



How Philosophy “Instructs the World”

Henry S. Harris

Volume 51, numéro 2, juin 1995

Hegel aujourd’hui

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/400916ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/400916ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Faculté de philosophie, Université Laval

ISSN

0023-9054 (imprimé)

1703-8804 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Harris, H. S. (1995). How Philosophy “Instructs the World”. *Laval théologique et philosophique*, 51(2), 311–321. <https://doi.org/10.7202/400916ar>

HOW PHILOSOPHY "INSTRUCTS THE WORLD"

Henry S. HARRIS

RÉSUMÉ : Cet essai s'efforce de déterminer la relation de la Préface de la Philosophie du droit de Hegel avec l'œuvre elle-même. L'auteur y montre qu'en dépit de la déclaration explicite « que la philosophie arrive toujours trop tard » pour enseigner comment doit être le monde, la structure rationnelle que la philosophie systématique découvre dans le monde est un idéal qui n'est parfaitement réalisé nulle part. Ainsi la philosophie, de fait, « enseigne » (ou guide l'action et dirige les attitudes) d'une certaine manière importante.

SUMMARY : This essay examines the Preface of Hegel's Philosophy of Right in its relation to the work itself. It is shown that, in spite of the explicit declaration that "philosophy always comes too late to instruct the world how to be", the rational structure that systematic philosophy uncovers in the world is an ideal that is not perfectly realized anywhere. Thus philosophy is in fact, "instructive" (or action-guiding and attitude-directing) in certain important ways.

Among the passages that have attained the status of proverbs for readers of Hegel (because they express what even the non-readers know of his philosophy) one of the best known is the paragraph at the end of the Preface to the *Philosophy of Right* (1821) where we are told that "philosophy always comes too late to teach the world how it ought to be." The image of the "owl of Minerva beginning her flight only with the falling of the dusk" is what everyone remembers (even those who have not read the book).

Those who *have* read the book ought to be puzzled ; for in simply "understanding" the rational State as it "actually" is, Hegel describes to his Prussian audience a State which manifestly was *not* actual in their world in many respects. He did not try to "jump over Rhodes," certainly, since everything that he described existed somewhere in the "Christian-German world" of his time. But it was nowhere put together in the way in which he put it together as "the *thought* of the world which first appears in time when actuality has completed its process of formation."

Philosophy, he says, "is its own time grasped in thoughts"; and only what is fully formed in life can be properly "grasped" in thought. One can only pick the

apple of knowledge when it is ripe. But that is when it is ready to fall in any case. It is too late, then, to be telling the apple how to grow. The world that can be "grasped in thought" must be on its death bed; and the only advice that one can give to a dying man is to make his peace with God.

Instead of the apple in the Judaic myth of human disobedience, however, we find in Hegel's text a rose to be recognized in the cross of Christian obedience; and instead of the religious task of making our peace with God, philosophy offers us a "peace with actuality" which Hegel says is "warmer" than "the cold despair which concedes that in this temporal life things go quite badly, or at the best, no better than middling well." Yet even in Hegel's account of the rationally-actual State, things do not go better than *middling well*: for the "inner dialectic" of civil society (PR, 246) guarantees the truth of the saying of Jesus "the poor ye have always with you" (cf. PR, 244). And from the fact that the Hegelian State is not completely actual anywhere, we could infer that in this temporal world things actually do go quite badly.

The Left Hegelians and the Marxists solved the riddle of the Preface (as they thought) by identifying the evening star with the morning star, or the flight of the twilight owl with the crowing of the cock at dawn. The "gray in gray" that Philosophy paints for the world that has grown old, becomes the project of the new day; and one must be bolder and more radical than Hegel was. One must follow the dialectic of civil society to its necessary conclusion and resolve the problem of poverty once and for all, by showing that the Reason in the world is moving necessarily towards a classless society in which the needs of all will be met. Then at last we shall have the rational world in which everyone contributes to the best of his (or her) abilities.

The first step in this "solution" seems to be indisputably correct. The world to which philosophy can give no advice is the one that can be comprehended only because it is dying. But philosophical comprehension takes the step into a new world beyond that death. In the cross of death, it recognizes the rose of Reason; and, at that point, the proposed "solution" goes wrong. For unless the apple in the older myth is plucked and eaten, it must fall and rot — and so go to waste as an object of enjoyment. But the rose in the new myth can only bloom properly for so long as it is *not* plucked. The rose of "absolute knowledge" is a *mystic* rose in the sense that if it is left unplucked, it will bloom for ever, and will never fade. So in Hegel's myth it is obedience to the divine prohibition that is rational, just as disobedience was both rational and necessary in the case of the Judaic apple.

The Marxists would have us pluck the rose; but then it is bound to wither. For Hegelians it is apparent that Engels spoke more wisely than he knew when he said that in the world of Communism "the State is not abolished, it withers away." He did not realize that the State was the social "rose," and that once it was gone there would only be thorns. We cannot have the rose without the thorns; but we can have the thorns without the rose. Nor is it only in the world of those who claim to follow Marx that this situation visibly exists. The truth is, rather, that in Hegel's own

"German-Christian world" the rose of Hegelian "Science" has still not bloomed. So we live mainly among the thorns for a different reason.

My ultimate aim is to say what the "cognition of the rose in bloom" means in the most ordinary and literal terms that I can command. But for the moment, I must pursue Hegel's metaphors a little further. The metaphor of the rose comes into his Preface through the punning transformation of the name of *Rhodes* — the island in the boast about the fabulous leap. Just as any place is "Rhodes" for the repetition of that leap, so the impossibility of leaping out of one's time can be demonstrated at any time. But Philosophy does not have to leap out of time; it recognizes the rose of eternal blessedness in the cross of "this temporal life." And this recognition is not a vision, but an activity. It is not a leap, but it is a *dance*.

The challenge "Here is Rhodes, and here the leap" refers to an impossibility. Hegel translates the Greek proverb into Latin, but both languages are dead and gone. We are no longer trying to leap into a philosophical Heaven that is outside of time. "*Here* is the rose, *here* dance" is not a challenge at all, but an invitation in the vernacular. *Saltus*, the impossible leap in the Latin, is translated into "dance" as if it were *Salta*, the imperative of the verb *saltare*.¹ The Latin translation was necessary so that this second pun could be made, and the heritage of Rome, Imperial and Papal, could be added to that of the Greek island/rose, to produce the living dance of truth in German. Anyone who has been properly taught can dance anywhere; and anyone who has been properly educated can recognize the rose. This "recognition" is a logical "dance" from petal to petal, which picks up the fallen petals of a temporal life that is at the point of death, and puts them together, so that the mystic rose can for the first time be seen clearly.

Unless we pick the petals up from "this temporal life" as we read, we are not philosophizing, but only designing another Utopia — not grasping our own time in thought, but dreaming. But if we do manage to follow Hegel's argument as a reading of his actual world, a reading in which what actuality has shown to be empirically possible is matched with what is rationally desirable, then we shall emerge from his lecture-hall as part of the educated public opinion that must eventually work upon the King of Prussia to grant a constitution. We shall know how to estimate realistically the social power that we actually have, and how to use it wisely.

We may, or may not, change our political and social goals as a result of our philosophical experience. The relation between reason and faith, between understanding and practical commitment, is not predictable, since *no* commitment to action is determined simply by logic; it is only the active commitment to attempt the

1. A. PEPERZAK (*Philosophy and Politics. A Commentary on the Preface to Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Martinus Nijhoff, 1987, p. 134-135, n. 133) is surely right in thinking that the punning transition from a *leap* to a *dance* was suggested by GOETHE's *Zahme Xenien*, III, n. 2. For Goethe this transition was determined by his desire to apply the story to those "inglorious Miltons" who remain "mute" because they have not found the subject that could inspire them to achieve their true potential. If you *are* a poet, says Goethe, the subject for a poem is always at hand. (But Peperzak ought not to say that Hegel is *translating* here. Hegel translates both from Greek into Latin and from Latin into German quite correctly; and that entails his knowing the difference between *saltus* and *salta*.)

logical dance that is determined by our embarking upon philosophy as the classical "guide of life." So we may or may not change our projects; but we shall certainly have moderated our *expectations*. For we shall have understood that our world is (in an ultimate or logical sense) "as it ought to be"; and that there will *never* be a world without the rich and the poor, the fortunate and the oppressed, the conservatives and the progressives, the liberals and the radicals, the irrational reactionaries and the fanatical revolutionaries.

The reactionaries and the revolutionaries are the enemies of philosophy, because they live their real lives in another world than this one, so that they do not care if this one is destroyed for the sake of their fantasies. Hegel, in his twenties, had watched a great revolutionary movement, of which he was an enthusiastic supporter, pass out of the control of those whose "constitutional" ideals he shared, into the hands of fanatical extremists. Then in his fifties he found himself in a home community in which irrational reactionaries were perilously close to the levers of social power. Both his choice of the "rose and cross" symbolism, and his attempt to throw a cloak of sound conservatism over his social philosophy, and to suggest that because of its concern with an eternal truth that is *actual* in time it was essentially in harmony with religious quietism, were partly determined by the character of the "Rhodes" for which he was dancing his Rose.² — But his passionate (and to that extent *irrational*)³ polemic against the philosophers of "feeling" was sustained by his urgent sense of the radical antithesis between "Science" (as methodical and discursive) and the essentially intuitive mode of all mystical meditation.

The Rose is eternal. To suppose, therefore, that the identification of the owl with the cock, or of the evening with the morning star, is the whole meaning of the completion of the "formation of actuality" and the emergence of speculative science, is a disastrous mistake. It amounts to the rebirth of the "Ought" in its most primitively objective form. The ideal of the Revolution is the moral necessity of Fichte without Fichte's moral conscience. If instead of seeing that no final social revolution is possible — because that would violate the logic of human social existence as freedom of action — one clings to the conviction that the final revolution is not

-
2. The whole political background of Hegel's social theorizing at Berlin is ably summarized by PEPERZAK (*op. cit.*, p. 15-31); and he makes the theological apologetic background of the cross-rose symbolism clear (p. 103-112). But the fuller account of J. D'HONDT in *Hegel en son temps* (Paris, 1968; translation, Lewiston, 1988) should still be studied. I do not agree with Peperzak's characterization of D'Hondt's book as a "one-sidedly progressive image of Hegel" (*op. cit.*, p. 29, n. 7). It is true that D'Hondt is writing mainly for a Marxist audience. He wants to convince the "progressives" that they have misjudged Hegel. But there is no other "side" to Hegel's social record except that of personal bitterness and self-righteousness (which has no *theoretical* significance according to Hegel himself — see the following note).
 3. We cannot doubt that Hegel took a malicious pleasure in being able to attack Fries (whose academic career began at the same time and place as his own, but who went to Heidelberg as professor, when Hegel's personal fortunes were at their lowest, and he had still ten years in the academic wilderness to face). The Fries polemic is ugly but understandable. But the way that Hegel attacked (and even consciously lampooned) Schleiermacher in the lecture-hall is less easy to forgive. We have to admit that the record shows Hegel was willing to use almost any (linguistic) weapon to maintain "Science" against "feeling." But that passionate commitment was itself *unscientific*. It turned "Science" into a feeling, and encouraged dogmatic theological interpretations of it.

merely possible but is now necessary and imminent, then indeed "God is dead, and all things are permitted."

The Hegelian doctrine of historical comprehension does indeed require that we should abstract from all the concerns of personal morality. Instead of being moral valets, we must assess the objective reasons for historical success and failure ; and in order to do that we must have clear insight into what the ideal of "success" is. If we approach history with the clear insight that it is "beyond morality," but also with a Fichtean standard of what counts as rational — i.e. a standard that is the ideal limit of a bad infinite progress — we shall find ourselves back in the "unhappy consciousness" of history as a slaughter bench that is without meaning and without the actual experience of salvation. The "triumph of Communism" is indefinitely delayed ; but it justifies every legal limitation, and every moral atrocity.

The step that "philosophy" takes when the "formation process of actuality" is completed, is the step into *political or social science*. I have to say "political or social," because Hegel's "science of Spirit" is certainly politics," the supreme *practical* science of Aristotle ; but it is that only because it is also the *concrete* shape of theoretical wisdom, the self-enjoyment of human reality. We must put it this way, and we must speak of theoretical wisdom as "*social science*" rather than as the self-contemplation of the Absolute (as Hegel does), because Hegel's Aristotelian language — which was only ever meant to close the circle of the system by concentrating our attention on logical *method* as the beginning and end upon which the whole circle depends — gives rise to so many false interpretations. What validates Hegel's formal closure of the circle in the words of Aristotle about God is his complete identification of God with the human world through the speculative interpretation of the Incarnation. But for an audience whose knowledge of Christian doctrines and symbols is merely traditional (and which "tradition" we inherit matters little) or simply non-existent, it is best to avoid the language of classical "theology" altogether.

Even to call Hegel's philosophy of spirit "political or social *science*" has its dangers. The maturity of "Absolute Spirit" is in philosophy as "Science" ; but this philosophical science is a concrete mode of human self-consciousness, which necessarily involves both the aesthetic experience of subjective creativity, and the religious experience of objective rationality. These non-scientific modes of experience are the proximate objects of philosophy as theoretical science ; but ordinary science does not have art and religion as its proximate object of study.

It appears to me (though I may be wrong, for I am not very deeply informed) that the recognized practitioners of what are called the "human sciences" fall into two great classes — those who want to understand our existence theoretically as an object of contemplative appreciation ; and those who want to develop it practically as a Baconian totality of the knowledge that is "power." The first group — though they can hardly be aware of it, for all too often their felt intuitions and methodical assumptions make it virtually impossible for them to recognize the fact — are "dancing the Rose." The second group are (or should be) improving the functioning

of civil society and the State. They certainly need to "grasp the Rose in the Cross," but they do not know what that means.

The social science of the Rose-dancing, the science that is essentially philosophical anthropology, belongs to the Hegelian "heaven," the realm into which the owl flies when the darkness falls and the actual world is "dead." This "Heaven" is, indeed, a world where the dead matter more than the living, for it is through the devotion to what is actual in a spiritual, but not in a physical (or practical) sense that we become "twice-born," and experience what "the resurrection of the body" really means. All of us who understand what the academic life — the pursuit of knowledge theoretically, or for its own sake — really is, and who are truly committed to it, live in the Hegelian "Heaven." I, who have done virtually nothing in my life since I learned to read, except to read books, and write other books about the experience of that reading, have existed successfully in that Heaven almost since I was born; and I hope to die there. But I want now to illustrate Hegelian "politics," i.e., the architectonic science of practice, as well as I can; and since the history of philosophy is what I have lived with and for, I shall in the process be illuminating the Hegelian circle through which the Rose of pure contemplation is shown to have a practical use, and to be, in fact, the most useful of all things.

The concrete and specific problem that presents itself most obviously for elucidation, in an essay focussed upon the Preface to the *Philosophy of Right*, is that of understanding Hegel's astonishing remarks about Plato's *Republic*. As we shall see, this takes us to the heart of the Hegelian *ethics*; as the problem of the integration of the family into the political community, it is a problem of what we call "sociology" rather than of "political theory"; and since Plato's problem has, since Hegel's time, become once more *our* problem, we shall find that the elucidation of it illustrates how the perception of the Rose changes when the cross of historical existence is carried differently.

"The Republic of Plato," says Hegel, "which passes as the proverbial case of an *empty ideal* has in essence apprehended nothing but the nature of Greek ethical life, and the fact that a deeper principle was breaking into it in his own time. In the consciousness that the deeper principle could only appear in it directly as a still unsatisfied yearning, and hence only as corruption, he was forced to seek the aid of the very yearning against itself, but he could seek this aid, which must come from on high, initially only in a particular *outward* form of that Greek ethical life. Through that outward form he thought he could forcefully control the corruption, and thereby he injured the deeper impulse of the yearning, namely free infinite personality, right at the heart. But in doing so he proved himself to be the great spirit he is, because the principle upon which the distinctive aspect of his Idea turns, is precisely the pivot upon which the impending revolutionary world-upheaval turned at that time."

Hegel's position is paradoxical from every "temporal" standpoint. No Greek of Plato's time would have taken the *Republic* as a valid "apprehension" of the nature of Greek *Sittlichkeit*. It was too Spartan-disciplinary for the Athenians, and too Athenian-intellectual for the Spartans. Nor has any modern interpreter (before Hegel,

or even since) seen the *Republic* as a reconciliation of Greek communal ethics with the modern principle of the self-defining moral conscience. Many moderns, on the other hand — including socialists like R.H.S. Crossmann, and philosophers of science like Karl Popper (thinkers who might perhaps have appreciated the virtues of the *Republic* better in another age) — have recognized its rational authoritarianism as a mortal injury to "the deeper impulse right at its deepest."

Hegel was certainly the first to see the *Republic* as an integration of the newborn personal self-consciousness of Socrates and the Sophists into the "substantial" identity of the City's public spirit. Plato uses the Socratic "care of the soul" *against itself* by inculcating in his young Guardians the Socratic view that the City and the Laws are the true parents of the citizens. This is the essential message of the "noble lie" about the metals in the soul; and that "lie" is grafted right onto the fundamental *local* myth of Athenian ethical life, according to which the Athenians were the *autochthonous* children of the Attic soil.

Having transferred the natural love of the young Guardians from their biological parents to the City, Plato expects them to accept an essentially military discipline imposed upon their sexual relations; and the young mothers must give up their children to the communal nurseries. This is the "injury to the deeper impulse at its deepest," for mother-love is the ultimate natural fount of the charity that returns to itself in the universal community.⁴

It is probable that when Hegel stigmatizes Plato's *Republic* as *external* (he underlined *äusseren* himself) he is joining the general consensus of interpreters in condemning the *rational authoritarianism* of the Guardians. But he does not insist on distinguishing between the *Republic* and the *Laws* (any more than Aristotle did); and when both the *clarification* at the beginning of the *Laws* (where the organization of society for peace not war is stressed, and life is said to be "playing for the Gods")⁵ and the correction at the end (where the philosophical Guardians are removed to the shadows, and allowed to have only an indirect control of government) are taken into account, I think we must say that Plato was not actually guilty on this point. There is no clearer statement of conscientious responsibility in all our literature than the herald's proclamation about the choice of lives in the Myth of Er. So Plato certainly did not *mean* to injure the principle that is truly "modern." But if Hegel *is* guilty of injustice to Plato here, his mistake is far less radical than

4. On the basis of a misinterpretation of Sophocles (*Antigone*, 904-928) — and probably on the evidence of Plato's *Republic* — Hegel believed that the Greek *ideal* of the family was "ethical" rather than naturally loving. But of course, Plato knew very well that he was violating the normal piety towards Aphrodite in his proposals about sexual relations. Hegel held that political "oppression" of the family was the "contradiction" that made the downfall of the *polis* inevitable. When we study the *Symposium* and the views of the dramatists generally in the context of Aristotle's politics we may decide rather that the politically harmonious *ethical* concept of the family was the root of the problem. Greek social custom certainly allowed the feelings of the parties to be ignored by the parents or guardians who actually made the marriage-contract. But *that* was still true to a large extent in Hegel's own "modern" community. He would hardly recognize it as significant therefore — just as he did not grasp the revolutionary potential of the exclusion of women from the political sphere.

5. *Laws*, I, 644d-645c.

that of the modern Plato interpreters (including the interpreters of what Hegel says about Plato).⁶

We could argue forever about the right interpretation of Plato, and about the significance of Socrates' impact upon him. It must be conceded that Hegel, although far more sympathetic with the quondam Plato was in, seems to agree with Popper that Plato was Socrates' Judas. It is my own belief that this is a mistake, and that Plato meant his Guardians to be as respectful both of spontaneous commitment and of equal opportunity as Hegel's "universal class" could ever be. But this is a difference of interpretation that is of no great speculative moment. What *does* matter is Plato's departure from Greek *Sittlichkeit*, and his recognition of "free infinite personality" in an aspect of social life that Hegel does *not* refer to: namely, his promulgation in the *Republic* of the equality of the sexes.

Plato's (rather carefully limited) "abolition of the family" is arguably a correct "apprehension of the nature of Greek *Sittlichkeit*" so far as the male sex is concerned. For the institution of "common tables" for young men existed in many Greek cities; and the segregation of young males from their families during the early years of their military effectiveness was even more widespread. But Plato's suggestion that girls and young women should be treated just like boys and young men, that motherhood itself (and the raising of children) should be socialized, that all should receive the same education, and be selected for social tasks according to interest and ability, with a blind eye to sex, was a radical breach of all the norms of Greek ethics; and at no time before our own has it appeared rationally relevant to the actuality of social life. Here it is Plato, not Hegel, who is *modern*. So the consideration of Hegel's attitude to Plato on this question will help us to identify the Rose in our own cross.

Plato saw the family as a social cross, and so do we. For Hegel, on the contrary, it was the heart of the ideal human society, the natural community of love into which the universal community of Absolute Spirit returns as the family of God. So all that Hegel could recognize in Plato's ideal of sexual equality was the still

6. Even Peperzak, who is interpreting what Hegel himself says here, ignores the clear implication that (in Hegel's view) the *Republic* is not a Utopia at all. He treats it as a Utopia in which "the insight of Plato, a true philosopher, into the existing reality of his place, culture and time" is provided (*op. cit.*, p. 88-89). But Hegel, like Plato, treats the ideal community as one which can "by divine inspiration" (*Republic*, 499 b-c) be actually realized; and where Peperzak thinks only of Plato's failure at Syracuse, Hegel probably thinks rather of the record which Socrates recollects concerning the achievement of Pythagoras in establishing a philosophical community. Peperzak's interpretation fails to explain Hegel's remarks about Plato's recognition of the "free infinite personality" as an "aspiration." Although he can see that Hegel is no longer maintaining the flat denial that Plato "knew" this "modern principle" that we find in the *Realphilosophie* of 1805/6 (G.W. VIII, 263, 16-17) he writes as if this has made no difference. My interpretation assumes that Hegel saw that he could not maintain that earlier position when he considered the impact of Socrates properly; and I have read what he says here in the light of his earlier analysis of the implicit goal of the *polis* (which the *Republic* only makes explicit). This creates some ambiguity regarding the "modern principle." On the one hand the principle is "conscience" (which Plato respects); and on the other hand it is "love" (to which Plato does radical damage). (I have to acknowledge that although I disagree quite radically with Peperzak, I should never have noticed the problem — or found my way to what I regard as a plausible solution of it — without the stimulus that his commentary provided).

unsatisfiable aspect of the "yearning" for recognition of personality as an "infinite" value. That yearning could be satisfied, as he saw it, only in the universal Church, or in the "Heaven" of absolute Spirit, where all are truly equal, and sex is sublated, because nature itself is finally sublated. In Heaven, as Jesus said, "there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage."

For us, this will not do, because moral respect for the free self-defining conscience has now broken into the last citadel of natural ethics. Acceptance of the family as the *natural* unit of society is now seen to be a spiritual *imposition* upon the wives, just as domestic slavery always was a spiritual imposition, no matter how Aristotle may struggle to maintain the pretence that it is "natural." The family as a "natural" community of love is a spiritual ideal in Hegel's theory (just as the "State" is). Empirically it has always been very imperfectly realized; and in our society the rational *commitment* to it (which made even its imperfect actuality "rational") has broken down. We may sympathize with Aristotle when he says that it is better to be blood-cousin to a man than brother to him after Plato's fashion.⁷ That is the authentic voice of Hegel himself. But we have come, of necessity (even those of us raised in families happier than Hegel's own can possibly have been)⁸ to see the wisdom of Plato's *generalization* of human love. Our children, even those with mothers completely committed to their family in the Hegelian fashion, are socialized in nursery schools and day-care centres, and we think them the better for it. We do not agree with Hegel when he criticizes Plato for making recommendations about how nurses should treat infants — or at least if we are good Hegelians we ought not to agree with him. Plato was not quite right *empirically*, for he believed that infants should not be encouraged to walk on their own feet as early as they naturally want to; but his interest is properly philosophical because he is concerned with the ideal to be actualized.⁹ This case is quite different from Hegel's other example of inappropriate philosophical meddling: Fichte's recommendation of portraits in passports. For as we all know, the function of passport photographs is to aid in the prevention of *fraud* — and that is a strictly empirical problem which presupposes that the ideal to be actualized is already adequately defined.

Of course, the "abolition of the family" has its costs both for mothers and for children; and the sociological study of our sublated family is an immensely complex field. I think that the Hegelian ideal of the loving family still retains some usefulness in this study. Certainly the ideal is still useful in the comparative study of societies that have not yet sublated their "natural" (i.e. in plainer language their *traditional*) foundation. But our world obviously needs a distinctly Platonized ideal model of the parent-child relation. I suppose we should have rediscovered Plato without

7. *Politics*, 1262a.

8. I mean here the family in which Hegel was the father. (That there was not always a perfect harmony of feeling in it, is guaranteed by the presence of his illegitimate son, Ludwig Fischer, in the household for some years. Ludwig Fischer was *never* happy there.)

9. *Laws*, VII, 789e.

Hegel's help, for he will never cease to be read, as long as any philosopher is read at all. But we should not have grasped the actuality of the rational (which is what gives our rediscovery of Plato its logical validity) without Hegel.

The fact that respect for conscience has finally wiped out the last citadel of natural ethics prompts one last reflection about the only purely rational principle in Hegel's ethics. Properly speaking, Hegel has a rather simple ethical theory, and no ethical principles of his own except the absolute value of *reconciliation*. His ethical *theory* can be summed up in two proverbial responses of Greek "wise men": the Pythagorean who said "Make him a citizen of a well governed state" when asked how the virtue of a son could be guaranteed; and the response of Protagoras to the question "who teaches virtue?": "You might as well ask who teaches Greek." The *substance* of our ethical personality comes to us as we learn our native language and the way of life in our community. But in a modern national community, there must of necessity be *many* "ways of life" (in this primitively substantial sense) within one universe of communication. That makes the principle of rational reconciliation into the absolute foundation of all our ethics. We *argue* in terms of "rights" — the rights of men, women, children, the unborn foetus, animals, minorities, and so on. But not even the most rabid adherent of "natural rights" would claim that all questions of "right" can be decisively settled by argument. So if we do not argue in the moral context of respect for conscience and ready forgiveness for conscientious blindness, we must come to blows quite soon. Indeed, we *do* come to blows sometimes — outside abortion clinics, for example. But we have a well founded confidence — based on the forgiveness ethic in which we have all been schooled — that eventually we shall come to a consensus even about *that* bitter conflict of feelings between the "divine right" of nature and the "absolute right" of self-consciousness.

Every scientific observer of social relations will agree, I think, that the unresolved conflicts of social feeling cannot be observed and analysed in the categorical language of "natural rights" employed by the disputants. Those categories must, of course, be *mentioned*, but they cannot be *used*. Social science cannot accord any absolute validity to them. This is implied by the notorious neutrality of scientific observation, which used to be called (and by some, perhaps, still is called) the "value-free" character of science. Hegel's greatest insight into the methodology of the human sciences was his recognition that — far from being "value-free" — all absolutely scientific knowledge, all true "science," must incarnate the *supreme* ethical value. Social-scientific "objectivity" is achieved by *forgiving* all of the conflicting moral (and for that matter the immoral) motivations of the agents under observation. Objectivity certainly cannot be achieved by *forgetting* (or ignoring) them; and any scientific observer who thinks that scientific neutrality is simple *indifference* to the value structures in the observed object must fall victim (consciously or unconsciously) to an alienated instrumental value-structure which has no properly absolute status at all. For the research that (s)he does must either incarnate some finite purpose of the researcher, or more generally, the utilitarian values of the market in which the research is bought and paid for. The most important lesson that any

student of our empirical value-structures can learn from Hegel is that objectively valid research *must* incarnate the ideal of "the peace that passeth all understanding." This is the foundation of Reason (as the *subjective* consciousness of the social *substance*). The rest is that hard discipline of surrender to the *Sache selbst* with which we are all familiar.