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Everyone and No One: Freedom, Politics and God in Hegel's Philosophy of Freedom

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Everyone and No One:
Forgiveness, Politics and God in Hegel's Philosophy of Freedom

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by
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For Miles.

“We already possess freedom in the form of feeling in friendship and love. Here, we are not one-sidedly within ourselves, but willingly limit ourselves with reference to an other, even while knowing ourselves in this limitation as ourselves.”

- Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*

Table of Contents

Preface.....	1
Chapter 1.....	11
Chapter 2.....	28
Chapter 3.....	56

Preface: On the Problem of Freedom

We are told that people die for the sake of freedom, but no one can tell us what freedom is. The story goes that the political revolutions of the modern West have all taken place in the name of freedom, as have the great popular movements. The Korean War memorial in Washington D.C. reads, "Freedom Is Not Free," which suggests that the death and suffering of those American soldiers, and perhaps all American soldiers, was for the sake of freedom. Yet the word 'freedom' is as resistant to definition as 'truth', 'being' and the like. In the United States we have a common-sense notion of Freedom, but it does not hold up to philosophical scrutiny. According to this notion, Freedom is the absence of external constraint: "freedom of speech" means that the government will not prevent us from speaking, "freedom of religion" means that the government will not prevent us from worshipping, etc. But this is a purely negative conception of freedom. It places restrictions on how the society may influence the individual, but it does not demand that the society provide anything positive to the individual in order to promote its freedom. For instance, is a person truly free to speak if he or she has not been educated in how to think and use language? Or is a person truly free to worship if the society does not provide a time and space outside of the commercial and domestic spheres for worship to take place? This notion of freedom also neglects the fact that individuals may limit each other's freedom directly, that is, without the mediation of any social apparatus. Must not a free society protect its individuals from each other? That means installing external constraints upon every individual.

The deepest flaw with our common-sense notion of freedom, however, is its premise that the individual is free in itself. It is as though the individual is a spontaneous source of freedom, a source which the society places blockages around *a posteriori*, and that the simple removal of social blockages will allow the individual's freedom to pour forth. It is clear, however, that an

individual does not need social constraints to be unfree. An extremely privileged or isolated person may still be enslaved by ignorance or bad habits. Again, the common-sense notion of freedom is purely negative: it does not demand that the *individual* provide anything positive either. In this way our common-sense notion of freedom is similar to a philosophical conception of freedom. The latter is to be met with in writings such as Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy* and Sartre's *Existentialism is a Humanism*. According to these writings the very nature of the human will is to be free, so that every human being is free insofar as it wills. While such a theory is ostensibly more philosophical, it is even more flawed than our common-sense notion because it utterly dilutes the concept of freedom. It states that the decisions of slaves, prisoners and drug addicts are made freely. Neither this nor our common-sense notion of freedom can be accepted as a true definition.

There is also the problem of determinism, which will not receive extensive treatment here as it is a metaphysical issue, whereas our concern here is ethical. The significance of determinism in regards to freedom as an ethical concept is highly limited. Once determinism is introduced into ethics a child becomes just as free as an adult, a dog just as free as its owner and, if freedom and happiness are treated as distinct concepts, as they should be, a slave just as free as its master. To be sure, such an equality of freedom is a trivial one because a determinist¹ would take all 'freedom' to be illusory. While that may be metaphysically interesting, it prevents us from having important and rational conversations about the ethical status of societies and individuals. Besides, metaphysical problems arise for determinism at the point where ethics and metaphysics meet. Even if all human behaviors are reducible to physical causality it is nonetheless clear that this sort of physical causality is not of the same order as that of billiard balls colliding with one another. The human body is formally constituted as to have desires, memories, reasoning, etc. and billiard balls

¹ Not Spinoza, who understood the distinction between the metaphysical and the ethical implications of determinism with his usual genius.

are not. To not recognize this distinction is to deny any role to form in causality, which is simply an error. As it stands, the formal properties of the human body make freedom an issue for human beings. Whether such properties are the epiphenomena of waves and particles is not germane to ethical inquiry.

Someone might object that the proper way to integrate determinism into ethics is to abandon any ethics centered around freedom and replace it with an ethics centered around happiness, which would be utilitarianism. Utilitarianism will, like determinism, not receive much treatment here. To refute its doctrine would be pleasurable but not therefore good. One can, in principle, seek out a definition for freedom without any reference to utilitarianism. Utilitarianism erects happiness as the highest moral value and treats freedom as either nonexistent or subordinate; therefore it is silent on the definition of freedom.

Utilitarianism would not be silent on the definition of freedom if freedom and happiness were identical or interrelated, but they are not. Freedom is an ethical concept and happiness is a psychological concept. Furthermore, a quick consideration of the facts of experience reveals that they do not follow from identical causes. Ignorance and comfort can cause happiness, but they only impede freedom. Likewise, laziness and the avoidance of risk may cause happiness in some cases, but they can never cause freedom. The statement "Freedom Is Not Free" suggests that something must be sacrificed for the sake of freedom, and this something cannot be anything other than a cause or causes of happiness. If it were not a cause or causes of happiness then the giving up of it would not be a sacrifice, unless it were a cause or causes of freedom, in which case it would be contradictory to sacrifice it for the sake of freedom. There are, of course, things which prevent both freedom and happiness, such as poverty and all of the forms of brutality. For this reason events which preclude or undo such things can cause both freedom and happiness

simultaneously. Such simultaneity nonetheless does not imply that the two are brought about in the same way. Freedom also may cause happiness if it is treated as a valued goal, because the approach and realization of a valued goal is something that causes happiness, but not because of any internal property of freedom. Happiness never directly produces freedom; if anything, people who are happy are less likely to pursue freedom for themselves and others. The causal relationship between freedom and happiness is therefore accidental, i.e., when they are causally connected it is not due to their respective natures but rather to the mediation of a contingent third factor. Their accidental relationship implies that freedom and happiness are distinct from one another. Therefore utilitarianism, which is essentially concerned with happiness, has nothing to contribute to the definition of freedom.

And so the problem of freedom remains and is of the utmost importance. The definition of freedom is the *lapis ethicorum*. Where happiness fails to provide a rational and moral *telos* for human behavior, freedom appears as the most promising alternative. When David Foster Wallace asks, “Is the real point of my life simply to undergo as little pain and as much pleasure as possible? But isn’t this kind of a selfish way to live? Forget selfish – isn’t it awful lonely?”² freedom is the alternative he is seeking. When human action is directed towards freedom as its absolute goal nihilism, hedonism and pessimism disintegrate: nihilism because freedom is a goal that does not devalue itself or give way to some other, equally finite goal; hedonism because freedom is not happiness; and pessimism because pessimism arises from the despair of nihilism and the failure of hedonism. All of this is, of course, empty verbiage from the present point of view. It does however apprise us of the importance of defining freedom. If an absolute definition of freedom were

² David Foster Wallace, *Consider the Lobster: And Other Essays*, ny uppl. ed. (New York: Little, Brown & Company, 2007), 261.

produced then, in theory if not in practice, life as an ethical problem would be solved, and with it ‘the riddle of history’. It would give us something that makes life worth living.

But an absolute definition of freedom will not be attempted or put forward here. Instead of coming to our own definition, we will merely draw attention to the importance of the problem of freedom and to the work done on it by one particular thinker: Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.

Hegel’s theory of freedom is valuable for a number of reasons. The most obvious of these is, in true Hegelian fashion, its place in the history of philosophy. Many if not all of the most influential theories of freedom in the continental tradition bear a direct Hegelian influence. Marx, of course, characterizes his own thought as Hegel turned on his head; Kierkegaard spares no ink in declaring war on ‘the System’, even while adopting Hegel’s dialectical method; Heidegger’s notion of authenticity as determined by the historicity of Dasein is markedly Hegelian; Sartre’s locating of freedom in the negativity of consciousness is torn almost directly from the pages of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*; and even the schizoanalytic nomadism of Deleuze and Guattari is a direct, if antagonistic, response to Hegel’s ‘aborescent’ dialectic. Foucault’s statement that contemporary philosophers may be doomed to find Hegel waiting patiently at the end of every road we travel should perhaps be altered to say that Hegel is instead at the *beginning* of every road we travel, although he may be waiting at the end as well.

In similarly Hegelian fashion, the negative determination of Hegel’s theory of freedom also makes it valuable. Since we wish to progress towards an encompassing definition of freedom it is best to concentrate on theories of freedom that are disparate from one another. If we evaluate theories of freedom that overlap or are identical with one another then we are making redundant use of our efforts. Hegel’s theory of freedom then benefits from being highly novel, at least according to Hegel. Hegel rejects what we have called our common-sense notion of freedom for

the same reasons put forward here, namely, that it is wholly negative. Although he thinks that the will is free in-itself, like Descartes and Sartre, he sees this as an inchoate, merely potential freedom that must be made actual. Hegel rejects the egalitarian conception of freedom found in Rousseau and embodied in the French Revolution – a conception of freedom that reappears in Marxism and much of subsequent leftist thought. Hegel rejects all transcendent conceptions of freedom, such as those met with in stoicism and religious asceticism, as overly abstract and divorced from social reality. Finally, Hegel rejects the conception of freedom developed by his great antecedent Immanuel Kant. Hegel devotes an exceptional amount of space to critiquing Kant's moral philosophy, especially in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, because he sees it as highly sophisticated yet still not in possession of the truth. Hegel's own conception of freedom then seems to be a strange island of its own, far away from any of the usual ideas that make their way into our popular discourse.

Problems ensue when it comes to identifying the positive side of Hegel's theory of freedom. Hegel's philosophical motto is to 'tarry with the negative' and so it is generally easier to determine which views Hegel opposes than which he assumes. The difficulty is, of course, exacerbated by Hegel's notorious obscurity. Thus in order to approach Hegel's positive conception of freedom, we might go through another one of Hegel's concepts, Spirit, which receives much more direct treatment in his writings. Fortunately, Hegel sees Spirit and freedom as fundamentally linked to one another:

The nature of Spirit may be understood by a glance at its direct opposite – matter. The essence of matter is gravity, the essence of Spirit – its substance – is freedom. It is immediately plausible to everyone that, among other properties, Spirit also possesses freedom. But philosophy teaches us that all the properties of Spirit exist

only through freedom. All are but means of attaining freedom; all seek and produce this and this alone.³

The problem is then identifying what Spirit is supposed to be. The nature of Spirit will be treated both directly and indirectly in the sequel, but for now we can begin with a highly provisional and incomplete definition: Spirit is the ideal structure of human social activity. For Hegel, culture, politics, history, religion and the like are all organized and innervated by Spirit. The meaning of the popular term ‘Zeitgeist’ – literally ‘time-spirit’ – is surprisingly close to Hegel’s concept ‘Volksgeist’ or ‘spirit of a nation’, considering how philosophical concepts are usually botched in the popular imagination.⁴ Spirit also changes by developing itself dialectically, and the development of Spirit is the Hegelian definition of history. That history is the history of Spirit means that Spirit is not meant to be a transcendent entity, as its name might suggest, but that it in fact exists and develops itself only by taking part in phenomenal reality. Thus Hegel says, “where Spirit is ... manifestation itself is the essential. The criterion of Spirit is its action, its active essence ... In regard to Spirit one cannot set aside its manifestations.”⁵ Therefore, since Spirit has freedom as its essence, and Spirit is one with its concrete manifestations, in seeking to understand Hegel’s conception of freedom we must look to the manifestation of Spirit that Hegel takes to be the most complete, or where Spirit blooms into its fullest development – what Hegel would call ‘Absolute Spirit’.

Unfortunately, Hegel gives conflicting accounts of what constitutes the manifestation of Absolute Spirit. In Hegel’s first mature work, the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, he argues that what he calls ‘reconciliation’ is the manifestation of Absolute Spirit, saying, “The word of reconciliation

³ G. W. F. Hegel, *Reason In History: A General Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, trans. Robert S. Hartman (New York, NY: The Liberal Arts Press, 1953), 22.

⁴ e.g., *Übermensch*.

⁵ Hegel, *Reason In History*, 51.

is the objectively existent Spirit ... a reciprocal recognition which is *absolute* Spirit.”⁶ Reconciliation is a social form in which individuals mutually repent to and forgive one another. It appears at the end of the section discussing morality in the *Phenomenology*, and so, according to Hegel’s dialectical logic, reconciliation is also meant to be the highest manifestation of moral action. Given that Hegel explicitly works within a post-Kantian tradition that equates morality with freedom, this confirms our supposition that the manifestation of Absolute Spirit corresponds to the highest expression of freedom. It would seem then that through the mere analysis of reconciliation we can ascertain Hegel’s conception of freedom. However, in Hegel’s later writings, specifically his *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, and *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, he posits a different social form, or ‘shape of Spirit’, than reconciliation as the manifestation of Absolute Spirit: the state. In the *Philosophy of Right* Hegel says, “the State in and for itself is the ethical whole, the actualization of Freedom ... The State is Spirit which is present in the world and which consciously realizes itself therein.”⁷ The state is, generically, a modern federal government with a constitution. As we see in the quote above, the state is characterized by Hegel as the fullest realization of both freedom and Spirit. It is obvious, even from the sparse accounts of reconciliation and the state presented here, that they are radically different, to the point where even to compare the two seems like a category mistake. Thus two possibilities present themselves: either Hegel changed his mind about his conception of freedom in passing from the *Phenomenology* to his later philosophy, or there is a deeper level of analysis at which reconciliation and the State reveal themselves as equivalent or interpenetrating.

⁶ G. W. F Hegel and J. N. Findlay, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller, reprint. ed. (Oxford [u.a.]: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977), 408.

⁷ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. Hugh Barr Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 279.

The goal of what follows will be to determine which of these above possibilities are true, or whether some third, synthetic interpretation is required. The question of what Hegel's conception of freedom is, and whether it is consistent across his mature philosophy, will be pursued as well. These two questions will be brought to bear on each other because, as we shall see, one cannot be answered without the other being answered as well. Our strategy for answering these two questions will be to carry out detailed exegeses and analyses of the passages from Hegel that are the most relevant to our two questions. Thus the Lordship and Bondage dialectic from the *Phenomenology of Spirit* will receive an exegesis and analysis, as it contains the basic conceptual formulations that Hegel employs throughout his entire theory of freedom; the 'Morality' section of the *Phenomenology* will receive an exegesis and analysis, as it contains Hegel's critique of Kant and his account of reconciliation; and Hegel's accounts of the state from his *Encyclopedia*, *Philosophy of Right* and *Lectures on History* will be treated in combination, as important points concerning Hegel's theory of the state and freedom are distributed throughout the three works. Unfortunately, Hegel's *Science of Logic*, which contains his transcendental theory of freedom, will not receive any treatment here, due to constraints on both time and length. Thus the present work does not pretend to be a conclusive or comprehensive account of Hegel's theory of freedom, reconciliation or the state, but rather a largely exploratory or experimental one. This is reflected in the fact that the sequel contains no substantial critique of Hegel's philosophy. It may then strike the reader that a mere adulation of Hegel is being carried out here, but that is not the intent. The present work was written with the following principle in mind: appreciation precedes understanding precedes critique. In dealing with a philosopher as wide-ranging and obscure as Hegel, in tandem with the aforementioned time and length constraints, the result has been that

appreciation has taken up a far greater portion of the enterprise than would otherwise be preferable.

Whether understanding has thereby been attained is at the discretion of the present reader.

Chapter 1: The Freedom of Self-Consciousness

In his *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* Kant bemoans the fact that thus far philosophy has not even succeeded in proving the existence of the external world. He might have added that philosophy has also not succeeded in proving the existence of ethics. To provide rational grounds for how ethical facts, or even ethical judgments, are possible remains a tenacious problem in philosophy. The existence of mathematical objects, which, like ethical “objects,” are unobservable, is tenuous enough, even while there is some consensus over what some of them are and what some of the methods are for determining their validity. Ethics, conversely, seems to be utterly without bearings. But let us suppose that a universally accepted method for arriving at ethical truths were discovered. A second, equally tenacious problem would remain untouched: why would any individual or society behave ethically? A tentative definition of ethics might be *a canon of behaviors that are carried out on the basis of something other than self-interested pleasure*. If this is not, to some degree, what ethics is, then ethics, as a field, is nothing more than a pretentious brand of practical wisdom. So then the problem is how it could be possible to act on the basis of something other than self-interested pleasure, and further, why anyone would ever do this. Traditionally, religions have answered this problem with an appeal to a retributive afterlife of one sort or another. Such an answer is unsatisfactory both epistemologically and because it ultimately reintroduces self-interested pleasure into ethics. Thus the task for philosophy is to give a rational, secular account for both why and how human beings should be “good” to each other, and not selfish or capricious only.

But what’s so special about human beings anyway? In the view handed down to us by popular science, human beings are so unexceptional as to be indistinguishable from the arbitrary, dynamic manifold of ‘the universe’. We consist of the same subatomic particles and wave

identities as everything else. In turn these subatomic elements emerge out of energy, which, without meaning or intent, is pushed in and out of itself into the forms accorded to it by the laws of physics. These forms of nature distribute themselves through the indefinitely vast container of spacetime, within which the Earth is a speck orbiting a speck orbiting a speck. Yet while the human's matter and its position in the cosmos is unexceptional, some will nonetheless grant that our form places us within a peculiar category: that of life. Organisms are indeed notable for their complexity, i.e., their advanced internal topology. They appear to be able to continuously appropriate and expel matter while maintaining their complex form, and appear to also possess their own internal sources of locomotion. Their activity nonetheless remains reducible, in principle, to the same forces that produce everything else. From a pure point of view, organisms are but one type of the random aggregates of energy being pushed into itself; to even individuate them within the flux of the universe is a mere pragmatic simplification; and among such pseudo-entities we find the human.

But there is something strange about the above view, which is that it was created by humans. Even stranger, when the humans who are reading, writing or thinking about this view leave that activity and return to their everyday existence they are bound to discover a strange fact: the world *is* made out of things, like clouds and cups and words, and among these things humans are not only special but the *most important things in the world*. Energy, so far as everyday experience is concerned, is nowhere to be found. From within the safety of abstraction, the theorist may profess any view he likes, but simply try to harm or have sex with one of his close relations and his true philosophy will appear. Some might protest that here we are reverting to a limited, human perspective on reality. Much to their disadvantage, however, there is no other perspective to be found. The predictive models of science and their interpretations are ineluctably human and

historical in their origin. People also speak of the wisdom of trees or of dogs, but in truth they are speaking of the wisdom of human interpretations of trees and dogs. Nature is silent on every question we pose to it, as that is what makes it Nature. If in attempting to overstep our human perspective we produce theories that erase the most basic features of experience, such as the existence of individuated things or what we call ‘consciousness’, which is really experience itself, then it is the theories that are at fault – experience remains untouched.

The failure of the popular view of science to capture the essence of the very life that produces it is where we find our impetus to rediscover humanistic and phenomenological philosophies such as that of Hegel. In returning to our original question, ‘what’s so special about human beings anyway?’ the preceding already indicates Hegel’s answer to this question. For Hegel, humans are special for a myriad of reasons, but they all spring from a single proximate and final cause: humans are *self-conscious*. To be more precisely Hegelian one might say that *we are self-consciousness*, which is to say that self-consciousness is not merely a property we have but rather that it defines our most fundamental being. It is crucial to note, however, that Hegel does not mean by ‘self-consciousness’ what is commonly understood by it. He is not referring to a private mental state in which we introspect on the brute fact of our own consciousness. The colloquial meaning of being ‘self-conscious’, denoting social anxiety, is much closer to Hegel’s meaning. What Hegel means by self-consciousness refers primarily to human behaviors. Humans are aware of themselves as finite thinking beings, but this awareness and this thought are not for Hegel, something abstract and mental but rather a species of collective human activity. Humans create artworks and write books, we form religions and investigate Nature, and above all we form societies and have a history. Through these activities we work out our role in our cosmos and in our societies. One might argue that these activities are the *expression* of our self-consciousness

rather than our self-consciousness itself, but for Hegel that is a meaningless distinction. It is therefore on the basis of such ‘spiritual’ activities, as Hegel would call them, that Hegel says we are self-consciousness. Even if we deny his conclusion, such spiritual activities are undoubtedly what make us, human beings, special.

It is on the basis of self-consciousness that Hegel seeks to erect the edifice of ethics. In order to see how he attempts this we must first grasp what Hegel understands by self-consciousness. Therefore we must consult the Lordship and Bondage dialectic from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The Lordship and Bondage dialectic, also called the ‘Master-Slave dialectic’, is to Hegel what Irma’s Injection is to Freud: the original and formative case study that has been reanalysed to death by countless pupils and critics. For better or for worse, the Lordship and Bondage dialectic remains the point of entry for Hegel’s social and ethical thought, what he calls ‘Objective Spirit’. In his *Philosophy of Spirit* Hegel designates Lordship and Bondage as “the emergence of man’s social life and the commencement of the political,”⁸ although in incomplete form, of course. The Lordship and Bondage dialectic must be reckoned with because it is there, fundamentally, that Hegel gives his rational, secular account for both why and how human beings should be good to each other, and not selfish or capricious only.

The Lordship and Bondage dialectic is, as Hegel scholar Robert Solomon put it, a parable.⁹ It tells a story about two people discovering each other for the first time. Hegel knew that such an event never really occurred; in his *Philosophy of History* he refers to the state of nature as, “one of those nebulous images ... without sufficient historical justification.”¹⁰ The story of the Lordship

⁸ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind: Being Part Three of the 'Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences' (1830)*, comp. Ludwig Boumann, trans. Arnold V. Miller and William Wallace, reprinted ed. (Oxford [u.a.]: Clarendon Press, 1971), 173.

⁹ Robert C. Solomon, *In the Spirit of Hegel: A Study of G.W.F. Hegel's "Phenomenology of Spirit"* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 443.

¹⁰ Hegel, *Reason In History*, 54.

and Bondage dialectic is rather meant to express a number general ideas, and it is supposed to be open to interpretation. It can be read as an account of how individuals come to terms with others in the course of their development, or of why different groups of people seek to oppress each other, or as psychic drama between the ego and the id, or even as a theory of how Judaism became monotheistic. In all of these the central theme is a struggle for recognition. Hegel says just before the Lordship and Bondage section of the *Phenomenology*, “a self-consciousness exists for a self-consciousness; only so is it in fact self-consciousness,”¹¹ and that is what he seeks to prove in the dialectic. What the above quote means is that I only become aware of myself as the particular individual that I am through my encounters with other people, i.e., I need a special sort of recognition from others in order to become self-conscious. The sort of recognition self-consciousness requires is a recognition of its *freedom*, which, Hegel argues, is the truth and ultimate content of self-consciousness.

Hegel’s parable of recognition begins in the state of nature. A solitary consciousness, which again may equally represent an individual or a nation, lives out in the wilderness. It lives entirely according to its appetitive desires. Its subjectivity is characterized only as the negative essence of the world, where “the Ego is, so to speak, the crucible and fire through which the indifferent multiplicity is consumed and reduced to unity.”¹² Such unity is entirely indeterminate, or rather it is the unity of indeterminacy. As such consciousness only negates the difference and determinacy of Nature. Behaviorally, therefore, it is characterized by the sheer consumption of natural resources, and it is certain of itself only through this consumption: “it destroys the independent

¹¹ Hegel and Findlay, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 110.

¹² Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic, with the Zusätze: Part I of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences with the Zusätze*, trans. Theodore F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting, and H. S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), 85.

object and thereby gives itself the certainty of itself as true certainty.”¹³ Its self-certainty never becomes concrete, however. Consciousness would be certain of itself in its relation to the object, but its relation to the object is one of immediate negativity, and so it loses its object in the very moment of relating to it. The passive objects of Nature cannot withstand the negativity of consciousness; they wither away immediately into the abyss of the Ego. Thus consciousness is lead about endlessly in unfulfilled repetition, a repetition without development or history. What self-certainty therefore needs is an object that can withstand the negativity of consciousness, an object that raises itself above the flux of Nature, that goes beyond the relative negativity of substance, which maintains itself in the negation of its particular predicates, to the absolute negativity of *subject*, which maintains itself in the negation of *predicates as such*:

On account of the independence of the object, therefore, it can achieve satisfaction only when the object itself effects the negation within itself; and it must carry out this negation of itself in itself, for it is itself the negative, and must be for the other what it is. Since the object is in its own self negation, and in being so is at the same time independent, it is consciousness ... [Thus] self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in self-consciousness.¹⁴

Consciousness needs an other to be self-certain, to become self-consciousness, and likewise the other needs consciousness. Put somewhat more concretely, “self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it exists for another; that is it exists only in being acknowledged.”¹⁵ When I encounter another person and thereby apprehend his or her properties, one of the properties I must apprehend is that the other person is apprehending me; that is the source of self-consciousness. Therefore self-consciousness is consciousness’s objectification of its

¹³ Hegel and Findlay, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 109.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 110.

¹⁵ Hegel and Findlay, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 111.

objectification in the other, with the same movement taking place on the part of the other. By some *deus ex machina*, the other appears in our parable just when its need is felt, and the story moves from the state of nature to the stage of history.

Self-consciousness, having found its proper object in the other, proceeds to apprehend the other as it did the natural objects. Specifically, self-consciousness apprehends the other's apprehending *of it*. Here another problem emerges. The apprehending of self-conscious still functions as the absolute negativity of subjectivity. Thus the recognition of self-consciousness by the other is in fact the negation of self-consciousness by the other, not the affirmation that self-consciousness requires. Self-certainty is thereby thwarted again. Consciousness has also lost its status as the negative essence of the world. Instead, self-consciousness finds itself reduced to an object that is being negated in the other's subjectivity. The same conflict takes place from the point of view of the other; the relation is reciprocal. From an absolute perspective, we can see that self-consciousness is in fact a singular phenomenon that spans both self and other, that "each is for the other the middle term, through which each mediates itself with itself and unites with itself; and each is for itself, and for the other, an immediate being on its own account, which at the same time is such through this mediation."¹⁶ Therefore any development on the one side is always immediately related to a corresponding development on the other side.

Self and other, equally confronted with objectification, must assert themselves as subject and not merely substance in order to be recognized and thereby self-certain as "the purely negative being of self-identical consciousness."¹⁷ For each, this self-assertion before the other "consists in showing that it is not attached to any specific existence, not to the individuality common to

¹⁶ Hegel and Findlay, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 112.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 113.

existence as such, that it is not attached to life.”¹⁸ At the same time, self-consciousness needs another self-consciousness for its satisfaction, and so the other must also be revealed *as other* to self-consciousness, and not merely as an immediate natural object. These recognitive dilemmas get resolved through self-consciousness and the other engaging in a “life-and-death struggle”;¹⁹ both side stakes its own life and seeks the death of the other. In the life-and-death struggle each side asserts itself as the pure negative essence. In seeking the death of the other each reveals itself as the negative power that can take away the world of the other, and in staking life each reveals itself as the essence that transcends all of its outward appearances. It is here that Hegelian freedom makes its first appearance, though in crude form, as the abstract essence of self-consciousness that at once exists apart from the natural predicates of the human person, but that makes itself actual in actions that extend beyond natural, appetitive purposes. The staking of life is therefore, for Hegel, the primary threshold that one must pass through in becoming free:

It is only through the staking of one’s life that freedom is won; only thus is it proved that for self-consciousness, its essential being is not just being, not the immediate form in which it appears, not its submergence in the expanse of life, but rather that there is nothing present in it which could not be regarded as a vanishing moment, that it is only being-for-self. The individual who has not risked his life may well be recognized as a person, but he has not attained to the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness.²⁰

In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* Hegel characterizes history as “the slaughter-bench at which the happiness of peoples, the wisdom of states, and the virtue of individuals have been sacrificed.”²¹ It is appropriate, then, that in Hegel’s parable history commences in violence.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Hegel and Findlay, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 114.

²¹ Hegel, *Reason In History*, 27.

Humanity lifts itself out of Nature – that which has no history – in negating what is natural in humanity, i.e., the body with its desires, and such negation in its most immediate form is violence. It cannot be violence for the sake of needed resources, however, but rather pure destructive violence directed against the *other qua other*, in which self-consciousness is recognized as being irreducible to any specific content.

This sort of pure, immediate violence nevertheless fails to satisfy self-consciousness for a simple reason: its consummation makes recognition impossible. Just as the immediate consciousness lost its object as soon as it had it, the life-and-death struggle would destroy at least one side of self-conscious movement that the life-and-death struggle itself seeks to complete. Through this experience “self-consciousness learns that life is as essential to it as pure self-consciousness,”²² which has the significance that, for Hegel, actuality is just as important for freedom as is the abstract essence, and that freedom is in fact one with its actuality. Thus self-consciousness abandons the immediate violence of the life-and-death struggle and adopts instead a mediate form of violence, one that maintains the other in a state of becoming-negated. Here emerges the shape of Lordship and Bondage, in which the two self-consciousnesses assume the asymmetric relation in which “one is the independent consciousness whose essential nature is to be for itself, [and] the other is the dependent consciousness whose essential nature is simply to live or to be for another.”²³ Such asymmetry reflects the unintegrated duality that has emerged in the dialectic of recognition between abstract freedom and actual freedom; at this stage the lord takes all of abstract freedom onto itself and has the bondsman as the passive actuality of its freedom.

²² Hegel and Findlay, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 115.

²³ Hegel and Findlay, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 115.

In the bondsman the lord has his recognition as absolutely free, while the lord recognizes the bondsman as a mere thing. Their recognition is itself mediated by things. The lord relates to the bondsman in the things that the lord makes the bondsman labour upon, and the bondsman relates to the lord in the products of the labour. These products are the actuality of the lord's self-certainty; in them the lord apprehends his freedom objectified in the shape of thinghood: "the lord, who has interposed the bondsman between it [the thing] and himself, takes to himself only the dependent aspect of the thing and has the pure enjoyment of it. The aspect of its independence he leaves to the bondsman, who works on it."²⁴ The bondsman, conversely, encounters the thing as substance, and through his labour negates the substance of the thing so that it takes on the shape of the lord's subjectivity, e.g., for the bondsman the thing is an animal that must be raised and processed, while for the lord the thing is meat that may be enjoyed or disposed of. Through this process the lord's freedom, his mastery over Nature, is made actual and reflected into the lord's self-consciousness in his enjoyment of the thing. The bondsman, on the other hand, relates to the thing only in its independent substantiality, and therefore finds himself to be utterly mastered by the thing – his freedom is without actuality and therefore without self-certainty. It seems, then, that the lord has successfully attained the freedom and recognition he sought, and that therefore the highest expression of freedom is domination viewed from the side of the dominator.

As we might expect, domination nevertheless proves to have its drawbacks. The impetus for the Lordship and Bondage relation was recognition but "the outcome is a recognition that is one-sided and unequal."²⁵ In other words, the reciprocity that characterized the previous shapes of

²⁴ Ibid, 116.

²⁵ Hegel and Findlay, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 116.

self-consciousness have been lost. The lord has indeed asserted himself as absolutely free before the bondsman, but in that very act he has undermined the possibility of recognition as such:

In this recognition the unessential consciousness is for the lord the object, which constitutes the truth of his certainty of himself ... What now really confronts him is not an independent consciousness, but a dependent one. He is, therefore, not certain of being-for-self as the truth of himself. On the contrary, his truth is in reality the unessential consciousness and its unessential action.²⁶

By placing the bondsman so far below himself, the lord makes the bondsman, to put it crudely, one whose opinion counts for nothing. The bondsman is reduced to a thing for the lord, and a thing cannot, as we saw earlier, satisfy self-consciousness's need for recognition. The lord's relation to the world thus regresses to the empty transitoriness of the appetitive consciousness. The world again takes on the shape of inert objects, which succumb immediately to the negativity of consciousness. The lord "has reserved to itself the pure negating of the object and thereby its unalloyed feeling of self, but that is the reason why this satisfaction is itself only a fleeting one, for it lacks the side of objectivity and permanence."²⁷ Through dominating the other, the lord has in fact denied himself access to the other, and so experience returns to its pre-other state of repetition. We see, then, that in degrading the other we ultimately degrade ourselves rather than elevate ourselves. "I am only truly free when the other is also free and is recognized by me as free."²⁸

Just as the lord's self-consciousness reverses itself, so too does that of the bondsman. Unlike the lord, who has a mere thing for its other and thus loses the moment of recognition, the bondsman has the absolute negativity of the lord as its other. "Hence the truth for [the bondsman]

²⁶ Ibid, 116-117.

²⁷ Hegel and Findlay, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 118.

²⁸ Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy*, 171.

is the independent consciousness that is for itself.”²⁹ Being thus recognized, the bondsman does not regress into an appetitive consciousness, but rather attains self-certainty. The recognition of the lord reaches the bondsman in the shape of the threat of death. This threat is not directed towards any specific or natural content of the bondsman, but rather the bondsman’s abstract self-consciousness itself. Labouring under the fear of death, the bondsman then subordinates his appetitive nature to the will of the lord, in order to preserve himself as an abstract self-consciousness. The bondsman’s self-certainty also has its side in actuality. In appetitive consumption, the lord lost his object as soon as he had it, but “work, on the other hand, is desire held in check, fleetingness staved off; in other words, work forms and shapes the thing.”³⁰ In working on the thing, the bondsman finds himself objectified in the product of his labour. The product objectifies and concretizes the bondsman *qua abstract self-consciousness*, because in working on the thing the bondsman put up with the harsh conditions that afflicted his natural being in order to preserve himself as an abstract self-consciousness. These two moments, the fear of death and the forming of the product, are equally essential for the development of the bondsman’s self-consciousness:

The two moments of fear and service as such, as also that of the formative activity, are necessary, both being at the same time in a universal mode ... Without the formative activity, fear remains inward and mute, and consciousness does not become explicitly for itself. If consciousness fashions the thing without that initial absolute fear, it is only an empty self-centered attitude; for its form or negativity is not negativity per se, and therefore its formative activity cannot give it a consciousness of itself as essential being.³¹

²⁹ Hegel and Findlay, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 117.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 118.

³¹ Hegel and Findlay, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 119.

Through an ironic, dialectical twist, then, it is the bondsman that attains self-consciousness, that recognizes itself as free, i.e., as a being that transcends its natural condition. This does not mean that Hegel thinks slavery is right or emancipatory. Quite the opposite – Hegel thought, for instance, that classical Greek and Roman society were inferior to modern society because of their practice of slavery.³² Instead, Hegel is showing that one need not resort to the dubious practice of positing and ought in place of an is when critiquing slavery because an immanent critique of slavery is already inscribed within the recognitive structure of slavery itself: in subjugating the slave the slave is recognized as in-itself free. Hegel is also making an argument that societies based on slavery are inherently unstable because the slaves are bound to become self-conscious of their freedom, and “that is why bloody wars developed in which slaves tried to free themselves, to obtain recognition of their eternal human rights.”³³ The bondsman’s self-consciousness at the end of the Lordship and Bondage dialectic is highly abstract and lacking actuality, and thus it is in need of determination and actualization, but it marks the first genuine appearance of self-consciousness in the *Phenomenology* and, according to Hegel, on the stage of history. Hegel says in the *Philosophy of Spirit* that “this subjugation of the slave’s egotism forms the beginning of true human freedom ... Slavery and tyranny are, therefore, a necessary stage in the history of nations.”³⁴ Hegel then thinks that absolute violence and bondage are necessary antecedents to the appearance of genuine freedom in history. Hegel’s view is shocking in one sense, but in another, it is well known that freedom is not free.

A number of important conclusions follow from the Lordship and Bondage parable, but one in particular is crucial for our purposes: Hegel’s conception of the two-fold nature of freedom.

³² Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy*, 174.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy*, 175.

On the one hand, freedom is, for Hegel, the abstract 'I', but on the other hand freedom must be made actual, and these two sides are immediately and inextricably tied to each other in their mutual development. The first side, the abstract 'I', is what has been called the Ātman, cogito, transcendental apperception, etc. Its freedom consists in its transcendence of any determinate content, as its nature is to collapse the manifold multiplicity of experience into a pure, negative unity. For Hegel, it is the abstract 'I' that grounds the human capacity for freedom because through it the human "stands above its content, i.e., its various drives, and also the further individual ways in which these are actualized and satisfied."³⁵ As the *Katha Upanishad* puts it, "As the one fire, after it has entered the world, though one, takes different forms according to whatever it burns, so does the internal Ātman of all living beings, though one, take a form according to whatever He enters and is outside all forms."³⁶ This vedic passage indicates both the freedom and the impotence of the abstract 'I'. In its negative unity, the 'I' maintains itself over and against the content, but at the same time it remains wholly indeterminate. In its indeterminacy the 'I' is only a passive medium that the content traverses; its negativity is in the shape of the appetitive consciousness in its indeterminate, repetitive negativity, rather than that of the bondsman, whose negation is determinate and thus gives the content a new, subsisting form. In this sense the abstract 'I' is originally entirely beholden to the content: "since it is formally finite, it is tied to this content as to the determinations of its nature and of its external actuality."³⁷ Hegel therefore argues that the human is not free insofar as it is the abstract 'I', but only that it thereby has the capacity or potentiality for freedom. To the abstract unity of the 'I', Hegel says, "determinism rightly opposed the content, which, as something encountered, is not contained in [the 'I'] and therefore comes

³⁵ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. Hugh Barr Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 47.

³⁶ Patrick Olivelle, *Upanishads* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 243.

³⁷ Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy*, 47.

from outside.”³⁸ The abstract ‘I’ therefore needs to be made objective and determinate in the field of actuality for it to give rise to genuine freedom.

The abstract ‘I’ is always already made actual and determinate in the shape of the other. Insofar as I recognize the other as self-conscious, the abstract ‘I’ is brought before me as object. As the Lordship and Bondage dialectic seeks to show, such recognition radically reorders the contours of reality that my actions and desires move across. My abstract ‘I’ is simultaneously determined as the other of the other and it ceases to be the negative mediator of reality as such. It is re-positing as the ‘I’ of *this particular individual*. Only then does the abstract person, as the person who is actual yet exceeds all of its predicates, exist at all. Crucially, for Hegel, such an abstract person can exist only in community with other abstract persons, even when it is a hostile community like that of Lordship and Bondage. It is in a community, not in an individual per se, that self-consciousness prevails. The collective behaviors that are characteristic of a given community are the actuality of the recognition that determines the self-consciousness of that community. It is in participating in these behaviors that the individual actualizes the abstract person, since these behaviors do not pertain to the natural order of humanity but rather to Spirit, or the self-conscious order of humanity.³⁹ Spirit is made unstable when the abstract truth and actuality contradict one another – as in the case of the bondsman who is self-conscious of his freedom but finds himself in bondage – thereby leaving the collective desires unsatisfied. That dissatisfaction compels humanity to develop itself and to create history, which is itself an expression of freedom insofar as in it Spirit develops without natural humanity developing. In

³⁸ Ibid, 48.

³⁹ This is Hegel’s answer to the Buddhist thesis, now promulgated by the great Sam Harris, that the self is an illusion. For Hegel, the abstract person exists in being recognized, and here recognition must be understood as social practice. My abstract self is real insofar as I am legally, emotionally, etc. treated as a coherent identity by my community. To deny the actuality of the self on the basis of a transcendental abstraction is for Hegel a simple falsification.

history actuality is transformed, and through it and with it the self-consciousness of the abstract 'I' receives new determinations. Thus the two, the abstract 'I' and actuality, continually develop and overstep each other and dance around their implicate unity. This process is the dialectic of history, and it can only come to a rest when the abstract 'I' and its actuality come into perfect accordance with one another. That would constitute the ultimate expression of freedom.

What exactly such a final shape of freedom would look like for Hegel will concern the rest of our discussion, but for now we can make some preliminary remarks. In the introduction to his *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* Hegel discusses the general features of his conception of Freedom and there says, "the will in its truth is such that what it wills, i.e., its content, is identical with the will itself, so that freedom wills freedom."⁴⁰ This has a twofold significance. On the one hand it means that the free individual is one who fights for recognition both for itself and for others – the latter being, due to the nature of recognition, a necessary concomitant to the former – especially when this is at the expense of the individual's natural being. Thus Hegel says, "those who remains slaves suffer no absolute injustice; for he who has not the courage to risk his life to win freedom, that man deserves to be a slave"⁴¹ What this provocative statement means is that the slave who allows its right to recognition to be subordinated to its natural being is not in-itself free; it is only a particularly wretched shape of appetitive consciousness. On the other hand "freedom wills freedom" means that in the final shape of freedom people will live according to freedom alone, and in so doing will spontaneously reproduce the conditions of their freedom in all of their actions. A common thread through all of this is the negation of Nature. In freedom, humanity overcomes its animalic dimension and our actions abandon the linear, repetitive logic of natural

⁴⁰ Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy*, 53.

⁴¹ Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy*, 175.

development to assume the dialectical, historical logic of Spirit. This is how Hegel argues for the possibility of ethics, i.e., a canon of behaviors that are carried out on the basis of something other than self-interested pleasure, as freedom is posited by him as the very force that overcomes the part of ourselves that acts only on the basis of pleasure. In what follows we will see how this brings Hegel's conception of freedom very close to that of Immanuel Kant, who also saw freedom as humanity's overcoming of Nature

Chapter 2: Critique of Kant and Freedom as Reconciliation

Like his fellow German Idealists, Hegel wrote much of his philosophy with one goal in mind: to overcome Immanuel Kant. For Hegel, Kant had brought about a revolution in thought that was the German counterpart to the political revolution in France. Hegel saw both of these revolutions as grand and seminal cataclysms in the history of Spirit. They constituted, so he thought, the moment when the contradictory forces of the Enlightenment finally erupted, allowing new dimensions of thought and freedom to open up and enter into history. Despite his reverence for Kant and the French Revolution, Hegel also thought that they were both deeply, disastrously flawed. Just as the Reign of Terror came about due to the flaws in the French revolutionary project, Hegel thought that there were forces in Kant's philosophy that could reap disastrous consequences such as skepticism, nihilism, radical alienation – what Nietzsche would later name the 'Death of God'. Hegel saw it as the task of his philosophical generation to carry out a *determinate negation* of Kant, that is, to take the Kantian premises and follow them out even further than Kant did, as to allow their contradictions to bloom and for a new shape of philosophy to appear. Hegel thought that other German philosophers, especially Fichte and Schelling, had already carried out much of this project, but that the final steps remained to be taken. In this way Hegel saw himself as the Napoleon of philosophy, with his task to save what was good in the revolution from the revolution itself.

Although Hegel's critique of Kant is often thought of as being primarily epistemological and metaphysical, Hegel took Kant's practical philosophy just as seriously. For Hegel, the Absolute is the "identity of the theoretical and the practical" (SL, 824) – itself a Kantian distinction – so that one cannot be considered complete until it is made to harmonize with the other. Thus Hegel dedicates four lengthy subsections of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* to his confrontation with

Kant's practical philosophy. The confrontation reaches its peak in the first two subsections of the Morality section of the *Phenomenology*, titled 'The moral view of the world' and 'Dissemblance and duplicity'. It is out of these two subsections that Hegel develops the final subsection of Morality, 'Conscience. The beautiful soul, evil and its forgiveness,' in which Hegel gives us his theory of freedom as reconciliation. It is therefore necessary to look at Hegel's critique of Kant's practical philosophy, both because the critique of Kant is central to Hegel's philosophy generally, and because the final conception of freedom that Hegel gives us in the *Phenomenology*, reconciliation, is a determinate negation of Kant's conception of freedom.

Before delving into Hegel's critique of Kant's practical philosophy we should first give a brief exposition of Kant's practical philosophy itself, with reference to the concept of freedom contained therein. It begins with Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Before and after Kant there has been a great deal of debate over the possibility of human freedom in reference to two seemingly conflicting facts: we appear to be physical bodies that are wholly subject to the laws of nature, while at the same time we have a powerful inner sense of being free. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant draws the boundary of our understanding so that the resolution to such a debate lies outside the field of the cognizable. He there argues that the human mind is of a definite structure, and one which only allows for certain kinds of objects to be cognized, such as those that exist in space and time and obey causality, etc. Everything else, that is, everything that cannot be cognized, belongs to the *things-in-themselves*. There is much debate over what exact nature Kant means to ascribe to *things-in-themselves*, but two things, among others, are certain: *things-in-themselves* cannot be cognized, and whatever we would need to know to determine whether humans are free or not lies within the *thing-in-themselves*. Therefore, Kant concludes, we simply cannot know whether human freedom is possible.

And yet Kant emphatically affirms the existence of human freedom. In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, written after the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant says that the structures of the mind analyzed in the previous critique were those of our theoretical faculty, i.e., the means through which we produce natural science, mathematics, metaphysics, etc. In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, however, Kant tells us that he is analyzing the structures of our *practical* faculty, i.e., the means through which we make rational decisions. Kant claims that these two faculties are, in fact, “one and the same reason,”⁴² but their supposed identity is quite obscure. That aside, Kant’s claim is that theoretical reason is silent on the possibility of human freedom, while the possibility of human freedom is the fundamental postulate of practical reason, since we can only make rational decisions on that assumption. Thus Kant claims that we can assume the possibility of human freedom for practical purposes without contradicting or infringing on our theoretical reason. In order to not corrupt theoretical reason with the postulate of freedom, or any other postulate that practical but not theoretical reason might contain, we simply must not bring it to bear on any question concerning natural science, mathematics, metaphysics, etc. Those domains are regulated by natural, spatial and temporal laws that theoretical reason seeks to cognize, and under the jurisdiction of such laws there is no room for human freedom. Thus Kant locates human freedom within the open domain of *things-in-themselves*.

The freedom that Kant ascribes to the human will is not that of capriciousness. It is not simply insofar as a human wills an act that the act is free for Kant. A decision can only be free under Kant’s definition if it has its origin purely in the practical use of reason and not in anything that is subject to natural laws. For instance, a person who decides to eat because he or she is hungry is not free because the stomach and the body as a whole are empirical objects and therefore subject

⁴² Immanuel Kant and Mary J. Gregor, *Critique of Practical Reason*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 98.

to natural law. Such an action, and all actions of that sort, which are motivated by appetites or emotions, are caught up within the causal nexus of nature and therefore are not free. This is not to say that Kant thinks we are never free when we do anything that pertains to our appetites or emotions, but rather that we are never free when we do anything *because* of our appetites or emotions; the same action may be free or unfree according to whether it was carried out on the basis of pure practical reason or not.

Kant must then show what the nature of pure practical reason is and how it can be that practical reason allows us to make decisions without basing them on appetites or emotions. Kant says that in order for practical reason to give us a determinate basis for making decisions that is wholly distinct from appetites or emotions, which are determined according to natural law, practical reason must have laws of its own. Thus Kant writes in the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*,

A rational being ... has two standpoints from which he can regard himself and know laws of the use of his powers and hence of all of his actions: first, insofar as he belongs to the world of sense subject to laws of nature; second, insofar as he belongs to the intelligible world subject to laws which, independent of nature, are not empirical but are founded only on reason.⁴³

This language of belonging to an intelligible world reflects some of the odd Platonic sentiments Kant holds in regards to practical reason. For simplicity's sake, we can take "insofar as he belongs to the intelligible world" to mean "insofar as he possesses and utilizes his practical reason." Kant's point is that just as Nature has laws that it must obey, e.g., Newtonian mechanics, and that nature *is* nature insofar as it obeys such laws, so too practical reason has laws that it obeys and practical

⁴³ Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals: With on a Supposed Right to Lie Because of Philanthropic Concerns*, trans. Ellington W. James, 3rd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996), 53.

reason is practical reason just insofar as it obeys such laws. The former Kant calls “laws of nature,” the latter “laws of freedom.”⁴⁴

The paradigm case for laws of nature in Kant’s time was, as mentioned about, Newtonian mechanics. In Newtonian mechanics, as in physics today, a minimal number of fundamental and universal laws, e.g., universal gravitation, inertia, etc., are posited through which particular events are derived or explained. According to Kant practical reason has only one fundamental and universal law, which he therefore calls *the* moral law, and he expresses it in the form of his famous Categorical Imperative: “Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become universal law.”⁴⁵ Kant puts the Categorical Imperative in various formulations but the one given above is the most famous one and the most conducive to our purposes; regardless, Kant insists that all of his formulations of the Categorical Imperative are logically equivalent. The meaning and implications of the Categorical Imperative are of course subject to debate, but this debate will be bracketed for our present purposes. The mainstream interpretation of the Categorical Imperative is that it says that in order for an action to be moral it must be capable of universal iteration. We can see this in the example of lying versus truth-telling: while one can achieve certain ends by means of lying, if everyone were to only lie all of the time, i.e., if the act of lying were universally iterated, then the act of lying would lose its efficacy because its efficacy is derived from the expectation that at least some people tell the truth at least some of the time – therefore lying is immoral. Conversely, if everyone were to only tell the truth all of time the act of truth-telling would not be undermined to any degree – therefore truth-telling is moral. Murder is another case where if everyone were to murder all of the time the act of murdering would

⁴⁴ Kant, *Critique of Practical*, 55.

⁴⁵ Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics*, 30.

obviously be rendered impossible in the long run. It is a common error to think that the Categorical Imperative is merely an abstruse formulation of the Golden Rule or ‘treat others the way you want to be treated’. The content of ‘the way you want to be treated’ is often determined by appetites and emotions, and therefore is subject to laws of nature and therefore does not accord with Kantian freedom. By contrast the Categorical Imperative is, according to Kant, not subject at all to appetites or emotions because it requires only that one employ one’s pure practical reason to determine if an action is universally iterable and thereby determine if it is moral. For Kant, then, one is free insofar as one obeys the Categorical Imperative and thereby raises oneself above the influence of natural law.

Kant’s practical philosophy seems to satisfy the concerns raised about freedom in our preface and in the Lordship and Bondage dialectic. The conception of freedom contained in Kant’s practical philosophy is not derivative of happiness or religion or an appeal to authority, and it provides humanity with a determinate means for carrying the content of their actions beyond the confines of our natural being. Also, if everyone were to obey the Categorical Imperative at all times, we could expect that this would create a social condition characterized by perfect mutual recognition. Kant himself thought this and he called such a social condition the “kingdom of ends.”⁴⁶ Finally, Kant’s conception of freedom is systematically contained within the highly sophisticated metaphysics and epistemology of his three Critiques, which makes it all the more philosophically satisfying.

Enter Hegel. In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* Hegel claims that “history is the exhibition of Spirit striving to attain knowledge of its own nature,”⁴⁷ that is, of its freedom. Kant’s

⁴⁶ Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics*, 39.

⁴⁷ Hegel, *Reason In History*, 23.

conception of freedom is presented in the *Phenomenology* as being the result of the development of Spirit's self-consciousness that arose out of the French Revolution. Through the French Revolution, Hegel claims, Spirit discovered a dimension to its freedom that was like Kant's conception of freedom in being divorced from appetite and emotion and oriented towards the absolutely universal. This was, supposedly, as a *necessary presupposition* for the occurrence of the French Revolution, since it is a law of dialectical development that "what appears as sequel and derivative is rather the absolute prius of what it appears to be mediated by."⁴⁸ The dialectical nature of this development also means, for Hegel, that the new stage of Spirit reached in Kantian philosophy must itself be sublated as was the French Revolution. Thus Hegel sets about critiquing Kant's practical philosophy. In being the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel uses his phenomenological method of critique. He asks the reader to imagine the perspective, or the self-consciousness, of the sort of moral agent Kant describes in his practical philosophy. It from the inside of this self-consciousness that Hegel then draws out the contradictions of Kant's practical philosophy.

The name Hegel uses for the consciousness that sees itself and the world in terms of Kantian practical philosophy varies between 'the moral view of the world', 'moral consciousness', 'moral self-consciousness' and the like, but for our purposes we will call it *moral consciousness*. The central dilemma that Hegel sees as facing the moral consciousness is this: for the moral consciousness nature, with its laws, is formally incommensurable with freedom, with its laws, and yet nature is the domain in which freedom must be realized. Hegel points out that Kant establishes the freedom of practical reason on the basis of an ontology that determines nature and practical reason as wholly separate though coincident orders of existence. In other words, Kant's practical

⁴⁸ Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy*, 283.

reason is not free because it subdues or commands nature, but merely because it is *indifferent* to nature. The relation between nature and practical reason is therefore symmetrical; each is equally endowed with “the freedom of mere being,”⁴⁹ meaning that they are both ‘free’ by virtue of both being ontologically self-grounding. Thus Hegel says,

The freer self-consciousness becomes, the freer also is the negative object of its consciousness. The object has thus become a complete world within itself ... a Nature whose laws like its actions belong to itself as a being which is indifferent to moral self-consciousness, just as the latter is indifferent to it.⁵⁰

Yet while the moral consciousness (or Kant) bases its freedom on this indifference, it nonetheless insists that practical reason reach across the ontological divide and influence the course of nature. This ontological divide is that which grounds the freedom of practical reason, yet the essence of practical reason is posited as being the negation of this divide. Such is the dilemma of the moral consciousness. Hegel draws a number of contradictions out of this dilemma in order to show that Kant’s practical philosophy not only makes freedom and morality impossible, but in fact ends up as a crude, metaphysically extravagant philosophy of hedonism.

The first contradiction that follows from the dilemma of the moral consciousness is that its happiness is incommensurable with its freedom, yet the demands of practical reason includes a demand for happiness. The incommensurability of happiness with freedom comes about because happiness pertains to the moral consciousness as an empirical entity, that is, insofar as it is a body in a historical moment. Thus happiness falls on the side of nature in the nature/practical reason antithesis. That happiness is natural does not mean that it is impossible for happiness to come about through the obeying of the moral law, but rather that such coming about is always an accidental

⁴⁹ Hegel and Findlay, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 372.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 365.

and never a necessary occurrence. It is rather the case that “nature is not concerned with giving the moral consciousness a sense of the unity of its reality with that of nature, and hence nature perhaps may let it become happy, or perhaps may not”.⁵¹ Therefore the moral consciousness cannot derive a universal law concerning happiness that conforms to the standard of the Categorical Imperative, i.e., universal iterability. Kant himself asserts this in the *Critique of Practical Reason*:

Where each has to put his happiness comes down to the particular feeling of pleasure and displeasure in each and, even within one and the same subject, to needs that differ as this feeling changes; and a law that is subjectively necessary (as a law of nature) is thus objectively a very contingent practical principle, which can and must be very different in different subjects, and hence can never yield a law because, in the desire for happiness, it is not the form of lawfulness that counts but simply the matter, namely whether I am to expect satisfaction from following the law, and how much.⁵²

For the moral consciousness, happiness in any form, be it its own happiness or the happiness of all or the greatest number, cannot issue necessarily from its moral action, because that would introduce empirical contingency into its moral deliberation, and thus happiness in any form cannot necessarily be an expression of its freedom. The occurrence of happiness is then a matter of indifference to the moral consciousness insofar as it is free, and so happiness is left up to chance.

And yet, “the moral consciousness cannot forego happiness and leave this element out of its absolute purpose”.⁵³ Even the most common moral sense recognizes that a morality that leaves happiness up to chance can hardly be viewed as adequate. Hegel’s reasons for why the moral consciousness must make a duty out of happiness are rather obscure: “this element [happiness] in the objectified purpose, in the fulfilled duty, is the individual consciousness that beholds itself as

⁵¹ Hegel and Findlay, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 366.

⁵² Kant, *Critique of Practical*, 23.

⁵³ Hegel and Findlay, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 366.

realized; in other words, it is enjoyment, which is thus implied in the Notion of morality”.⁵⁴ Fortunately, we need not spend too much effort discerning what Hegel means by this because Kant agrees that the realization of happiness is an absolute duty of practical reason:

Concerning meritorious duty to others, the natural end that all men have is their own happiness. Now humanity might indeed subsist if nobody contributed to the happiness of others, provided he did not intentionally impair their happiness. But this, after all, would harmonize only negatively and not positively with humanity as an end in itself, if everyone does not strive, as much as he can, to further the ends of others.⁵⁵

Happiness, both for self and others, is therefore a duty that the moral consciousness must realize if it is to be free. It is such an important duty, in fact, that Kant determines its realization as the *summum bonum*, or highest good, not only of the moral consciousness but of the universe. Kant opens the first section of the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* by saying that, “there is no possibility of thinking of anything at all in the world, or even out of it which can be regarded as good without qualification, except a good will,”⁵⁶ meaning that a good will, i.e., adherence to the moral law, is the only unconditioned good of the moral consciousness; but that it is the only unconditioned good does not imply that it is the *highest* good. Rather, “to need happiness, and to be worthy of it, and yet not to participate in it cannot be consistent with the perfect volition of a rational being,” and thus, “virtue and happiness together constitute possession of the *summum bonum* in a person, and happiness distributed in exact proportion to morality (as the worth of a person and his worthiness to be happy) constitute the *summum bonum* of a possible world.”⁵⁷ The highest good, the ultimate aim, of the moral consciousness is to attain happiness as grounded in its

⁵⁴ Ibid, 366.

⁵⁵ Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics*, 37.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 7.

⁵⁷ Kant, *Critique of Practical*, 89-90.

moral action, that is, happiness as necessarily following from its moral action. This was shown in the preceding to be impossible, and so the moral consciousness has in its very essence a contradiction of practical reason.

Another contradiction follows from the dilemma of the moral consciousness. The moral consciousness derives its freedom from its practical reason, expressed in the Categorical Imperative as “act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become universal law,” because practical reason is indifferent to nature, but when the moral consciousness evaluates the maxims that it is to act by it cannot help but introduce sensuous, and thereby natural, elements into its deliberations. Kantian freedom is abstract and universal, but the moral consciousness faces an injunction within the essence of its freedom to bring its abstract universality into unity with nature through its action. Therefore its sensuousness cannot be done away with or ignored because “sensuousness is itself a moment of the process producing unity, viz. the moment of actuality.”⁵⁸ Sensuousness brings the contingency and particularity of natural activity into the morality of the moral consciousness, which thus puts anything, or any *maxim*, it wills at odds with the strict universality of the Categorical Imperative. To put it in Hegelese:

The moral consciousness as the simple knowing and willing of pure duty is, in the doing of it, brought into relation with the object [i.e. nature] which stands in contrast to its simplicity, into relation with the actuality of the complex case, and thereby has a complex relationship with it. Here arise, in relation to content, the many laws generally, and in relation to form, the contradictory powers of the knowing consciousness and of the non-conscious.⁵⁹

This expresses the very essence of the Categorical Imperative, because the Categorical Imperative is the formula for bringing the particularity of action into harmony with the universality of practical

⁵⁸ Hegel and Findlay, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 368.

⁵⁹ Hegel and Findlay, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 369.

reason. There is a problem, however, which is that it is in principle impossible for any maxim to attain to the universality demanded by the Categorical Imperative because all maxims, as maxims of action, are related to sensuousness. In philosophical discourse it is possible to give deliberations about the morality of lying the appearance of total abstraction, but in reality lying is always something that is carried out by a body to another body or bodies through sensuous communication, and lying is always *about* something and thereby, either directly or indirectly, related to sensuousness (even lies about mathematical theorems are motivated at some level by something sensuous).

From the above problem for the moral consciousness follows one of the most common criticisms of Kant's practical philosophy: the Categorical Imperative leaves it undetermined as to what level of *generality* a maxim must have in order to qualify as a *universal* law. The ambiguity becomes problematic when one encounters cases of conflicting moral duties. The classic example is the following: imagine that an innocent person is being hunted by a murderer and comes to your house and hides in your basement; if the murderer were then to come to your door and ask you if the innocent person were in your house, would it be better to lie and protect the innocent person or to tell the truth and risk letting an innocent person be killed? Neither lying nor letting an innocent person be killed can become a universal law. The moral consciousness could resolve this problem by saying that *in circumstances such as these* it is moral to lie or moral to let an innocent person die (Kant prefers the former). Whichever option is chosen, such a law would be general, but it is unclear whether its generality meets the level of universality demanded by the Categorical Imperative. On the one hand it must, because otherwise an indefinite number of paradoxes of similar form would inevitably beset practical reason, but on the other hand it must not, because that

would destroy the universality of the Categorical Imperative, which is the ground of its being in its differentiation from nature.

This contradiction is especially problematic from Hegel's perspective because he argues in an earlier section of the *Phenomenology* that all ethical action requires a choice between conflicting moral duties – thus he says, “innocence ... is merely non-action, like the mere being of a stone, not even that of a child”⁶⁰ – and therefore cases of conflicting moral duties, which are those that bring out this contradiction of practical reason, are the rule rather than the exception. The moral consciousness is then constantly faced with this contradiction that the Categorical Imperative demands that the moral consciousness *violate the Categorical Imperative* by acting according to maxims that *in principle* cannot become universal laws. The alternative is to do nothing – which might be the only action that is genuinely universally iterable, only that Kant makes it clear in the *Groundwork* that “to preserve one's life is a duty.”⁶¹ Once again we see that the moral consciousness has a contradiction in its essence, in that which is meant to ground its freedom.

The third major contradiction Hegel develops out of the dilemma of the moral consciousness is the most fundamental. As said above, the freedom of the moral consciousness, or rather the very existence of the moral consciousness, is grounded in the opposition of nature and practical reason. At the same time, the demands of practical reason are absolute, uncompromising, *categorical*. As Kant says in the *Groundwork*, it is not enough for the moral consciousness to merely not violate the moral law, but rather it must positively embody the moral law to its ultimate end. Thus the absolute duty of the moral consciousness, which is that which it must pursue if it is to be free, is to bring nature into conformity with the moral law. This is, of course, an insane

⁶⁰ Hegel and Findlay, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 282.

⁶¹ Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics*, 10.

injunction, but it is one which follows from the premises of Kant's practical philosophy, as Kant readily admits. As quoted above, Kant says that his *summum bonum* is also the *summum bonum* of "a possible world". Kant in fact concludes his *Critique of Judgment* by arguing that the *summum bonum* is the *telos* of the natural universe. Anyone will concede that it is practically (in the colloquial sense) absurd to expect that nature can be made to conform to Kant's moral law, but this is not Hegel's concern. Hegel's concern is that even if such a task were practically possible for the moral consciousness it would nonetheless remain ontologically impossible for the moral consciousness. The task is ontologically impossible because the moral consciousness is, again, constituted by the opposition between nature and practical reason, and so the removal of this opposition would be the removal of the moral consciousness itself. Hegel says,

Consciousness has ... to bring about this harmony [with nature] and continually to be making progress in morality. But the consummation of this progress has to be projected into a future infinitely remote; for if it actually came about, this would do away with the moral consciousness. For morality is only moral consciousness as negative essence, for whose pure duty sensuousness has only negative significance, is only *not* in conformity with duty.⁶²

The moral consciousness itself is defined in contradistinction to nature, and thus insofar as something is in harmony with nature it cannot be the moral consciousness and vice versa. The moral consciousness thereby guarantees its own failure in the demand it makes for itself, which is its essence, that it bring nature into accord with freedom. It cannot, however, give up this demand because then it gives up itself, and it cannot allow the realization of this demand because then it likewise gives up itself. The moral consciousness therefore makes a compromise, to perpetually

⁶² Hegel and Findlay, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 368.

strive for the realization of its absolute duty without ever hoping to reach it. Such perpetual striving is what Kant himself posits in the *Critique of Practical Reason*:

Complete conformity of the will with the moral law is ... a perfection of which no rational being of the sensible world is capable at any moment of his existence. Since it is nevertheless required as practically necessary, it can only be found in an endless progress toward that complete uniformity.⁶³

This plea by the moral consciousness, that it be allowed to never realize the demand of its practical reason so long as it promises to strive endlessly after it in utter futility, is pure duplicity for Hegel. If the moral consciousness is to be truly moral then “its content has to be thought of as something which simply must be, and must not remain a task.”⁶⁴ In other words, the supposed purpose of practical philosophy is to determine a means by which an ‘ought’ may be derived from an ‘is’, but the practical reason of Kant and the moral consciousness produces an ought that is utterly impotent, which in principle cannot be realized, and the moral consciousness disguises this failure in the guise of an endless striving. There can not even be any question of advancing towards the impossible goal in this case because “advancing as such ... would assume quantitative difference in morality; but there can be no question of these in it”⁶⁵ at least not in a morality that operates according to universal laws and categorical imperatives.

As the quotes from Kant show, Kant himself was well aware of all of these problems with his practical philosophy, and he was the first to raise them. Kant nevertheless thought that he had a solution to these problems: God. Kant takes all of these flaws in his theory not as evidence against his theory but rather as evidence for the existence of God. Kant claims that God will give the moral

⁶³ Kant, *Critique of Practical*, 98-99.

⁶⁴ Hegel and Findlay, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 368.

⁶⁵ Hegel and Findlay, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 379.

consciousness infinite life through which to endlessly progress towards moral perfection, will consecrate the particular laws of practical reason even if they do not otherwise conform to the Categorical Imperative, and will reward the moral consciousness for its moral behavior, and thus establish a necessary connection between freedom and happiness. Hegel thought this was ludicrous. The moral consciousness has failed in every regard to meet the standards of morality that it has set for itself, and yet it expects God to grant it immortality and happiness out of divine grace:

It is aware of its imperfection and cannot, therefore, in point of fact demand happiness as a desert, as something of which it is worthy. It can only ask for happiness to be granted as a free act of grace, i.e. it can only ask for happiness as such, as something existing in and for itself, and can expect it, not on the absolute ground mentioned above [morality] but as coming by chance and caprice. Here, then, non-morality declares just what it is – that it is concerned not about morality, but solely about happiness as such without reference to morality.⁶⁶ (PS, 379)

Kant has been called a puritan, a prude, a tyrant and even an idiot for his practical philosophy, but Hegel went so far as to accuse him of being a hedonist. Hegel even makes the proto-Nietzschean point that the only discernible function that the moral view of the world serves the moral consciousness is to provide it with a basis for judging others, especially those who are happy, for being immoral and therefore undeserving of happiness. Whether such was Kant's intention in writing his practical philosophy is of course impossible to determine, although in regards to hedonism it is true that Kant left humanity instructions on how to throw a good party in his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. Victor Lyle Dowdell and Hans H. Rudnick (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), 185-191.

The moral consciousness collapses under its contradictions, but the dialectic of the *Phenomenology* carries on. What follows is not a ‘synthesis’ of the moral consciousness with whatever one might suppose its ‘antithesis’ to be, rather it is an uncovering of the presupposition of the moral consciousness. The latter showed itself to be contradictory and thus incomplete, and so it cannot be a self-subsistent system of thought but must instead be a botched abstraction of a more fundamental, more expansive system of thought. We need our immanent critique of the moral consciousness in order to identify the underlying system of thought; without this critique we would not know what the moral consciousness truly *is*. What it is, at least for Hegel, is not the autonomous rational agent pursuing the good of humanity as its ultimate end, but rather a consciousness that judges itself to be good and deserving of happiness despite its not conforming to any universal standard of goodness. At the same time, Kant claims that the moral consciousness is free insofar as it obeys the dictates of its practical reason, but in making this claim Kant surreptitiously posits a second, more fundamental freedom: the freedom of the moral consciousness to choose to between obeying its practical reason and *not* obeying its practical reason. Such hidden properties are in fact what grounds the moral consciousness and make possible its particular shape of self-consciousness.

Hegel calls the shape of consciousness that follows the moral consciousness in the dialectic of the *Phenomenology* ‘conscience’. Conscience does not reflect on its actions or its attitudes, but instead embodies them immediately and without deliberation, and in so doing affirms its actions and attitudes as moral: “It is a pure conscience which rejects with scorn such a moral ideal of the world; it is in its own self the simple Spirit that, certain of itself, acts conscientiously regardless of such ideas, and in this immediacy possesses its truth.”⁶⁸ Conscience is the anti-philosophical

⁶⁸ Hegel and Findlay, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 385.

consciousness, the person who has no answer to Socrates' questions and does not care. Its convictions come to it like its senses,⁶⁹ i.e., with pure immediacy and certainty. Conscience is therefore immersed in the particularity and fullness of content of its lifeworld in a way that the moral consciousness was forced to spurn. Its actions are immediate in that there is no gap between them and its convictions; its convictions are translated immediately into its actions such that its convictions and its actions are in fact one and the same, only viewed according to different modalities. It is thus absolutely free in itself and this freedom can only be limited or negated through forces that are external to conscience.

At first sight, conscience can appear as an underdeveloped or naively optimistic shape of Spirit for Hegel to put forward, since Hegel says that it acts morally without providing any schema for how it arrives at its moral convictions. This gap is intentional, however, and through it Hegel anticipates many of the critiques of morality that later appear in thinkers like Marx, Nietzsche and Freud. The moral convictions of conscience are *bodily* and receive no mediation from thought: "It determines from its own self; but the sphere of the self into which falls the determinateness as such is the so-called sense-nature; to have a content taken from the immediate certainty of itself means that it has nothing to draw on but sense-nature."⁷⁰ Sense-nature pertains to the dark, animalistic portion of the human soul for Hegel, meaning that it pertains to Hegel's much-neglected conception of the unconscious. Hegel's claim is that moral convictions appear immediately to conscience out of its unconscious, just as sense impressions appear to us without our awareness of how they were created. It is not that every thought appears to conscience as moral, but rather that some of its thoughts appear to it as already determined to be moral.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Hegel and Findlay, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 390.

The late placement of conscience in Hegel's discussion of morality signifies that it is, in addition to being a particular shape of Spirit, what ultimately grounds all the preceding shapes of morality and ethical judgment presented in the *Phenomenology*, including hedonism, utilitarianism, Kantianism, etc. Again, along Marx-Nietzsche-Freudian lines, Hegel is arguing that all these moral systems, with their various degrees of elaborateness, are intellectual dressing for moral convictions issuing from the unconscious. The particular shape of Spirit called conscience is simply the first consciousness that is self-consciousness, that is, embodying, the true nature of its morality; it is the truth of these ethical shapes that is raised to certainty. Hegel does not mean to deprecate moral action in this way, or make it seem entirely arbitrary. As we saw above, not all thoughts that enter conscience's consciousness appear to it as moral, just as any person experiences thoughts that he or she ethically disowns. Conscience is the righteous agent who only obeys the thoughts that appear to it as moral.

Conscience, being a shape of self-consciousness, requires recognition. What conscience is, and therefore what it puts forward for recognition, is not its outward, actual aspect, but rather the pure form of its willing that immediately relates its actions to duty. The consequences of its actions are not what counts, nor the specific content of its convictions and actions. So far as its duty is concerned, all that counts is that its actions are one with its convictions. Thus conscience must declare its convictions to others: "what is valid for that self-consciousness is not action as an existence, but the conviction that it is a duty; and this is made actual in language."⁷¹ All that conscience essentially does is declare its convictions, so that others will recognize that conscience is acting out of its convictions rather than out of its non-moral thoughts and impulses. But although conscience seeks the recognition of others, there is no necessary connection between its

⁷¹ Hegel and Findlay, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 396.

convictions and the convictions of others. Conscience has no universal law, no ethical criteria, and no system of norms from which it draws its convictions, and so others are bound to view conscience as capricious, selfish, etc. Conscience, however, cannot acknowledge the judgments of others, good or bad, because that would violate the immediacy of its freedom. It must continue to act as it naturally does while submitting itself to unsympathetic social judgment.

Thus conscience faces the tribunal of the universal consciousness. The universal consciousness represents the interests of the community and of pure, unadulterated duty. From the point of view of the universal consciousness, conscience is evil. Conscience wills only its particular sensuous being; it makes no attempt to reconcile its actuality with that of others and in fact must not make such an attempt. If conscience were to will anything other than its particular sensuous being then it would cease to be conscience. Conscience is therefore in its very essence opposed to the universal consciousness of others and thus, “when anyone says that he is acting according to his own law and conscience against others, he is saying, in fact, that he is wronging them.”⁷² The universal consciousness condemns conscience, as is its right, but conscience, again, cannot acknowledge the criticism. It goes on declaring the righteousness of its convictions and thereby preserves its being-for-self. The ultimate result is that the universal consciousness recognizes conscience as both evil and hypocritical:

For the consciousness which holds firmly to duty, the first consciousness counts as evil, because of the disparity between its inner being and the universal; and since, at the same time, this first consciousness declares its action to be in conformity with itself, to be duty and conscientiousness, it is held by the universal consciousness to be hypocrisy.⁷³

⁷² Hegel and Findlay, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 402.

⁷³ Hegel and Findlay, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 401.

Insofar as conscience is conscience it is only this hypocrisy. The being-for-self of conscience is its recognition by the universal consciousness. The movement of its recognition is for conscience to declare its conviction, which is only its particularity, to be universal, and the universal consciousness recognizes this contradiction as such. At this stage of the dialectic, then, morality is revealed to be nothing more than an empty, formal hypocrisy.

The nature of the universal consciousness remains undeveloped, however. So far it has been defined merely as that which conscience appeals to for recognition, which is determined to bear witness to the hypocrisy of conscience in its opposition to the so-called universal. However, all formal criteria for morality, that is, the universality of an action, have already been lost at this stage. There is no higher law for the universal consciousness to appeal to. It seemed at first to represent the interests of the community, but the community has been reduced to an atomized heap of consciences. The universal consciousness does not, therefore, represent any community per se or any universal; it is merely another conscience. The judgment that it employs to judge the first conscience therefore issues from a morality that is just as sensuous and particular as that of the first conscience. It commits just as much of a sham in declaring the other to be a hypocrite as the other does in declaring its conviction to be universal:

In denouncing hypocrisy as base, vile and so on, it is appealing in such judgment to its own law, just as the evil consciousness appeals to its law. For the former comes forward in opposition to the latter and thereby as a particular law. It has, therefore, no superiority over the other law, rather it legitimizes it.⁷⁴ (PS, 402)

The judging consciousness is immediately a hypocrite in denouncing the hypocrisy of the acting consciousness. It nonetheless must carry out its judging. It is just as much conscience as the acting

⁷⁴ Hegel and Findlay, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 402.

consciousness, and so it derives its being-for-self from the recognition of its moral convictions. Insofar as it is the recognizer, which is as essential to self-consciousness as being recognized, its moral conviction is its judgment of the other. Its declaration succumbs to its particularity just like that of the acting consciousness, and it reveals itself as the hypocrisy that claims to speak for the universal. Thus the two consciousnesses reveal themselves as reciprocally opposed.

The opposition between practical reason and nature in Kant's practical philosophy here reappears as the opposition between the acting consciousness and the judging consciousness. In the moral consciousness the opposition was present in one and the same individual: the moral consciousness judged itself, as a natural, acting being, from the standpoint of its own practical reason and always found itself wanting. In conscience the opposition is split between two individuals. The split is significant for a number of reasons. First, it reintroduces recognition into the movement of freedom. The moral consciousness failed in part because it lacked the moment of recognition. Instead of seeking recognition from others it sought to produce self-recognition out of its own resources by seeking out an absolute standpoint, one from which it could anticipate the judgment of the *universal Other* – as Kant says in the *Critique of Judgment*: “(1) think for oneself; (2) think from the standpoint of everyone else; and (3) think always consistently.”⁷⁵ Thereby the moral consciousness thought it could simulate the abstract form of recognition without risking confrontation with actual others. Conscience, conversely, sees the failure of the supposedly absolute standpoint. It therefore has no other option but to brave actual recognition in the social field. What conscience wins in doing this, however, is the removal of the asymmetry that beset the moral consciousness. In the moral consciousness its actual, natural being was always subordinated to its abstract, rational being. In conscience, however, its tribunal is not before some ultimate

⁷⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett Pub., 1987), 160.

authority but rather before another conscience, that is, another fragile, confused human being. The opposition remains due to the indifferent particularity of each consciousness, in tandem with their mutual requirement to recognize and be recognized by each other. However, for the first time since the life-and-death struggle, the equality of self and other has come into view.

The equality of self and other prepares the way for the ultimate recognition that is reconciliation. In the opposition of the two consciousnesses action and judgment collapse into one another. The judgment, as action, is to convict the other of hypocrisy. The hypocrisy of the other comes from its action, in which it judges the first consciousness for its hypocrisy. In this perfect symmetry the moment of true recognition finally occurs in which each consciousness is able to recognize the judgment of the other. Such recognition occurs because each consciousness comes to see itself in the other, that is, to see their symmetrical identity and interdependence. Thus the movement of reconciliation can take place. The first moment of reconciliation is confession:

[The acting consciousness] does not merely find himself apprehended by the other as something alien and disparate from it, but rather finds that other, according to its own nature and disposition, identical with himself. Perceiving this identity and giving utterance to it, he confesses this to the other, and equally expects that the other, having in fact put himself on the same level, will also respond in words in which he will give utterance to this identity with him, and expects that this mutual recognition will now exist in fact.⁷⁶

In a certain sense the charge of hypocrisy remains here, only its meaning is reversed because the shape of Spirit in which it is embedded shifts around it. When the judging consciousness *hypocritically* says, ‘you are a *hypocrite*,’ it is in effect saying, ‘you are like me’. In other words, once both consciousnesses lose their claim to universality the charge ‘you are a hypocrite’ reveals itself to mean ‘you are conscience’ and this is said *as* and *by* conscience. That is why “confession

⁷⁶ Hegel and Findlay, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 405.

is not an abasement, a humiliation.”⁷⁷ In confessing to hypocrisy conscience is in fact confessing to being conscience, which is nothing else but the declaration of conviction that is the essence of conscience. With both consciences making their confessions the second moment of reconciliation also takes place: forgiveness. In forgiveness, like in confession, the charge of hypocrisy remains but is sublated through its shifting context. ‘You are a hypocrite’ reveals itself as ‘you are conscience’ and finally ‘you are me’. With this we have perfect recognition that is the reciprocal codetermination of self-consciousness, which possesses both its truth and its certainty, and does not need to go beyond itself. Thus we have at last the resolution of the Lordship and Bondage dialectic and the emergence of the shape of Absolute Spirit:

The word of reconciliation is the objectively existent Spirit, which beholds the pure knowledge of itself qua universal essence in its opposite, in the pure knowledge of itself qua absolutely self-contained and exclusive individuality – a reciprocal recognition which is *absolute* Spirit.⁷⁸

Here the abstract ‘I’ appears in its absolute determinacy, which corresponds to the absolute expression of freedom. The actuality of the absolute ‘I’ is here the *word* of recognition, meaning the linguistic expression of reconciliation understood as an immanent phenomenon, since “language is the existence of Spirit as an immediate self.”⁷⁹ In freedom, then, self and other are determined as being one and the same ‘I’ despite their outward differences, and this unity is made actual in the language of reconciliation.

One might think, then, that Hegel’s conception of existent freedom is a naive, hyper-Christian state of forgiveness, in which we forgive all others for every misdeed they might commit.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Hegel and Findlay, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 408.

⁷⁹ Hegel and Findlay, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 405.

However, reconciliation is not directed towards any particular act, but towards otherness as such. Also, there are necessary developments that precede the moment of reconciliation. It is necessary, above all, that each consciousness repents. Hegel is quite clear that “the stiff-necked unrepentant character ... cannot attain to an identity with the consciousness it has repulsed.”⁸⁰ Therefore the lord, the moral consciousness, or any other shape of self-consciousness that precedes the repentant conscience cannot achieve reconciliation, regardless of whether or not it is forgiven by its other. That is because the former shapes of self-consciousness still cling to their particularity in their self-certainty. The lord is self-certain in his power over the bondsman and his consumption of the bondsman’s labour; the moral consciousness is self-certain in its isolated contemplation of the abstract moral law. Even the bondsman is self-conscious only in the things it forms through its labour. What this does, ultimately, is cut self-consciousness off from its other when, as Hegel argued in the Lordship and Bondage dialectic, the other is the truth of self-consciousness. The abstract ‘I’ exists only in its reflection in the other; Hegelian self-consciousness is an *intersubjective* phenomenon. In repentance, the individual determines the particularities of its outward existence as unessential, and self-certainty is brought into communion with the abstract ‘I’. In forgiveness, the individual determines the particularities of the other’s outward existence as unessential, and self-consciousness is brought into communion with the abstract ‘I’. These two moments constitute the movement of reconciliation that liberates the self from its isolation.

It is crucial to note that the negation of outward existence, i.e., the determining of it as unessential, is not a vilifying of it. Rather, it is in the medium of outward existence that the abstract ‘I’ becomes itself. The abstract ‘I’ is thus nothing other than the self-negation of outward existence. This cannot be overstressed: *a purely behaviorist reading of these passages is possible*. In special

⁸⁰ Hegel and Findlay, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 405-6.

sorts of interactions between people linguistic and social content is generated in which people recognize and embody their abstract unity and equality with other people despite the countless material differences between people, and these linguistic and social content come to influence the ways in which people interact with each other – that is Hegelian freedom. The phenomenological aspect is certainly important to Hegel, but it is always inseparably linked to its manifestation in concrete reality. Hegel's language can obfuscate this, as it obfuscates many things, but Hegel's appropriation of terms from Christian theology and Greek ontology reflects the ecumenical role Hegel that ascribes to himself in the history of thought rather than a commitment to the metaphysical concepts that these terms traditionally signify. Hegel's idealism proper becomes relevant in his conception of the Absolute, but that is beyond the scope of our discussion here. What is relevant here is to observe that in reconciliation the 'I' needs the outward content, which is the form of otherness, to exist at all, since the 'I' is only the self-negation, or the immanent negativity, of this content itself. The self-negation of nature in human behavior is Spirit, and in reconciliation it is Absolute Spirit. In reconciliation the abstract 'I' as Spirit reclaims its status as the negative essence of the world, since it no longer finds itself opposed by another negative essence. Now the abstract 'I' is that which negates the natural differences of distinct individuals and thereby posits their unity and encompasses their self-consciousness. Again, Hegel is not positing anything transcendent. Absolute Spirit is the process by which bodies in a community each say to one another, "despite the fact that I am over here and you are over there, we are one and the same."

When reading ethical philosophy we often seek some guidance in the author's words for how we ought to lead our own lives. Here, Hegel must disappoint. First of all, Hegel thinks that the whole notion of an 'ought', as something which is absolute yet non-actual, is specious. Hegel's

philosophy is therefore not normative but rather descriptive. For Hegel, freedom is a historical phenomenon that he simply wants to give an account of. Second of all, and this is some sense the same as the first point, Hegel rejects the notion of individualistic morality. Morality is concerned with how I relate myself to the other. As Hegel tries to demonstrate, *I* and *other* are only legible in terms of one another. Therefore, for the *I* to deduce moral judgments in isolation and out of its own resources, whether through a utilitarian or a Kantian schema, is misguided from the outset. The isolated individual is always finite and subjective, so for it to make its own pronouncements on morality, which concerns the infinite and objective, is the highest pretension. Therefore if one were to extract a normative doctrine from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, it would say that the individual should simply follow its immediate conscience and reconcile itself to others when its convictions come into conflict with those of others. That, however, would ultimately miss Hegel's point, which is that individuals cannot help but follow their consciences, and that all 'rational moralities' are rather rationalizations of a morality that is always decided in advance by unconscious processes. This does not mean that everything is permitted. Rather the opposite: every individual bears absolute responsibility for his or her actions; there is no abstract schema to defer to. Thus no one can say, like Eichmann, "I was only performing my duty." Concomitantly, however, individuals are not in a position to pass moral judgment on one another. For one individual to judge another would necessitate that it employ a system of oughts and an individualistic morality. Morally speaking, individuals are intrinsically equal in that no one, by virtue his or her station or moral education, is in any better position than anyone else for making moral judgments or decisions. Such moral equality, again, does not imply that every act is equally justified, or that every act should be forgiven, but rather that morality is not the business of the

individual qua individual. As we will see in what follows, it is up to social institutions to determine the moral value of a given action.

Chapter 3: Sittlichkeit, the State and Absolute Spirit

With the possible exception of his supposed obscurantism, charlatanry, hubris, panglossianism, Christianity, atheism, pantheism, monism, relativism, absolutism or overall weirdness no aspect of Hegel's philosophy has received more derision than his supposed totalitarianism. The charge that Hegel is totalitarian, be it valid or not, certainly has its origin in interpretations of his philosophy of the state. In his book *The Open Society and Its Enemies* Karl Popper identifies Hegel as one such 'enemy' on the basis of his state philosophy, to the point that Popper accuses Hegel of bearing responsibility for both the far left and the far right totalitarianism of the 20th Century. Likewise, Hegel's name is rarely mentioned in Deleuze and Guattari's two-volume *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, but he is clearly the unnamed enemy lurking in the background, as the purest embodiment of the philosopher-apologist for the 'state apparatus', in contrast to the 'nomadic' thinking Deleuze and Guattari positively associate with themselves and whatever past philosophers they happen to like (such as Nietzsche and Archimedes). It is surprising that a thinker so obsessed with freedom, who argued so strongly against subjugation, would be accused of totalitarianism, but the reason for this is to be found, quite unsurprisingly, in Hegel's writing style. Hegel makes a number aphoristic remarks in his later philosophy that, when removed from their context, can easily arouse suspicions of totalitarianism. For example in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* Hegel says that "the State is the divine Idea as it exists on earth"⁸¹ and "what counts is the common will; in thus being suppressed the individual will retires into itself, and this is the first condition necessary for the existence of the universal."⁸² There is no question that Hegel is opposed to classical liberalism, but given the general complexity of Hegel's thought,

⁸¹ Hegel, *Reason In History*, 53.

⁸² *Ibid*, 51.

much care must be taken in assessing the supposed totalitarianism of his state philosophy, particularly as it stands in relation to the regimes of the 20th Century.

Hegel's most notorious statement comes in the preface to his *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, his major work of political philosophy, in which he says, "what is rational is actual, what is actual is rational."⁸³ This statement has been interpreted by many otherwise intelligent thinkers, such as Schopenhauer, Russell and, of course, Popper, to mean that Hegel is saying that whatever the status quo happens to be, it must be rational and therefore justified. The actual/rational quote is used repeatedly to characterize Hegel as an apologist of the Prussian state he was living under. While it is true that one of the central projects of Hegelian philosophy is theodicy (Hegel himself uses the word) in the style of Leibniz, this must be understood in a qualified sense. Hegel's rational/actual principle is to some extent simply a reversal of Aristotle's position put forward in the *Metaphysics* that accidental causes and predicates are not capable of being analyzed. To give an example of this principle, take the relationship between manifest dream content and latent dream content as presented in Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*. The manifest dream content presents itself in the jumbled, surreal form we are all familiar with, in which meanings, memories and images are squished together and stacked on top of each other according, seemingly, to pure accident. The rational/actual principle tells us that because this overdetermined structure of the dream content has no discernible logic to it, it must be epiphenomenal. This is exactly the position that Freud takes, leading him to formulate his method of dream analysis for arriving at the latent dream content, which has a special logic of its own and is therefore actual, i.e., the true structure of the dream. To take a Hegelian example we have already discussed, relationships of subjugation are non-actual according to the rational/actual principle. In the Lordship and Bondage relationship

⁸³ Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy*, 20.

the lord's self-consciousness, his immediate *certainty* that he is free and that he has total mastery over the bondsman, is not rational: it is beset by contradiction and structural failure. Thus the *truth* of the relationship, what is actual in it, is that the lord the is one who is unfree, although this has not yet reached the certainty of Spirit. Therefore when it comes to social relations, which would include whatever the status quo might be, the rational/actual principle is not a means of justification, but it is rather the very means by which Hegel criticizes the state of affairs. The meaning of this notorious statement is then anything but that might is right.

It is on the basis of the rational/actual principle that Hegel argues that the state is the most rational of all of the social systems that have appeared across history, and therefore the most actual, i.e., stable and self-determining. Hegel also thinks that among states there are more or less rational ones, the most rational being his theoretical *ideal state*. Hegel's ideal state is not one that has ever existed on Earth. It is not, for instance, the Prussian state that Hegel himself lived under, which it is often claimed to be by those who want to portray Hegel as an apologist for his beaurocrat benefactors⁸⁴. The exact significance of Hegel's ideal state is difficult to determine. First of all, the detailed description he gives of it in his *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* does not, again, accord exactly with the constitution of any existing state. One might think, then, that Hegel is proposing a perfect society that we should strive to bring into existence, as Plato is often thought to be doing in the *Republic*. Hegel explicitly rejects this, however. He says in the preface to the *Philosophy of Right*, "this treatise ... must distance itself as far as possible from the obligation to construct a state as it ought to be; such instruction as it may contain cannot be aimed at instructing the state on how it ought to be, but rather at showing how the State, as the ethical universe, should

⁸⁴ Allen Wood's introduction to the Cambridge translation of the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* details a number of ways in which Hegel's ideal State differs in structure from the Prussian State of 1820.

be recognized.”⁸⁵ The latter part of this statement is not very clarifying. One might take it to mean that Hegel is presenting what he takes to be the State as such, that is, the *telos* that all contingent states tend towards and have as their total actualization. However, Hegel also seems to preclude a teleological reading with his famous remark towards the end of the preface to the *Philosophy of Right* that “the owl of Minerva begins its flight only with the onset of dusk,”⁸⁶ meaning that philosophy is something that essentially comprehends the past, and thus has no instructions or predictions for the future. If Hegel were claiming to have deduced the *telos* of all contingent states then it is difficult to see how he could avoid committing himself to making predictions about the future, at least of a general sort. To interpret the significance of Hegel’s ideal state is extremely challenging and deserving of a treatment elsewhere since it will not receive one here. Rather, the discussion here will mostly ignore Hegel’s ideal state and rather focus on Hegel’s concept of the state as a species concept, that is, as a way that Hegel describes a special sort of social order that appears repeatedly throughout the cycles of history. Nonetheless, for the purpose of not repressing anything important, it should at least be mentioned that there are a number of bizarre and embarrassing aspects to Hegel’s ideal State, such as its being a monarchy and having some sanction over the press.⁸⁷ In regards to these and other views of Hegel’s that would seem retrograde in our political climate, we can only say, “as far as the individual is concerned, each individual is in any case a child of his time; thus philosophy, too, is its own time comprehended in thoughts.”⁸⁸

If one thing can be said about the state as a historical species concept it is that Hegel thinks that any society brings its potential for freedom into its fullest actualization when it assumes the

⁸⁵ Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy*, 21.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 23.

⁸⁷ Hegel’s view on the press and public opinion are complex – for instance, he does not think the state should have any sanction over scientific activities – and they cannot receive proper treatment here. See *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, 353-358 for Hegel’s account of the subject.

⁸⁸ Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy*, 21.

form of a state. When Hegel says that “the State is the divine Idea as it exists on earth,” the “divine Idea” he is referring to is freedom. Earlier in the *Lectures* Hegel says, “In contemplating world history we must thus consider its ultimate purpose ... hence, it is the Idea in general, in its manifestations as human spirit which we have to contemplate. More precisely, it is the idea of human freedom.”⁸⁹ Hegel, again, also tells us that “the essence of Spirit – its substance – is Freedom,” and so “all the properties of Spirit exist only through Freedom.”⁹⁰ The divine Idea is then freedom and therefore Spirit considered abstractly. The state is then Spirit considered concretely, or in actuality. Here it should also be noted that the appearance of the state in the dialectic of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Spirit* and *Philosophy of Right* correspond closely with that of reconciliation in the dialectic of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. In the former two books appearance of Ethical Life [Sittlichkeit], which culminates in the state, appears directly after conscience. The conception of conscience in these books is roughly the same as that in the *Phenomenology*. In the *Philosophy of Spirit* and *Philosophy of Right* a conflict emerges when one conscience is forced to confront the conviction of another conscience, which is then resolved when the two are shown to be formally indiscernible. However, in the *Philosophy of Spirit* and the *Philosophy of Right* this resolution comes about simply by a direct transition into Ethical Life: “the standpoint of bare reciprocity between the two independent sides – the standpoint of the ought, is abandoned, and we have passed into the field of ethical life;”⁹¹ there is no moment of reconciliation. Hegel himself points this out in the ‘Conscience’ section of the *Philosophy of Right*:

The extent to which ... certain other phenomena are related to the stage we are considering [conscience] – these are questions which I have discussed in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The whole of Section (c) of that work, ‘The Conscience’,

⁸⁹ Hegel, *Reason In History*, 53.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 22.

⁹¹ Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy*, 253.

should be compared with what is said here, especially in relation to the transition to a higher stage in general (although the latter is defined differently in the *Phenomenology*).⁹²

When we compare what is said in the two books we find the determinate negation of conscience passing into Absolute Spirit, or the highest manifestation of freedom, but this takes a different form in each book: reconciliation in the *Phenomenology* and the state in the *Philosophy of Right*. We are thus lead back to our original problem. However, it is helpful to revisit it in order to draw out a further parallel that could not have been drawn out before, that freedom appears in both forms as the determinate negation of conscience. The parallel role of conscience in reconciliation and the state confirms that the presentation of the state as freedom in Hegel's later philosophy is exactly equivalent to the presentation of reconciliation as freedom in the *Phenomenology*. Their equivalency, and its relation to conscience, cannot be further developed here until we have described Hegel's conception of the state as a historical species concept.

The state is the highest development of what Hegel calls *Sittlichkeit* and is usually translated as 'Ethical Life'. *Sittlichkeit* is the complex system of social customs, norms, beliefs and practices that we all absorb and come to embody both consciously and unconsciously simply by being immersed in it. It is not created by any one individual and in principle it cannot be so. Instead, *Sittlichkeit* emerges spontaneously and continually through the interactions of self-interested individuals. Again, Hegel does not believe in the state of nature, but Hegel does believe in a transhistorical human nature: "In speaking of human nature we mean something permanent. The concept of human nature must fit all men and all ages, past and present. This universal concept may suffer infinite modifications; but actually the universal is one and the same essence in its most

⁹² Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy*, 182-183.

various modifications.”⁹³ This human nature is selfish, animalistic, and above all appetitive. The caveat, for Hegel, is that our appetites bring us into contact and conflict with other individuals. When this occurs we are eventually forced to use our intelligence to communicate, negotiate and compromise with one another. It is here that Spirit makes its initial appearance in History. Through the continual processes of communication, negotiation and compromise within an interwoven complex of individuals a *Sittlichkeit* is produced and maintained. In its coming to be *Sittlichkeit* negates the animal drives that produce the it. The functioning of the drives is sublimated and sublated into the aforementioned customs, norms, etc. that allow for their measured satisfaction along with the existence of a relatively stable collective order. Hegel compares this rational negation of natural being to the building of a house out of natural materials:

The building of a house is, in the first instance, a subjective aim and design. On the other hand we have, as means, the several substances required for the work – iron, wood, stones. The elements are used in preparing this material: fire to melt the iron, wind to blow the fire, water to set wheels in motion in order to cut the wood, etc. The result is that the wind, which has helped to build the house, is shut out by the house; so also are the violence of rains and floods and the destructive powers of fire, so far as the house is made fireproof. The stones and beams obey the law of gravity and press downwards so that the high walls are kept up. Thus the elements are made use of in accordance with their nature and cooperate for a product by which they become constrained. In a similar way the passions of men satisfy themselves; they develop themselves and their purposes in accordance with their natural destination and produce the edifice of human society. Thus they fortify a structure for law and order against themselves. Thus the passions are by no means always opposed to morality but actualize the universal.”⁹⁴ (LH, 35)

In the final sentence of the above passage Hegel brings together the gap between Nature and freedom as posited by Kant and the moral consciousness. *Sittlichkeit* is an immanent system of ethics that exists as an *is* and not merely an *ought* and is brought into existence by the spontaneous

⁹³ Hegel, *Reason In History*, 21.

⁹⁴ Hegel, *Reason In History*, 35.

functioning of our natural being. Hegel nonetheless agrees with Kant that living according to one's natural impulse makes one unfree, and that living according to one's reason makes one free. Because our natural being is not of our own creation, when we blindly obey it we are subjecting ourselves to an outside force. Conversely, when we obey our reason, with its infinite capacity for abstraction, determination and creativity, then we live freely. This is the Kantian position. Where Hegel disagrees with Kant is in rejecting the hard boundary Kant draws between Nature and Reason. Hegel thinks that Nature and Reason, at least when it comes to humans, are inextricably intertwined according to the scheme presented above. For Hegel, human nature is *naturally* self-negating, and this self-negation is Reason, which belongs to the Spirit that structures the *Sittlichkeit*.

The result is that, for Hegel, Reason is an inherently social phenomenon. Hegel thinks that individuals are endowed with a faculty called the *Understanding*, which is more or less the Kantian Understanding, i.e., a faculty of stable cognitive structures like the Categories, but that Reason, as the faculty of dialectics that gives us access to the Absolute, only appears when a community of persons engage in the process of coordinating their finite, subjective perspectives with one another's.⁹⁵ This is why Hegel uses the German word *Geist*. *Geist* can be translated either as 'Spirit' or as 'Mind'. The double meaning of 'Geist' signifies how a community comprehends the world, and functions as a kind of virtual subject, in a way that exceeds the comprehension of any one person in that community, exceeding it not only quantitatively but qualitatively. Because *Sittlichkeit* is produced by *Geist*, or Spirit, and not any individual within a community, each individual within *Sittlichkeit* will find the structure of it beyond his or her comprehension:

⁹⁵ Thus the dialectic of the *Phenomenology* passes from 'The Understanding' to 'Self-Consciousness'.

If we consider ethical life from the objective point of view, we may say that ethical man is unconscious of himself. In this sense, Antigone proclaims that no one knows where the laws come from: they are eternal. That is, their determination has being in and for itself and issues from the nature of the thing. But this substantial element is also endowed with consciousness, although the status of the latter is only a moment.⁹⁶

A number of important points are contained within the above passage. The first is the one that we have already outlined: that ethical practices, being a collective construction, exceeding the understanding of any given individual. The second is that Hegel is not a social contract theorist. The statement “their determination has being in and for itself...” is, in a sense, Hegel’s idiosyncratic way of saying that he does not agree with social contract theory. For Hegel, an individual is a product and an organ of his or her Sittlichkeit. The Sittlichkeit is a self-regenerating substance, which loses and produces individuals without its essential form suffering in the least. The individual is therefore an accident of the Sittlichkeit, not the cause of it. The individual is an accident of Sittlichkeit because, first, there is no state of nature, and therefore there has never been an individual that has existed outside of society because, second, an individual is only an individual insofar as it is a self-consciousness, and self-consciousness only exists through the recognition of another self-consciousness. An individual, insofar as it is anything more than an abstract vessel of drives, is determined by its Sittlichkeit. Thus Hegel says that, “although it is true that all great men have formed themselves in solitude, they have done so only by assimilating what the state has already created.”⁹⁷ By contrast, social contract theory beings with preformed individuals who are self-conscious of their natural rights and who come together and create a society through their conscious volition. Social contract theory is thus wrong for Hegel because it

⁹⁶ Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy*, 189.

⁹⁷ Hegel, *Reason In History*, 51.

posits the individuals as the substance of the society, and because it presupposes that individuals are capable of comprehending the society that they are contractually agreeing to be a part of. The third point from the above passage comes from the final sentence where Hegel says that, “this substantial element [Sittlichkeit] is also endowed with consciousness, although the status of the latter is only a moment”. The consciousness that Sittlichkeit is endowed with is simply the consciousness of each individual that lives within it. Consciousness is only a moment of Sittlichkeit because, again, it is not the consciousness of any particular individual that is essential to Sittlichkeit, but only the presence of conscious individuals as such, in the same way that the matter in an organism’s cells is only a moment of its substance. Nonetheless, such consciousness is essential, and it is conscience. As we saw in the previous chapter, the convictions of conscience arrive from its unconscious. This unconsciousness is accounted for by the fact that “ethical man is unconscious of himself.” Therefore the convictions of conscience have their origin in Sittlichkeit, which is to say no more than the obvious point that we pick up our moral convictions from our families teachers, friends etc. without first determining whether or not they are rational. The conflicting convictions of different consciences within Sittlichkeit then manifest the contradictory forces of Sittlichkeit itself, which are still in the process of developing towards a higher unity. Thus the passage from conscience to Ethical Life in the *Philosophy of Mind* and *Philosophy of Right*.

Hegel breaks up Sittlichkeit into three substantial moments: the family, civil society and the state. These designations have a relatively familiar meaning. The family is simply the domestic sphere, which presents itself as a miniature Sittlichkeit within the larger one that encompasses all of social life. That is because the family has its own customs, norms, beliefs and practices that

function in the characteristic, only partly-conscious way.⁹⁸ However, the family taken by itself is neither complete nor self-subsistent. There is also civil society, which is the sphere of production and private interests, which also has its own customs, norms, etc. The family and civil society are caught up in a relation of both conflict and interdependence. The two spheres do not recognize individuals according to the same principles, and so they continually undermine one another. From the point of view of the family, the ways of civil society are harsh and unfeeling, from the point of view of civil society, the ways of the family are weak and impractical. Yet the family needs civil society to provide it with resources and civil society needs the family to provide it with workers. Thus the two are caught in an endless deadlock. When civil society inevitably undermines the family, e.g., separates its members from one another, it thereby also undermines itself, and vice versa. Of course, this speaking of ‘the family’ and ‘civil society’ as though they were persons is mostly metaphorical. Concretely, their deadlock means that any given individual is saddled with a conflicting set of ethical commitments regarding its role in its family on the one hand and its role in civil society on the other. Hegel thought that the greatness of *Antigone* was to depict this tragic choice as embodied in the characters of Antigone and Creon, both of whom choose either the family or civil society to the exclusion of the other, and both of whom fail both society and themselves as a result. Because of the conflicting modes of recognition the individual receives from the family and civil society, the individual is made self-conscious of his or herself as belonging to an order that supersedes the family and civil society alike; this is the state.

The state stands above, so to speak, the family and civil society, and seeks to bring them into harmony. It does this by recognizing the individual that transverses both. The state recognizes individuals through law. Law is the essence of the state because it is that which gives the state and

⁹⁸ Sigmund Freud did not invent the practice of using Sophocles to illustrate unconscious conflicts between family members.

its branches a stable structure that is “protected against their [the particular branches] casual subjectivity and against that of the individuals.”⁹⁹ This is done through language since, for Hegel, language “belongs ... to that which is inherently universal,”¹⁰⁰ meaning that language automatically takes whatever particular content an individual wishes to express and transforms it, with or without the individual’s consent, into a universal content. Thus the law, by taking the unwritten customs of *Sittlichkeit* and putting them into language, makes the customs into self-conscious universals, i.e., laws, that are thereby recognized as such by all citizens and made protected from the whim of any particular citizen. It is necessary for the law to be open and transparent, that is, self-conscious, for it to be authoritative: “the positive form of Laws – to be promulgated and known – is a condition of the external obligation to obey them.”¹⁰¹ The most important part of the law, for Hegel, is the constitution. It is the constitution that makes the citizens free by recognizing them as such. It defines the citizens as having certain rights, e.g., right to property, right to life, equality before the law, etc. and thereby makes these rights, otherwise abstract and ineffectual, actual. The constitution is thus the universal medium through which law-abiding citizens recognize others and themselves as free beings, endowed by their own conscious willing with certain inalienable rights. Hegel sees law as that which actualizes freedom rather than limits freedom because he sees every restriction on behavior, every negative duty, that law mandates as carrying a positive aspect with it, which is a right: “to a right on my part corresponds a duty in someone else.”¹⁰² Therefore, as long as a law is rational, the negative duty functions only to prevent the base, unfree part of human nature from being satisfied while simultaneously

⁹⁹ Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy*, 265.

¹⁰⁰ Hegel and Findlay, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 66.

¹⁰¹ Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy*, 260.

¹⁰² Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy*, 242.

recognizing the rational, free part of our nature and protecting the latter from the former. The role of the state is then to complete the movement of *Sittlichkeit*, to be the medium in which the collective recognizes its objective morality, codifies it, and makes it actual on Earth. By living out this morality the individual overcomes his or her baseness and particularity and comes to live by the universal light of Reason, that is, freely:

What dominates in the State is the spirit of the people, custom, and law. There man is recognized and treated as a rational being, as free, as a person; and the individual, on his side, makes himself worthy of his recognition by overcoming the natural state of his self-consciousness and obeying a universal, the will that is in essence and actuality will, the Law; he behaves, therefore, towards others in a manner that is universally valid, recognizing them – as he wishes others to recognize him – as free, as persons.¹⁰³

The freest an individual can therefore be is as a recognized member of a rational state, and to continually reproduce, maintain, and advanced the state through his or her actions. In this form of life, which is Absolute Spirit and completed freedom, “freedom wills itself” (PR, 53).

Hegel’s conception of political freedom has often been criticized as backward or contradictory due to its seeming disregard for individuals and naive trust in state power. Hegel appears to think that the ideal individual is a conformist. Such a reading, however, misses the affirmation of the individual in Hegel’s political philosophy. In the *Lectures on History* Hegel says, “need, instinct, passion, private interest, even opinion and subjective representation ... constitute the tools and means of the World Spirit for attaining its purpose”¹⁰⁴ – this purpose of course being freedom. As we saw before, *Sittlichkeit*, and therefore the state, only takes shape out of the complex collisions and compromises that occur between the private interests of individuals.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 172-173.

¹⁰⁴ Hegel, *Reason In History*, 31.

This is why the only individuals that Hegel is fully dismissive of in his writings are ascetics, cynics, beautiful souls, etc., i.e., those who refuse to participate in society. Hegel's ideal individual is one who lives out its private interests within the social field, making its influence felt and, above all, does this with passion, since "nothing great in the world has been accomplished without passion."¹⁰⁵ This valuation of passion and individuality reaches its apex in Hegel's notion of the world-historical individual. These individuals, such as Caesar and Napoleon, go beyond maintaining the existing social order and revolutionize it. They do this by pursuing private ends, but Hegel thinks that in their very particularity they unconsciously develop and actualize freedom: "It is the same with all great historical individuals – their own particular purposes contain the substantial will of the World Spirit."¹⁰⁶ Thus it is the individuals who throw themselves into private ends without concern for precedent or convention that Hegel values above all others. It is also the case that Hegel designates the state as the actualization of freedom because it is there that the abstract person receives its full substantiality. Outside of the state, the individual is not recognized as a coherent totality or as a free being endowed with rights. In the absence of a rational society, individuals are "free" to kill and enslave one another, and strength alone, not the sanctity of the abstract 'I' that constitutes individuality, is what guides the course of events. It is therefore only in the rational state that individuality has the force of the law behind it to make its freedom a potent actuality. Therefore Hegel's political philosophy does not at all disregard the individual, but it simply conceptualizes the individual's role in the state and the state's responsibility toward the individual in different terms than those used in classical liberalism.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 29.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 39-40.

As regards Hegel's naive trust in state power, here we must recall, in addition to the rational/actual principle, the Heraclitean character of Hegelian philosophy. According to Hegel *Being itself* is unstable and self-negating, and with it all particular beings, notions and societies. Everything contains disparate and conflicting principles within itself, and societies are perhaps even the paradigm case of this. The conflicts between individuals and between institutions within the state embody the conflicting forces within the abstract spiritual structure of the state. The state is a dynamic, nearly chaotic unity, which struggles constantly to integrate the private ends within it. Hegel believes that all states are therefore destined to collapse or transform, and that this process is world history:

The principles of the spirits of nations are in general of a limited nature because of that particularity in which they have their objective actuality and self-consciousness as existent individuals, and their deeds and destinies in their mutual relations are the manifest dialectic of the finitude of these spirits. It is through this dialectic that the universal spirit, the spirit of the world, produces itself in its freedom from all limits, and it is this spirit which exercises its right – which is the highest right of all – over the finite spirits in world history as the world's court of judgment.¹⁰⁷

The state is the actualization of freedom, but not in its stability and absolute authority, but rather in its dynamic development in the history of Spirit. The state's dynamism is the effect and responsibility of individuals, especially the free individuals who *will freedom*, that is, who make the state adapt to recognize the freedom of every individual living under it. If anything, Hegel's naivety lies in his trust in the conscience and passion of individuals. He certainly believes that history is not without collapses and catastrophes, that it is ultimately a "slaughter-bench," but also that the cruel and the unjust forms of society will prove themselves to be less stable and effective than the rational and just forms because individuals will fight for the recognition of their freedom.

¹⁰⁷ Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy*, 371.

If they do not, Hegel argues that they are subordinating their freedom to their natural being, and that therefore they do not have in-themselves any freedom that is being suppressed. That final point is either harsh, cheap or profound depending on one's outlook.

Now that we have a tentative outline of Hegel's philosophy of the State we can return to the question posed at the outset, namely, whether Hegel's conceptions of freedom as reconciliation and freedom as the state are compatible with one another. Before addressing this question directly we can draw out the commonalities between the two and see if there is a unified conception of freedom underlying them. Both reconciliation and the state qua freedom are centered around the abstract 'I' and its appearance in actuality through recognition. In reconciliation self and other mutually recognize the abstract 'I' not only as their common essence but as their *shared* essence, as that which encompasses the being of each in the shape of intersubjective self-consciousness. The actuality of this recognition is the linguistic expression of reconciliation. In the state the abstract 'I' is recognized as the basis of the legal person, and everyone is treated as having a certain equality and set of rights deriving therefrom. The actuality of this recognition is in the written law and its enforcement. In both of these cases the abstract 'I' is made through recognition into an effective force or object in the actual world and thereby becomes a determinant of action that is distinct from the natural dimension of human existence, though not disconnected from it. Such recognition must be collective and its collectivity is derived from the intersubjective nature of self-consciousness. So far as the material here considered is concerned, that appears to be the nature of Hegelian freedom.

Another similarity between reconciliation and the state is that they appear, dialectically, as the determinate negation of conscience. Reconciliation appears with the recognition by conscience that it, conscience, cannot provide a basis for moral judgment. In this discovery the amoral

character of conscience is revealed to itself. Conscience, as individuated, cuts itself off from other people and obscures its equality and continuity with them, even while other people are the essence of morality and self-consciousness, and thus conscience itself. When conscience, as conscience, recognizes its moral failure it passes into reconciliation, wherein the barriers established through moral conviction are lifted and otherness is sublated, i.e., the shape of otherness persists only as the precondition of its self-negation. The state appears with the recognition of conscience as an empty formalism. Conscience is nothing other than the passage of immediate moral sentiments through the abstract 'I'. As individuated, the abstract 'I' is entirely indeterminate and thus incapable, again, of providing a basis for moral judgment. It is only in the collective spirit of *Sittlichkeit* that the individual 'I' receives filling and determination. Thus in the state, conscience must once again abandon its individual shape and integrate itself with the historical development of the law, which is the product of Spirit and not that of any particular individual. In reconciliation as freedom and the state as freedom alike we then see an underlying critique by Hegel of individualistic morality. The individuals are "the tools and means of the World Spirit for attaining its purpose" and therefore the raw matter that loses its substantiality in being taken into the form of freedom. The individual as such is for Hegel merely a clever animal, one that is selfish, appetitive, subjective and thereby yet incapable of culture, history or rationality. It is only through participation in the dialectical development of self-consciousness that the individual overcomes itself and is inducted into the extra-natural, or spiritual, behaviors that constitute the actuality of human freedom. We might say that Hegelian freedom is the *possession* of the human body by Spirit. Such a collectivist conception of freedom and morality necessarily contains a rejection of individualistic moralities, that is, moral systems such as utilitarianism and Kantianism, which allow the individual to generate moral judgments while locked within itself, and to consult only

the virtual Other present in the formal universality of the system. Conscience, for Hegel, is the *truth*, i.e., the fundamental structure, of all individualistic moralities. The truth of conscience is its dissolution, and that appears in the *Phenomenology* as reconciliation, and in the later Hegel as the state.

Despite their underlying similarities, reconciliation and the state remain markedly different. Reconciliation appears as a kind of endpoint for moral action. Once one is ‘reconciled’ to those in one’s community, there is nothing further to do but to continually repeat the reconciliatory process. Reconciliation also does not provide a total schema for living one’s life freely. Most of the activities that occupy daily life are simply not amenable to assuming an explicitly reconciliatory structure like the one described in the *Phenomenology*. The state, by contrast, does provide a total, dynamic *lived schema* for free living. The function of the state is to integrate the disparate moments of the family and civil society, and to recognize the individual at a higher, all-encompassing level of abstraction. The state also facilitates justice and punishment, and thereby allows judgment to be passed on individuals by the *collective* through institutions, something reconciliation is of course incapable of doing. The state also passes over into world history. It is thus of itself open to the potential for an indefinite development of its form, whereas reconciliation, being formally far simpler than the state, is not. Above all, reconciliation, while negating individualistic morality, nonetheless remains within the frame of conscience; it is, so to speak, a ‘first person’ shape of Spirit. By contrast, the state is a collective shape of Spirit. It appears that, despite the fact that there is a generic Hegelian conception of freedom that grounds both reconciliation and the state, Hegel may have simply changed his mind in the passage from the *Phenomenology* to the *Encyclopedia* as to what constitutes the manifestation of Absolute Spirit, and thus the highest expression of freedom.

Nevertheless, there is a further parallel between reconciliation and the state that we have not yet addressed. The dialectic of the *Phenomenology* passes from reconciliation to the chapter on Religion, and likewise the dialectics of the *Encyclopedia* and *Lectures on History* pass from the State as such to “The Religious Foundation of the State.”¹⁰⁸ Unfortunately, Hegel’s philosophy of religion cannot receive just treatment here. Nevertheless, whether or not one accepts the comprehensiveness of Hegel’s ‘system’, he did succeed in making it nearly impossible to discuss any one part of his thought without bringing everything else in, and so the relation between reconciliation and the state cannot be properly understood without dealing, if in truncated form, with his philosophy of religion. First, it is necessary to see the idiosyncratic nature of what Hegel means by ‘religion’. For example, Hegel takes Athenian athletics to be a shape of religion. Hegel has a universalist conception of religion, that is, he takes every religion to be the same in its essential content, and he therefore determines something to be a religion on the basis of whether it expresses this content, and not from its outward appearance or whether it is conventionally considered to be a religion. For Hegel, religion is “absolute Being in and for itself, the self-consciousness of Spirit,”¹⁰⁹ meaning that religious art, architecture, rituals, literature, etc. are the concretized self-consciousness of Absolute Spirit. Hegel’s conception of religion follows from his thesis that Absolute Spirit *is* God. As we have seen, Hegel conceives of Spirit as: the self-consciousness of self-alienated Nature, the providential author of history, the source of reason and morality, and the immaterial, unchanging substance that maintains itself in its essential unity through its activity and the flux of the world. In his *Science of Logic* Hegel also argues that Absolute Spirit is the formal cause of the transcendental structure of thought and reality. On the

¹⁰⁸ Hegel, *Reason In History*, 62.

¹⁰⁹ G. W. F Hegel and J. N. Findlay, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller, reprint. ed. (Oxford [u.a.]: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977), 410.

basis of these characteristics, Hegel takes it to be self-evident that the intersubjective, collective imagination of humanity across history is the mind of God. Otherwise put, human beings are the part of reality that has developed self-consciousness, and therefore, insofar as humanity is self-conscious, humanity is the self-consciousness of all of reality, i.e., the Absolute. As we have seen, the determinate self-consciousness of Spirit is inextricably tied to the actuality of Spirit, or humanity's historical condition. Thus, the self-consciousness of God develops along with the development of human society. From the human perspective, historical developments have given rise to new and developing forms of religion and religious ideas, from the divine perspective, "World History is the exhibition of Spirit striving to attain knowledge of its own nature."¹¹⁰ Therefore the developing self-consciousness of Absolute Spirit is made concrete in the historical development of the various world religions. In sum, because human consciousness is the self-consciousness of the Absolute, our evolving conceptions of the nature of God are one and the same as God's evolving self-consciousness. This is where many readers, including Kierkegaard, Marx and Russell, put down their Hegel book.

However, we must not lose sight of the double-identification Hegel is making in his philosophy of religion. Hegel is not only saying that Spirit is God, but also that God is Spirit. Thus Hegel's God is not a supreme being existing somewhere outside the world, which listens to prayers and intervenes on natural phenomena, or which possess a ready-made corpus of absolute knowledge that it metes out to specific individuals through divine inspiration. Rather, Hegel's God *is* immanent reality insofar as immanent reality is self-transcending. This is how Hegel manages to offend religious people like Kierkegaard and atheists like Marx and Russell in equal part – in the *Philosophy of Spirit* Hegel remarks that philosophy is accused of both having "too little of

¹¹⁰ Hegel, *Reason In History*, 23.

God” and “too much of him.”¹¹¹ Hegel’s peculiar conception of divinity does place him somewhere between what we would today call atheism and mysticism, even though he tries to make a Christian theologian out of himself. Hegel calls Christianity the “Revealed Religion” and argues that “it was through Christianity that [universal freedom] came into the world [because] according to Christianity the individual as such has an infinite value as the object and aim of divine love, destined as spirit to live in absolute relation with God himself, and have God’s mind dwelling in him, i.e., man is implicitly destined to supreme freedom.”¹¹² Hegel’s justifies his claim to being a Christian through his understanding of religious expression as ‘picture-thoughts’ [Vorstellungen]. Hegel believes that religion expresses absolute self-consciousness pictorially and emotionally, and that it is the work of philosophy to raise the content of religion into the free universality of pure, articulated thought. Thus he argues that the Christian narrative depicts in picture-thoughts how the Absolute Idea (Father) must be ‘incarnated’ in the consciousness of the individual (Son), and then the individual must be negated (crucified) before the Absolute Idea enters into the self-consciousness of the communal Spirit (Holy Spirit). The cogency of Hegel’s reading aside, the fact remains that Hegel’s status as a Christian thinker, in any conventional sense, must be rejected despite his insistence to the contrary.¹¹³ Hegel goes so far as to criticize the very sayings of Jesus:

“The precept of religion, ‘Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s’ is not enough: the question is to settle what is Caesar’s, what belongs to secular authority: and it is sufficiently notorious that the secular no less than the ecclesiastical authority have claimed almost everything for their own.”¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy*, 304.

¹¹² Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy*, 240.

¹¹³ Hegel’s ontotheology seems to share much more with Advaita Vedanta and its principle “Ātman is Brahman” than it does with Christianity, although this point cannot be sufficiently argued for here.

¹¹⁴ Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy*, 286.

It is clear then that Hegel's universalism extends beyond Christianity, so that his own philosophy of Spirit is meant to supersede Christian doctrine. Therefore, when he speaks about religion as the foundation of the state, he is speaking about self-conscious Spirit, as his own philosophy understands it, as the foundation of the state. The important qualification being that, again, religion is pictorial and emotional according to Hegel. The power Hegel sees in religion, especially in Christianity, is its ability to structure the emotional life of Sittlichkeit according to the self-consciousness of Spirit.

When Hegel says that religion is the foundation of the state he is making two related points. First, he is making a relatively simple historical point:

The nature of [a people's] religion determines that of the State and its constitution. It [the latter] has originated from it: the Athenian and the Roman state were possible only through the specific paganism of these peoples, just as a Catholic state has a spirit and constitution different from a Protestant one.¹¹⁵

Hegel's other point is that the emotional character of Sittlichkeit is determined by its religious consciousness, and that this in turn influences the structure of Sittlichkeit. This means that a given society will tend to actualize its spiritual convictions, regardless if any individual is conscious of these spiritual convictions, and that the degree of freedom achievable by a given society is predetermined by the degree of spiritual self-consciousness, i.e., self-consciousness of freedom, that prevails in its religious life. For example, Hegel argues that freedom is limited in Indian society because of the religious significance of the caste system. Thus Hegel thinks that a people will not put up with having laws that lag behind the freedom that is self-conscious in their religion, and neither will they let their laws go further:

¹¹⁵ Hegel, *Reason In History*, 65.

Opposed to what religion pronounces holy, the laws appear something made by human hands: even though backed by penalties and externally introduced, they could offer no lasting resistance to the contradictions and attacks of the religious spirit. Such laws, however sound their provisions may be, thus founder on the conscience, whose spirit is different from the spirit of the laws and refuses to sanction them.¹¹⁶

All of this follows from what we have been seeing since the Lordship and Bondage dialectic. As we have seen, Hegel argues that the dialectical development of the abstract 'I', as Spirit, redirects our natural drives and emotions toward extra-natural ends. Hegel simply thinks that religion is one piece of this, and that it contains the most abstract element of a given people's self-consciousness in emotional and pictorial form. It is as though religion expresses the way in which a people conceives of itself in relation to its individuals, its collective, Nature and the Spirit that connects all of them in extracted, condensed and poeticized form. It follows from this that there is bound to be a correspondence between the social organization of *Sittlichkeit* and religious life because they ultimately derive from the same collective self-consciousness or Spirit. Hegel does, however, take religion to be a more immediate representation of the self-consciousness of Spirit than the social forms of *Sittlichkeit*.

Religion, as the self-consciousness of Absolute Spirit, is also the foundation of morality.

Hegel concludes his discussion of morality in the *Phenomenology* with the following passage:

The reconciling *Yea*, in which the two 'I's let go their antithetical existence, is the existence of the 'I' which has expanded into a duality, and therein remains identical with itself, and, in its complete externalization and opposite, possesses the certainty of itself: it is God manifested in the midst of those who know themselves in the form of pure knowledge.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy*, 287.

¹¹⁷ Hegel and Findlay, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 409.

Hegel then pivots on this passage to the ‘Religion’ chapter of the *Phenomenology*. Since reconciliation, as the negation of otherness through identification with the other, appears at the end of the dialectic of morality, we know that reconciliation is in fact the absolute basis and final cause of all preceding shapes of morality. Because reconciliation *is* God, Hegel is here arguing that, after all, God is the ultimate legislator of morality. We can understand this in terms of conscience. In conscience the moral conviction arises immediately, without deliberation, and it is unclear what the true source of the conviction is. As we saw, the conviction comes from Sittlichkeit and the long history of self-consciousness out of which Sittlichkeit develops. At the center of Sittlichkeit we find religion, wherein are contained the deepest and most abstract determinations of the communal self-consciousness. Religion therefore underpins morality and the State in equal measure, as is thereby that which makes them one:

It is evident and apparent from what has preceded that moral life is the State retracted into its inner heart and substance, while the State is the organization and actualization of moral life; and that Religion is the very substance of the moral life itself and of the State ... If Religion then is the consciousness of absolute truth, then whatever is to rank as right and justice, as law and duty, i.e., as true in the world of free will, can be so esteemed only as it is participant in that truth, as it is subsumed under it as its sequel ... The body of religious truth, as the pure self-subsisting and therefore supreme truth, exercises a sanction over moral life which lies in empirical actuality. Thus for self-consciousness religion is the basis of moral life and of the State.¹¹⁸

Morality is the actuality of the self-consciousness of Spirit in the shape of the individual, and the State is the actuality of the self-consciousness of Spirit in the shape of the collective. The fullest realization of these two interpenetrating moments appears with reconciliation and the rational State

¹¹⁸ Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy*, 283-284.

respectively, and in their appearance Absolute Spirit attains self-consciousness in its traversing and encompassing of the two moments.

Before we disregard Hegel as a mystic, an absolutist theocrat, or any other number of things that would relegate Hegelianism to the heap of philosophical anachronisms that precede our post-Darwinian era of restrained rationality and naturalistic clarity, we should recall what Hegel believes the ultimate content of religion to be: none other than his theory of freedom as explicated in the preceding. Hegel's emphasis on the role of religion in freedom is merely to say that it is necessary for people to *feel* that they are connected to each other in a way that allows for mutual recognition. Hegel's free society is one in which people feel themselves, along with their fellows, to be part of the divine process through which reality comes to know itself, and to therefore recognize all people, irrespective of their outward conditions, to be themselves divine. In such a condition there is no abdication of responsibility to a retributive afterlife, or deferral of judgment to the Supreme Being or its representatives, or claims to secret wisdom from a supernatural authority: if God is only manifest in and through human activity then there is no higher court and no higher justification than our own judgments and our present social condition. Such an acceptance of responsibility does not, however, resign us to cheap existential despair or nihilism, for, as Hegel says, every responsibility is equally a privilege. In Hegel's eyes, we have been granted the highest responsibility and privilege there is: Self-Consciousness – to safeguard and cultivate it. Thus there is in fact a *telos* to life, freedom, to which all other ends must be subordinated, and it is imbued with the same divinity that the religions of history have ascribed to their deities. Freedom requires, first of all, that we recognize that we *need* others from the very foundation of our being, that others just as equally need us, and that withdrawal from this need

leads only to spiritual starvation. And here we see philosophy return again to the usual punchline, that the only thing that makes life worth living is love.

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