

III. HUMAN NATURE AND SOCIETY IN HEGEL

INTRODUCTION

The world has meaning. It signifies something. Hegel's philosophy is the systematisation of this affirmation: an affirmation that is itself necessitated by the world being significant. Thus (and here is the aptness of the circularity that Hegel frequently and persistently designates as the proper characteristic of his philosophy) the affirmation is at once the premise from which the world's significance stems and the product of the world having significance.

Hegel is certainly one of the most self-consciously systematic of all philosophers. The corollary of this is that in studying his philosophy, whilst a start can be made at any point, the comprehension of this point entails the comprehension of the system that gives it meaning. Hence, although our concerns with Hegel are, as they were with Hume, limited, it does mean that explication of this concern will involve and invoke putatively 'wider' issues.

The nub of our concern is this: Hegel sees man as socially (historically) defined and he regards any discussion of man outside society as meaningless; yet the meaning of man's socio-historical nature is to be found in the universality that constitutes the significance of the world. Man is thus concrete and culturally specific or contextual. However, the relativism seemingly implied thereby is rendered inappropriate by seeing both man and the cultures in which he is found as the bearers of the world's meaning.

Our point of entry into the circle is Hegel's understanding of human nature and our perspective the connexions drawn in his thought between this understanding and his interpretation of society and history. As such the treatment formally mirrors that given to Hume in Part II and we shall on occasion indulge in a comparative analysis of certain specific issues dealt with by both thinkers. We shall first examine Hegel's conceptualisation of human nature (Chapter 8). The relationship therein theoretically implied between human nature and society will then be analysed in terms of the major categories (the *Volk* and the State) that can be seen to effectuate this relationship (Chapter 9). The fact that full comprehension of this relationship requires a universal or absolute perspective within an explanation of social diversity is next elucidated in the context of Hegel's philosophy of history (Chapter 10) before finally the bearing of the meaning of

this perspective on the individual in interaction with his fellows and environment is examined (Chapter 11).

As with the exposition of Hume, the argument, in this Part also, will require the introduction of certain themes at one place in the argument and their postponement until a more appropriate juncture where they can be discussed in full.

The following abbreviations are inserted in parentheses in the text throughout this Part.

- WL *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. G. Lasson (& J. Hoffmeister) (1921).
 WG *Werke*, ed. E. Gans et al. (1840).
 WJ *Sämtliche-Werke (Jubiläumsausgabe)*, ed. H. Glockner (1927).
 Ph *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, tr. as *The Phenomenology of Mind* by J.B. Baillie.
 PhK *Phänomenologie des Geistes – Vorrede*, tr. as *Hegel: Texts and Commentary* by W. Kaufmann.
 EL *Encyclopädie des Philosophischen Wissenschaften – Logik*, tr. as *The Logic of Hegel* by W. Wallace.
 EN *Encyclopädie. . . – Natur*, tr. as *Philosophy of Nature* by A.V. Miller.
 EG *Encyclopädie. . . – Geistes*, tr. as *Philosophy of Mind* by W. Wallace & A.V. Miller.
 SL *Wissenschaft der Logik*, tr. as *Hegel's Science of Logic* by W.H. Johnston & L.G. Struthers in 2 vols.
 PR *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, tr. as *Hegel's Philosophy of Right* by T.M. Knox.
 PHS *Philosophie der Weltgeschichte*, tr. as *Hegel's Philosophy of History* by J. Sibree.
 PGN *Philosophie der Weltgeschichte – Einleitung*, tr. as *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History (Introduction)* by H.B. Nisbet.
 VG *Ibid.*, tr. as *Reason in History* by R.S. Hartmann.
 PW *Hegel's Political Writings*, tr. T.M. Knox.
 TW *Early Theological Writings*, tr. T.M. Knox.
 TJ *Hegels Theologische Jugendschriften*, ed. H. Nohl.
 GA *Vorlesungen über die Aesthetik (Einleitung)*, tr. B. Bosanquet in G. Gray, *Hegel on Art, Religion and Philosophy*.
 GR *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion (Einleitung)*, tr. E.B. Spiers & J.B. Sanderson in Gray.
 JPG *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie (Einleitung)*, tr. E. Haldane & F. Simson in Gray.
 PRel *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, tr. as *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* by Spiers & Sanderson in 3 vols.
 GP *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, tr. as *History of Philosophy* by Haldane & Simson in 3 vols.
 JRI Jenenser Realphilosophie (1803/4), ed. J. Hoffmeister (= WL, Vol. XIX).
 JRII Jenenser Realphilosophie (1805/6), ed. J. Hoffmeister (= WL, Vol. XX).