HEGEL AND THE FREEDOM OF SPIRIT

Known as a "philosopher of exceptional difficulty" (Gardiner 1969, 41), Georg Hegel made the case that reality is full of contradictions and history records the alternating between the contradictory positions. What might make Hegel so difficult to understand is that he writes in a convoluted way to the point where one is not able to keep up with his philosophy.

Also, Hegel makes claims that are unorthodox and may seem to be contradictory on the surface. Yet, Hegel sees contradictions as fundamental to reality and subsequently, he embraces them in his philosophy. For instance, Hegel writes: "The grades which Spirit seems to have left behind it, it still possesses in the depths of its present" (87). What is being said here is that the Human Spirit or the development of World history over time will evolve in a way that will retain some semblance or materials from the past but will never regress to its past self. History will move through states that are reflective of the past via dialectic movements that require negating and affirming contradictory positions of past and future movements. Hegel's work aims to show how change or progress is made possible, given the limits outlined by Kant's philosophy. Hegel makes the point that reality or history is always changing and transitioning from one state to another. Reality is simply history in the making (77). History is a process of becoming with a reality that is consistently changing into something new. Hegel sees this development of human history or the Human Spirit as something that should happen, and the Human Spirit's ability to fully understand and be self-conscious of itself is the aim of the Spirit, which embodies the notion of the freedom of spirit. This essay explains how Hegel arrived at the claim that the

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Spirit's ability to be self-conscious, self-determining and self-actualizing describes the freedom of Human Spirit. This essay is structured into three sections. In the first section I will describe Hegel's dialectic process of development in history and critique of logic and describe how reality was seen to be full of contradictions. The second section will explain in more detail what the Human Spirit is. Also, this section will explain how the Human Spirit moves or progresses in history, using the dialectic process outlined in section one. Lastly, the third section will address the problems noted with Hegel's philosophy, of its accusation of being "illiberal [and] reactionary" (Ameriks 2000, 181), while offering a possible defence of Hegel's argument and my own critical evaluation of his work.

To help understand how it is that the Spirit is free by coming to know itself, it is important to understand how logic must be invigorated. Like said before, Hegel believes that change is an important concept to accommodate in philosophy. The system of logic must be invigorated to allow for this. As a system that deals with thought and must make self-conscious judgements, logic maintains "the necessity of skepticism as well as the necessity of the dissolution of the ultimacy of those skeptical doubts themselves" (175). Seemingly a contradiction, Hegel's words show us that logic itself reminds us of the limit of our understanding. In the same light, Kant's claim that we could never know noumena (a thing-initself) and only know phenomena (things as they appear to us), does not go far enough for Hegel so as to show how progressive change could take place. On the surface, it seems that not being able to know noumena limits knowledge and hence, change that could occur in history. However, Hegel says that Kant's claim must be further understood:

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> Transcendental Idealism… has recognized the emptiness of the spectre of the Thing-in-itself which the critical philosophy left over - an abstract shadow, detached from all content - and had it in view to demolish it altogether. Also, this philosophy made a beginning of letting Reason produce its own determinations out of itself. (Gardiner 1969, 65)

Hegel recognizes the new beginning and progress Kant's philosophy has generated. The claimed "emptiness" of noumena recognizes the limit of the human epistemology, simultaneously holding the point that we can still know things through reason's deduction. In other words, we can know things, but not know things fully. Kant's claim has an underlying assumption that there is a "'whole' in which there is already a grasp on 'in thought' of two different and potentially opposed elements, the appearance and that which is appearing" (Ameriks 2000, 175). The popular saying: "What glitters may not be gold" beautifully explains what is being said. We might be able to understand/ make sense of what we see - "the appearance", but we may never truly know if it is what we think we see - "that which is appearing" (noumena). In logic there can be contradictions from the assumptions of the premises held. Hegel writes that "Reason which is in contradiction with itself, and does not recognize that the contradiction is just the lifting of Reason above the limitations of Understanding and the dissolution of these" (Gardiner 1969, 64). Reason, which guides logic, recognizes that it has limits and can only go so far in understanding, yet it is this recognition that makes reason so powerful and advances it to the point that it could still be used in understanding. If we were to simply leave reason and logic as they are with their "immovably rigid" determinations (70), it would be a hindrance to progress by not promoting

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knowledge. Thus, not accommodating change. The system of logic already has within itself the ability to evolve.

Concerned with change and progress, Hegel maintains the notion that logic must evolve over time just like how knowledge develops. If it is the case that "Logic has undergone no change since Aristotle" (69), then it suggests that the notion is already complete as it is. Nevertheless, this is not Hegel's claim. Logic must be developed, just as knowledge develops over time. Dialectic movements allow for this development to occur over time. The dialectic movements are already in the system of logic (71) as has been noted earlier by the claim that the system of logic maintains a contradictory assumption. All logic has to do is follow itself or its own method of the dialectic. This can be referred to as becoming self-conscious, accommodating change. Dialectic movements involves a "Unity of Opposites, or of the Positive in the Negative" (73). This clearly embraces the contradictions that Hegel claims are a part of reality. The dialectic allows for logic to negate itself while reforming itself in a more invigorated way. The dialectic arises from the self-consciousness of logic "in which realizing itself abolishes itself, has its own negation as its result,- and thus passes over into a higher mode" (71). Relate this to when someone is trying to overcome an addiction. The first step to overcoming it is admitting one has a problem with addiction. This is how one will change and become better. As logic becomes self-conscious and aims for invigoration, it reaches its limit or recognizes that it has inherent contradictions. These contradictions are then overcome by logic itself to maintain certain scientific principles. This point sounds a lot like the faith Fichte said we maintain when we make knowledge claims. While faith may not be the terminology Hegel uses, the dialectic shows that growth and change happens from the death of the Subject, but results in the reformed subject.

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This dialectic is what allows for change to occur.

On that note, the Human Spirit develops over time through dialectic. The self-consciousness that must be assumed by the system of logic is that what must be realized in the Human Spirit. To make it clear, the Human Spirit describes world history. It involves the evolution, progress or history of both physical and psychical nature (77). However, Hegel focuses more on psychical nature, such that knowledge is being development. The Spirit is unfolded over time, it must be observed over time. This alludes to the point that Spirit is always changing, it is not supposed to be the same. Similar to the point made earlier that the system of logic must be invigorated to accommodate the evolution of knowledge, the Spirit must stay changing and to unfold history. The history of the world or Spirit involves an "intersubjective unity" of peoples "by patterns of mutual recognition" (Ameriks 2000, 164). This refers to the point that in our being conscious of other things that exist in the world through phenomena, we also are displaying our "self-consciousness of taking them to be a certain way" (165) as phenomena. This also describes how history has evolved.

The Spirit "supplies its own nourishment, and is the object of its own operations" (Gardiner 1969, 76). This claim shows how the Spirit is free. The freedom of Spirit is equivalent to the destiny or the telos of the Spirit (79). The final cause of the Spirit is for it to be conscious of its own freedom meaning that it can be conscious of its essential nature or conscious of itself. The freedom of the Spirit allows it to develop in history as it is supposed to. The freedom refers to the Spirit's ability to become itself, to fully realize itself and to be exactly what it is - evolution or progress. Hegel also says that the Spirit is immortal and that it has "no past, no future, but [is] an essential now" (87). This means that Spirit is not a static being, it is dynamic.

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The fact that the Spirit is always changing or in the process of becoming itself through self-consciousness, Hegel refers to this historical process as a "voyage of discovery" (Ameriks 2000, 172). The Spirit is actively finding itself throughout history. It goes through the dialectic process of negating and affirming itself taking on what appears to be contradictory positions, but in the end the Spirit will always end up as a new and invigorated version of itself. The freedom of Spirit describes this process that is never-ending. Freedom of Spirit requires the Spirit to be self-determined meaning that the Spirit follows itself or its destiny, which is to fully realize itself. In other words, the Spirit is determined by the Spirit. Freedom does not just mean for the Spirit to choose how it will evolve throughout history; it implies that Spirit's purpose is to evolve on its own accord. This notion of freedom of Spirit sees to relate to the notion of God in religion. God actualizes himself. Similarly, Sprit's sole purpose is to actualize or realize itself. Even so, Hegel says that "the very essence of Spirit is activity" (Gardiner 1969, 82). The self-actualization of the Spirit's own will is what also is embodied by the notion of the Freedom of Spirit.

Moreover, the Spirit of a people can be captured by nations, which consist of people. Translating the universal understanding of the Spirit into the particular or more specific terms shows that people have their own wills and desires. It may be true that peoples have individual desires and beliefs, however Hegel says, "the highest point in the development of a people [is] to have gained a conception of life and condition… [and in this] unity Spirit can attain to and with itself" (84). As the system of logic and history should evolve or progress, so too, should people. This is what history, or the universe is about - progressive change not merely a cycle of the same old things. The Spirit or history evolves through dialectic. This means that individuals will have their own desires and even isolate from each other, want extremely different things. However,

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through the development of history, people will find satisfaction in the ideas of universal desires or "Universal Thought" (85) or simply share in unity with others. This conflict of interests is what will happen with Spirit. The dialectic movements of progress that Spirit undergoes show that it "is essentially the result of its own activity: its activity is the transcending of immediate, simple, unreflected existence- the negation of that existence, and the returning to itself" (86). Spirit is definitely an unfinished story. In this same way people are always evolving and will have conflicting interests. However, Hegel makes the claim that people will aim to find their "definite place in the world" (83) whereas they become apart of the general or universal Spirit or grow accustomed to the beliefs and duties that are taken up by a nation. Therefore, Hegel says that the nation is the highest point of the development of a people. The Nation should reflect the interests of its people, and people should find happiness in taking up their part in the nation. This further describes the freedom of Spirit. Spirit is happy to be itself, and to have unity. Therefore, the Spirit is said to be free.

On the contrary, Hegel's "freedom of the Spirit" has been criticized so as to say that the Spirit does not reflect freedom for individuals. While the Spirit acts according to its own will, Hegel does say that the Spirit of the people reaches its highest form when there is unity in the people's desires. The first argument brought against Hegel is that his philosophy is anti-individualist (Ameriks 2000, 181). To put it simply, Hegel prioritized the whole over the individual. Individual desires do not really have significance to the Spirit, but the universal desires or will does. While Hegel does not exactly make this claim, his philosophy seems to imply this. This shows that Hegel's philosophy is illiberal. The second claim brought against Hegel's philosophy is that it reflects historical positivism. This means that Hegel has put too

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much power in history's hands, so as to make it seem that what happens in history is supposed to happen or that it should happen. This makes it seem as if history is a "rationally necessary development" (182). This claim seems very powerful in the sense that it really does capture the theme of Hegel's philosophy. He holds that history is about progress and always is going through change. This is the case with Hegel's philosophy. This claim shows that Hegel's philosophy is simply reactionary to the philosophies that preceded him, but in particular to Kantian philosophy. In response to the claims brought against Hegelian philosophy I do not think that the first claim of being anti-individual is strong. The reason I say this is because Hegel has emphasized the point that Spirt is free and what makes the Spirit free is its ability to be itself. Hegel does not oppose individuals being their authentic selves, nor does he devalue them being themselves. Instead, Hegel shows that Spirit being itself is necessary and should be welcomed. The dialectic requires for there to be periods of individualism and then periods of holism. This is necessary for history to develop and for Spirit to unfold. Therefore, I do not think the claim that Hegel's philosophy is anti-individualist is strong, because Hegel shows how individualism is important in arriving to the point of the universal. He even said that one would always look at the particular to get the universal and this point shows that Hegel's philosophy embodies liberalism.

To the point that Hegel's philosophy demonstrates historical positivism, I must admit that this is a strong claim. This claim is strong in the sense that it really does capture what Hegel's point was in his philosophy. Hegel does put a lot of emphasis on the evolution of history, so as to make the claim that contradictions are a part of reality. This makes it seem as if history is powerful and knows best. While I must agree that this claim might be true, the reply Hegel might make to this is that his philosophy is not reactionary because it puts a lot of emphasis on history,

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but his philosophy is revolutionary because he takes past philosophies further than they were pushed. He sheds light on contradictions, showing their vitality in growth. This is a unique perspective in looking at the way progress develops. Hegel showed us that history is not simply ran by the common notion of logic, but it is run by a logic that must be further pushed along the dialectic.

In conclusion, Universal history or the Human Spirit embodies a freedom that allows Spirit to be itself, by realizing itself and determining itself. The Spirit's essence is to be what it already is. Like history, the Spirit must undergo change to develop and progress. This change is facilitated by dialectic movements which allow for a negation and affirmation of itself to from and evolve into a new thing. This is what history must go through to evolve according to Hegel.

Bibliography

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