

WOULD HEGEL BE A 'HEGELIAN' TODAY?¹

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ABSTRACT: In this paper H. S. Harris argues that it is misguided to suggest that Hegel's philosophical project was a dialectical illusion generated by his historical situation and that he would never have believed that his vision was achievable if he had been faced with the world that we face today. Not only does Harris proclaim himself to be a Hegelian, he claims that Hegel would today also remain a Hegelian. He goes on to argue that despite the fragmentation of the twentieth century and the apparent collapse of the vision articulated in the French Revolution, Hegel's thinking continues to be relevant because although his philosophy is the 'comprehension of one's time', Hegel also produces a philosophy that is out of time and somehow final.

KEYWORDS: Hegel; Hegelianism; Time; Future; Forgiveness; Justice

If we can have a conference on the announced theme 'Hegel Today', it would seem that many of us must think that there is *something* still alive and relevant to our situation in Hegel's thought. Yet this does not entail that any of us must think that his basic project was valid. It is demonstrated easily, in fact, that some of the most intelligent and dedicated contemporary students of Hegel's work have concluded that his philosophical project was a dialectical illusion generated by *his* historic situation; and that he would never have believed that what he set out to do was achievable, if he had been faced in his maturity with the world that we face.

Thus Emil Fackenheim concluded in the 1960s that 'such are the crises which have befallen the Christian West in the last half-century that it may safely be said that, were he alive today, so realistic a philosopher as Hegel would not be a Hegelian';² and Charles Taylor concluded ten years later that 'his actual synthesis is quite dead. That is, no one actually believes his central ontological thesis, that the Universe is posited by a Spirit

1. [Editors' Note: The editors of this volume would like to thank Jim Devin, the executor of Harris' papers for making this text available. The text is the 'Presidential Address' delivered on 2 October 1980 to the *Hegel Society of America* meeting at Trent University, Peterborough, Ontario. The presentation is previously unpublished and this version was transcribed from a typescript of the manuscript by Jim Devin. Readers interested in the work of H. S. Harris should visit the digital repository of selected works, <https://www.library.yorku.ca/dspace/handle/123456789/883>.

2. Emil Fackenheim, *The Religious Dimension in Hegel's Thought*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1967, p. 224; cf. also p. 12.

whose essence is rational Necessity'.³ Others have arrived at a similar verdict for their own reasons, including our Vice President [Merold Westphal].⁴ But at this first conference in Canada I shall concentrate attention—*honoris causa*—upon these two Canadians.

What these critics are saying is both very easy, and very difficult, to refute. Thus, one can refute Taylor's empirical claim that 'no one is a Hegelian today' in the defined sense, by pointing to Clark Butler, who calms that Hegel's diagnosis of his time led to a 'comprehension of God, revolution and their inner identity' which is precisely what *our* time needs because the revolution that began in 1789 is still on going.⁵ But Taylor's generalization was plainly intended to cover only thinkers as 'realistic as Hegel' and (in spite of Taylor's own record of youthful protest) one may doubt whether he would be seriously disturbed by the counterexample of one who is prepared to take the 'counter-culture' of the 1950s and 1960s as evidence that the revolution is still on going.

A far more impressive example can be offered in *confirmation* of Fackenheim's thesis, and as the exception that proves the rule for Taylor's. Geoffrey Mure was committed to Hegel's 'central ontological thesis' all his life. But he was too well schooled in the history of philosophy since Kant to affirm it categorically—and too careful a student of Hegel to be as sure as Taylor is, that it was indeed what Hegel meant to affirm. Yet in his *Idealistic Epilogue*, published just before his death in 1979, he validates Fackenheim's thesis that 'From so fragmented a world [as ours] the Hegelian philosophy would be *forced* to flee, as surely as Neoplatonism was forced into flight from Imperial Rome.... such a resort to flight would be tantamount to radical failure'.⁶

Mure's last verdict upon an academic career that began just before the First World War, reads thus:

The fact is I am sick to death of the spectacle of humanity en masse. I don't doubt that at least from the beginning of this century, perhaps earlier, the human species has declined in quality in inverse proportion to its increase in quantity; declined in thought and action, art and morality, indeed by any standard you can think of except perhaps health and expectation of life. Leaving out black Africa, for which I have no figures, there are now more than three thousand million human beings alive, over-populating this planet by at least 40 percent. The majority of them are not significantly discriminable from one another and are, quite consistently, egalitarian in outlook so far as they have any outlook. The real danger with which

3. Charles Taylor, *Hegel*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1975, p. 538.

4. Merold Westphal, *History and Truth in Hegel's Phenomenology*, Atlantic Highlands, Humanities Press, 1979, pp. 199-200. It is fair to say, in criticism of Westphal's 'adherence' to Fackenheim's view, that it is internally inconsistent. For if Hegel could believe in the sort of millennium that Westphal ascribes to him, then he was never the hard-headed realist for which Fackenheim takes him. If Westphal agrees with Fackenheim about *that*—as I do—then he ought to have been driven to re-examine his own interpretation of the supposed final solution reached in the *Phenomenology*.

5. Clark Butler, *G. W. F. Hegel*, Boston, Twayne Publishers, 1977, pp. 9-10. That Butler holds Hegel's central ontological thesis in something like the form in which Taylor states it, is shown—in my opinion—by his declared allegiance to Whitehead's philosophy of nature (see pp. 11, 174-77).

6. Fackenheim, *The Religious Dimension in Hegel's Thought*, p. 236.

the uncontrolled proliferation of mankind threatens us is not starvation. Science for some time will produce a sufficient quantity of food at the expense of its quality to balance Nature's continuing production of more and more inferior human beings. The danger is that, after a little token bloodshed and a great deal of dishonourable appeasement, man will lie flattened under the tyrannies which egalitarianism inevitable begets. The old like me, as they take us to the concentration camp, will cry with Cleopatra, 'The odds is gone, / And there is nothing left remarkable / Beneath the visiting moon'. That is why I shut my eyes and reflected on what an individual can be and has been.⁷

If *this* is what the Hegelian "peace" between faith and philosophy' leads to at the present time, then we may well feel, like Fackenheim, that 'The time is not ripe for the self-elevation of thought to the divine side of the divine-human relation, for *no* time has *this* kind of ripeness.'⁸ Mure looks back to the world before 1914 as a time of 'ripeness'. On the other side, Merold Westphal thinks that the author of the *Phenomenology* looked *forward* to a time of 'ripeness' instead of what actually came to pass between 1814 and 1914. Both of them are mistaken in their conception of 'ripeness'. The optimistic Hegel of 1807 did learn indeed that he was mistaken in 1814. But Hegel as a philosopher never *needed* that lesson (if he had needed it, he would after 1814 have denounced the prophetic pretensions, which Westphal claims to find in the *Phenomenology*, as violently after 1814 as he denounced the philosophical prophecies after that date). He lived in *two* times: a time of social hope and a time of social despair (for that is how the century that Mure looks back to with homesick longing appeared to Hegel as it opened). For Hegel personally, the time of social hope was a period in which he was driven as near to despair as he was capable of coming; while the time of social despair was for him personally the moment of success and universal recognition. He well might have come to the conception of philosophy that he held in those last years because of this complex reversal: and his doctrine of the 'ripeness' of his time then might have rested upon the experienced ambivalence of the 'times' in his experience. But in fact he did not come to his view in this way; and the only difference that Hegel's experience of the 'carrousel of time' makes to his concept of its 'ripeness' is that it enables *us* to demonstrate that he was always fully conscious that systematic philosophy as 'time comprehended' is 'absolute', that is to say not dependent upon any time at all. We can show this, because Hegel already maintained in the good time, both that the 'comprehending of one's time' was the highest achievable goal, and that philosophy, because it rises out of its time by comprehending it, cannot presume to give practical advice for its own particular time. We find these two lessons in early texts from successive years (1801-1802); and we find them again, repeated side by side in the

7. G. R. G. Mure, *Idealist Epilogue*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1978, pp. 174-75.

8. Fackenheim, *The Religious Dimension in Hegel's Thought*, p. 240. This is actually the foundation of one of two *extremes* that Fackenheim distinguishes in 'post-Hegelian religious thought'. He says himself that 'philosophic thought must move beyond the extremes of partisan commitments' (p. 241) but he does not say how. He leaves *me*, however, with the impression that the thesis I have quoted represents for him the abiding truth of *this* extreme—cf., p. 49.

bad time to which the Preface of the *Philosophy of Right* was addressed.⁹

One way in which those who say that ‘Hegel today would not be a Hegelian’—or that no rational observer of today’s world can be one, which is the same thing—plainly contradict themselves, and themselves ‘Hegelians’ of a sort is here revealed. They all agree with Hegel’s definition of philosophy as ‘its own time grasped in thoughts’. What they cannot see is how the ‘comprehension of one’s time’ can possibly produce a philosophy that is *out of time* and somehow final. If they could see that, they would agree, I assume, that it is legitimate to be a ‘Hegelian today’ (and that Hegel himself, the model philosopher from whom they all alike accept the definition of philosophy’s problem as comprehension of the time, would *a fortiori* still be a ‘Hegelian’ today or on any other day). They would agree with this, I think, even though they might not be converted to Hegelianism in the full or systematic sense themselves. (Nothing, I am convinced, ever would convert Fackenheim. The claim that ‘there is but one Reason. There is no second super-human Reason. Reason is the divine in man’¹⁰ offends him—upon his interpretation of it—by its *positive* presumption. Upon the interpretation that I shall offer here, it will offend him almost as much by its *negative* presumption—it denies too much; it would require him to give up something too precious to him to be surrendered—namely, his religious faith.)¹¹

The solution to the problem of how time finally can be transcended is simpler than one expects. That is why it goes unrecognized. First, to ‘comprehend a time’ involves comprehending the way in which all previous times are relevant to it. Thus there is at all times a *common structure* in the endeavour to comprehend one’s time; and any effort to comprehend a previous time that is known to one is peculiarly relevant to one’s own effort in this time. Everything that counts for one as such an effort is ‘philosophy’; and in virtue of the fact that it only qualifies as philosophy so far as one can (and has) suc-

9. For 1801-02 compare the ‘Resolution’ poem (Johannes Hoffmeister, *Dokumente zu Hegel’s Entwicklung*, Frommann, Stuttgart, 1936, p. 388): ‘Bessers nicht als die Zeit, aber auf’s Reste, sie seyne’ and the introduction to the essay on the *Constitution of Germany*—‘The thoughts contained in this essay can have no aim or effect, when published, save that of promoting the understanding of what is, and therefore a calmer outlook and a moderately tolerant attitude alike in words and in actual contact [with affairs]. For it is not what is that makes us irascible and resentful, but the fact that it is not as it ought to be. But if we recognize that it is as it must be, i.e. that it is not arbitrariness and chance that make it what it is, then we also recognize that it is as it ought to be. Yet it is hard for the ordinary run of men to rise to the habit of trying to recognize necessity and to think it. Between events and the free interpretation of them they insert a mass of concepts and aims and require what happens to correspond with them. And when doubtless the case is nearly always otherwise, they excuse their concepts on the plea that while what dominated them was necessity what dominated the event was chance. Their concepts are just as restricted as their insight into things, which indeed they interpret as mere isolated events, not as a system of events ruled by a single spirit...’ (G. Lasson, ed., *Schriften zur Politik und Rechtsphilosophie*, Leipzig, Meiner, 2nd ed., 1923, p. 5; *Hegel’s Political Writings*, trans. T. M. Knox with an introductory essay by Z. A. Pelczynski, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1964, p. 145 [one small revision made to translation]); the relevant passage from the *Preface* of the *Philosophy of Right* is in Lasson, p. 16 (*Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1952, p. 11).

10. G. W. F. Hegel, *Einleitung in der Geschichte der Philosophie*, Johannes Hoffmeister (ed.), Leipzig, Meiner, 1940, p. 123 (cf. Fackenheim, *The Religious Dimension in Hegel’s Thought*, p. 223).

11. cf. Fackenheim, *The Religious Dimension in Hegel’s Thought*, p. 12.

cessfully related it to one's own effort, one must always be able to speak of philosophy as 'perennial' (or as being able to speak of philosophy as 'perennial', (or as being one and the same at all times)).¹² Secondly, Hegel's time is 'ripe' because it is *now* that this comprehension of what philosophy is has been reached. Hegel can be sure that it could not have been reached earlier—no previous time could have reached it—because his concept of spirit as the community of rational inquirers, or as the continuing dialogue of those who are striving to grasp how humanity structures its life-world in its ambiguous pursuit of natural satisfaction 'happiness' and self-expression for contemplative appreciation ('freedom'), presupposes Kant's Copernican revolution—i.e. it presupposes the recognition that real, objective, scientific cognition does not tell us the way things are 'in themselves' but the way they are 'for us'. Because of this *subjective* structure of all finite cognition, the absolute of what [*is*] is 'in and for itself', not the direct or intuitive awareness of what is 'in itself'.

In a sense, of course, this insight was old news. There is a long traditional of 'perennial philosophy' before Hegel.¹³ But that earlier tradition depended on the *faith* (or the dogmatic assumption supported by 'proofs' which had only a dialectical validity) that 'what is' is a self-conscious Being, who reveals Himself to us, His finite creatures, truthfully, because He is infinitely good. It was, of course, this great tradition that *una veritas in variis signis varie resplendent* (to borrow a tag from one of the great exponents of the *philosophia perennis*, Nicholas of Cusa) that Hegel wanted to take over. But he wanted both to translate it into post-Kantian terms, and to incorporate the philosophic traditions of unself-conscious naturalism and/or dualism. He could only overcome the Kantian dialectic between these different traditions if he could show that there is a *real* absolute Subject in *human* cognition (not just a 'logical form' furnished with a set of categories peculiarly adapted to make Newton's physics and the sociology of Hobbes and Locke appear as the eternal truth). But what subject is there in our experience for whom the self-positing power of Fichte's Ego can be claimed, without our being required to venture into acts of faith that must inevitably generate 'unbelievers'? Only the human community, as sharing the common duty and delight of knowing the world as its home, and exploring and forever extending its free range of self-expression in that home, can be

12. Many texts repeat this point at all stages of Hegel's career—from the *Difference* essay (G. W. F. Hegel, *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, trans. H. S. Harris and Walter Cerf, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1977, p. 114) to the *Einleitung in der Geschichte der Philosophie* of November 1827. But this last is perhaps the passage that comes closest to saying exactly what I am saying: 'Philosophy is Reason that grasps in the mode of thinking, brings itself to consciousness, so that it becomes *Gegenstand* [an ob-ject] for itself or knows itself in the form of thought. This producing, the fact that it knows of itself, is thus also one only—just one and the same thinking. Hence there is strictly just *one* philosophy only. Much may be called by the name of philosophy though it is not.—We have nothing of our own [*Spezielles*] before us, for philosophy is the thinking spirit in world-history' (Hegel, *Einleitung in der Geschichte der Philosophie*, pp. 123-24). [For another translation refer to *Hegel's Introduction to the Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. T. M. Knox and A. V. Miller, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1985, p. 92.]

13. The expression *philosophia perennis* was coined, I think, by the Italian humanist Agostino Steuco, and its most notable popularizer was perhaps Robert, Cardinal Bellarmine—but the concept is medieval and possibly Hellenistic.

the subject *for* which the ‘order’ of nature, and the dialectical disorder of history exists. Thus ‘philosophy is the thinking spirit in world-history’; and the self-formative or phenomenological problem of the philosopher is to raise himself to the standpoint of this *real* transcendental subjectivity. From this standpoint the maxim, *homo sum, nihil humani a me alienum puto* will embrace all the ways there are of knowing and relating to the *objective* world, as well as to one another; and the true significance of the ‘postulate of immortality’ will be found precisely in the possibility of obeying the maxim.

That is the easy part; for it is hard to contest the claim that Hegel’s *Phenomenology* could not well have been written any sooner than it was. Even to imagine it being written more clearly, by somebody else at that time, becomes difficult when we reflect that nobody we know of understood Hegel’s version then and there; and only a scattering of readers seem to have understood it ever since. Yet the conviction that philosophy is the comprehension of one’s time is widely shared, and the knowledge that we owe this conviction to Hegel, though not universal among those who share it, is certainly not uncommon.

What is harder to grasp is why Hegel was sure that his own comprehension of what ‘comprehending the time’ involves would not itself be transcended in some future comprehension of the time. We shall only see why his insight into the problem of what ‘comprehending the time’ *is* has a colourable claim to be as ultimate as the logical principles of identity, contradiction and excluded middle are in certain modes of formal discourse, when we understand clearly what that insight was. It never ceases to astound me personally—for whom this was almost the first thing I really understood in Hegel, a beacon that has shed light ever more widely on the theoretical puzzles of his work over more than thirty years of studying it since—that in spite of Hegel’s perpetual trumpeting about the ‘identity’ of (Christian) religion and philosophy, Hegel’s most crucial debt to the Gospel, is so seldom clearly understood.

The French proverb says ‘*tout comprendre, c’est tout pardonner*’. This is one of those axioms of ‘*gesunder Menschenverstand*’ that takes on a somewhat Pickwickian sense when it gets its proper ‘speculative’ interpretation. For when we comprehend everything philosophically we do necessarily forgive it. What is *necessary* has minimally to be accepted or recognized rather than forgiven—the ‘forgiveness’ of what is at all times beyond our power is pointless. Yet Hegel does not characterize even this ‘recognition of necessity’ as the admission of *justice*: to see that things must be as they are is to see that ‘they are as they ought to be’. Thus he makes all recognition of necessity into an anticipation of the rationality of ‘forgiveness’; and he does so because forgiveness, whenever it is appropriate, is a higher level of reason than the recognition of justice. In human (or ‘spiritual’) relations forgiveness is the only *self-sufficient* rationality, for it is what the recognition of necessity properly leads to; and in freeing us from the tyranny of the demand for ‘justice’, the granting of the pardon shows us that we are indeed free—that freedom is not a ‘postulate’ but an experience, an actuality to which we can rise at any moment—just as Jesus taught when he counselled us to ‘Love your enemies’, ‘Bless them that persecute you’ and so on.

Hegel recognized the three realms of Absolute Spirit as the ‘real presence’ of the ‘Kingdom of God’ which the unhellenized Jew, Jesus of Nazareth proclaimed to his people; and he saw that the spirit of charity is ‘resurrected’ in every man who enters those realms (just as the hellenized Jew, Paul, proclaimed to the Gentiles) because one cannot enter the world of universal human culture without putting the one sided partisanship of practical life behind one. Milton’s *Paradise Lost* belongs to the Hegelian Kingdom of God because Shelly, for instance, can recognize the human ‘heroism’ of Milton’s Satan. This kind of recognition does not mean one must ‘forgive’ everything that one opposes in the ordinary world (as the youthful author of the *Necessity of Atheism* certainly opposed Milton’s ‘Christianity’ for example). Also it is true that, for Hegel—as for Jesus—there is such a thing as the ‘sin against the Spirit’—for which there is no forgiveness. I cannot engage to discuss that now, for it seems to me to take several forms and I am not sure I can classify them, still less provide a rational ‘phenomenology’ for them. But a marvelously clear example is provided by the report—which I am assuming to be true simply because it so providentially apt—that Eichmann claimed that he had tried always to live in accordance with the *Categorical Imperative*. This puts him beyond the range of the prayer ‘Father forgive them, for they know not what they do’. He is beyond the range of any of the ambiguous senses of ‘not knowing’ because the second formula of the *Categorical Imperative* (‘always to treat humanity as an *end*, and never as a means only’) was the clearest *philosophical* expression of man’s rational self-comprehension in practical relations before Hegel. It took Hegel himself several years of hard thinking to see that Jesus had already grasped what ‘respect for humanity’ involved far better than Kant ever did; and it is the conviction that *he*, Hegel, has finally found a *logical* way to express what Jesus understood that makes him confident that his comprehension of what man’s task of self-comprehension is will not be transcended. It is logically impossible to assert as a matter of definite necessity that Hegel’s confidence is absolutely warranted. The essence of rational speech requires us to recognize its absolute *freedom* in this direction. One of the reasons why, whether we believe in God or not, we must construct our philosophical logic without speaking of Him (except in non-logical metaphors) is that no word uttered by human tongue or pen can have the absolute finality of ‘God’s’ Word as conceived in the older *philosophia perennis*. But before I let this logical limit trouble *my* confident acceptance of Hegel’s ‘absolute knowledge’ as absolute, (at least) what it might mean to ‘transcend’ the religious definition of man’s vocation as ‘loving God (the God who *is* Love) and his neighbour as himself.’ I confess that I do not know (cannot ‘conceive’) what a ‘transcending’ of that formula would be like—i.e., a philosophical doctrine that makes it look as inadequate as Hegel made Kant’s moral philosophy look to me beside it. Because Hegel’s philosophy has done that for me, I am confident that the new *philosophia perennis* will indeed prove perennial. Since I am thus content to proclaim myself a ‘Hegelian today’ (in defiance of Charles Taylor), it hardly needs stating that I claim that severest of realists, Hegel, as a Hegelian likewise (in defiance of Emil Fackenheim).

But where does the ‘realism’ come in? Well, the *Phenomenology* brings the whole range of human moral attitudes, from that of Cain to that of Novalis, within the range of

Christian charity, by showing us that the self-conscious appearance of ‘charity’ itself requires them. Thus it turns ‘*Father, forgive them ...*’ into ‘Do you, against whom we trespass, forgive us, as we in turn forgive you.’ (The confluence of ‘Conscience’ with ‘The Manifest Religion’ shows us *how* we both can and must return from the Hobbesian Terror to the civilly unequal struggle for liberty and equality, in a spirit of fraternity that rests on the clear awareness of our equal helplessness to avoid offence, and of our actual freedom to forgive one another in spite of that. Thus we can also maintain an equal respect for conscience in spite of its inevitable ‘badness’.

This general recognition of ‘freedom of conscience’ can be institutionalized in our public life; and it *is* institutionalized in the modern state. Freedom of conscience cannot be ‘perfect’ according to *any* concept that conscience can form for itself, because the only conceptual ‘perfection’ possible here is the recognition that *imperfection is logically inevitable, and morally necessary*. The modern state is thus the only ‘perfect’ actuality that practical Reason can have, because life must always proceed all the way from the ‘*unwisdom*’ of wealth (the pursuit of material or natural happiness) to the quest for the Hegelian kingdom of God. Free civil life is bound to contain injustice and inequality of opportunity, because neither ‘justice’ nor ‘equality’ can be defined in an uncontroversially mandatory way; and since our civil existence must contain the ‘pursuit of happiness’ (the freedom to define human happiness for oneself is the *foundation* of ‘conscience’—in other words it is the very earth upon which Jesus once went round forgiving sins, and upon which alone He can be resurrected as the spirit of the community) the modern state necessarily contains the seeds of its own destruction. Whether those seeds will germinate into a struggle for life that finally destroys the ethical bond of our earthly City, philosophy cannot tell us; and the ‘actual rationality’ of this ignorance arises from the fact that the outcome here depends upon our free use of our own reason. Hegel knew that, far from being spiritually ‘perfect’, the bourgeois world is utterly ‘without wisdom’ in its worship of Mammon; and more than forty years before Marx, he saw and said both that the ‘Wealth of Nations’ is the angel of death for the nations, and that the abstract rationalization of *labour* (with an apparently consequent lightening of the burdens) destroys the concrete rationality of life as human *work*.

Fackenheim remarks that ‘Hegel never despaired of the modern bourgeois, Protestant world’. I suspect that, existentially speaking, Hegel sometimes did despair just as—with so much more evident reason—I sometimes do. (For Hegel was a better social logician than I am, and hence much more farsighted, as my remarks about his early analysis of Adam Smith was designed to show). But despair is no more a philosopher’s business than hope. The philosopher must look at ‘what is’ (in and for itself) and show what sort of rationality it actually has. Where the *Begriff* is in *stable equilibrium* its institutional actuality will have the rationality of charity, for the whole community will be agreed about it, and the spirit of mutual respect and forgiveness will make its perceived ‘injustices’ (various and conflicting as they must be from the different active standpoints that social life offers) bearable for all parties: but so far as the *Begriff* is *in motion* (or ‘alienated’ or ‘for itself the opposite of itself’) it will have only the rationality of justice—that

is to say we shall be faced with a social *problem*, a conflict that is in the stage of ‘judgement’, but not yet resolved.¹⁴ This is how the ongoing mechanization of society appeared to Hegel in his own time. He could only analyse the necessity of the process. If he did not despair, it was mainly because war, ‘the judgement of God’, was always present to save his world. He had seen a war of national preservation save the French Revolution from the egalitarian extremism of the Terror; then Napoleon went down to defeat in the second war—the war for the national salvation of Europe—leaving Hegel in a world that he compared to Imperial Rome because no spiritual star was visible. But he could expect still confidently that a war of national preservation would put things right in the godless conflict of bourgeoisie and proletariat, before the worship of Mammon destroyed the sanctuary of Absolute Spirit from which the new star would be recognized whenever it did finally arise.¹⁵

This is the only respect in which our situation has significantly developed since Hegel’s time. Hegel would not have been surprised to see Jean Juarez and his socialist brothers (including Mussolini) turn into patriotic nationalist in 1914. He also would have been rightly proud of Benedetto Croce’s defence of the cultural kingdom in which all are always brothers, and wrongly contemptuous of Bertrand Russell’s resolute pacifism. But the awful ‘motion of the Concept’ from 1914 to 1945 has brought now to birth a world in which the ‘rationalization of Labour’ has given war quite a new functional meaning. I was nineteen when the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima—Hegel was nineteen when the Bastille fell. And I know that something cataclysmic had happened just as surely as he did. But the difference between us can be estimated from the fact that I did not see the relevance of Hiroshima to the Nuremberg trials then at all. That ‘the waging of aggressive war’ should be declared a ‘crime against humanity’ seemed to me absurd. (I then had not read Hegel, but I could see that ‘the world’s *history* is the court of judgement’ without being told.) Yet I see not that the solemn confirmation of God’s ‘justice’

14. This failure to distinguish between these two levels of ‘rationality’ is the main reason why Charles Taylor is obliged to conclude that Hegel’s ideal of systematic logical necessity cannot be reconciled with his ideal of free self-expression. The ‘necessity’ of Hegelian logic can only be, in Taylor’s view, what Hegel himself calls ‘the unbending righteous self-sameness’ of Spirit as ‘substance’, see Hegel, G. W. F., *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Johannes Hoffmeister (ed.), Hamburg, Meiner 1952, p. 314 [*Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1977, ¶ 439]. But *self-conscious* rationality—Spirit as *Subject* is the *Aufhebung* of this ‘righteous self-sameness’ in the *free use* of one’s Reason. This involves the initial *irrationality* of following one’s own ‘conscience’—and it only gains a *substantial* rational ground in the community’s recognition and forgiveness.

15. Perhaps he was more confident than he should have been. But the expulsion of the Turkish imperial power from Europe, the gradual advance of human rights in Russia, and the eventual downfall of the Russian and Austrian Empires in a war which ended in the proclamation of the Wilsonian principle of national self-determination, all seem to me to testify to the essential soundness of his claim that ‘If we were to presuppose a ruler in Europe, who acted according to his whim, and took a notion to make half of his subjects slaves, we should be conscious that this would not work even though he were to use the most extreme force’, *Geschichte der Philosophie, Einleitung*, Johannes Hoffmeister, 1940, p. 233—the passage comes from several student transcripts of 1823. In the world of superpowers, computers, and atomic war Hegel would be quick to recognize that the situation has changed. Practical Hegelianism in the shadow of *Nineteen Eighty-four* [1949 (transcriber’s addition)] cannot be quite what it was in 1824.

upon Nazi Germany by a court of bourgeois judges was absolutely appropriate—though it was not the Nazis but their victorious judges who first waged war in a way that made it an evident crime against humanity. (The Nazis had enough genuine crimes against humanity on their conscience without that one, so there is and was—as I saw at the time—no need to be sorry for the leaders who were punished civilly.)

War is only ‘the judgement of God’ now, in the sense that a world war like the one that Hitler started would be the Last Judgement, literally. By making the Last Judgement present visibly as a technological achievement of our very own, we have driven God from his last vestige of a throne. It is now visibly we who sit in judgement upon ourselves in our history. Can the *Church of Reason*, whose true founder and only father was Hegel, control the *State of Reason* (which the men who followed Jesus, and ultimately Luther and the Reformers founded, but which took its sceptre of sovereign power from Bacon and the scientific Enlightenment)? The control has to be exercised through what Plato called the ‘persuasion of necessity by Reason’ because that is how the realm of natural necessity is organized into the world of rational freedom. I do not know, and *logically I know why I cannot know*, how our fate will turn out. But there are some relevant things that I do know about it. As a student of Hegel’s ethics I can see that it is morally wrong to repine about the egalitarian aspirations of the underprivileged millions on this over-populated planet (as Mure does); and I understand why in the universal community which the economic and technological growth imperative of the scientific Enlightenment created, as the structural context of this problem of over-population, the possibilities of error and the penalties of failure are greater and more terrible than they were in the world of the national communities which ‘the judgement of God’ could purge and keep healthy by the periodic experience of warfare. The wars that are possible now, are exactly and only what that utilitarian, von Clausewitz, said war is: ‘nothing but the prosecution of policy by other means’. A genuine life and death struggle must be avoided because it could prove altogether too final. Because of this Mure’s gloomy forebodings about ‘appeasement’ and ‘tyranny’ may prove to be correct. But even that outcome will not show that Hegel ought to have despaired of the political world in which ‘liberty, equality and fraternity’ had for the first time become real possibilities. Rather it was his task to show (as he did), the *meaning* of liberty, the dialectical *ambivalence* of equality, and the *price* of fraternity—respect for the ‘conscience’ of the Vicar of Bray¹⁶ is such an affront to ‘good sense’, and the Protestant ‘earnestness’, that Charles Taylor can suppose that Hegel is being ironic about it!

Philosophy cannot produce the millennium, or even guarantee its continuance supposing—*per impossible*—that it was to produce itself. Rather it is the case that, in the fullness of time (i.e. when we had gained a comprehensive grasp of what our rational freedom is and what it *must* aim at) philosophy could show us why there is no millen-

16. [Transcriber’s note: From *The Oxford Encyclopedic English Dictionary*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1991—‘The Vicar of Bray is the hero of an 18th century song who kept his benefice from the reign of Charles II to the reign of George I by changing his beliefs to suit the times. The song is apparently based on an anecdote of an identified vicar of Bray, Berkshire, in T. Fuller’s *Worthies of England* (1662).’]

nium. This is the ‘self-positing Spirit whose essence is rational necessity’ which Taylor says that no one nowadays can believe in. I say that, on the contrary, every rational person today is fully conscious of the negative presence of this spirit (as the *justice* of the ‘fate’ that we have yet to bring upon ourselves). Few of us have much confidence in its *saving* power, when we contemplate the appalling problems (and costs) of establishing any charitably enduring measure of social justice in the world community as a whole. But we do not therefore have to ‘fly from the world’. Mure’s claim that the world is already forty percent overpopulated is the measure of his deepest despair here. How can a Hegelian say that what is *ought not* to be, or a Christian borrow the answer of Cain?¹⁷ Those who do not fly from the problem, but regard this despair as selfish and cowardly (as I do) merely see that the cycle of growth has somehow got to be stopped. To believe that *ought implies can* here is to admit the saving capacity of reason, to recognize the positive presence of the Spirit, its existence as moral necessity, i.e., as freedom and as charity. It is not a very comfortable home that we have made for ourselves in this world. But the absolute philosophy is the one that shows us that it is our *home*, and that we are the ones who have built it. The only comfort that philosophy can add to its amenities must come from our understanding why it is idle to look for comfort in it. That insight is, indeed, as cold as any comfort Job was offered. But it remains nonetheless the *absolute* truth that ‘*Ich ist in der Welt zu Hause; wenn es sie kennt, noch mehr wenn es sie begriffen hat*’.¹⁸

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17. [Editors’ Note: In response to God’s question ‘where is Abel thy brother?’ Cain replied ‘Am I my brother’s keeper?’ Genesis 4:9]

18. [Editors’ Note: ‘I am at home in the world when I know it, still more so when I have understood it’ (Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, § 4A).]