



Hegel's Concept of Intellectual Development in Human History

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Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analyzed and interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Hegel undoubtedly, one of the most famous philosophers of the modern time, sees human history as a dialectical method which involves thesis, antithesis and synthesis. This famous method which is also commonly referred to as dialectics was the brainchild of Hegel who considered human history as a process of development involving human spirit, consciousness and freedom. Starting with the thesis, Spirit is an abstract entity which already contains its antithesis. Spirit becomes real through its antithesis of human consciousness. Human being, the opposition of Spirit, helps the Spirit to actualize its self-purpose of freedom. When the Spirit finally attains its purpose i.e. freedom becomes the synthesis. This process in history continues but in higher form than the first. For inherent in every synthesis (which in turn becomes the thesis) is its antithesis, then to synthesis. Hegel considers the ultimate aim of human history as to attain freedom which is the final product of spirit and consciousness. Development comes out as a parallel but the vital product of this process of freedom in human history. Freedom, spirit and reasoning are some of his key concepts in this regard which he tends to connect with human history in a meaningful manner. Precisely, Hegel observes and interprets human history as the process of attainment of a better state of freedom

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and development. This study aims to briefly explain and discuss the key concepts of Hegelian philosophy of development and how human history has progressed towards development and freedom.

Keywords: Development; freedom; spirit; consciousness.

THESIS STATEMENT

World history represents the development of the spirit's consciousness of its own freedom and of the consequent realization of this freedom. This maintains that world history has progressed throughout due to the intellectual growth of human race and its desire to attain more and more freedom.

1. INTRODUCTION

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770 - 1831) was a German philosopher of the early Modern period. He was one of the leading figures in the German idealism movement in the early 19th Century. He has also been called the "Aristotle of modern times", and he used his system of dialectics to explain the history of philosophy, science, art, politics and religion [1].

Hegel was the first major philosopher to regard history and the Philosophy of History as important. Hegel's Historicism is the position that all human societies (and all human activities in science, art or philosophy) are defined by their history, and that their essence can be sought only through understanding. According to Hegel, to understand who a person is, you must put that person in a society; and to understand that society, you must understand its history, and the forces that shaped it. He is famously quoted as claiming that "Philosophy is the history of philosophy" [2].

His system for understanding history, and the world itself was developed from his famous dialectic teachings of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. Although Hegel himself didn't use these terms himself but these terms were originated by Johann Fichte from Hegel's works [3]. Hegel saw history as a progression, always moving forward, never static, in which each successive movement emerges as a solution to the contradictions inherent in the preceding movement. He believed that every complex situation contains within itself conflicting elements, which work to destabilize the situation, leading it to break down into a new situation in which the conflicts are resolved. For example,

the French Revolution constituted the introduction of real individual political freedom, but carried with it the seeds of the brutal "Reign of Terror" which followed, and only then was there the possibility of a constitutional state of free citizens, embodying both the benevolent organizing power of rational government and the revolutionary ideals of freedom and equality.

Thus, the history of any human endeavor not only builds upon, but also reacts against, what has gone before. This process, though, is an ongoing one, because the resulting synthesis has itself inherent contradictions which need to be resolved (so that the synthesis becomes the new thesis for another round of the dialectic). Crucially, however, Hegel believed that this dialectical process was not just random, but that it had a direction or a goal, and that goal was freedom (and our consciousness and awareness of freedom) and of the absolute knowledge of mind as the ultimate reality.

2. HEGEL'S CLASSIFICATION OF HISTORY

Georg Hegel identifies three types of history: original, reflective, and philosophical.

2.1 Original History

Original history is composed of different accounts of events, actions and situations lived through and witnessed by the historian. Other primary sources are used, but only as ingredients, the account depends fundamentally on the historian's own witnessing of the times [4].

Hegel notes that original history must deal instead with the observed and observable reality of people who are self-aware and unique.

Further, original history cannot be of great external scope, it is a limited viewpoint. The original historian does not offer a great deal of theory about or reflection on the events and situations he or she recounts. For Hegel, the spirit in which the original historian is writing is the same as the spirit of the times he or she had written about.

Hegel notes that speeches recorded in historical accounts may seem to be a special case here, since they would seem to be reflections on the times rather than mere accounts of the times. But public speeches are in fact effective actions in their very essence, just as much as a war or an election. For this reason, they are considered to be integral components of history recorded by the original historian [5].

We can distinguish three but very rough stages of original history. In antiquity, it was primarily statesmen who wrote history. In the middle ages, monks were the historians (Hegel calls their works "naive chronicles"). In Hegel's own time, the things were changed and the culture immediately converts all events into reports for intellectual representation. These contemporary original histories aim for breadth and accuracy, seeking to portray things precisely and simply so that we can then interpret them in other forms of writing. Hegel writes that only people "of high social standing" can execute this kind of history: "only from a superior position can one truly see things for what they are and see everything" [6].

2.2 Reflective History

We can call reflective history as panoramic history. It goes beyond the limits of the time to which it relates or it transcends the present. It attempts to gain a view of Universal History i.e. a comprehensive or complete history of a people, a country, or the world. Unlike the original historian, the reflective historian is not a participant in the events and spirit of the times of which he gives an account. Reflective history is divided by Hegel into four sub-types:

- Universal history
- Pragmatic history
- Critical history
- Specialized history

Universal reflective history aims to give an account of the whole history of a people or even of the world. But, since this is reflective history, the spirit that unites all these events in a written history is foreign to the time of the events--it is rather the spirit of the historian's own time. In the case of broad world histories, particular events must be condensed into very brief statements, and it is almost as though the author's own thought is the main feature (the "mightiest epitomist") of the text [7].

Pragmatic reflective history has a theory or ideology behind it. The events recounted are "connected into one pattern in their universal and inner meaning" by the historian, and the account actually consists more of reflections on history than simply of history itself. Hegel makes a side-note here about the idea that history should provide us with moral lessons (a function which would be found primarily in pragmatic history). He thinks this idea is wrong, and that if history can be said to have "taught" us anything it is that "nations and governments have never learned anything from history." This is largely a matter of the unreality of the past in relation to the present. According to him, "In the press of world events, there is no help to be had from general principles...for a pale memory has no force against the vitality and freedom of the present" [8].

Critical reflective history is a kind of research into historical accounts, a history of history that tests the accuracy of given accounts and perhaps poses alternative accounts. Hegel dislikes this kind of history, which "extorts" new things to say from existing accounts. He points out that this is a cheaper way to achieve "reality" in history, because it puts subjective notions in place of facts and calls these notions reality [9].

The final type of reflective history, the "specialized," focuses on one thread in history, such as "the history of art, of law, or of religion." At the same time, it represents a transitional stage to philosophic history because it takes a "universal viewpoint." The very focus is taken (e.g., the history of law) represents a choice on the part of the historian to make a universal concept the guiding rationale for his history. If the specialized history is good, the author will give an accurate account of the fundamental "Idea" (the "inner guiding soul") that guided the events and actions being discussed.

2.3 Philosophic History

If the idea guides the history of nations as they pursue law, art, or religion, the "Spirit" is what guides history as a whole. It is this larger process that is the focus of the third category of history, philosophic history. We think constantly, Hegel notes, but most history (even reflective history) would seem to emphasize events over thought in the end. Philosophic history, however, prioritizes thought before history, bringing pure philosophical ideas to bear on events. The thoughts that organize the "raw material" of

historical events into philosophic history come first and can stand alone. The crux of philosophic history is that it uses a philosophic thought to interpret history as a rational process [10].

3. HEGEL'S CONCEPT OF REASON

Reason or Absolute Spirit, for Hegel, is the Substance and Infinite Energy of the Universe. It reveals itself in Nature and in individual human beings. World history is the necessary rational path of the development of the World Spirit towards its absolute aim, which is its complete and absolute actualization. Nature is an embodiment of Reason (Understanding, Absolute Spirit, Providence or God) as it rules and directs the world [11].

Reason is thought to condition itself with perfect freedom. It is pure abstraction, a pure self-consciousness, and an inward unity that necessitates the desire for an outward external concrete realization of itself. The Divine Plan is manifested in history as we see these in isolated cases wherein the "guiding hand of God" unexpectedly comes to an individual in great perplexity and need. [An example could be the Good Samaritan who helped a wounded Gentile, who was robbed along the road to Jericho.] But we are here dealing with individual men. In the history of the world, we deal with totalities of peoples, the states [12].

4. HEGEL'S CONCEPT OF FREEDOM

The central thesis of Hegel's Philosophy of History is the progress of the consciousness of freedom and its realization [9].

According to Hegel, the world spirit evolves historically, increasing its awareness and commitment to freedom. Human beings are the vehicles of the world spirit; the process of liberation takes place through human existence and interaction. Each great civilization has a peculiar understanding of freedom, which represents generally an improvement over past conceptions. This understanding structures the society's morality and ethical life.

History becomes the process of the Spirit forging its own history by struggling to have a self-knowledge of its own self. Spirit, Hegel says, is essentially active, it is what it does. It is revealed only in its actions, and exists only as so revealed. It is by action and reflecting its actions that spirit constructs for itself coherent knowledge of a world and, in the same process,

acquire self-knowledge. For Spirit, as it creates the world, creates the object of that knowledge, which is the world. This Spirit, struggling through history to have a self-knowledge, is self-creating, self-determining, and self-projecting. It is self-determining because it sets its own goals, for its objective and goals are of its own making. It is self-projecting because it brings forth the object of its knowledge. But history cannot come to fulfillment without Spirit, an abstract entity, projecting out of itself its own contradiction which is matter (nature and man). Hegel contrasted between man and spirit and came to the conclusion that 'Spirit' is necessary whereas 'Matter' is contingent. That is, "Spirit is self-contained existence" that put all things into motion, setting them towards the actualization of its own goal. This goal, according to Hegel, is "Freedom". As Hegel puts it: "the History of the world is none other than the progress of the consciousness of Freedom [12].

Freedom, according to Hegel, consists of "being with oneself in another". For this state of being with oneself to be achieved, Hegel thinks that two distinct conditions must be satisfied. First, one must be subjectively free and, secondly, objectively free with respect to one's end. An individual enjoys subjective freedom, according to Hegel, when he reflects on his ends (rather than blindly acting on authority, or trust, or unquestioning the conventions and traditions of his community) and when he can endorse those ends on the basis of his own particular desires and ambitions. The idea of objective freedom, by contrast, is when an individual has the motives and ends that reason prescribes. Putting these together, Hegel thinks that an agent is self-determining and free if and only if it sends are his own both in the subjective sense that they are grounded in his reflectively endorsed desires and evaluations and in the objective sense that they are grounded in his own goals and purpose as a rational being. Spirit possess both the subjective freedom and the objective freedom. But this freedom is just an abstract thing, a potentiality that needs to be actualized.

For Hegel, one of the means of actualization and realization of freedom by the Spirit is the Will which is the activity of man in the widest sense. It is only by this activity that Spirit, according to Hegel, is realized and actualized. This is so because without man's will, Spirit is powerless. The motive power that puts them in operation, and gives them determinant existence, is the need, instinct, inclination, and passion of man [10].

It would not be incorrect to say that freedom is the goal of history; it cannot itself make that history. This is because the destiny of freedom is but an immature idea, it is only general, or abstract and requires the opposition of a second component in order to produce actuality or realization. This second component consists of the passions and the interest of man. Such means are to be employed because the making of history requires the activities of people, and people act for object which they are interested in.

5. RELATION OF SPIRIT AND FREEDOM WITH WORLD HISTORY

Universal History belongs to the realm of Spirit. The World is both physical and psychical nature. Nature is both a rational system in itself and its physical component plays a part in the development of World History. Spirit rules and directs the world (nature).

Spirit, on the one hand, may be defined as that which has a center in itself. Its unity exists in and with itself. Freedom is a self-contained unity and freedom is the sole truth of Spirit. One is free when its existence depends upon itself, when it is independent of something external. The self-contained existence of Spirit is self-consciousness (consciousness of its own existence). In self-consciousness, the Spirit is conscious of itself and it knows that it is conscious of itself. It involves an appreciation of the potentiality of its nature and the energy to enable it to actualize itself. Universal History is the manifestation of the Spirit working out the realization of the knowledge of its own potentiality. "as the germ bears in itself the whole nature of the tree, and the taste and form of its fruits, so do the first traces of spirit virtually contain the whole of that history?" [13].

The Orientals did not attain the knowledge that Spirit — Man as such — is free and, hence, they believe that man is not free. They only knew that the one that is free, was the Ruler or King. The Greeks were conscious of freedom and therefore were free. But they (and the Romans) only knew that some were free. Thus, they had slaves and their liberty was maintained by the institution of slavery. Their liberty was transient and of limited growth. Only the Germans under the influence of Christianity were first people to be conscious that man (Man as such) is free. But, of course, slavery did not cease immediately on the reception of Christianity and liberty did not immediately predominate in German states. It

took time to develop nation-state system and then constitutions to adopt a rational organization with freedom, and recognition of the right of self-determination as a birth right and fundamental human right [14].

6. CASE STUDY: HEGEL'S CONCEPT OF DEVELOPMENT

If we analyze the period of the 20th century onwards up till now, it could become a great case study of Hegel's idea of history i.e. progress of history to attain more development.

World has experienced rise and fall of two radical ideologies, Fascism and Communism. Both ideologies failed to give a sustainable political, economic and social system, rather became a major reason for the two world wars. After the end of the two world wars, European nations and the rest West adopted the liberal democratic system which is a success story till now leading to the fall of USSR and European integration as major success stories. Western world is united in its aspiration to establish liberal democracy, at the same time promoting idea of open society, capitalism and liberalism in the world.

Francis Fukuyama in his book titled "End of History and the Last Man" argued the concept given by Hegel which was End of History. He argues that the history ends when the ideological conflict is eliminated and replaced by one integrated ideology. According to dialectic of Hegel, the contradictions of views result in new point of view which is embraced by both regions. When Soviet Union and the other eastern countries fell and tended towards the west, demonstrated the victory of the liberal ideas and western system. The established norms of west were the main factors for creating peaceful society, as it was proved and materialized by liberal ideas. European countries in the last four decades had not being in any conflict with each other, through the principles of liberal democracy develop society socially, economically and politically.

Victory of western ideology was dignity and sense of recognition. According to him, democracy in western countries had secured dignity and recognition for individuals by giving them all individual rights. Basic rights from freedom of expression to economic allowance were established in their constitutions. In such a way under the liberal democracy, structured system secured legal rights to practice the basic

individual rights. Therefore, there was no room for conflict over rights which underpins the foundation of dignity and sense of recognition. This system paved the way For individual's This seems to be a good case study of how history is progressing towards a better political, economic and social system.

7. CONCLUSION

In Summary, Hegel maintains that the consciousness of freedom in history moves from despotism, to a sense that freedom is a privilege of a few, to a robust notion whereby humanity is free inside and outside. Hegel believes that the spirit of human freedom is best nurtured within a constitutional monarchy in which the monarch embodies the spirit and desires of the governed, and his reading of history locates the rise of such forms of government in the Germanic nations of, for example, the United Kingdom and Prussia after the protestant reformation [12]. Hegel's "one, some, and all" proposition follows the basic geographical metaphor, which hegel takes throughout his philosophy of history, namely, "world history travels from east to west; for europe is the absolute end of history, just as asia is the beginning". When referring to the east, hegel generally has in mind the historical cultures of persia, though at times he referenced china and spends a great deal of space discussing india and indian religions. However, he also said that the view of history (including his own) should be open to change based on the 'empirical facts' available [15]. To conclude, one must reiterate hegel's claim that world history represents the development of the spirit's consciousness of its own freedom and of the consequent realization of this freedom.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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