

interpretation

A JOURNAL OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

May 1985

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Annual subscription rates individual \$13; institutional \$16; student (3-year limit) \$7. INTERPRETATION appears three times a year.

Address for correspondence INTERPRETATION, Queens College, Flushing, N.Y. 11367, U.S.A.

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The Meaning of 'Will' in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*

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Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* is devoted to a systematic exploration of the idea that politics can only be understood in terms of freedom and its realization. By this I do not merely mean that Hegel places freedom high on the scale of goals to pursue, but that for him the root of all politics is freedom, or an original spontaneity from which all order that we call right or wrong, just or unjust, originates. Although this freedom may express itself in negative forms, ultimately it contains an effective striving for the realization of freedom in a practical and reasonable way of life. From this striving, the human experience gains its orientation in matters of right and wrong. Hegel holds that the deepest power governing human affairs is this original freedom, and that man in the modern state must be understood as its product. The ultimate law that we obey, whether we know it or not, is not the law that says "no" but the law that says "be free."

Hegel presents his analysis of freedom itself (in contrast to his study of freedom as result) in the "Introduction" to the *Philosophy of Right*.¹ The argument is stated in an extraordinarily terse form as a series of thirty-three theses bluntly declaring what freedom is and explaining how it is the basis of right. Today Hegel is frequently read as though his fundamental concern were to insist on the integration of the individual into community and state and thus to overcome liberal individualism. But his real aim is first and foremost to construct an ethics of the free will and of the primacy of the spiritual over the natural, in senses superseding a simple contrast between the individual and the social. The pieces in Hegel's account of both individuality and community do not fall into their proper proportion unless one understands them from the point of view of their common foundation, the logic of freedom enunciated in the "Introduction." It is only in their relation to that original force, the true 'reality' and 'energy' in human affairs, that one can grasp the significance of each in its relationship to the other.

The argument of the "Introduction" is austere descriptive.² Except for certain rather heavy polemics against opponents who today seem unworthy of He-

1. Henceforth cited as *PR*. For the text, I have used G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über Rechtsphilosophie, 1818-31*, 4 vols., ed. Karl-Heinz Ilting (Stuttgart-Bad Canstatt: Frommann, 1973-74). References will be to volume and page number of this edition, or to the paragraph number (§) provided in all editions. Volume II of the Ilting collection is a critical edition of the *PR* as published in 1820, while the other volumes contain extensive material from Hegel's manuscripts and lecture notes and from transcriptions of his lectures made by students. Translations are from the English version by T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1945), cited as 'K'; but I have occasionally modified Knox's rendering.

2. Cf. Kenley Royce Dove, "Hegel's Phenomenological Method," *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. xxiii, no. 4 (June 1970), pp. 615-41 on the "descriptive" method of the *Phenomenology*.

gel's attention, the discussion proceeds without extensive reference to what could loosely be called the traditional views concerning freedom, natural right and will. However, as I have previously tried to show, Hegel had these traditional views in mind, reflected on them, and proposed not an adoption of their solutions but a new reply to the questions they propounded.³ Hegel, as is well-known, was attentive in his early work to the advantages of classical thought and the classical polis, but he eventually came to agree with the view of Hobbes and other moderns that all obligation must come from will, so that the state is to be conceived as the product of an act of choice by which we remove ourselves from nature.⁴ But he thought the meaning of will and freedom inadequately fathomed by Hobbes, and Hobbesian thought left relatively few explicit traces in his mature teaching, except for the fundamental contrast between nature and freedom and perhaps a heightened respect for the importance of struggle and conflict in defining human identity. Hegel attributes to Rousseau the discovery that "will is the principle of the state" and he holds that Rousseau is thereby the first to understand right in terms of "thinking itself." This comment alludes to the emphasis on will in the *Social Contract*, and, more fundamentally, adopts the anthropology presented in the *Discourse on Inequality* (*PR* § 258 Remark; § 29 Remark). In the latter book, Rousseau claims that the human world emerges out of an original independence from determination by nature. The human being is equipped with a faculty of free "perfectibility," rooted in a mysterious capacity for general "ideas" and for construction of a world in which the fundamental priorities cannot be shown to be prescribed by nature. But, Hegel thought, Rousseau failed to achieve the adequate exposition of will and hence of right. He "takes the will only in a determinate form as the individual will, and he regards the universal will not as the absolutely rational element in the will, but only as a 'general' will which proceeds out of this individual will as out of a conscious will. The result is that he reduces the union of individuals in the state to a contract and therefore to something based on their arbitrary wills, their opinion and their capriciously given express consent . . ." (*PR* § 258 Remark). Rousseau's doctrine makes the fundamental, substantive and primary thing "the will of a single person in his own private self-will, not the absolute or rational will, and mind as a particular individual, not mind as it is in its truth" (*PR* § 29 Remark).

3. See Donald J. Maletz, "An Introduction to Hegel's 'Introduction' to the *Philosophy of Right*," *Interpretation*, vol. 13, no. 1 (January 1985); on Hegel's view of the tradition, see the works by Manfred Riedel cited in this article, note 4. Cf. also Karl-Heinz Ilting, "Hegel's Auseinandersetzung mit der aristotelischen Politik," *Philosophisches Jahrbuch*, vol. 71 (1963/1964), pp. 38–58; and Joachim Ritter, "Morality and Ethical Life," in Ritter, *Hegel and the French Revolution*, trans. Richard Dien Winfield (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982), pp. 151–82.

4. *PR* 1, 240. On the eventual priority of the modern principle, see Manfred Riedel, "Hegels Kritik des Naturrechts," in *Studien zu Hegels Rechtsphilosophie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1969); and Shlomo Avineri, *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972). See also *Hegel's Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, 3 vols., trans. E. S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson (New York: Humanities Press, 1968; reprint of 1896 edition), III, 315–19; and Riedel, *Bürgerliche Gesellschaft und Staat* (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1970), pp. 11, 26–32.

Hegel claims to deepen these beginnings in recognition of the importance of will by examining the meaning of freedom both as origin and as goal. He inquires in the "Introduction" about the implications of the original emancipation from nature. What are its consequences? Is it merely a lack, a kind of non-naturalness that sets men adrift? Or does this freedom have its own kind of "nature," so that we might speak of it as intelligible and even as containing a certain end? Further, how does it comport with the natural world? Surely the freedom of the spirit, however understood, is not unaffected by the natural world, nor can it be capable of rearranging things in whatever arbitrary direction it might choose. This freedom must come to terms in some way with the natural world, which confines but does not direct human endeavor. In the "Introduction," he offers an account of how this primal freedom organizes itself, generating a human world as its product. Less immediately visible is his account of the self-education by which the primal freedom comes to a reconciliation with the natural world and adapts itself to its limits in an act of conscious realism about human possibilities. The result is a world we can call a realization of what is right, the state as a realization of freedom.

The exposition of freedom and will begins, properly speaking, in the fourth thesis of the *Philosophy of Right*. Here Hegel claims that "The basis of right is, in general, mind [or spirit]; its precise place and point of origin is the will. The will is free, so that freedom is both the substance of right and its goal, while the system of right is the realm of freedom made actual, the world of mind brought forth out of itself like a second nature." This statement follows a brief but telling argument about positive right,⁵ in which Hegel tries to show why we cannot rely for knowledge of right on "the science of positive right" (jurisprudence). Knowledge of the actual laws of a given country can tell us what is enforced, he argues, but it cannot explain adequately what is at work in the positing of law or in the acts of choice by which we change or criticize laws and institutions. Further, we expect the law to attain a certain systematic orderliness, coherence, and consistency. But whether it does so or not is unknowable by the standards of positive law itself as long as jurisprudence is concerned only with what is enforced and not also with what is right. We inevitably ask whether a given law is justified, not merely enforced. Study of right cannot be content with the given but must turn to mind or spirit. "Man thinks, and wants to find in thinking his freedom and the ground" of the world he inhabits. The right must have something to do with what can command rational assent. This is already inherent in positive law itself, insofar as it contains a hazy orientation toward "form" and a certain implicit set of general categories from which it acquires justification or coherence. Positive right cannot stand by itself. It is confronted by the critical mind, which cannot identify the right solely by what is enforced, and cannot conscientiously indulge

5. Positive right means what is more commonly called positive law, except that it includes both the written and the unwritten law (i.e., customs, mores, the 'way of life').

the habit of giving good reasons for bad things, which is so characteristic of the merely legal mind (§3 Remark).

But what is the meaning of the critical faculties that are not ruled by the established structure of the laws? What is their source and result? Is the free mind only a permanent critic, or is it itself compatible with some kind of law? The problem of the possible independence of the mind from the given leads back to the “psychological” roots of right. Hegel turns to “mind” or “spirit,” looking for the source of that independence which first comes to sight as the critic of existing right but also as the source of the conceptual structure ultimately implicit in the right as such, insofar as it is worthy of the name.

The transition from positive right (§ 3) to the realm of the mind or spirit (§ 4) is abrupt. It has the character of a confrontation, not a deduction, imitating the radicalism of the view that holds to the priority of thinking over existing, historically sanctioned institutions. Positive law is challenged by another realm, that of the free spirit or mind, which lays down its own rules, which is ultimately free in the sense of a procreator of criticism and judgment, and which finally builds something of its own. Positive right should be, when its implicit “system” is fully developed and rendered explicit, a manifestation of the nature of mind or spirit, which in its freedom seeks a realization of itself in the world. In so realizing itself, according to its own inner necessities, it takes up the existing phenomena of nature and history and works them into an order which one may call a “second nature.” The right properly speaking is a certain congruence of what seemed initially to be opposites: positive right, with all that it means concerning the acceptance of the constraints imposed by circumstances, and, on the other hand, the inner freedom of the mind or spirit, now understood to want an externally realized existence in the practical world at hand. The notion that these two can and must cohere is advanced by Hegel as the meaning of his insight into the “nature of mind [or spirit]” (“die Natur des Geistes,” § 4 Remark). Their effective coherence in the modern state is the culmination of the development of both. The *PR* is devoted to the attempt to substantiate the claim that the inner freedom of the mind or spirit reaches out for actualization in the world of property, contract, crime and punishment, morality, family, civil society, and state, and does so only in this world. This reaching out is not an abandonment of the inner freedom but its completion.

What is the will, through which this reaching out is achieved? Let us note first that it may be somewhat misleading to speak of “the will.” We tend to think of will as a faculty, alongside our other faculties, and yet Hegel denies that it is a faculty, as he denies that it is an entity accessible to the methods of empirical psychology (*PR* I, 241; § 4 Remark). Rather it is freedom itself; the will cannot be distinguished from freedom. “The free is the will. Will without freedom is an empty word, just as freedom is only real [effectual] as will, as subject . . . Will is a particular way of thinking, thinking as setting itself over into existence, as a

drive to give itself existence" (*PR* IV, 102). It is the practical element of thinking. Thinking has both theoretical and practical elements; one without the other, especially the theoretical treated in isolation from the practical, is an abstraction which ignores the reality of thinking which is lived.⁶ Freedom is the first result or sign of thought. Freedom is at the first level self-distinction from the animal world, the inner capacity to abstract from natural determination (*PR* IV, 106–7, III, 111; K 227). The human world is characterized throughout by the capacity for emancipation from natural determination. Hegel would not deny that excellence in thinking is rare, but he would assert that the emancipating aspect of thinking is general—human.

The crucial theses on the will, the fifth through the seventh, are an elaboration on the meaning of freedom. They argue that freedom is complex and manifold, not simple; that it is inherently dialectical; and that, properly understood, it is not negative and destructive but positive when carried through consistently in terms of its own inner logic. The will has a three-fold structure, which he examines in each of its parts.

Thesis five. The first "element" of the will is an "element of pure indeterminacy." "Everyone," says Hegel, will find in his "self-consciousness" the ability to "abstract from everything which he might be" and likewise to "determine himself" toward a particular content (*PR* II, 114; IV, 111). No natural need and no limitation from any other source can finally resist this capacity of the mind or spirit to deny, refuse, or repudiate. The capacity for abstraction and withdrawal can be developed to completion, and will then be found in its purest form in the "pure thinking of oneself," a kind of thinking the pure self, the general self purged of all that is specifically individual and particular.

This first element of will or freedom is negative, a capacity for withdrawal from specific content. It seems first chronologically as well as first in the sense of primary; but Hegel does not thematically discuss its beginnings or historical development; for here, as throughout the *PR*, his study examines the will with fully "educated" reflective powers (*PR* IV, 111). It cannot be natural, for it is a reflective emancipation from the limitations of the natural. It is egotistical: it seems to culminate in a distinction between, first, a pure, thinking self, which is thereby general and abstract (reaching the "I" of man generally, abstracting from the "I" of an existing individual?) and without effective individuality, and, second, the world of particulars, hence the world of life and action. This freedom partakes of both the theoretical and the practical: the theoretical because it is dependent on a sort of thinking of the self, the practical because it acts in a fashion both in positing this abstractly pure self and in negating the bondage of specific contents and claims. The practical element seems more fundamental, though

6. *PR* IV, 102–8; Cf. K 226–27, *PR* III, 108–10; and *Encyclopedia*, 3rd edition (1830), §§ 234–35.

7. *PR* IV, 111. Judith Shklar, *Freedom and Independence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 53, 110.

never categorically separate from the theoretical. Behind the pure act of thinking lies a motive, to comprehend what is, in order to overcome the gulf between the 'I' and the external world. But that gulf has first to be posited, 'willed,' in an act by which undifferentiated experience is knowingly split apart into subject, which thinks and acts, and object, as that toward which thinking and action are directed (*PR* IV, 102–8).

But let us examine more closely the practical meaning of this "element of pure indeterminacy." Does it have a consequence beyond the inner 'psychological' influence it exerts? Hegel argues that it may and, indeed, that it is not uncommon to see this highly restricted form of will made into a basis for action.

Now when this pure, abstract self-hood goes over to action as it is, then it functions as a "negative will," which has a most destructive influence "in the political and in the religious." "Remaining purely theoretical," or wrongly believing that it remains purely theoretical while it actually comes to determine a course of life, it can have "the feeling of its existence" only insofar as it destroys. It pretends to want "positive reality," but every actual form of life requires some distinct order, both institutions and individuals; and such particularization in external life is perceived as a constraint on, not a realization of, this inner abstract freedom. "Only in destroying something does this negative will possess the feeling of itself, as existent." The negative will may imagine that it creates something positive, "such as universal equality" (the French Revolution) or "universal religious life" ("the fanaticism of the Hindu pure contemplation"), but it does not. "Such actuality leads at once to some sort of order, to a particularization of organizations and individuals alike; while it is precisely out of the annihilation of particularity and objective characterization that the self-consciousness of this negative freedom proceeds" (*PR* § 5 Remark; IV, 113–14).

Hegel's examples refer to something "Eastern" (religion) and to something "Western" (revolution, the terror) which is now a significant element of the modern in politics. He alludes in the "Preface" to a certain negativism that arises from modern philosophy and which is, nevertheless, despite its rationalist progenitors, a source of irrationalism in practice and of an inability to grasp the character of sound practice (*PR* II, 61ff.; K 4ff.). What is apparently rational, reliance on the "form" of thinking as a guide in political life, can conduce to the "maximum of frightfulness and terror"⁸ or to a moralism in which the sovereign subjectivity of conscience can lead to a similar, if less overt, nihilism, as represented in the refusal to attend, on claims of moral principle, to any lessons presented by the objective world.⁹

8. *PR* § 29 Remark, § 258 Remark. Hegel associates the extremism in practice with tendencies in Rousseau's thought. Cf. Shklar, *Freedom and Independence*, pp. 58, 65.

9. *PR* § 140 Remark. Hegel clearly has the French Revolution in mind, but he does not name it specifically. In general, his polemics in the *PR* are directed less against the state and its officials than against those for whom the modern liberation of the mind ('enlightenment') seems to mean a negative stance toward all existing institutions. Cf. Shklar, *Freedom and Independence*, pp. 173ff. He ex-

Thesis six. In his portrait of the first element of will, Hegel has shown both what that element is and also how it can lead to a bizarre kind of practice. He understood clearly about this kind of abstract self-consciousness to be a modern development, commencing essentially with Descartes; but he must also be read to mean that there is an inherently destructive potential allied with this discovery.¹⁰ Clarification of pure selfhood is an important step on the road to freedom and hence a grasp of the basis of right, but taken by itself it is a misleading half-truth. But how is it to be corrected?

Since Hegel emphasized the practical consequences of this self-regarding selfhood, one might anticipate a practical argument against it. It would be possible to argue (in the manner of Burke, for example) against the critical freedom of the modern self-consciousness by defending positive right as such. Thus, it might be held that historical developments contain a kind of hidden wisdom superior to anything that might be achieved through rational insight. Yet this is not Hegel's course. Though his "philosophical right" is profoundly concerned with history, it never argues 'from' history, as though history were some kind of independent authority sufficient to show the one-sidedness of rationalism.¹¹ Hegel's exposition of the calamitous practice coming from a one-sided version of the will is as strong (if briefer) as anything said by others who opposed new, specifically modern forms of extremism. But his insight into the overcoming of the danger takes a totally different course.

Hegel poses the question, is the abstracting will upon which the experience of the pure self rests complete in itself? He believes it is not and that the most conclusive argument against it is not the argument from history but the argument from the nature of free willing itself. Thus, in his sixth thesis, Hegel argues that there is a second element inherent in the will. The "I" or "self" must be a "going-over" from undifferentiated indefiniteness (that is the pure self) to a positing of a specific, determinate content of its own. Positing something definite means knowingly choosing to be something definite in actual existence, knowingly choosing to live as this or that.

The act of positing choice is not loss of nerve, a moralistic repudiation of the more intense freedom of purely abstract egotism. Far from such a compromise, it is in fact *the* self-criticism of the abstract, negating self. The criticism emerges

presses a certain sympathy for statesmen who think the 'state' should ask about the implications of various current 'philosophies' (*PR* II, 66–69; K 7–9); it is apparently his view that the most dangerous threat to thought and to practice in his day comes not from the state but from the not only liberated but hyperliberated mind. For his views on the French Revolution, see also *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), pp. 355–63 ("absolute freedom and terror"); and Charles Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 100ff.

10. Manfred Riedel, *Theorie und Praxis im Denken Hegels* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1965), pp. 82–84. *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, III, 223–24, 228, 250–51.

11. Except, perhaps, in a more popular work such as the *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*. Cf. Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 219 note 2.

through recognizing that the movement of reflection which led to the pure, abstract self contained a motive: it was at basis a quest for freedom through conscious repudiation of everything limiting, confining and one-sided. But it is then subject to the rejoinder that being a purely self-conscious but otherwise empty self is itself a new form of the purely one-sided, namely being nothing definite at all. Wanting to be utterly free and nothing more is an unwitting bondage to a most limited mode of life, one which can only destroy or deny whatever is definite. As this deeper self-understanding dawns—and it is an insight that ultimately *cannot* be avoided, because the motive toward freedom necessarily turns inward to examine itself—then there must follow a turn in a new direction.

The turn in a new direction means understanding the terrible limitations of purely negative freedom. The negating and critical freedom possible to the free will must be subjected to critical examination and overcome. In so doing, the will moves toward a more complete, not a lesser, self-realization. It is true that its achievement of this higher realization must proceed through the former stage. There will be no clarification of the meaning of self-conscious choice, and no clear will toward it, unless there is first the achievement of the pure detachment of the reflective self and then a self-critical reflection on the limitations of pure detachment. Radical autonomy is presupposed as a stage to be consciously overcome; the fully realized will wills to be something definite as a deliberate overcoming of its own propensities toward a contentless freedom.

In what precise way can it be said that this second element of the will is higher than the first, beyond the fact that it is a self-criticism of it? Hegel argues that there is in the will an impulse toward the “infinite”—that which is complete, self-sufficient, whole, not rivalled by another of equal worth. This impulse, connected with the meaning of freedom itself, was manifest in the reflections that drove thought not just toward a critical distance from the existing world but toward a dogmatic, categorical distinction between all of the existing world and the pure reflecting self. Yet that one-sided distinction proved not infinite but limited, by its own criteria. It is limited and therefore merely abstract because it stands simply in opposition to the world; it rejects worldly limitations as such and separates itself from them. In that sense, it is one-sided because it can do no more than respond with a resolute “no” to what the world presents. The second element of the will, however, the act of knowing choice, is called by Hegel the “truly infinite” (“wahrhafte Unendlichkeit”) (*PR* § 6 Remark). In choosing to be something definite, as a knowing refusal to be radically autonomous and nothing else, we have the self-conscious particularization of the thinking self. Its aim is to be something definite, as a self which could be radically free in a negative sense but wills instead to be in existence as something living and definite; it is a “concrete universal,” the purely universal and abstract made alive and definite, knowingly accepting or conforming to the limitations which all definite existence imposes, but also realized in such a way that it is no longer merely abstract.

This state is, for Hegel, the fruitful unification of the finite and the infinite, the

limited with what is unlimited, complete and self-sufficient. Or, to speak more accurately, we should say that, for Hegel, this condition is what alone can be considered to be the infinite, the completely satisfying and sufficient. And it is such because, Hegel holds, there can be no fuller form of freedom than this.

Thesis seven. In the concluding statement on the will itself, we learn that “the will is the unity of both of these moments.” It is being something particular and definite, while retaining the “self-identity and universality” of the thinking, abstracting self. In the act of choosing some defined realization, the free self does not limit or restrict itself because it regards that choice as “ideal,” a “possibility by which it is not constrained and in which it is confined only because it has put itself in it” (*PR* § 7). This is “individuality,” “not individuality in its immediacy as a unit, our first idea of individuality, but individuality in accordance with its concept; indeed individuality in this sense is just precisely the concept itself” (*ibid.*). The elements of the will described in §§ 5–6 can only be separated for purposes of analysis; to treat them as wholly distinct is to miss the underlying unity of the will itself. But it is a unity which is an end, not a beginning. The two elements must be consciously and actively brought into harmony, so that their implicit unity becomes explicit and fully realized as itself a project of willed self-realization.

The seventh thesis has introduced nothing new, except the statement that the elements described in the two preceding theses constitute a whole. But this is perhaps the most difficult point of all. Hegel does not hesitate to refer to the contradictory character of such a unity, for it is not altogether unlike holding that the one and the many can be one. In what sense can the universal and the particular be unified? Hegel continues, in the remark to § 7: It is “the task of logic as purely speculative philosophy to prove and explain this innermost secret of speculation, of infinity as negativity relating itself to itself, this ultimate spring of all activity, life and consciousness.”¹² Hegel indicates hereby the precise point of dependence of his “philosophic right” on his “logic,” but he also shows why the *PR* has itself a “logic-like” character: it is one form in which a more fundamental thesis about the character of the “ultimate” spring of “all” activity, life, and consciousness manifests itself. In the “will” we have the point where psychology, “logic,” and right coincide. “Will” is the motive energy not only of the human world, in which “right” figures, but of “activity” and “life” more generally. The unity arising from a certain sort of contradiction is at the heart of “right” but also of life itself.¹³ That motive energy can become explicit in man, and making it

12. Cf. Hegel’s lucid comment on speculative thought, *PR* IV, 118–19. See also II, 124; § 7 Remark; III, 117, 119; and *Encyclopedia* (1830), § 378 Remark.

13. *PR* III, 122; IV, 118: “Man appears as a being full of contradictions, he is the contradiction itself and only through this does he come to consciousness. It is the strength of the mind [spirit] that it can endure this contradiction in itself; no other natural being can hold it . . .” Cf. Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society*, pp. 43, 62ff.

explicit, for its own sake, is, in Hegel's view, the end toward which "will" strives.

Will, in this teaching, takes on an aspect that is no longer exclusively human. Hegel calls "will" an innermost key to life and activity. In the world there is, somehow, a relationship between the intelligible and the particular, insofar as each thing is both itself and also capable of being conceived more "generally," as an instance of a kind, genus, form, or essence. In the human realm, this relationship becomes active. It 'develops' and contains its own kind of teleology, expressed in the fact that the relationship is an end, as well as a beginning. Hegel's doctrine may at first glance seem obscurely cosmic. But it is in a certain sense an attempt to interpret what is in fact typically modern, as can be seen in the common assertions advanced as self-evident truths in modern thought about right: that 'free thought' and 'free speech' are sacred ends, that an ultimate dignity belongs to man as a 'rational being' and an 'end in himself,' that the individual as such is worthy of respect because he contains a trace of the universally human (cf. *PR* § 273 Remark [at the beginning]). These and similar assertions claim a great deal for the human world and implicitly hold that it contains in itself something of ultimate worth.

Hegel's theme, after the initial exposition of the meaning of 'will' as the source of right, is to elucidate the manner in which the particularization of the will occurs. If §§ 5–7 have described the inner structure of the will, has this depiction of the practical element of thinking shed any light on our grasp of right?

Hegel argues, in the remainder of the "Introduction," that the reaching out of the will toward some definite embodiment is an intelligible process with an order of growth toward full maturity. In his treatment of this process, the daunting complexity of the argument in terms of both language and thought is due in part to the weaving together of three different issues. First, there is a discussion of the importance of the natural impulses and their role in action; here the problem is to understand the natural will, the natural in the will, "natural life" and its implications for the will (*PR* IV, 121). Second, there is a discussion, closely related to the first, of the problem of whether and how the 'content' of the will is its own? Does will come to be a master of itself, controlling its own experience in some sense, or is it the product of external forces and hence always dependent on them? Third, there is a constant examination of the 'finitude' of the will. This discussion is aimed at showing that 'finitude' is not the last word, because ultimately the will achieves something complete, self-sufficient, and whole. Particularizing and individualizing the inner freedom of the mind perfects and completes that freedom, bringing it to realization in a way which is satisfying, hence 'infinite,' not rivalled by another condition of equal worth.

Let us turn first to his treatment of the natural will. In discussing the first stage of willing, we are not dealing with an animal level of life. Of the animal, it can be said that it is automatically what its drives and instincts are. It cannot (so far

as we know) separate deed from consciousness and hence has no will or individuality (*PR* IV, 124, 121; I, 245). The will, even at the most basic level, implies the capacity for abstracting from the immediacy of natural life. It separates self and object. But it also chooses, determining itself toward some goal, “translating the subjective purpose into objectivity through the use of its own activity and some external means” (*PR* § 8; § 105ff.).

Purpose obtains content either from what is at hand in the external world or by generating content from the will itself. At the level of natural will, purpose follows the lead of the various “impulses, desires and inclinations whereby the will finds itself determined in the course of nature” (*PR* § 11). This is not the stimulus-response mechanism of the animal but a natural “will,” a response to natural impulse in which some element of freedom and self-determination is present. It is will in the form of conscious receptivity to the impulses of nature and an implicit ability to impose order on them. As this ordering develops, the conscious element increases. The external stimuli are deprived of their simple, unmediated naturalness. Natural stimuli by themselves are chaotic and discordant; whatever order is achieved must derive from conscious direction and arrangement of these impulses.

Hegel argues that the “natural will,” even when it makes its choices intelligently, is unable to overcome a kind of “abstractness”—that is to say, an incomplete self-realization. This is his fundamental criticism of attempts to limit the role of will to riding herd over the natural drives, or to make the mind solely a “scout and spy” for the passions. Even when choices are made among the natural impulses in the most intelligent manner conceivable, choice is still limited in its range, and dependent on stimuli derived from an external source. Willing remains a prisoner of content “given either from within or from without.”¹⁴ Whatever one chooses from this limited palette, a certain arbitrariness of content remains. Even the maximum levels of self-control leave one enchained by the fact that any choice one might make is unsatisfying, ‘finite,’ because the desire can be directed equally to another object.

Let us examine the character of the dissatisfaction more closely. That it must arise is crucial to Hegel’s case. For he claims to show that no form of the natural will, even the most intelligently ordered, can satisfy, and that therefore the will necessarily seeks for something beyond intelligent response to nature. That something more is what he eventually calls ‘right.’

The perfected natural will is the will in which there is the highest degree of conscious self-regulation, so that instead of mindless responsiveness to every provocative stimulus, one attains a self-control by means of which to regulate and harmonize the impulses. When achieved, there will be an implicit freedom from natural impulses inherent in the ability to regulate them. The implicit freedom can be made explicit. As this is done, it gives rise to a certain self-under-

14. *PR* § 15. By “from within.” I believe Hegel means the desires and passions; content “from without” refers to external things as objects of desire.

standing. This self-understanding, when it reaches clarity, interprets its own freedom to mean 'arbitrariness'; it interprets will as arbitrary autonomy ("Will-kür"), thinking that exactly the arbitrary power to pick and choose constitutes freedom.

When freedom is understood as arbitrariness, then the will understands itself as follows: "the self-reflecting, independent and infinite ego stands over its content, i.e., its various impulses, and also over the further separate ways in which these are actualized and satisfied" (*PR* § 14). It is tied to no particular impulse and able to abstract from each. (*PR* IV, 132). It regards each choice as only one possibility among many. Freedom is actualized in the autonomy with which one chooses now this, now that. Far from abstruse, this outlook is so common as to be banal. "The idea which people most commonly have of freedom is that it is arbitrariness . . . ability to do what we please" and thus to be directed to no choice as necessary (*PR* § 15 Remark).

Arbitrariness is ultimately a deficient kind of freedom. This is not to say that it is unimportant; on the contrary, Hegel later finds it essential to make a place for it both in the economy of the will itself and also in civil society.¹⁵ But still it remains defective because it holds implicitly that no particular thing is a decisive actualization of the will. Every choice is relativized, as one possibility among many, and preserving the arbitrariness means knowingly relativizing choices so that one will always retain the consciousness of independence from them. This view is at bottom an "abstract" freedom, preserving the negative emancipating thrust of pure withdrawal. It leads finally to a doctrine of ultimate arbitrariness: as the will is here seen as arbitrary freedom, so must the world be a collection of arbitrary possibilities.

But as one draws out the consequences of this view of freedom, Hegel holds that one can begin to see an inner contradiction that corresponds to the internal dialectic of the will. The premise of arbitrariness is the freedom from natural determination that allows standing aside from impulse. This freedom is at work in the will that takes satisfaction from its arbitrary autonomy. But freedom can and must become self-critical, turning in upon itself and examining the sufficiency of arbitrary independence. If, as Hegel contends, will contains a striving toward full satisfaction and actualization, then there cannot help but be a self-criticism of the partial freedom of the merely arbitrary will. Arbitrariness is defective in two ways. First, it leads to a notion of an indefinite number of possibilities with no one goal as predominant and none as permanently satisfying. Instead, one has only restless, pointless movement, leading nowhere except, perhaps, to exhaustion. Second, the arbitrary will fails to achieve and embody freedom. Even if able to pick and choose at whim, it still remains dependent on external stimuli. It fails to make "its content" the content and product of its freedom.¹⁶ Thus, it is

15. *PR* §§ 185, 187, 206. Consider the illuminating treatment of this issue in M. B. Foster, *The Political Philosophies of Plato and Hegel* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1965), Chs. 3-4.

16. Cf. *PR* §§ 21, 15.

not its own master and not completely self-determining; and it cannot resist the dawning of this insight.

The arbitrary will is a “contradiction” (*PR* § 14 Remark). It is a contradiction not in a formal logical sense but in the sense of a self-contradiction, an incomplete mode of self-realization. It cannot last, for it leads to the emergence of reflections that force the mind to move toward something fuller.

The self-contradiction encountered in all attempts to refine the arbitrary will is a productive, not a debilitating, contradiction. Above all, it forces the raising of the question, what, if anything, can be an appropriate content or aim for the free will? Can any object of choice be decisively satisfying, or is there only an endless number of possibilities? This question leads to reflection on the variety of the discordant impulses and then to the development of an idea of ‘happiness’—an intelligible conception of a sum total of satisfactions. This idea is a result of an attempt to conceive a rational system of the impulses, so that the arbitrariness and contingency affecting each singly is purged and they are integrated into a reasonable whole (*PR* §§ 17–20; III, 142–43).

It is important then that there be an insight into the whole range of impulses and needs. Such insight—here associated by Hegel with the task of “education,” said to have “absolute worth”¹⁷—seeks a wholeness in the sense both of a sum of satisfactions (so that the desires do not any longer get in the way of each other or arbitrarily succeed one another) and a wholeness in the sense of universality. That is to say, desire as such is made a matter for critical reflection, so that there is a commencement of reflection on the meaning of desire and on the general—i.e., human—subjection to it. The idea of happiness arising from this course of thought is an idea of happiness for man as such, not the satisfaction of this or that individual and this or that desire. Every pursuit of rational insight (in this case, into the impulses and desires) is a pursuit that generalizes, inquiring into the phenomenon as a whole.

In the idea of happiness, is it the sum total of pleasures that is the goal or is it the imposition of rational order? This question seems to be at the core of Hegel’s reasoning as to why the free will has to interpret the idea of happiness in terms of the idea of right, its true end.¹⁸ In the process of attempting to order the impulses rationally, to “educate” them, there emerges the view that the impulses “should be freed both from their form as immediate and natural determinations, and also from the subjectivity and contingency of their content” (*PR* § 19). Bringing them into rational order must mean subjecting them to thoughtful evaluation and hence freeing oneself from thoughtless bondage to the “natural” and

17. *PR* § 20, IV, 136–37. Hegel’s term for education is “Bildung.” Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, translation edited by Garrett Burden and John Cumming (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), pp. 10–19. See also Otto Pöggeler, “Hegels Bildungskonzeption im geschichtlichen Zusammenhang,” *Hegel-Studien*, vol. 15 (1980), pp. 241–69.

18. Cf. Hegel’s comments on ‘eudaimonism,’ *PR* IV, 135; III, 143–45; K 231.

“contingent” way in which they present themselves to unreflective experience. The idea of happiness is then a stage in the development of the “spiritual” drive toward freedom, toward maximum rational self-determination (*PR* IV, 138). The motive hidden in the quest for the idea of happiness, when undertaken as a criticism of arbitrary freedom, is not primarily a hedonistic motive but one coming from the will’s drive toward freedom as self-determination.

The spiritualization of happiness means “that the impulses should become the rational system of the will’s volitions.” Further, to “grasp them like that, proceeding out of the concept of the will, is the content of the philosophical science of right” (*PR* § 20). The goal of the fully developed will is the state of being self-determining in a rational way with an appropriate external mode of actualizing this inner condition. This does not mean discarding happiness in its more usual meaning; Hegel is not an ascetic. It means an absorption of “the immediacy of instinctive desire.” This “process of absorption in or elevation to universality is what is called the activity of thought. The self-consciousness which purifies its object, content and aim and raises them to this universality effects this as thinking getting its own way in the will.”¹⁹ The thoughtful will gives itself content by making “its freedom its object.” That is, it seeks the “rational system of mind” and also seeks to fashion the world so that it accords with rational mind, so that “this system shall be the world of immediate actuality” (*PR* § 27). “Dies, daß ein Dasein überhaupt, Dasein des freien Willens ist, ist das Recht. — Es ist somit überhaupt die Freiheit, als Idee” (*PR* § 29). (This might be translated as follows: “This is the right—an existent of any kind as an existence of the free will. Right is thereby freedom as idea.”) Perhaps the meaning of this principle could be more vividly put for us as follows: This is what right is: that natural life should be made over into a way of life where the free will exists in an effective manner. Freedom thereby becomes not just wish or dream but a realization of thought in practice.

Hegel now gives a clarifying example, mentioning the alternative of freedom or slavery.²⁰ It is clear that for him this is the fundamental social and political alternative. Will is freedom, self-emancipation. Hegel finds, in the emergence of freedom from slavery, *the* representative movement of the human spirit. In the “Introduction” we are shown the principles of this movement. But this gains external expression in history through the rebellions by which slavery is over-

19. *PR* § 21 Remark. Note here the implication that the peak of ‘will’ brings ‘thinking’ into predominance. Patrick Riley, *Will and Political Legitimacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), cites the observation of Michael B. Foster that Hegel’s “will” as it relates to the state is “imperfectly differentiated from reason.” (See Foster’s *The Political Philosophies of Plato and Hegel* [New York: Russell and Russell, 1965; reprint of 1935 edition], pp. 131ff.) Riley’s study also cites a comparable view of Leibniz: “to will is nothing but the striving which arises from thought, or to strive for something which our thinking recognizes” (p. 221, note 53). Commenting on Hegel, Riley also remarks (p. 17): it is “with Hegel [that] the concept of real will as a kind of knowing begins.”

20. *PR* § 21 Remark; cf. § 40 Remark, § 49 Remark, § 57 Remark, § 66 Remark, § 356.

thrown and freedom developed. At the basis of rebellion, however, lies the mind or spirit. The basic turning point between slavery, in all its forms, and freedom, does not have to do with questions of power but with self-understanding. All slavishness comes from deficient self-understanding: "the slave does not know his essence, his infinity, freedom, he does not know himself as essence." He fails to see himself this way because he fails "to think himself" (*PR* § 21 Remark). Thinking liberates man from slavishness, especially from the deepest slavishness, that which is self-imposed or which is permitted because one fails to give thought to oneself. But when thinking arouses itself, and turns inward, one begins to see oneself in terms of the "universal" element (to see oneself as an instance of 'man,' not merely as this or that particular individual), which is the decisive rebellion against unfreedom.

Hegel has provided the account of how the desire for freedom can become explicit and coherent. His position seems to be one that agrees with common sense insofar as common sense holds that the quest for freedom is the supreme expression of right and that laws and institutions should be adequate to insure freedom. But common sense cannot by itself explain this impression. The philosophic science of right gives it rational form, elucidating the source and the goal of right. It brings it back to reason, one might say, finding that the only serious liberation is that accomplished by "thinking getting its own way in the will."

Hegel's argument in the "Introduction" has developed a new account of the 'psychology' at the basis of right. He has built on the views of Rousseau, who was perhaps first to see the human as free, perfectible, historical, self-creating, and emancipated from the determinism that modern thought associates with the idea of nature. But Hegel has shown how to develop a psychology adequate to free subjectivity, free both in its emancipation from natural determination and free in aiming toward the goal of being fully free, unable to be satisfied (once the mind is awakened) with anything less than freedom. He offers a doctrine which does not oppose freedom to reason but holds that the awakening of the mind is the source of freedom and the perfecting of mind is the only way to complete freedom. As he later argues, this view is also one in which freedom as individual autonomy and freedom as public spirit can be coherently brought together in a reasonable order without suppression of either.

Hegel's psychology of right directs us first to the inner principles of right as they arise from the quest ('will') of thinking to find an appropriate mode of existence. What thinking is implicitly must be achieved in a realized way of life in the actual world. Second, we are taught by Hegel to look for the external manifestation of this essence, in the struggle for "freedom," understood as emancipation from slavishness. We must look especially to that kind of self-emancipation which is not just an overthrowing of the master in order to enslave oneself anew (to new masters, to desires or passions, to uncritical indulgence of whim) but is

self-emancipation arising from thought, from an attempt to live up to what one is as a thinking being. This is rebellion that stands for an idea, an interpretation of man and freedom.

But what exactly is the meaning of the 'infinite' existence that is presented by Hegel as the final achievement of the fully realized will? Hegel presents its outline rather generally in the "Introduction." The remainder of the *PR* attempts to explain how the will reaches out to create or assimilate abstract rights, morality, family, civil society, and state and thereby form a world adequate to its principles. This process comes to highest fruition in the 'state' achieved in varying degrees within the various states of modern Europe.

In wanting to be something definite and existent, the will must reach out to the existing world, so that it can have opportunities for work, action, politics, and public life. In so doing, it accepts to some degree the existing "positive right" and makes an accommodation with it. This accommodation undeniably means an elevation and improvement of positive right. The rational will, seeking realization, must in its own way be interested in reform. Positive right, as it tends to develop by itself, is disorderly, incoherent, a blend of the reasonable and the accidental. The rational will returns to the mundane world, looking for a vehicle for a rational life. It will necessarily attempt to put the realm of positive right into order, seek to make it achieve clarity about its purposes and meaning, insist that the law must come to distinguish between what is fundamental and what is exclusively a compromise with circumstances. This influence of rational will on the existing world that it adopts will seem insignificant only to those who harbor utopian illusions.

Nevertheless, if rational will alters positive right while making peace with it, there are effects in the other direction as well. The insistence on a return to the mundane world, in order to seek an effective existence within it, means that the rational will must conform to the limits of a mundane world. It attaches itself to a particular and therefore limited entity—a given people, its law and customs, its particular historical situation—with all of the constraints that this entails. It must therefore educate itself to the realities of the particular situation and accept them as they are in the main. It must undergo an education in realism. It must posit itself within the conditions of the time. Thus, it is precisely characteristic of Hegel's *PR* that it does not lead to creation of an ideal city that is timelessly nonexistent, suitable for contemplation and study but not suitable for real existence. The *PR* ends rather with an embrace of world history and with the thesis that the mind must, and does, lower its heaven to the mundane world.

An aspect of this teaching, however, remains paradoxical, if the term might be used here in its looser sense. Borrowing the terminology of Plato, one might say that the will described by Hegel insists on returning (from pure selfhood, from abstraction) to the cave. It does not return to the conventional world merely as a concession to the limitations of mundane life. On the contrary, the will's insistence on returning to the mundane world is a criticism of all claims to indepen-

dence from that mundane world. Such independence is illusory; it is merely abstract, hence in principle not realizable and, Hegel would say, inferior in principle to what *is* realizable in the mundane world. A knowing existence within the cave is intrinsically superior to solitary independence outside of it.

Now Hegel holds that the realization of the free will, within the mundane world, is "infinite," a perfected and satisfying unification of the impulses of thought toward realization in life, beyond which there might be much to desire but there is nothing more to 'will.' He would not deny that the particular thing (people, country, system of positive right, historical period) with which the free will becomes associated is finite and thus limited; nothing that simply "exists" is by itself infinite. But, he holds, a finite thing can be the vehicle of an infinite purpose.²¹ This combination of the purely universal (the purest freedom of the rational will) with the particular and finite is the highest truth and the supreme end.

Hegel thus argues that the mind can find its satisfaction in bringing together what is originally "spiritual" with the mundane world, as reformed; the result will be harmonious and indeed the only fully adequate way in which will can be satisfied. As this is understood, there ceases to be a need for systematic discontent with the existing, historical world. That temperament which would repudiate the world in order to look to heaven or which believes, in a more practical vein, that the world can or will be remade in accordance with the standards of heaven (utopianism) becomes irrelevant, just a stage on the road to the development of a fuller insight into the real character of freedom. Hegel's view is, in its essence, a criticism of any attempt to divide systematically the ideal world toward which the mind or spirit strives from the mundane world in which we live. It is a critique of religion, of ahistorical philosophy, and of utopian politics.

Hegel's teaching is intended, as we must always recall, not only as a statement of his reflections but also as a characterization of what is: "philosophy is its own time grasped in thought" (*PR* II, 72; K 11). It might be useful to observe in this context that there may be a difficulty in his reading of the modern world. Surely he is in part correct in holding that a leading theme of the modern outlook is the systematic critique of religion, idealism, and utopianism in the name of history and mundane realism. But is this view *the* leading theme? Or would it be necessary to say that modern life has been repeatedly challenged, to great effect both for good and bad, by views and then movements which borrow enough from that older temperament to be called "secular religions" (the certainties of the religious mind attached now to secular causes)?²² Hegel's suggestion that this mentality will disappear, as "will" is educated to live rationally within the mundane world, seems to be utopian. But if the existing world is then torn between those wanting to bring the mind or spirit down to earth and those wanting to confront the mundane world with the absolute righteousness of their religious

21. *PR* III, 117; II, 526–28; K 101.

22. Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*, Part I, Chs. 2–3; Part III, Ch. 2.

or idealist or political cause, then the divisions of the existing world appear more insuperable than Hegel would lead us to anticipate. Perhaps then it is possible that there is a need for a certain critical independence of the mind by which we grasp and evaluate these divisions. If so, is Hegel again utopian in holding that the congruence of mind and mundane world will leave us infinitely satisfied, with no reason for loyalties divided between what the mind might see and what the mundane world offers?