical limitations as well as the insights of his interpretation. And it is to these questions that we now turn.

CHAPTER II

THE HISTORICAL STATUS OF MODERN CHINESE HISTORY

The conception of China as the immobile empire, which was popular among western writers, could be found in almost all western literature dealing with China in the preceding three centuries. It could be found in the polemics between the European sinophiles and sinophobes of the 17th and the 18th centuries, originated from the writings of the Jesuits in China. The same theme was echoed in the writings of the British merchants, imperialists, and politicians of the 19th century. These men arrived at the same conclusion but with a different understanding of the phrase. Whether China was immobile because it was perfect in its cultural and political institutions, or because it was stagnant and incurably corrupt, the same theme recurred time and again in the history of the literature.

Since the time of Marco Polo but particularly in the 18th century, China was "all the rage" in Europe (Peyrefitte, 1992:20-8). Chinese handicrafts, particularly porcelain sets (hence the word 'china'), were popular among cultured members of high society. In less frivolous circles, philosophers, scholars, and economists of the Éclaircissement used virtuous China

as a foil to decadent Europe. Every aspect of European society was held up to examination and criticism by the light of reason. Christianity, hereditary monarchy, scholastic philosophy were all called into question. By contrast, China was hailed as the perfect model, the land of atheism, benevolent despotism, and social harmony. Leibniz proposed the universal adoption of the ideographic writing system. Voltaire (at least in his early and middle career) believed that the Chinese emperor ruled by moral authority, accepting advice and reprimands from his advisors, men of letters who had achieved literary and moral excellence (Peyrefitte, 1992:26; J.-R. Armogathe, 1976:27-9). The physiocrat Quesnay defended his doctrine on the grounds that it accorded with the "Chinese notions of cosmic harmony, the primacy of agriculture, and the role of the state as the organizer of the economy" (ibid., 26-7). Enlightenment scholars were critical of everything European and blind to any defect in Chinese society. Montesquieu was the most famous exception to this general adulation.

In the 1790s, Lord Macartney's Embassy to China, a diplomatic mission which was followed closely by all of Europe, for the first time produced eye-witness accounts which were less than entirely flattering. (The most far-sighted and balanced of the

numerous accounts, namely, the series of memoranda which contained Macartney's analyses of Chinese politics and culture to the British Cabinet, was not released by the government until the last years of the 19th century.) From this began the avalanche of negative criticism of China in Europe. Hegel himself studied these accounts carefully; he mentioned Macartney's mission at least twice in the Philosophy of History (Hegel, 1956:122, 133). Indeed Hegel's characterization of the Chinese often reads like exact reproductions of accounts by John Barrow, the Stauntons, and other members of the Macartney mission. [11] As Alain Peyrefitte puts it, Hegel's criticism was as much a reflection of, as it was an influence on, this cultural and perceptual change in Europe (Peyrefitte, 1992:489-90).

Hegel's interpretation can be summarized thus: China is what it is and cannot be other than what it is. The exclusion of otherness is what makes it non-historical. This state of affairs will last so long as China remains in its isolation. And this is the basic premise of Hegel's interpretation, namely, a nation as substantial as China will never, on its own, break out of the background of unreflective relationships and activities characteristic of age-old customs. Hegel's discussion of China ends here.

However, a nation that tries to isolate itself may nevertheless be drawn into contact by another "expansionist" nation. Expansionism seeks not only contact but domination. Just as there are historical forces which compel one nation to isolate itself from the world, so there are equally powerful forces which compel another one to expand across the globe. Hegel's discussion does not mention the possibility of an outside force intruding in China. After all, it is not his philosophical task to predict the future, to guess whether or not such an influence would materialize -- and if it would, from what source and when. But there is no a priori reason for Hegel to exclude such a possibility. In his examination of the Macedonian intrusion in Greece, which precipitated the fall of the Greek polis, Hegel argues that Greek culture was preserved by the intrusion (Hegel, 1956:223-4). In his discussion of the world-historical significance of Napoleon in Jena in 1806, he argues that a foreign invasion could compel a country (i.e., Prussia), which had lagged behind the times, to keep up with History (Löwith, 1991:215). In some cases, foreign intrusions could take on a certain world-historical significance. I argue that this was the case in the confrontation between China and the West in the 19th century.

Indeed, how long could China hold out against the ever-expanding trade and the political influence of Europe in the 19th century -- the century of European imperialism -- and sustain its self-imposed isolation? The new critical attitude of the Europeans prepared the way for an imperialistic European foreign policy towards China. In Hegel's lifetime and shortly thereafter, History was already knocking on the door of the Middle Kingdom, the first time in peace (Lord Macartney, 1792), the second time in war (1840). As Lucien Bianco writes, "before recent changes in the school curriculum, the Opium Wars were the gong that announced China's entrance on the stage of world history..." (Bianco, 1971:2).

The Opium War in 1840 was the first violent confrontation between China and the West. A weak state, aware of its own precarious position among other hostile states, might have a chance of survival by skillfully playing a diplomatic balancing act. A weak state, unskilled in European diplomacy, with pretensions to universal greatness and cultural superiority but without the guns to back them up, was bound to provoke contempt. [12] Half a century of European writings on China, to which Hegel himself contributed, provided the philosophical rationale for that contempt. This representation of China presented

the Chinese as less than equal to the Europeans at every level -- morally, religiously, intellectually, politically, and scientifically. To represent is to have power over what is represented, and to be powerless is to have no power over how one is represented. For the Europeans, it was a matter of translating the various theories and representations of China into actual foreign and trade policies. If China would not change by itself, the outside world was prepared to force it to change.

This confrontation was not accidental. Europe, and England in particular, was first driven to trade with China and later to dominate it by powerful historical forces intrinsic to its society. In the Philosophy of Right (paragraphs 243-248), Hegel has already charted the course of the dynamical development of civil society in the West. He argues that colonialism is necessarily the outcome of advanced civil society (Hegel, 1967:151-2). According to his analysis, economy in a state of unimpeded activity leads to rapid expansion in population and industry. Phenomenal wealth is generated by linking together the needs of individuals who demand an ever expanding production of goods and services in order to satisfy themselves (ibid., 149-150). But the unequal distribution of wealth results in "a rabble of

paupers"; and the specialization of tasks in the production process robs the workers of any enjoyment of life and freedom in civil society (ibid.). Hegel was disturbed by the growing phenomenon of poverty, particularly in England. The excess of production is left unconsumed by an increasing population of paupers. Poverty results in the "loss of the sense of right and wrong, of honesty and self-respect" essential to being a bourgeois and a citizen (ibid., 150). To support the poor through charity would rob them of self-respect as useful members of society; it is also against the basic principle of social labour in civil society. To give them work while production is already excessive would only perpetuate the problem. The only solution, according to Hegel, is to seek new markets overseas, in backward and poorer countries (ibid., 151): "The mature civil society is driven" to "colonizing activity" which offers "a part of the population a return to life on a family basis in a new land and so supplies itself with a new demand and field for its industry" (ibid.).

The colonizing activities of the Europeans and the Japanese in East Asia led to the collapse of the Chinese empire: the French annexed Annam (Vietnam), the British Burma, the despised Japanese Korea. China itself fell to pieces when the western powers established "extra-territoriality" in Chinese

territories in which western jurisdictions and administrations would apply and from which Chinese nationals were excluded. This pseudo-legalistic principle showed that China in the late 19th century ceased to exist as a sovereign country.

In this historical context, Marx wrote the following lines in 1853:

"It is almost needless to observe that, in the same measure in which opium has obtained the sovereignty over the Chinese, the Emperor and his staff of pedantic mandarins have become dispossessed of their own sovereignty. It would seem as though history had first to make this whole people drunk before it could rouse them out of their hereditary stupidity" (Marx, 1983:343).

Because of the erosion of the authority of the ruling elite and the imminent collapse of the Chinese state, the Chinese masses, who had not been concerned with the affairs of the state, became aware of the dangers that threatened the very survival of the country. According to Hegelian principles, a people who had been excluded for centuries from government, who therefore had no practical knowledge of the affairs of the state, could only be awakened to the political realities of their country and the insecurity of its position by the greatest catastrophe. The vast majority of the Chinese subjects had no "history" because they had been non-political. (This was the consequence of despotism,

which excluded any meaningful political participation for the political subjects.) Only when the sovereignty of the state was seriously challenged could such a people be politicized. Only then could they begin to think for themselves concerning the necessary conditions for the sovereignty and security of state and country and to fight actively to bring about these conditions. In this Hegelian context, war is not necessarily a bad thing. As the failure of diplomacy and government, and an imminent threat to the social order, war is not an accident, something best to be avoided. There is an "ethical moment in war" and it is the awakening of political consciousness among the citizens. For it is "the duty (of the citizen) to maintain this substantive individuality, i.e., the independence and sovereignty of the state, at the risk and the sacrifice of property and life..." (Hegel, 1967:134; see also Hegel, 1977:287-9).

Hegel would probably have viewed the intrusion of the western powers in China favourably, as the attempt of History to end the isolation of China, to break the non-historical patterns of its temporal existence, and to "historicize" its people. What does it mean for a people to become historical? It means that they must become politically conscious, to become aware of their political duty as citizens: this is the

pre-condition of freedom. At the stage of ethical life, duty must not be understood as an external imposition, but as a right actualized: one cannot have right without duty -- "slaves have no duties because they have no rights, and vice versa" (ibid., 162). An actual or concrete right pre-supposes that the will of the citizen is in harmony with the will of the state. In the case of China, Hegel would probably think that only the radical phenomenon of war could bring about this "ethical moment" because the Chinese state had treated its subjects as slaves and children, rather than as citizens, in the course of its long history.

In the historical confrontation between China and the West, we find another example of the forces of negation at work in the historical-political field. For Hegel, the dialectic of domination leads to self-consciousness. In the history of modern China, western imperialism leads to Chinese nationalism. Before China's contact with the West, the Chinese subject is unreflective, according to Hegel. He leads his life as a simple affirmation of the unchanging dictates of age-old customs. But Western imperialism undermines the sovereignty of the Chinese state and calls into question the validity of its customs. The Chinese are compelled to reflect on their own political and cultural conditions. In his confrontation with an

other, the Chinese subject acquires knowledge of the other. But, as Hegel has argued, only by confronting an other can one be shaken out of the unreflective attitude to which the unmediated substance of customs has limited us (Hegel, 1977:111). What is true for consciousness is equally true for nations. Hegel's philosophy of right shows that subjectivity (or subjecthood) and reflection are the pre-conditions of concrete freedom. Here, he contrasts substance with subject. For China to break out of the substantiality and the non-historical nature of its existence, the entire Confucian edifice, the substantial basis of Chinese customs, would have to be undermined. [13]

In this confrontation, dialectical-historical forces came into play which worked as the background to the actions of individual actors. Hegel teaches that in our interpretations of history, we must pay attention to these dialectics. Individual actions, insofar as they are historically significant, only make sense in these contexts. Hegel argues that historical actors are never aware of the historical significance and full implications of their actions. Even historians, with hindsight, must remain ignorant of the full and final meanings of historical events and people. Only the philosopher is privileged to trace out the dialectics at work, and only at the final stage of history when

the absolute standpoint becomes attainable. The morality and the wisdom of historical actors are therefore of limited interest to the historian and the philosopher: historical meanings necessarily go beyond the meanings which the actors attribute to their actions. The philosopher must look at the whole; he must look beyond particular human sufferings and injuries to one's country to which the pitying heart and the proud nationalist are limited in their historical understanding. What matters is that the world spirit achieves its goal, and for that, the well-being of nations and the happiness of individuals are sacrificed in the course of history (Hegel, 1956:33).

Our interpretation of modern Chinese history necessarily goes beyond Hegel's own account because his own interpretation simply did not prepare for the direction in which East-West relations were to take after his death. But as we must confront the limitations of Hegel's account of China, we have seen that the application of Hegelian categories nevertheless provides many interesting and fruitful insights. We must learn to see the historical forces that were at work in European and Chinese societies and which compelled the individual actors to act the way they did. We cannot understand modern Chinese history

simply by condemning the imperialism and the arrogance of the West or the myopia and the xenophobia of the Chinese ruling elite. When the emperor Qianlong rejected the British proposals for the expansion of Sino-British trade, the permanent stationing of a British envoy in China, and the mutual exchange of ambassadors, he did not know that the rejection of diplomacy was an invitation to the use of force. His decision was driven by age-old customs, by the belief that China had nothing to learn from the West. If the western nations wanted to come to offer tributes, he was willing to extend this privilege. But he would not establish relations on a diplomatic basis (see note 12). When William Jardine manipulated the British Cabinet into the first Opium War and when Palmerston authorized the deployment of a contingent British fleet to protect British interests, they were acting out of the most immediate personal and national interests. They also believed that British imperialism was a civilizing force for the rest of the world. It is easy to condemn but difficult to understand. If we look at this historical period from the standpoint of the dialectic of domination and self-consciousness, then western imperialism in the end modernized China and prepared it for participation in the 20th century. The modern Chinese, insofar as he is led to reflect upon

the conditions of his own country, is a citizen; he is no longer mere substance but subject.

For Hegel, the end or the goal of dialectical history is freedom. Only historical man is capable of working towards freedom; only political institutions can evolve in order to realize civil liberty. For freedom is not something an individual can realize on his own. It can only be achieved in history, in social-political institutions. Hegel argues that the Orient is only suitable for despotism; the logic of his conceptual scheme excludes the Orient from history -- from the category of the historical. To argue that the East is unfree amounts to saying that it is non-historical. It can have no conception of liberty. Therefore it has no history. The imperialism of the West in the past has put China on the world-historical stage. China, perhaps by its sheer physical size and vast population, has survived its confrontation with the West and has remained intact today. And in the process, its fate is permanently linked with the rest of the world. But to become historical, according to Hegel, is to become aware of the value of freedom and to struggle to realize it, viz., to give it concrete expressions. It is to demand the institutional recognition of the rights of personality and moral autonomy. This, it seems to me, is how Hegel would have

understood the challenge of China today and the meaning of modern Chinese history of the past two centuries. There is nothing a priori in Hegel's dialectical concept of history to prevent the Orient, and China in particular, from becoming historical, except that his interpretation of China would no longer be true. But this too is a Hegelian truth, namely, consciousness, having become conscious of itself, is no longer what it was; a truth, once articulated, is sublated. In the end, even Hegel, who claimed to be at the standpoint of the absolute, did not escape from this fundamental truth of his own dialectics; he too was a child of his time (Hegel, 1967:11; Habermas, 1974:194). What are the implications of the post-Hegelian historical developments of the world -- and of China in particular -- for Hegel's notion of the totality of history? We will examine this question in the next, and our last, chapter.

CHAPTER III

CONCLUSIONS: SOCIETY EAST AND WEST

Hegel's philosophy of history is a profoundly "Euro-centric" interpretation of history, if I may use this word without value judgement or negative connotation. According to him, the centres of the spiritual development of humanity have always been Europe, the Mediterranean, and Palestine: "[T]he Mediterranean Sea is the unifying element, and the centre of World-History. Greece lies here, the focus of light in History. Then in Syria we have Jerusalem, the centre of Judaism and of Christianity[.]" "The Mediterranean is thus the heart of the Old World... Without it the History of the World could not be conceived" (Hegel, 1956:87). Northern Europe came to acquire world-historical significance at a later date, beginning with Caesar's conquest of Gaul. From then on, the centre of history shifted westward (ibid., 88). In Europe, spirit finally realizes itself in socio-political institutions, in philosophical-scientific thought. These places constitute the spiritual core of mankind; all the other places -- in

the Americas [14], in Asia, and in Africa -- are on the periphery, devoid of true spiritual significance.

If we accept this view in its entirety, the history of the world since Hegel's death in 1831 becomes highly problematic. As Habermas has written, "Hegel's political philosophy cannot simply be projected without difficulty onto the plane of the twentieth century" (Habermas, 1974:193). Indeed, his philosophy was called into question by historical events even before his death. Hegel had witnessed the fall of the Bourbons three times in his life, and he understood that the July Revolution in France in 1830 and the success of the Opposition in the elections in England were historical events which called into question the very basis of his philosophy (ibid., 176-7; Löwith, 1991:28). The fact of the revolution demonstrated that the right order of ethical-political life, which he had described in his political philosophy, was not realized. The period of the Restoration after the Napoleonic era was not the restoration of ethical order (which he had so longed for), but only a respite until the next round of revolutionary fury. The 19th century was a century of liberalism and nationalism -- precisely the kind of movements that, as Hegel had predicted, would perpetuate social unrest (Hegel, 1956:452). It was a

strange time for a philosopher to proclaim the end of history and the restoration of ethical life and order.

In the post-Hegelian period of history, we have witnessed the historical decline of Europe. As one historian has written, less than a century after Hegel's death, "what had been the centre of the world became merely 'the European question'" (Taylor, 1971:xxxvi). Hegel's acute historical sense came through when he predicted in the Introduction to the Philosophy of History that the future of the world was to be North America (Hegel, 1956:84-7). But this prediction was at variance with his historical philosophy, according to which Spirit had consummated its purpose already in Europe. The New World did become the most powerful nation in the history of the world, and Russia, traditionally the most backward of all the European countries, became its rival. In the century and a half since Hegel's death, many major events and movements of worldwide significance occurred outside of the spiritual core of Hegel's Europe. As the major European powers decolonized around the globe, particularly after the Second World War, the "periphery", in Asia and in the Middle East, came to take on a significance scarcely surmised even by the most far-sighted of the 19th century writers.

It is in this historical context that we, as readers of Hegel, must confront the historicity of his interpretations. Of the significant themes that emerge out of the post-Hegelian history of the world, this thesis has been concerned with two issues in particular: 1) the fragmentation, in advanced western countries, of civil society (the realm of particularities) against the unifying tendency of the objective spirit of the state; 2) the emergence of China as a world power and its profound political implications for world history.

The separation of state and society has been characteristic of the liberal phase of western capitalist development. After this phase, the welfare state came to intervene, leading to a reciprocal interlocking of the two spheres. The processes of production and commerce have become so complicated that the political mediation of the state becomes necessary in many areas (Habermas, 1972:195). Just as the state has acquired significant economic functions, so civil society has been politicized. While for Hegel civil society primarily denotes the economy, in contemporary political discourse it is "the homeground of difference", consisted of "churches, ethnic groups, social movements, unions, professional bodies, organizations for mutual aid and defence" (Walzer,

1993:46). According to Hegel, it is the realm of particularities, where individual desires, interests, and demands enjoy arbitrary freedom -- this is the right of civil society. Hegelian particularities are the motive forces that drive men to economic and productive activities. Particularities in contemporary society have taken on an overtly political dimension along ethnic, gender, and religious lines. As each sector asserts its right to satisfy its demands, society becomes fragmented, where the right of one group is asserted against the right of another. According to Hegel, it is the function of the state to resolve and reconcile the conflicting claims of different groups in society; individuals must recognize each other as fellow citizens, not only as opposing members of particular groups (Hegel, 1967:209-210). Only on this basis can duty and right be harmonized. When the state fails to reconcile conflicting claims, difference asserts itself in terms of the conflicts between opposing particularities.

In Hegel's terms, this is the failure of the state to sublimate civil society. As a result, the state is only a creditable institution in the eyes of particular groups when it is able to satisfy their demands. Indeed, it has no other reason to exist than to satisfy particular demands. But it is impossible to

satisfy demands that are by their very nature in conflict -- the satisfaction of one group implies the dissatisfaction of another group. The function of the Hegelian state is not to satisfy particular concerns or interests. To insist that this is the function of the state is to discredit it. For then the security and protection of property, personal freedom, and particular interests become the ultimate ends of the state. "(T)he interest of the individual as such becomes the ultimate end of their association, and it follows that membership of the state is something optional" (ibid., 156). If the welfare state does not provide the "welfare" that one deems as one's right to which one is entitled by the very fact that one says so, it is no longer necessary to respect the state, its laws, and its institutions. One can opt out or opt in depending on the benefit which the one alternative or the other provides. (If the voice of one person is not loud enough, then the grouping together of like-minded individuals would guarantee a louder voice and a greater demand.)

If we read Hegel in this way, then his theory of state and society could be interpreted as a powerful critique of contemporary civil society and of the political discourse that celebrates its fragmentation as "real" freedom against the power of the state.

Hegel, while he failed to foresee the direction of western society and prematurely proclaimed the end of history, may turn out to be a most effective critic of contemporary society: the political failure of the state to sublimate civil society can be interpreted as a critical problem for contemporary society. That Hegelian principles could work as criticism may at first sight seem to be against the very basis of Hegel's mature philosophy. Philosophy, according to him, always arrives too late to make any difference; it can only understand what has happened but it cannot tell us how to act except to accept "what exists" as rational and necessary. But this holds only in the context of the totality. We have seen that it is not possible to adopt the totality of Hegel's vision of the world and still make sense of modern and postmodern history. Nevertheless, he has spelled out the socio-political conditions in which individuals as citizens are reconciled with each other and with the state. These conditions can be used as categories by which the recent fragmentation of civil society and the loss of credibility of the state are to be understood. Hegel then provides us with a theoretical framework within which to analyze the breakup of community in contemporary society into groups along the lines of race, gender, age, and sexual orientation --

designations and divisions of individuals on the sole basis of the most particular, exclusionary, and the least universal of human characteristics. For Hegel, these characteristics are purely given, that is, substantial, while man (and woman) is true spirit only in his struggle to transcend the particularities and accidents of his birth, to reach the universality of thought (science/philosophy/ Wissenschaft), to achieve an understanding of his age, of the people and the cultures in it, and of the destiny of the species of which he is a member.

Hegel, like the Greek political philosophers before him, has been concerned with the right order of life. His answer is the ethical life of the state, in which individuals are determined as citizens fully aware of their rights and duties. This is only possible, and can only be known, at the end of history. But we have seen that it was not the case in Hegel's time, and it is not the case now: ethical life has not been realized. If anything, we are further away from it. And yet Hegel claims that his account of China is based on the absolute historical standpoint (or history understood philosophically as the standpoint of modern ethical life). If we are right in our assessments of contemporary society and of 19th century Europe, then his judgement of China was not the judgement of history

but the judgement of a philosopher. As the judgement of history, it has failed, or is at least historically limited. A limited judgement, by Hegel's own standards, is inherently abstract and one-sided; it means that it has failed to account for the Whole. Today China is undergoing changes faster and more fundamental than any period in its millennial history. Hegel, on the other hand, argues that to understand China is to understand its unchanging nature. But to say that Hegel is simply wrong is to find no merit in his interpretation of China; on the contrary, there are many insights in his account. We can say of his account of China what we have said of his account of civil society in the West: Hegel, having failed to foresee the radical historical changes which China was to undergo, has nevertheless provided an effective (if not complete) framework within which modern Chinese history can be understood.

Hegel often contrasts substance with subject. Substance is the pure given; it is what it is and is always the same. It does not differentiate itself and so everything foreign -- that is, everything other than what it is -- is excluded. A culture that is immersed in the substantiality of its millennial customs is driven to discourage innovation, to exclude foreign contact, and to isolate itself. It will believe that

the outside world has nothing to offer, that it is entirely self-sufficient and self-contained. Hegel has written that the knowing of oneself presupposes the knowing of an other (Hegel, 1977:104-5). In the confrontation between two consciousnesses, each realizes that the other is equally self-contained and independent; each is certain of itself but not of the other because neither side has been exposed to the other (ibid., 112, 113). A relationship can only be established through the mediation of a fight for recognition, a battle of nerves (or an actual battle) to prove who is willing to risk death and who is not. The first dialectical contact between consciousnesses is necessarily violent because the understanding of oneself and of the other is impossible in the absence of mediation. Something like the dialectic of self-consciousness was played out between two nations in the 19th century.

When the court of Qianlong replied to King George's request for the establishment of diplomatic relations, the letter was written in such a tone of haughty condescension that King George would have been insulted if he had read the original (Peyrefitte, 1992:288). The translators had to tone down the letter before it could be shown to the British king. With hindsight, the self-satisfied chauvinism and myopia of

the Chinese court were all the more remarkable in light of the fact that Guanlong was addressing the king of a country whose marine power could wipe out the entire coastal defence of China in the south and the south-east in a matter of weeks. But in the last years of the 18th century, China was not aware of its weakness, nor England of its strength.

The catastrophe of the Opium Wars was a profound tragedy of the first magnitude to the Chinese patriots and the literati. For the first time, the Chinese realized that another people could be militarily and technologically superior to them, even if they still insisted upon their cultural superiority. Both China and England were equally proud of themselves and certain of the superiority of their national achievements. While China wanted nothing more than to be left alone, certain that its superiority was recognized by all foreign nations, England demanded recognition as a world power, even if at first, it was willing to extend mutual recognition, on an equal basis, between the two countries. The confrontation could only be resolved through a fight, resulting in the relationship between a master and a slave, between a victorious nation and a prostrate one.

For Hegel, the process of self-consciousness is a kind of education. But it is also a process of

labour, and as the Christian myth has taught us, labour is pain, hardship, and toil. It took China almost a century and a half, a long series of national destruction and construction, before it could self-consciously pursue a policy of openness (1978), to establish permanent and regular contacts with the rest of the world. Such a self-conscious policy for the first time recognizes that other countries exist, that China cannot "do it" alone. (As late as the 1960s, Mao taught that China must rely on itself, that it could be great without help from others.) After years of catastrophe and the phenomenal sacrifice of lives and resources (which no national leaders, however great and visionary, could legitimately demand from their own people), only now can China try to determine its rightful place among the other nations of the world. One can only hope that it will escape from the myopia and chauvinism so characteristic of China for the past two centuries.

NOTES

1. Hegel is probably thinking of the rivalry between Caesar and Pompey, and earlier between Marius and Sylla, which polarized the people against the nobles. Machiavelli traces the conflict back to the enactment of the Agrarian Law which worked against the nobles by restricting the amount of lands that they could own as well as confiscating the excess of lands which they already owned. According to his analysis, the law eventually led to the end of Roman republicanism (Plutarch's "Life of Caesar" and Machiavelli's Discourses, book 1, ch. 37).

2. This is the basis of Hegel's critique of Kant's moral theory. Hegel wants to reconcile the political conception of freedom, which is Greek, with the Kantian notion of the free will, which is Christian in origin. We will examine this issue in detail in chapter 2, sub-section b on autonomous subjectivity.

3. As Alan Wood has pointed out in his Introduction, in the political and philosophical literature prior to Hegel's time, the term "civil society" is synonymous with the word "state" (Hegel, 1991:xviii). Thus Hegel's categories of state and society evolve directly out of modern western history. This social change is coeval with the transformation of the self-consciousness or the self-understanding of modern individuals as persons. In order to participate in civil society, we must first understand ourselves as persons and respect each other as such (Hegel, 1967:37).

4. For Hegel, the administration of justice, the police, and the corporation find their raison d'être in the economic sphere: the actualization of arbitrary freedom in the economic pursuit of private ends has to be guaranteed through the protection of property by the administration of justice (Hegel, 1967:80-1, 134, 145-6). Furthermore, in order to guard against contingencies, the institutions of the police and the corporation are needed. Polizei here is not necessarily the police force, but any public authority, and corporations are really guilds, professional bodies which represent the interests, and regulate the service standards, of their members. Examples in our time are the medical association and the law society.

5. Hegel's respect for civil society does not harmonize with the picture of the philosopher as the prophet of the total state. The picture of Hegel as an honorary liberal is equally misleading because civil society must be sublated by the state in the dialectic of the Idea of right, i.e., right as it is objectively actualized. These political categories can never capture Hegel's thought because they are all products of the Understanding, in other words, intellectual distinction without synthesis. Such categories must always remain abstract and one-sided. They can distinguish a given position and its opposite, but they can never reconcile their opposition. But reconciliation is the heart of the dialectic.

6. In this context, in two passages, Hegel argues explicitly that subjective morality is mediated, but not suppressed, in the ethical life of civil society and the state:

"But when subjective particularity is upheld by the objective order in conformity with it and is at the same time allowed its rights, then it becomes the animating principle of the entire civil society, of the development alike of mental activity, merit, and dignity" (Hegel, 1967:133).

"The principle of modern states has prodigious strength and depth because it allows the principle of subjectivity to progress to its culmination in the extreme of self-subsistent personal particularity, and yet at the same time brings it back to the substantial unity and so maintains this unity in the principle of subjectivity itself" (ibid., 161).

If one forgets the meaning of Aufhebung, or (mis)understands it as suppression, then it makes sense to interpret Hegel's theory of the state as the suppression of morality for reasons of state, in the name of political expediency. If Hegel were arguing for realpolitik or Prussian militarism, then he would be equally guilty of the one-sidedness of which Kant was accused: the opposite of Kant is equally one-sided. Whether Hegel's critique of Kant is ultimately justified, whether he succeeds in reconciling morality

and actuality, it is clear that the critique itself cannot be construed as a call for Machiavellianism.

7. He goes on to say that it is easy to find faults with existing institutions. But even the ugliest of men, cripples, and invalids are still living men. And it is life, "this affirmative factor which is our theme here." Thus any existing state, however defective, still has "in it the moments essential to the existence of the state" (Hegel, 1967:279). He thereby goes out of his way to neutralize any critical or practical implications of his political theory.

8. Not knowing Chinese, Hegel is simply wrong. Fung discusses five different meanings of Tien that are philosophically relevant:

(1) The material or physical sky, usually contrasted with the earth.

(2) The ruling heavenly king, an anthropomorphic figure.

(3) A traditional fatalistic or deterministic belief, similar to the Greek notion of fate.

(4) Nature, in contrast or in harmony with culture or human affairs. This is Hegel's understanding of the word throughout the text on China in the Philosophy of History.

(5) The ethical principle(s) of the universe (For a more detailed discussion, see Fung, 1983:31).

There is no doubt that all five meanings are intricately related. It would take a sophisticated linguist-philosopher to sort out their relationships.

9. Hegel's interpretation of China is remarkably similar to Montesquieu's account of oriental despotism in the Spirit of the Laws. For Montesquieu, each particular type of political regime has its own unique governing principle that determines the mores and manners of its subjects. He is less interested in the classification of political regime than in the effects which particular regimes have on their subjects. In the case of despotism, the ruling principle is fear. (Despotic regimes can also be characterized in terms of the lack of (public) virtue, moderation, and honour in their subjects, the respective principles of republicanism, aristocracy,

and monarchy (Montesquieu, 1992:21-29; Harder, 1983:84.) In the notorious passage in book 8, chapter 21 of the Spirit of the Laws, Montesquieu, emphasizing the principle of fear in Chinese despotism against the insistence of the Jesuits and other Sinophiles on Chinese virtues, writes that there is no question of "this honour of which one speaks among a people to whom one can compel to do nothing without the blow of the stick", <<... cet honneur dont on parle chez les peuples à qui on ne fait rien faire qu'à coup de bâton.>> To this passage, Montesquieu adds the well known footnote: <<C'est le bâton qui gouverne la Chine, dit le P. du Halde.>> (It turns out that he was quoting out of context: Father du Halde was only commenting on the general application of corporeal punishment by the stick in the Chinese penal system, not on China as a whole (Harder, 1983:86).)

10. In the text, we have asked how Hegel arrives at such a negative view of the Chinese "moral" character so contrary to the moral teachings of Confucius. We will now ask the same question of Montesquieu. Montesquieu explains: "Our missionaries speak of the vast empire of China as of an admirable government, in whose principle intermingle fear, honor, and virtue. I would therefore have made an empty distinction in establishing the principles of the three governments" (Montesquieu, 1992:126-7). In order to "save the appearance", to justify his system, Montesquieu has to show that either the Jesuits were deceived by appearance, or that they offered less than candid accounts in their Lettres édifiantes et curieuses for various reasons (e.g., the continuation of their China mission depended on Chinese good will). He believes that they were deceived by an appearance of order, that they were not guilty of any conscious duplicity (ibid.; Watson, 1980:18). It is well that the Chinese state justifies itself on the basis of moral precepts. But in its social and political practices, it cannot but follow the logic of despotism -- the rule of fear -- which Montesquieu has articulated in his book. A despot is understood as someone with absolute power, someone who makes laws but who is beyond the laws. The latter characteristic is what distinguishes the despot from the constitutional monarch. This characterization fits well with the various accounts of the power and prerogative of the Chinese emperor. If by chance an emperor is enlightened, that does not change the fundamental character of despotism or its effects on the subjects. In other words, the institutional form of despotism does not depend on the individual character

of the ruler (Watson, 1980:27). One of the senses in which the word "laws" is understood in the title of Montesquieu's book is the causal relationship between a determinant and an effect (Aron, 1989:49). The mores and manners of a people (the effects) under despotism (the cause) must be such as Montesquieu has described in his book.

11. One may compare Hegel's passage on "the great immorality of the Chinese" (Hegel, 1956:131) with the similarly damning accounts, among others, of Montesquieu, John Barrow, and George Thomas Staunton. Staunton's long preface to his ground-breaking translation of Ta T'sing Leu Lee, the Manchu penal code, is particularly relevant in this context. A substantial portion of the Spirit of the Laws is on China because China stands for oriental despotism (and its corresponding principle of fear) for Montesquieu. But the passage which describes the Chinese as "the most unscrupulous people on earth" in book 19, chapter 20 is particularly revealing. The uniformity of opinion among China experts in Europe is striking.

12. In any case, China could not be expected to know anything about the fine points of cabinet diplomacy, the protocol, conventions, and unwritten rules that governed interstate relations among the major European powers since the Westphalian Congress in 1648. Much has been written on the incompatibility between European diplomacy and the Chinese tribute system (e.g., Fairbank, 1979:158-163). Was Macartney, the quintessential cabinet diplomat, a victim of this incompatibility? He did not expect China to conform to the rules of European diplomacy, but he has been criticized for not conforming himself to the rules of the tribute system -- e.g., not prostrating himself before the Chinese emperor. Interesting as it is, one should not in the end overinterpret this incompatibility in the history of East-West relations.

13. In this context, the May Fourth movement in the late 1910s could be interpreted as the significant outcome of the dialectic of political consciousness. The movement advocated not timid reforms, but a fundamental revolution against the very ideological foundations of the Chinese state. Accordingly, it attacked the conceit of Confucianism and argued that Confucianism could not be equated with civilization as such but only with one particular civilization. And given the fact that this civilization was crumbling and proved itself utterly incapable of resisting foreign

intrusion, Confucianism was ill-suited for the future reconstruction of the Chinese nation. To rebuild China in the modern world, new ideas were needed, not only old Confucian values and ideals. The Confucian idea that the ruler was the patriarch of the people legitimized tyranny. Respect for the old and for one's ancestors undermined all innovations and individual initiatives. According to the leaders of the movement, the use of classical Chinese must be replaced by Chinese vernacular in order to facilitate cultural and scientific exchange. Xenophobia metamorphosed into xenophilia. Such brilliant writers and scholars as Yen Fu, Lin Shu, Hu Shih, Ch'en Tu-hsiu, Ts'ai Yuan-p'ei were not only well-versed in the Confucian tradition (in which they excelled but which they rejected); they were equally accomplished as scholars and students of western humanities; they were equally at home in German, French, and English and they were masters of Chinese prose. It was necessary to learn from the West and to study it. It is interesting to observe that Yen translated Hegel and Montesquieu, and Chen was as knowledgeable as any expert on the history of western political thought.

14. "[A]s a Land of the Future, [North America] has no interest for us here, for, as regards History, our concern must be with that which has been and that which is" (Hegel, 1956:87).

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