Hegel's Ethics

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Abstract

My purpose in this article is not to offer any original insights into Hegel's ethics, but merely to provide a brief overview that draws upon the most reliable secondary sources. In order to help organize the material, I compare Hegel's views with the communitarian critique of liberalism. Following this, there is a brief account of the relation between Hegel's ethical and religious thought. Hegel's philosophy is one of reconciliation. He is both a follower of Kant and a sharp critic of Kant. With Kant, he affirms the idea of moral autonomy, that moral agency requires us to think for ourselves and impose moral obligations upon ourselves. Unlike Kant (at least as usually interpreted), however, he does not think that this means that the only motivation for moral behavior should be the will to do one's duty. Because of the antinomy of free will and determinism, Kant concluded that agency springs from a noumenal realm beyond the phenomenal world. Hegel seeks to reconcile freedom with causal constraints in a form of compatibalism that differs fundamentally from the soft determinism of the empiricist tradition. Kant argued that morality must derive from reason. Hegel agrees, but he understands reason as a process in which the finite self overcomes itself through its identification with others. My indebtedness to Robert Wallace's recent book on this topic will be obvious; my gratitude to him should be, as well.

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Introduction: The Development of Hegel's Ethical Thought

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle introduces the notion of the supreme good as that which is sought for its own sake and as that which is comprehensive rather than subordinate. The end sought may be an activity, or something beyond the activity. Everything that is desirable must be desired, either directly or indirectly, for the sake of this supreme good, which is the end or *telos* of man. The supreme good for man is the activity of the soul (rather than something beyond activity) that expresses virtue.[2] In Christianity, the question of the ultimate good of man was discussed in terms of man's vocation or calling, *die Beſtimmung des Menschen.* Ancient Greek ethics and Christian teachings were the basis of the moral thinking of Hegel when he attended the seminary (*Stift*) in Tübingen, and together with his roommates, Hölderlin and Schelling, read Plato and Aristotle.[3]

For the Romantics and the young Hegel, this vocation was understood to be the achievement of a harmony, wholeness and unity in life, including the inner life, the social life, and one's life with nature, so that one will be at home in the world (*in die Welt zu Hauſe*). This harmony is threatened by division (*Entzweiung*) and alienation (*Entfremdung*). Division and alienation can only be overcome through freedom: freedom to develop one's potential, freedom from any conflict or disproportion in this development, and freedom to bring about this integrated realization of potential in one's own unique way. This ethics of authenticity was championed by the Romantics as an alternative to Bentham's (1748–1832) hedonistic ethics and to Kant's (1724-1804) ethics of duty or deontology. Utilitarianism was rejected as having a superficial view of the human being as a mere consumer or recipient of benefits and harms, while deontology was rejected for confining its moral vision to an intellectual sovereignty of duty without taking into consideration human sentiments and their

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2. *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1094a; 1098a.

3. Beiser (2005), 37.

improvement. Schiller (1759–1805) advocated an ethics of love as superior to an ethics of duty because it enables us to act in accord with duty in harmony with inclination rather than despite one's natural desires. In *Der Geist des Christentums und sein Schicksal* (The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate),[4] Hegel proposed an ethics based on love as its fundamental principle, which alone, he argued, could overcome the dualities inherent in Kant's ethics. Thus, Hegel's early writing on ethics blends themes derived from the study of Plato, Aristotle, Christianity, and Romanticism.[5]

Later Hegel came to think that it was unrealistic to attempt to found a social and political ethics with love as its sole principle. He also would not accept the Romantic overemphasis on the value of unique individuality. By the time the *Philosophie des Rechts* was written in 1820, love was confined to the family.[6] In Hegel's later writings, instead of the focus on love, the legal and moral relations in ethical life gain more prominence, although even here, love is not cast aside, but expressed through the elaboration of legal and political relations.[7] The shift is already evident in the discussion of mutual recognition in the *Phänomenologie des Geistes* of 1805, and begins to emerge in the even earlier discussions of the distinction between the ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) and morality (*Moralität*).[8] Hegel introduces the term *Sittlichkeit* for the sort of morality and moral reflection that is integrated with one's social life, and whose paradigm was an idealized view of the ancient Greek *polis*. He uses *Moralität* for the private concern with duty that seemed to characterize modern society, and the moral philosophies of Kant and Fichte.[9]

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4. The translation of which can be found in Hegel (1971), 182-301; the original was not published during Hegel's lifetime, and was written in 1798-99.
5. Beiser (2005), 37.
6. Beiser (2005), 120.
7. Wallace (2005), xviii.
8. Beiser (2005), 122; Wood (1993), 215.
9. Wood (1993), 215.

Like many of his generation, Hegel was very enthusiastic about the French Revolution, and, subsequently, about Napoleon, and in both cases the hopes of the intellectuals of Hegel's generation were disappointed. Neither the Revolution nor Napoleon would bring about the realization of the ideals they sought. Disappointment nurtures realism, and Hegel came to believe that a realistic view of modern society would show that the ideals of the Romantics were unachievable dreams. The conditions of modern society seemed to foster division and alienation. The increasing specialization of labor prevented people from developing all their talents. The natural sciences were taking a form in which nature became disenchanted and was seen only as a challenge to be conquered. Modern economic relations were impersonal and divorced from other areas of human concern. The wholeness sought by the Romantics seemed to be undermined by irresistible currents of modernity. Hegel's philosophy may be seen as an attempt to provide the philosophical equipment needed to meet these challenges of modernity.

The equipment Hegel sought to provide did not merely consist of a theory of ethics, but an entire system of philosophy, including ideas about metaphysics, epistemology, politics, history, action, aesthetics, and ethics.[10]

Despite his early Romanticism, Hegel did not reject Kantian morality in favor of a pre-modern form of ethical life. Indeed, he considered himself a Kantian, despite his criticisms of Kant, and as headmaster of the Gymnasium in Nuremberg (1808-1816), his lectures display many points drawn from the Kantian theory of morality.[11] Beginning with the Heidelberg *Enzyklopädie* of 1817, morality is seen as a stage in a process that leads from abstract right to the ethical life, which is no longer the lost ideal of the Greek *polis*, but the social life characteristic of the ideal modern state, which receives

10. Beiser (2005), 48-49.

11. Wood (1993), 216.

its most fully developed treatment in the *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* in 1820.[12]

Central Themes of Hegel's Ethical Thought: Freedom and Autonomy

Central to Hegel's mature ethical theory is the concept of freedom. In Kant's philosophy, our direct perception of our own freedom is presented in contradiction with the causal determinism of the phenomenal world to demonstrate that freedom must belong to a realm beyond phenomena, the noumenal world of the *Ding an sich*. Hegel's criticism of this Kantian view of freedom and the formulation of his own view is presented in his *Wissenschaft der Logik* (1812-13). This provides the foundation for the ethical views elaborated in the *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts.*

Like Kant, Hegel prizes the value of moral autonomy. In the *Philosophie des Rechts*, he asserts that moral autonomy requires that one be able to evaluate one's own desires and inclinations:

> The human being, however, stands as wholly indeterminate over the drives and can determine and set them as his own. The drive is in nature, but that I set it in this 'I' depends on my will, which therefore cannot appeal to the fact that it lies in nature.[13]

If one acts directly on the basis of one's desires, one is not autonomous, i.e., not self-governed, for when one is called upon to give a reason for an action, one must provide a reason for one's free choice of the action; to say that the action was performed because of one's nature is to place it outside the range of that for which reasons can be demanded and provided. Hegel is in agreement with Kant on

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12. Wood (1993), 216.

13. Hegel (1820), §11A: "Der Mensch steht aber als das ganz Unbestimmte über den Trieben und kann sie als die seinigen bestimmen und setzen. Der Trieb ist in der Natur, aber daß ich ihn in dieses Ich setze, hängt von meinem Willen ab, der sich also darauf, daß er in der Natur liegt, nicht berufen kann." See Wallace (2005), 6.

the general point that action based solely on desire is not autonomous. Where they depart is at Kant's insistence that the autonomous agent is motivated purely by the good will, the will that acts from duty alone.[14] Hegel's theory does not require that duty should predominate over all other motives in an act of a morally autonomous agent, and the moral worth of an act is not determined entirely by its conformity to duty. As long as one does one's duty and wills to do so, non-moral incentives will not detract from the worth of the act or the goodness of the will.[15]

Human autonomy is not restricted to the private realm of motivation and will, however, but is to be understood in the context of social and economic relations. Hence, the *Philosophie des Rechts* begins with discussions of property, contracts, and civil society after introducing the abstract notion of right.

Human autonomy is not a condition that describes man, but is an ideal to be achieved. As such it may be understood through the process of its realization, which begins with basic moral choices and ends in an affiliation with reality as a whole, a going beyond one's own finitude to the infinite and divine. Perfect autonomy is to be found only in God.[16]

While Kant argued that the antinomy of freedom required the positing of a noumenal realm beyond phenomenal causal determinism, Hegel sees the antinomy as showing two poles in a dialectical relationship; indeed, the Hegelian dialectic is a direct response to Kant's treatment of the antinomies. For Kant (at least as Hegel read him), reality is divided into phenomenal and noumenal realms: in the former, human actions are determined; and in the latter, human agency is free. For Hegel, however, freedom is to be achieved through a dialectical development that begins with the conditioned and moves toward the unconditioned.[17] Hegel agrees with Kant that human

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14. For reservations about this standard view of Kant's ethics, see Wood (2006), 33.
15. Wood (1990), 150.
16. Wallace (2005), 8-9.
17. Beiser (2005), 166 f.

freedom transcends the finite conditions of the agent, but not because the freedom of the agent belongs to another realm—the noumenal—divorced from the physical world in which our actions are realized; instead of being opposed to nature, freedom is seen as a consummation of nature, for nature is only properly understood when room is made in it for free actions that cannot be adequately understood through causal laws.[18] The contradiction Kant saw between the causal determinism of the phenomenal realm and the direct apperception of freedom is discussed at length in Hegel's *Wissenschaft der Logik*.[19] He gives a summary in the *Logic* of his *Enzyklopädie*:

> …when the antinomy of *freedom* and *necessity* is more closely considered, the situation is that what the understanding takes to be freedom and necessity are in fact only ideal moments of true freedom and true necessity; neither of them has any truth if separated from the other.[20]

Hegel may be said to uphold a form of compatibilism, but he is far from the compatibilism of the empiricist tradition.[21] Very briefly, the main idea is that freedom of agency is neither to be analyzed as the possession of some causal power nor as being able to make arbitrary choices,[22] but as being in a position to offer appropriate reasons for one's actions with reference to the normative structure of one's social community. While "soft determinism" allows for moral responsibility despite determinism when an action occurs *through* an agent, the sort

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18. See Wallace (2005), 51.

19. Hegel (1832), Vol.II, Sec. 2, Ch.3, "Teleology", 734-754.

20. Hegel (1830), §48, 94: "…von der Antinomie der *Freiheit* und *Notwendigkeit*, mit welcher es sich, näher betrachtet, so verhält, daß dasjenige, was der Verstand unter Freiheit und Notwendigkeit versteht, in der Tat nur ideelle Momente der wahren Freiheit und der wahren Notwendigkeit sind und daß diesen beiden in ihrer Trennung keine Wahrheit zukommt."

21. See Beiser (2005), 75. The most extensive discussion of this issue is to be found in Pippin (2008), Ch.5. Pippin argues that although Hegel should be considered as a compatibilist, his compatibilism is unlike the standard form that defines freedom as absence of coercion. This idea is also endorsed by Wallace (2005), 82-83.

22. Hegel (1820), §15.

of compatibilism advocated by Hegel focuses on what it means for an action to be one's own.[23]

One acquires increasing freedom as a moral agent as one becomes increasingly able to take responsibility for one's acts. A first condition of this responsibility is the realization of the Enlightenment ideal of thinking for oneself, at least to some degree, so that responsible contractual arrangements can be entered into, one can participate in civil society, and finally become a free citizen of a modern state.

Social Norms and the Critique of Kant

The manner in which social norms enter into Hegel's ethics are a departure from Kantian moral theory, and are prompted by perhaps the most famous of Hegel's criticisms of Kant's ethics, that it results in an empty formalism.

> However essential it may be to emphasize the pure and unconditional self-determination of the will as the root of duty—for knowledge of the will first gained a firm foundation and point of departure in the philosophy of Kant, through the thout of its infinite autonomy—to cling on to a merely moral point of view without making the transition to the concept of ethical life reduces this gain to an *empty formalism*, and moral science to an empty rhetoric of *duty for duty's sake*.[24]

Hegel is unfair to Kant in this passage, but as he reads him, Kant is committed to the view that moral autonomy is attained simply by making sure that one's maxims do not contain contradictions and are not contradictory with one another. To the contrary, on Hegel's view,

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23. Wallace (2005), 26.

24. Hegel (1820), §135: "So wesentlich es ist, die reine unbedingte Selbstbestimmung des Willens als die Wurzel der Pflicht herauszuheben, wie denn die Erkenntnis des Willens erst durch die *Kantische* Philosophie ihren festen Grund und Ausgangspunkt durch den Gedanken seiner unendlichen Autonomie gewonnen hat, so sehr setzt die Festhaltung des bloß moralischen Standpunkts, der nicht in den Begriff der Sittlichkeit übergeht, diesen Gewinn zu einem *leeren Formalismus* und die moralische Wissenschaft zu einer Rednerei von *der Pflicht um der Pflicht willen* herunter." See Wallace (2005), 20.

moral autonomy can only be achieved through due regard for *Sittlichkeit*, the moral norms embodied in a social tradition of taking responsibility, providing reasons for one's actions and asking for reasons, where appropriate, for the actions of other moral agents.

The main themes associated with Hegel's attack on Kantian formalism have reappeared in the communitarian attack on liberal individualism. Indeed, all of the major objections raised by communitarians to liberal political theory are prefigured in Hegel's partial endorsements and criticisms of the moral and political philosophies of Kant, Rousseau, Fichte, and others. However, Hegel should not be assumed to side with the communitarians against the liberals in this debate, for he consistently attempts to formulate a position that goes beyond liberalism and the objections to it.

It is testimony to the contemporary relevance of Hegel's moral and political thought that his position can be outlined with reference to the modern debate between liberals and communitarians. However, these issues are controversial, and have played an important role in how Hegel has been portrayed by his commentators. After World War II, a number of writers (most notably Karl Popper) portrayed Hegel as a proto-fascist, largely because of the authority he accorded to the ideal of the modern state. In reaction, commentators who defended Hegel emphasized the more liberal elements of his political thought. The portrayal of Hegel changed dramatically with the publication of Charles Taylor's work on Hegel,[25] in which Romantic themes in Hegel's work are emphasized, such as organic unity, wholeness, and alienation. Taylor's "communitarian interpretation" of Hegel has been corrected by more recent commentators, such as Allen Wood, Robert Pippin, and others who seek to understand both the continuities and divergences from Enlightenment thought in Hegel's ethical philosophy.[26] Most of these writers, however, have tended to stress how Hegel's ethics and

25. Taylor (1979); Taylor (1975).
26. See Franco (1999), x-xi.

political philosophy may be understood in a manner compatible with a naturalistic outlook, and have not focused on Hegel's religious thought.[27] So, when we compare Hegel's criticism of Kant with the communitarian criticism of liberalism, we should seek to understand three factors: (i) what Hegel appropriated from Kant, (ii) his criticism of Kant, and (iii) how he sought to overcome what he saw as the flaws in the earlier view while keeping the truth in it.

According to Mulhall and Swift, the communitarian criticisms of the liberalism of John Rawls may be summarized under five headings:

1. the conception of the person;
2. asocial individualism;
3. universalism;
4. subjectivism/objectivism;
5. anti-perfectionism and neutrality.[28]

1. Communitarians have argued that the liberal notion of the self is so abstract that rational moral decisions cannot be based upon it; instead, they have argued that moral and political reasoning must take into consideration how individuals are embedded in cultures and traditions. Objections to the liberal view of the self could be found in the Romantic ethics of authenticity that were current in Jena when Hegel wrote the *Phänomenologie des Geistes*; but Hegel is satisfied with neither the liberal nor the Romantic view of the self.[29] In Hegel's dialectical method, one must begin with a vague and abstract notion, and then study the successive realizations of that notion in order to discern the movement through which the direction of advancement toward the Absolute may be grasped. So, Hegel begins his *Philosophie des Rechts* with a discussion of the person that is abstract, formal, individual and private. At this level, right means only to respect others as persons:

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27. The rectification of this problem is the object of Wallace (2005).
28. See Mulhall and Swift (1996), 157-160.
29. See Pinkard (2000), 214-216.

> Personality contains in general the capacity for right and constitutes the concept and the (itself abstract) basis of abstract and hence *formal* right. The commandment of right is therefore: be a person and respect others as persons.[30]

In order to understand the respect that is due to persons, however, beyond this abstract and formal claim, persons must come to recognize one another as embedded in such social institutions as the family and civil society, and it is only with such mutual recognition that they can enter into contractual relationships.[31] The state, however, cannot be justified through the device of the social contract, according to Hegel, not because the persons who are assumed to be parties to the contract are too abstract to make informed choices, as in the communitarian critique, but because the idea of the social contract reduces the state to a product of individual wills and neglects the spirit of the whole.[32]

Like the communitarians, Hegel rejects the atomic notion of the person that would seek to understand the person independent of all social relations; but this does not mean that he denies that there is any sovereign self at all, as suggested in some post-modernist writing. For Hegel, the self is to be understood as a work in progress, and one whose progress depends essentially on its relationships with others.[33]

2. Communitarians have argued that liberalism is committed to an asocial individualism that assumes that individual interests, values and identity can be determined independently of the communities of which they are a part, and that there are no human goods that are inherently social. Both of these points are clearly Hegelian. For Hegel, spirit is at once social, but has a value over that of the interests of the members

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30. Hegel (1820), §36: "Die Persönlichkeit enthält überhaupt die Rechtsfühigkeit und macht den Begreff und die selbst abstrakte Grundlage des abstrakten und daher *formellen* Rechtes aus. Das Rechtsgebot ist daher: *sei eine Person und respektiere die anderen als Personen*." See Williams (1997), 137.

31. Hegel (1820), §71.

32. Hegel (1820), §75; Williams (1997), 307-308.

33. See Wallace (2005), 65.

of any society,[34] and membership in the state, through which spirit expresses itself, determines the identity of its members. As Charles Taylor puts it: "Hegel… believed himself to have shown that man reaches his basic identity in seeing himself as a vehicle of *Geist*."[35] But despite the liberal criticism of individualism, Hegel endorses individualism as a starting point to be preserved through the developments that lead to the state. What he opposes, is a reductive individualism that fails to recognize the emergence of social norms that are not the mere sum of individual values or agreements among individuals.[36]

3. Michael Walzer has criticized John Rawls for his universalism, that is, for the idea that the universal reason common to humanity is sufficient to ground a theory of justice.[37] Walzer contends that a just distribution of goods in a society must take into account social and cultural peculiarities and so can only yield a variety of spheres of justice. More recently, however, he has modified his critique of liberalism by emphasizing the place of universal moral values and political rights that need to be recognized alongside the particular culturally dependent factors that are needed for the establishment of a just society. Hegel's position on this issue is similar to Walzer's. He also sees a need for both *thin* or universal rights, such as the right to property, and *thick* rights and duties that depend on the historical contingencies in which civil societies and states emerge.[38]

4. Hegel's own discussions of the universal and particular in the *Philosophie des Rechts* are more closely related to the issue discussed by Mulhall and Swift under the heading of *subjectivism/objectivism*, where they point out that communitarians have criticized the liberal assumption that individual goals are

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34. Hegel (1820), §257-258. See the discussion of institutional rationality in Pippin (2008), 247-252.
35. Taylor (1975), 373.
36. See Wallace (2005), 5-9, 27-31.
37. See Walzer (1983); and for a more recent statement of his views see Walzer (1994).
38. See Hicks (1999); Mullender (2003); Peperzak (2001), especially Ch.10; and Williams (2001).

arbitrary and cannot be subject to rational criticism. One way to overcome this opposition between the subjective and objective is given by Kant. Moral autonomy requires that one be self-governing, that one seek the greatest good however one sees fit. The ends of the self-governing agent are not arbitrary, according to Kant, because those ends should be attainable within the bounds of practical reason. The difference between Kant and Hegel is that Hegel's account is developmental instead of formal and social instead of confined to the individual will. For Hegel, individual ends begin as subjective, but they are modified as they become objective in interaction with others. A person's own individual desires are modified insofar as one considers oneself as a particular member of a family. One's aims are further modified as one engages in civil society, and still more as one acts as a citizen of a state. At first the end is only subjective and internal to the self, but it should also become objective and throw off the deficiency of mere subjectivity, Hegel explains in the Introduction to the *Philosophie des Rechts*.[39] The end must be posited objectively so that subjective and objective may be united in freedom and will. In the beginning of the section on civil society, he explains:

> The concrete person who, as a *particular* person, as a totality of needs and a mixture of natural necessity and arbitrariness, is his own end, is *one principle* of civil society. But this particular person stands essentially in *relation* to other similar particulars, and their relation is such that each asserts itself and gains satisfaction through the others, and thus at the same time through the exclusive *mediation* of the form of *universality*, which is *the second principle*.[40]

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39. Hegel (1820), §8, Addition.

40. Hegel (1830), §182, 220: "Die konkrete Person, welche sich als besondere Zweck ist, als ein Ganzes von Bedürfnissen und eine Vermischung von Naturnotwendigkeit und Willkür, ist das *eine Prinzip* der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft, - aber die besondere Person als wesentlich in Beziehung auf andere solche Besonderheit, so daß jede durch die andere und zugleich schlechthin nur als durch die Form der *Allgemeinheit, das andere Prinzip, vermittelt* sich geltend macht und befriedigt."

Indeed, Hegel's entire philosophical system may be viewed as an attempt to show how the duality of the subjective and objective is to be overcome.

5. The final criticism of liberalism by communitarians mentioned by Mulhall and Swift is the charge that liberalism must rely on a more substantial concept of the good than its theory allows. While liberalism advertises itself as neutral between opposing views of ultimate goods, it surreptitiously takes sides. Hegel makes essentially the same point in his *Phänomenologie des Geistes* in which the charge of empty formalism is levied against Kant. Hegel argues that while the principle of non-contradiction may be sufficient to rule out some proposed activity, such as not returning a deposit, the contradiction will only arise on the assumption that there is a convention of trusts or deposits. Without this assumption, no contradiction arises, and there is no contradiction involved in the supposition that trusts, or even personal property altogether, do not exist.[41] In the Philosophie des Rechts, too, Hegel maintains that one may arrive at particular duties only because "One may indeed bring in material *from outside,*" that is, because one can smuggle something in from outside the merely formal considerations.[42] So, Kant's claims (as Hegel and many others understood him) that particular duties are determined by formal reason alone are seen to illicitly bring in assumptions that go beyond the need to avoid practical contradictions.

With regard to the more political conception of justice, with which the communitarians have been specifically concerned in the form of Rawls' procedural account of justice, we again find Hegel making a comparable complaint against Kant. To limit freedom or arbitrary will in such a way that it may coexist with the arbitrary will of others in accordance with a law provides only a negative concept of freedom, one that is purely formal or empty, and because of this, it can have the

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41. See Hegel (1807), §428-436§, and the discussion in Franco (1999), 214-215.

42. Hegel (1820), §135, "man kann *von außen* her wohl einen Stoff hereinnehmen."

most appaling consequences, such as the Terror that came in the aftermath of the French Revolution. In order to determine a system of rights that can avoid such outrages, a positive view of freedom needs to be advanced in a developmental fashion in such a manner that right and duty will be understood to be *sacred*.[43]

Ethics and Religion

Theological criticism of Kant has often accused him of reducing religion to morality. Discussions about the degree to which this criticism is justified need not detain us.[44] At the very least, the main focus of Kant's religious thought was ethical. Hegel initially (that is, in his twenties) followed Kant not only in elements of his moral theory, but also in the belief that the existence of a personal God may be postulated on moral grounds.[45] However, even at this time, Hegel differed with Kant by emphasizing love over morality and duty; and his study of the life of Jesus (peace be with him) raised doubts about how much of Christianity could be given a moral justification. By the time Hegel writes his *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (1807), he had come to the conclusion that God and religion must be understood within the context of a metaphysical system, that it must also be understood by elaborating its relations with art and ethics, and that this elaboration must proceed historically.[46]

Recall Aristotle's discussion of the supreme end for human beings: it is not something that is reached outside of the realm of human activity, but, rather, it is the active expression of virtue. For Hegel, our finite efforts aim at the infinite which is to be realized in this very activity of making efforts to approach the infinite. The autonomous agent is not subject to external commands, regardless of whether these

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43. Hegel (1820), §29-§30. Franco (1999), 174-178.

44. See Firestone (2009) for a refutation of the view that Kant reduces religion to the ethical.

45. Jaeschke (1990), 100.

46. Jaeschke (1990), 127; 186.

commands are issued by pure reason, by religion, by one's own desires, or by one's society. This does not mean that the autonomous agent needs to ignore the demands of reason, religion, desire or society, and make arbitrary decisions, but that one must consider all factors critically, and go beyond one's own drives and prejudices, until one finds the ability to govern oneself as one identifies oneself with what goes beyond any limited and merely subjective viewpoint.

Kant took an important first step in this direction by showing how the moral ought has its source in reason and not in any authority outside the self. Kant, however, was not able to adequately explain how the self could identify with reason, and how reason could go beyond empty formalism. Another failing of Kantian ethics is the role played in it by God, who, like a *deus ex machina*, is brought in merely to resolve the conflict between private interests and moral duty. Hegel overcomes the flaws in the Kantian system by reformulating the problem of ethics in such a manner that God is central, although God is not understood as standing over and above the world, and the divine role is not merely to make sure what is sacrificed in this world for a life of virtue will be compensated in the afterlife.

Human beings become truly free, according to Hegel, only in God. Human freedom requires a person to go beyond one's own limitations in concert with others. The identification with others in the social enterprise is also required if we are not to treat others merely as means, but, as Kant said, as ends in themselves, and yet to avoid being constrained and limited by others. It is the self-imposed *ought* that makes possible the transition from necessity to freedom, for it is through this *ought* that one overcomes the limitations of one's own subjectivity and identifies with a more comprehensive whole. Hegel generalizes on this point as a sort of metaphysical principle in his *Wissenschaft der Logik*: the finite only has reality as it transcends itself and becomes infinite.[47]

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47. Hegel (1832), 145.

The Notion of the infinite as it first presents itself is this, that determinate being in its being-in-itself determines itself as finite and transcends the limitation. It is the very nature of the finite to transcend itself, to negate its negation and to become infinite. Thus the infinite does not stand as something finished and complete above or superior to the finite, as if the finite had an enduring being *apart from* or *subordinate to* the infinite. Neither do *we* only, as subjective reason, pass beyond the finite into the infinite; as when we say that the infinite is the Notion of reason and that through reason we rise superior to temporal things, though we let this happen without prejudice to the finite which is in no way affected by this exaltation, an exaltation which remains external to it. But the finite itself in being raised into the infinite is in no sense acted on by an alien force; on the contrary, it is its nature to be related to itself as limitation,— both limitation as such and as an ought—and to transcend the same, or rather, as self-relation to have negated the limitation and to be beyond it. It is not in the sublating of finitude in general that infinity in general comes to be; the truth is rather that the finite is only this, through its own nature to become itself the infinite. The infinite is its *affirmative determination,* that which it truly is in itself.[48]

According to Robert M. Wallace, it is this understanding of how the infinite is present in the finite that is the key to understanding the

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48. Hegel (1832), 138: "Es ist die Natur des Endliches selbst, über sich hinauszugehen, seine Negation zu negieren und unendlich zu warden. Das Unendliche steht somit nicht als ein für sich Fertiges *über* dem Endlichen, so daß das Endliche *außer* oder *unter* jenem sein Bleiben hätte und behielte. Noch gehen *wir* nur als eine subjective Vernunft über das Endliche ins Unendliche hinaus. Wie wenn man sagt, daß das Unendliche der Vernunftbegriff sei und wir uns durch die Vernunft über das Zeitliche erheben, so läßt man dies ganz unbeschadet des Endlichen geschehen, welches jene ihm äußerlich bleibende Erhebung nichts angeht. Insofern aber das Endliche selbst in die Unendlichkeit erhoben wird, ist es ebensowenig eine fremde Gewalt, welche ihm dies antut, sondern es ist dies seine Natur, sich auf sich als Schranke, sowohl als Schranke as solche wie als Sollen, zu beziehen und über dieselbe hinauszugehen oder vielmehr als Beziehung-auf-sich sie negiert zu haben und über sie hinaus zu sein. Nicht im Aufheben der Enlichkeit überhaupt wird die Unendlichkeit überhaupt, sondern das Endliche ist nur dies, selbst durch seine Natur dazu zu werden. Die Unendlichkeit ist seine *affirmative Bestimmung*, das, was es wahrhaft an sich ist."

relation between Hegel's ethical and religious thought. Many commentators have misconstrued Hegel because they have thought that if the infinite arises out of the finite, what we are presented with is really a form of atheistic naturalism. Others, such as Feuerbach, have thought that what Hegel presents under such labels as *the Absolute*, *infinity*, and *Spirit*, is an entirely otherworldly and traditional view of deity based on a dualism between the immanent and the transcendent.[49] In fact, Hegel's view is that if God were to be understood as an entity that could be placed alongside and in exclusive opposition to finite entities, then God would be misunderstood as limited by the finite. If God and creatures stood in opposition to one another, then the opposition would make God into what Hegel calls a *schlechte Unendlichkeit* (*spurious* or *bad infinity*). Instead, Hegel draws on the mystical tradition (especially of Meister Eckhard and Jakob Böhme[50]) to develop a view of divinity whose embrace is more encompassing than what is found in more orthodox theologies.

In keeping with the mystical tradition, Hegel views God as what is most fully and completely real, and presents this understanding as an "ontological argument," although not one like Descartes' that begins with a definition of God as including all perfections and tries to make God real by definition by considering existence to be a perfection. Instead, Hegel's ontological argument is that Absolute Spirit must be understood as that which is most truly real, and then seeks to derive other perfections from this conception.[51]

The connection between the mystical theology and metaphysics and ethics goes back to the idea of how the finite cannot be properly understood without reference to the reality of the infinite. The finite is overcome when a person seeks to step back from oneself and look critically at one's own drives, desires, and motivation. For Kant, it is

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49. Wallace (2005), 99.

50. See Wallace (2005), 104, 106, 256.

51. Wallace (2005), 101-102.

this ability to purify the will that establishes that the self has a noumenal being beyond the sensory world and the causal necessity that governs it. For Hegel, the experience of freedom does not show that there is another world of things-in-themselves or a standpoint from which the phenomenal aspects of things may be abstracted; rather, it shows that reality itself includes the infinite, that is, that the single reality in which we live and make decisions includes that which goes beyond what can be understood as determined by selfish desires and causal factors behind motivation. The single real world includes within it the "space of reasons" (to use the phrase of Wilfrid Sellars that has been taken up with such enthusiasm by recent exegetes of Hegel) and the normativity that governs it.[52]

Normativity consists in the recognition of *oughts*. For Kant, this is entirely a matter of practical reason and is completely separate from the theoretical. Hegel, however, sees the separation of fact and value as only a stage in a development by which they are unified by divine providence.

> Unsatisfied striving vanishes when we [re]cognize that the final purpose of the world is just as much accomplished as it is eternally accomplishing itself. This is, in general, the outlook of the mature person, whereas youth believes that the world is in an utterly sorry state, and that something quite different must be made of it. The religious consciousness, on the contrary, regards the world as governed by divine Providence and hence as corresponding to what it *ought* to be. This agreement between is and ought is not rigid and unmoving, however, since the final purpose of the world, the good, only *is*, because it constantly brings itself about; and there is still this distinction between the spiritual and the natural worlds: that, whilst the latter continues simply to return into itself, there occurs in the former certainly a progression as well.[53]

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52. See Sellars (1963), 169; Pinkard (2002), 220; Pippin (2008), 236.

53. Hegel (1830), §234: "Das unbefriedigte Streben verschwindet, wenn wir erkennen, daß der Endzweck der Welt ebenso vollbracht ist, als er sich ewig vollbringt. Dies ist überhaupt die Stellung des Mannes,

The normative is present in the world precisely because it is through the presence of norms that the good is promoted. Even if the goal of what ought to be is not fully realized, the very presence of the ethical demand and the activity it instigates is the factual realization of value and the present goodness of the world.[54]

The norms that are expressed in the *ought* are not arbitrary, but result from one's going beyond oneself and finding identity with the other. Through successive identifications with expanding groups—family, civil society, state—the atomic individual overcomes exclusive individuality and identifies with the universal. The private person participates in welfare-promoting mutual aid institutions, such as municipalities and churches, to discover a greater freedom there than in the restrictively individual sphere of private interests, and expresses this freedom in conscious activity aimed at a relatively universal end.[55] The individual steps beyond the self and becomes aware of its universality as identification with the other. This is Hegel's refutation of moral egoism, which is expanded upon in one way in his discussions of mutual recognition (in his *Philosophy of Spirit*),[56] and in another way in his lectures on *Religionsphiloſophie*.

The practical element of the knowledge of God finds expression in the *cultus*, the religious life. The first form of the religious life is devotion and worship. Secondly, it involves sacraments and sacrifice. Finally, Hegel describes the highest form of religious life:

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während die Jugend meint, die Welt liege schlechthin im argen und es müsse aus derselben erst ein ganz anderes gemacht werden. Das religiöse Bewußtsein betrachtet dagegen die Welt als durch die göttliche Vorsehung regiert und somit als dem entsprechend, was sie sein *soll*. Diese Übereinstimmung von Sein und Sollen ist indes nicht eine erstarrte und prozeßlose; denn das Gute, der Endzweck der Welt, *ist* nur, indem es sich stets hervorbringt, und zwischen der geistigen und natürlichen Welt besteht dann noch der Unterschied daß, während diese nur beständig in sich selbst zurückkehrt, in jener allerdings auch ein Fortschreiten stattfindet."

54. Wallace (2005), 258-260.
55. Wallace (2005), 305.
56. See Wallace (2005), 263.

> The third and highest form within the cultus is when one lays aside one's own subjectivity—not only practices renunciation in external things such as possessions, but offers one's heart or inmost self to God and senses *remorse* and *repentance* in this inmost self; then one is conscious of one's own immediate natural state (which subsists in the passions and intentions of particularity), so that one dismisses these things, purifies one's heart, and through this purification of one's heart raises oneself up to the realm of the purely spiritual. This experience of nothingness can be a bare condition or single experience, or it can be thoroughly elaborated [in one's life]. If heart and will are earnestly and thoroughly cultivated for the universal and the true, then there is present what appears as *ethical life*. To that extent ethical life is the most genuine cultus. But consciousness of the true, of the divine, of God, must be directly bound up with it.[57]

In his lectures of 1831, Hegel's discussion of the cultus includes a section on the relationship of religion to the state, which begins with the statement:

> When this cultivation of subjectivity and this purification of the heart form its immediate natural state has been thoroughly elaborated and made an enduring condition that accords with its universal purpose, it is then consummated as the ethical realm, and by this route religion passes over into *ethics* and the *state*.[58]

With this statement, Hegel does not mean to endorse the domination of the Church over the state. To the contrary, Hegel is convinced that the emergence of the modern secular state is one of the major benefits to mankind that resulted from the Protestant reform movement.[59]

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57. Hegel (1827), 194; Hegel (1984), 446.

58. Hegel (1984), 451: "Diese Bearbeitung der Subjektivität, diese Reinigung des Herzens von seiner unmittelbaren Natürlichkeit, wenn sie durch und durch ausgeführt wird und einen bleibenden *Zustand* schafft, der ihrem allgemeinen Zwecke entspricht, vollendet sich als *Sittlichkeit*, und auf diesem Wege geht die Religion hinüber in die *Sitte*, den *Staat*." Perhaps the last clause would be better translated as, "and by this route religion passes over, in the ethical norms (*Sitte*), to the state."

59. Hegel (1820), §270. This section is the most important statement of Hegel's views of the relations between religion and the state, and warrant extended study, which is beyond the scope of this paper.

Nevertheless, religion and the state are both forms of the self-knowledge of the spirit and its freedom.[60]

Hegel rejects the Romantic view that the state should grow organically out of religion, for the sort of self-knowledge attained in religion and the state differ: the former is immediate and subjective, while the latter is discursive and objective. The spiritual and ethical content of religion and state coincide, but are understood by different routes.

If Hegel rejects the control of the state by the Church, he also rejects liberal secularism that cuts off the mutual support of state and religion. His discussions of religion in this context, however, accord privilege to a Protestant view of religion, whose distinctive principle is taken to be subjective freedom.[61]

In any case, he argues that the state requires the support provided by religious sentiments that endorse respect for the law, and that religious sentiment provides the ultimate anchor to the institutions of the state, even when there is a fully developed constitutional system in place.[62] Plato is faulted for trying to establish the political community on the basis of philosophy alone without religion.[63]

Wallace summarizes Hegel's ethical views as making the following points.

1. Reason requires us to push our own desires beyond themselves. In doing so, reason and desire are united and become free;

2. Human beings achieve freedom in God, by going beyond themselves and reaching Absolute Spirit;

3. The duality of knower and known is overcome as the full reality of the known is understood through self-knowledge;

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60. Jaeschke (1990), 261.

61. See Franco (1999), 296-306. Wallace suggests that Hegel may have exaggerated the unique features of Protestant Christianity, and that parallels may be found to Hegel's statements about revealed religion that would apply to the more sophisticated forms of Taoism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism and Islam. Wallace (2005), 316.

62. See Fulda (2004), 27, where Hegel's remarks on the July Revolution of 1830 are discussed.

63. Hegel (1820), §185.

4. Self-consciousness occurs through mutual recognition, by which we find ourselves in one another and in God. The other is not a limitation on one's freedom when one surpasses oneself by identifying with the other;

5. Evil may be overcome as the good is found in a distorted form in evil.[64]

It is on the basis of such principles that Hegel seeks to ground human freedom, the ethical life, and religious commitment.

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64. Wallace (2005), 319-320.

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