

TWO CONCEPTS OF SPIRIT IN HEGEL

Kenneth Smith

It is cause for reflection that so many disparate ideological strains—Marxism, fascism, liberalism—trace back to the Hegelian philosophy, and particularly anomalous that even perspectives in diametrical opposition claim a Hegelian derivation. Out of the Hegelian matrix was refined not only a communitarian foundation—which we see in Marx, Gentile, Royce, and others—but a more individualistic orientation which we may know from the writings of Weber, Foster, Habermas, Riedel, and others. The communitarian perspective has tended to reduce ego, conscience, and other paraphernalia of individuality to intersubjective and historical factors, while the individualist perspective has regarded just these structures of individuality as ultimate and irreducible. There is grave disagreement involved here: the status of civil or bourgeois society and its categories of legal responsibility, within which individuals are related to one another merely qua individuals, has become extremely problematic.

It is no novel thesis to observe, with respect to the communitarian and individualistic worldviews, that Hegel's syntheses have broken down: the mediation linking objective and subjective spirit (or, as Löwith termed it, "the two extremes of internal and external"¹) has lapsed in virtually all of the post-Hegelian social theorists. The commensurability Hegel seemed to discover between the orders of subjectivity and intersubjectivity has become much more chimerical to us, precisely to the extent that subjectivity has delved further into arbitrariness and irrationality and the world of intersubjective relations has grown more oppressive and alien. The coordination of these dimensions seems less and less plausible because contemporary forms of individuality and community do not have any longer the traditional value of being naturally or teleologically interdependent. The two dimensions seem eminently abstractable from one another in theory, as indeed their antagonistic relations seem to create repulsion between the dimensions in practice.

It is not our purpose to survey this diremption in general. We are seeking clues to enable us to reclaim the coordination

that these dimensions found in Hegel's arguments. As we shall see, individuality and communality are not themselves the philosophically precise terms of those arguments: Hegel's theory obliges us to reconstruct the notions of individuality and communality in terms of more primordial concepts, so that, from these introductory orientations, we must understand that we have not yet penetrated to the "two concepts of spirit" whose dialectical interplay may provide a more exact appreciation of our post-Hegelian dilemmas.

A prime clue in identifying pivotal differences may be taken from the subsequent ideological appropriations of Hegel's philosophy of social subjectivity. Among the reversals and revaluations Hegel's career has undergone, almost none is more astonishing than the liberal or libertarian (individualist) restoration of Hegelian doctrine: renowned as the theorist of the organic state, virtually a neo-Aristotelian critic of Kantian and Platonic abstractionism and universalism, Hegel seems extraordinarily ill-cast as an advocate of individualist-Kantian autonomy of the will. Yet, in a strikingly clear essay,² Manfred Riedel has worked prodigiously to assimilate Hegel to the Kantian and Fichtean models of subjectivity (man interpreted as rational will): throughout, Riedel takes his bearings from a modal dichotomy between nature and spirit, and insists (from a Kantian standpoint) on the opposition between laws of necessity and laws of freedom. The laws of freedom, having no validity transcending human will, are conceived almost Sophistically as artificial: "normative laws" are said to be "laid down ('posited,' *gesetzt*), they originate with man and depend upon his will and consciousness."³ Drawing upon a somewhat vague metaphysical contrast, Riedel cites what seems to be the Hegelian rendering of a Kantian dualism: "We oppose spirit to matter. Just as weight is the substance of matter, so we are moved to say that freedom is the substance of spirit."⁴ Riedel's arguments are directed toward the vindication of a form of social order in which all relations originate in the freedom of the will and nature is systematically invalidated as a basis for rights or obligations: this concept of society we recognize as contractualism, not significantly different from the views Aristotle attributes to Lycophron the Sophist (*Politics* III.ix) or the arguments of modern anarchists such as Godwin or Nozick. Riedel points in conclusion to the

contrast between this libertarian schematization and the reality of natural necessitation by which capitalist economy thwarts the concept of will.

Riedel's argument is open to a number of objections. Evidence for the centrality of the principle of freedom is drawn from *The Philosophy of History* without regard for countervailing evidence that Hegel consistently desired to qualify the validity of freedom: that freedom is necessary but not sufficient; that it is an invariant condition but not a fertile principle is recognized as a far more typically Hegelian position. Hegel's critique of abstract freedom is well-recounted by J.-F. Suter's essay⁵ in the same volume as Riedel's, and the contrast between Hegelian and liberal concepts of rights is securely documented in a recent article⁶ by Peter Stillman. Without desiring to cover that ground again, let it suffice that Riedel has imposed an altogether too antagonistic relation between will and nature: Hegel allows that the specific determination of the will to some act—the resolution of the will that translates it from mere potency (self-relation) to actuality, that is, without which the will is not complete—requires a concreteness of content that can, indifferently, be produced by subjectivity itself or by something else (*Philosophy of Right*, para. 7). Criticism of abstract freedom ("negative freedom, or freedom as the Understanding conceives it," para. 5; ". . . will is thinking reason resolving itself to finitude," para. 13; and, to the Kantians, ". . . freedom is nothing else but this empty self-activity," the illusory freedom of arbitrariness, para. 15; and so on) abounds so evidently throughout the Introduction to the *Philosophy of Right* that we cannot imagine Hegel to be endorsing the unqualified validity of abstract right or the individuality of civil society.

It is not, however, at the level of controversies in social-political theories that we want to define the issues that obstruct a contemporary appreciation of Hegel's coordination between subjectivity and intersubjectivity. It is our suspicion that a misconception at a prior level of argument has obliged Riedel to endorse that abstractionist, merely negative species of freedom which Hegel enjoined. This misconception revolves around the metaphysical status, the specific ontological modality, in accordance with which spirit is to be construed. The passages Riedel cites in illustration of the polarity

between nature and spirit are interesting not only for the way in which they refract Kantian metaphysics but for their anticipation of the vitalism of Nietzsche and Bergson. Still, these metaphorically charged polarities of gravity and freedom hardly represent Hegel's most considered statements about the distinctive modalities of nature and spirit. The relation between these two metaphysical regions—the world of nature and the world of spirit—is consistent in all contexts within Hegel's arguments, and this equivocation is illuminating not only with respect to Riedel's misrepresentations but with regard to the duality of spirit that we hope to define.

Hegel's expression of the most fundamental ontological contrasts between nature and spirit takes a double form: the ontology of nature describes the realm of *Äussersichsein*, or being-outside-of-itself, an order in which there is a mutual exclusiveness among all of its elements. Nature is a domain of mutual repulsion, dispersion, and externality in time as in space:

The infinite divisibility of matter simply means that matter is external to itself. The immeasurableness of Nature . . . is precisely this same externality. Because each material point seems to be entirely independent of all the others, a failure to hold fast to the Notion prevails in Nature which is unable to bring together its determinations. . . . It is only in *life* that we meet with subjectivity and the counter to externality. The heart, liver, eye, are not self-subsistent individualities on their own account, and the hand, when separated from the body, putrefies. The organic body is still a whole composed of many members external to each other; but each individual member exists only in the subject, and the Notion exists as the power over these members. . . . The spatiality of the organism has no truth whatever for the soul. . . .⁷

We also find nature characterized as *Ansichsein*, being-in-itself, an order in which every member has strict unity with itself. Every natural form of being is governed by the kind of immediacy (self-identity or self-coincidence) which allows us to say that it is what it is and is not what it is not; natural entities

