

WAS HEGEL CHRISTIAN OR ATHEIST?



After Hegel's death there was a great clash of intellectuals which the Hegelian theologian David Strauss called the clash between "the Left Hegelians and the Right Hegelians." The Left Hegelians were atheists, led by the ex-minister Bruno Bauer and his famous follower, Karl Marx, and by the radical editor Arnold Ruge and the radical egoist whose real name was not Max Stirner.

The Right Hegelians were Christian fundamentalists. They found Christian inspiration in Hegel's philosophy, and they condemned David Strauss' progressive New Testament critique, *THE LIFE OF JESUS*. Strauss also took his inspiration from Hegel. He showed how the earliest Christian communities altered the Gospels with their local traditions. Albert Schweitzer praised his book as epoch-making, and by today's standards the book is tame. But it was the 19th century death-knell for Hegelian scholarship.

Strauss defended himself by accusing Hegel himself of ambiguity on the subject. Bruno Bauer was living evidence of this. Bauer was first the leader of the Right Hegelians, and led the damnation of David Strauss' theology of demythologization. After more years of reflection, however, Bauer turned coat and became the leader of the Left Hegelians. (In either role, Albert Schweitzer praised Bauer's scholarship as world class.)

Scholars for generations have reviewed the arguments of the Left and Right Hegelians, and are still divided on the question: Was Hegel a Christian or an atheist?

One way to decide is to review Hegel's earliest writings on religion, especially Christianity. This will help us decide if the idea of the Absolute in Dialectics is simply a variation on the fundamentalist idea of God. If it is, I will plead guilty to Gary's charge of mysticism and authoritarianism. If not, then I hope I will have shed some light on a complex modern question.

A little background may be in order. In Hegel's day, the official Government pose in most European constitutions was a Christian one. Unlike the American Constitution, which never once mentions the words "Jesus" or "Christ," European Constitutions, even after the French Revolution, were officially Christian and even sectarian. Non-Christians were routinely stripped of Civil Rights throughout European history.

The Industrial Revolution, which gave Europe the decided economic and military edge over all other nations in the world, did much to suggest that Christian civilization was inherently superior to all others. Was this not a Divine Blessing? Weren't all other nations and all other religions now obviously inferior?

This was the world in which Hegel grew up.

When Hegel wrote about the relative status of religions in 1820, he did not have the vast materials we have today. Our century has translated hieroglyphics. We have discovered and translated cuneiform. We have discovered great libraries from long dead civilizations. We have translated Sanskrit, ancient Persian and Babylonian. Hegel had only a minute fraction of the information our century has on this subject.

So it should not be surprising that when Hegel wrote about Christianity and other religions, he wrote about them from the dominant European viewpoint which was all around him. He preferred Christian theology to all other theology. He believed that Christianity was the highest form of religion the world would ever produce.

He remained a Lutheran all his life, and he believed that the Lutheran sect of Christianity was superior to the Catholic, Anglican and Puritan. As any Lutheran, he was a critic of the oldest, most conservative Christian institution, the Roman Catholic.

If Hegel's philosophy can be made to fit into this ethnocentric mold, then we're justified in minimizing its value for a progressive science.

But I maintain that Hegel's philosophy can't be made to fit that mold. I'll summarize Hegel's earliest theological essays to show why this is so. I'll use Hegel's, *EARLY THEOLOGICAL WRITINGS* (Tr. T.M. Knox and R. Kroner, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), as my primary source for what follows.

Hegel's early method is speculative synthesis. He experiments with equations of metaphysical idea like God, Soul, Universe, the Good, Courage, Virtue, and Freedom. He concentrates on defining Ethics.

For centuries Christian sects have labored to uncover the original core of Gospel teachings, to prove their case against other sects. Hegel believed secular philosophy also has the right to enter this debate in its effort to vindicate Ethics over authoritarianism. Hegel's hypothesis is that authoritarian doctrines have always been sectarian forgeries.

HEGELIAN ETHICS

Hegel identifies himself as a rationalist and a moralist. The Gospel about Jesus, he said, is nothing if not a teaching of morals and Ethics. Now, Ethics, to be truly Ethics, must be pure, free from all force and authoritarianism. So the original Gospel could not have been otherwise than a religion of freedom, free from authoritarian principles.

Authoritarianism devalues free will and so devalues the philosophy of Ethics. From the point of view of Ethics, authoritarian religion isn't true religion, because only free Virtue is true Virtue.

Ethics is most compatible with Reason. Reason is inborn. We inherit it freely. Ethics should be the same. We discover Ethics naturally, by following our sense of Reason. The only honest morality is respect for this inborn morality, this law of the heart which makes love the guide of life. True morality can awaken itself spontaneously, or someone else's moral example may inspire it to awaken in me. We can't force it. Nothing else can awaken morality except morality.

Ancient Hellenic civilization let moral freedom reign, and it enlightened Europe for centuries. In our time, Immanuel Kant defined the moral realm in scientific terms, though it may take centuries for humanity to rise to his lofty vision.

Authoritarian religion does not measure up to either of these ideals.

Authoritarian religion teaches us that morality comes from outside humanity, beyond people, so that humanity can never directly touch it.

What we must freely, bravely discover for ourselves, authoritarian religion claims to have for us in a pre-packaged form. It has Laws which specify how we are to act, think and feel. These Laws are the crux of its whole power.

But if subjection to alien, external Laws without representation is the definition of oppression, then the Law of authoritarian religion falls into

this category.

All other arts and sciences have progressed by leaps and bounds, but the science of Ethics hobbles along and falters century after century.

Might authoritarianism be to blame?

To be responsible for ourselves isn't just a right, it's a Duty and a valid definition of humanity. To renounce the right to Reason, responsibility and free thinking is tragic. It smacks of renouncing humanity. Perhaps this best explains man's inhumanity to man.

Might authoritarian religion be to blame for this, too?

HEGELIAN CHRISTIANITY

Hegel's definition of Christianity stands or falls entirely with the question of Ethics. It's a form of Ethical Christianity, and as such is antagonistic to authoritarian Christianity.

For Hegel, the stories about Jesus' miracles were originally of secondary importance. For Hegel, the doctrines of resurrection and of the Messiah were merely ploys that Jesus employed to get into the hearts and minds of his listeners, so he could preach his perfect message of morality.

The doctrines of miracles, resurrection and Messiah were not only secondary, but were positively superfluous for Hegel. They may have even been negative in value, since they tended to distract people from the primary lesson the Gospel wants us to hear--the lesson of higher morality.

Authoritarians claimed that the human mind is incapable of grasping the Absolutes of reality. They demanded that we accept the force of Christian history. Didn't Christianity overwhelm the mighty Roman Empire? Aren't those who quietly accept Christianity in our Western world more calm and well adjusted? Didn't non-believers lose their Civil Rights in Europe for more than a thousand years, as if to underscore their lonely misery?

But Hegel sees another view of things. Christianity is a highly splintered religion. Its doctrines have changed over the centuries, usually to conform to this or that national belief or holiday, or to promote the interests of this or that sectarian committee. Accounts of such compromise fill the history of Dogma.

GOSPEL ETHICS

The Gospel portrays Jesus as often rebuking the Pharisee leaders of the Hebrew religion. These Pharisees, we're told, taught that the essence of Ethics is the fastidious observance of the Law. Jesus disagreed. The essence of Ethics is more than that, he insisted.

For Hegel, this is the core of Christianity. Miracles, eschatology and messianism are secondary. The primary message of the Gospel is that the Pharisee definition of morality was in error. Even if someone were to prove that the Gospel is pure literary fiction, this Ethical message would still stand on its own as a courageous, immortal proposition.

The miracles in the Gospel are not as impressive. Rationalists have for generations proposed ingenious explanations for nearly all of them. No Roman or Hebrew historians of the day bothered to write about them. History tells us that other people in the region cured demoniacs. Itinerant exorcists were not

rare in Galilee and Palestine. In the Gospel's account of Jesus healing a withered hand in a Synagogue, what impressed the Synagogue was not the marvel but the desecration of the Sabbath.

The Gospel portrays Jesus as one who rejected any faith based only on a miracle or sign. He sought freely believing disciples.

Perhaps the Gospel's resort to miracles, like a highway detour, only made the road longer, with more ways to get lost. It became too easy to mistake externally-grounded lip-service for self-grounded morality.

If the Gospel's moral teaching had become the object of devotion, as intended, then perhaps the Person of Jesus would not have become the object of such intense focus. As it is, many revere the miracles first, revere Jesus' Person as a result, and finally his moral teachings are given weight by proxy, rather than in themselves.

The Gospel portrays Jesus as a moral teacher. Ethics, or as he might have said, Divine Purpose, is the great duty of humanity. As portrayed, he taught this by parables, stories, and especially by his moral example. He spoke about himself and his mission often, ever aware of himself. He was attentive to his personal example of the morality he preached, since it was obvious that some people can't understand Ethical ideas from a mere hearing. They have to see examples.

Authoritarians seize upon his examples as sacrosanct, leaving as secondary the greater principle of free Ethical action.

Who inserted this authoritarianism?

ETHICS

Ethics is more subtle, more beautiful and more sublime than the Law. The Law is only the minimum comportment we require before we collectively restrain or otherwise apply force.

Liberal, Ethical believers, if they condemn anything, condemn only willful cruelty and destruction, not differences in interpretation. They may view mythological religion as unworthy, but not as damnable.

By contrast, authoritarian believers say that Ethical philosophy and crass superstition have the same root--human imperfection. They say that individual interpretation is damnable in itself. They make official belief and official morality into a new Law. Just as the Sadducees made the temple-cult into the essence of their faith, so has Christendom made an ancient catechism and an external ritual into the essence of its faith.

If we live Ethically only by carefully following rules and rituals, what becomes of our free will? Do we have no salvation except that outside of us? Are we born blind and deaf to Ethics, dependent entirely on external benefactors and unfamiliar revelations?

If we aren't born with the possibility of Ethics in our hearts, then no amount of preaching can strike that chord in us. But if we're born with Ethics in our hearts, then only our own hearts are the proper measure of external systems of Law.

The Gospel portrays Jesus as one who holds the Ethics of the Heart to be superior to the Ethics of the Law.

This is no mystical interpretation of the Gospel, but a rational interpretation which also speaks to the highest levels of human awareness, the levels of beauty and morality.

Morality is an invisible realm, where laws are potent but do not have discernibly physical roots. Legislation, rules, codes and rituals do little to illuminate our knowledge of this invisible realm. But simple inner faith and inner confidence in one's own heartfelt feelings, these are the road to spiritual awareness. This is the esoteric Gospel teaching, hidden beneath mounds of doctrines of miracles, eschatology and Messianism.

The Gospel's moral preachments at one time shone with an inner truth and beauty of pure Ethics. But the demand to believe in Jesus' Person first, and in his Ethics only secondarily, shouted out the original lustre. Duty was reduced to belief in Jesus' authority. Dogma asked Reason not to judge, but to remain silent and listen.

When Christendom became an enforced Dogma of canned Ethics, it became a self contradiction. An Ethic not rooted in freedom is a fraud.

Where did this authoritarianism come from?

One answer suggests itself immediately. Those who twisted the Gospel's original message of pure Ethics were those who had a vested interest in Authoritarianism, the holders of State power.

THE STATE

The Gospel portrays a Jesus who used the Hebrew idea of the Messiah to reach his audience, but who changed the meaning of that office. Instead of a warrior Son of David, the Gospel tells of a peaceful Son of Man who taught universal morality for all nations.

The Gospel presents this as his undoing. Nationalist interests would not hear of the universal morality heresy. Universalism is treason, they charged. The Gospel portrays Jesus as having to defend his actions often, and he tried to keep his wider mission as secret as possible. We're told of his arrest for heresy and treason, for coming into conflict with the State.

Now, anyone who knows Hegel knows he isn't a fierce critic of the State. He is conservative on that score. But he does show strong feelings against mixing Church and State.

I can belong to MENSAs and still be a full member of my State. But if I belong to a religious sect, I voluntarily restrict my membership in the State because of sectarian loyalties. This helps us define a sect. A sect is a smaller, more intolerant group nestled inside a larger, more tolerant group.

But if a religious sect grows to become a majority, then a struggle ensues between State Law and sectarian Law. When this happened in Constantine's Rome, the Christian Church won the struggle and became the State.

Perhaps this is the time when Christianity was first corrupted with authoritarianism.

(It's tempting to accuse Hegel's critique of the Roman Church-State of mere Protestant sectarianism. In fact, Protestant Church-States have been just as guilty of authoritarianism as ancient Rome ever was. The core of truth in Hegel's narrative is that since the Catholic was the first Christian Church-State, we who look for the origins of Christian authoritarianism have

an obligation to look here first.)

When Christianity became the State, the cold, public community of the State diluted the warm, separatist community of the sect. The State quickly abandoned the original Christian tradition of communal social organization, where elders administered all the community's goods. Weekly contributions and the continuing support of monasteries replaced the early communes. The State then abandoned the early practice of Christian equality. Equality became real only in God's eyes, and only in heaven. Phony public rituals, like washing the feet of the poor in public, replaced the original equality.

Did the State have an interest in modifying other original Christian practices?

The Gospel portrays Jesus' last moments on Earth at a table, eating a nourishing meal with his friends, conversing about Fate, Attitude, Duty and Courage, and how these may lead to Love of Humanity. It was pleasant, so Jesus asked his friends to remember him at similar mealtimes.

Was this ordinary supper transformed into a sacrificial cult by the Roman establishment, as an attempt to replace the Jewish and Roman sacrificial cults? After the Church-State dismissed common property and equality, were simple supper gatherings also replaced by a mandatory public ritual?

Were Jesus' original disciples really passive and unreflecting? Did they really seek to mimic Jesus' example, with no thought of their own? Did they really sacrifice all for Jesus' mission? Did they really go out for missions so short they had time only for the most authoritarian appeals?

Or were the simple, Ethical teachings of the Gospel altered over time, making passivity the highest virtue? Rather than Love and Tolerance, the authoritarians seem to have made professed belief and baptism into the sole marks of the Christian.

If the authoritarian State is to blame for making the originally Ethical system of the Gospel into an authoritarian tool, how did this happen? How were they able to do so?

CHRISTIANITY: HEBREW OR ROMAN?

One of the most fascinating spectacles of Western History is the mass conversion of the Roman Empire from ancient paganism to Christian Religion, by way of ordinances from the Emperor.

Scholars do not agree on all the details of this phenomenon of history.

Some scholars, including Hegel, Bauer and many others ancient and modern, explain it by saying that the change was not as great as we may first think. The essential core of Christian imagery is Greek and Roman, not Jewish, they say, so the conversion was not so radical.

Of course, this is what Hebrew leaders have said from the beginning, which is why they rejected Christianity as an evident pagan dilution of their original faith. Jesus' anti-legalism, his anti-Mosaicism, was their evidence.

Not that Hegel and Bauer agreed with the Hebrews on all matters. On the contrary. They still rejected Judaism, but they went even farther than the original Christians by not only rejecting Judaism, but by cutting even more ties between Christianity and Judaism.

There is substantial material available to show how Christianity is less a form of Judaism and more a form of Greco-Romanism. For centuries Protestants accused Catholics of absorbing and retaining too much paganism in their religion. More exclusive Protestant sects also criticize the older Protestant sects for retaining too much alleged pagan Catholicism in their religion.

Scholarship which shows how modern Christian theology links up with the old paganism (cf, John Hyslop's THE TWO BABYLONS), is a two edged sword. One may use it to show how much paganism remains within the most refined Christianity.

For Hegel, a Hellenophile who loved the Classical Greek civilization, this wasn't shocking, it was exciting.

THE LOVABLE PAGAN

Hegel, in preferring Hellenism to later European culture, found himself preferring some pagans to some Christians in many ways.

In his mind, the parts of Christianity which are most important are those parts which are Platonic, Hellenic, philosophical and rooted in Ethics. Hegel saw Jesus as the Socrates of the masses. Those Scriptures which were superfluous, perhaps supra-added over time, were those which struggle to reconcile Jesus with the same Mosaic Law which condemned his neo-paganism.

Hegel sympathized with pagans. He praised their relative tolerance of foreign religions. He sympathized with their pain when Hebrews and Christians mocked their ancient religion. He admired their fierce patriotism, their blunt honesty, their rugged fearlessness and especially their love of freedom for those willing to fight for it.

Hegel admired how the holidays of pagans were emotional events, celebrated with great abandon and uncommon revelry. Pagans knew how to have a rip-roaring good time. They celebrated their religion in all aspects of their home and state. Theirs was a happy religion.

Pagans had great intellectuals like Plato, Aristotle and Marcus Arelius. They had great leaders, free states, great art and great moral courage. We still imitate their Senate, their Olympics, their military and legal systems. For the Hellenophile, Athens and Rome are like an Atlantis, whose many virtues are so grand they seem to belong to an alien species.

Hegel appreciated that pagans didn't demand that their gods be perfect moral examples. Morality was just freedom, and freedom was everywhere. They even enjoyed comedies about the gods. What they wanted from the gods was Beauty, Drama, Art and Fate.

The pagan was neither passive nor zealous, neither pious nor sinner. The pagan didn't use history to prove his religion. The final authority of religious truth, for pagans, was the human heart.

Every aspect of the life of Greece and Rome interweaved Pagan mythology in its bosom. It was at home, at school, in the theater, in the Senate, in the battlefield and in the public square.

How then did paganism fall to Christianity? It did not fall peacefully, and the commoners in the countryside persecuted the Christians more than any Emperor. Emperors even denounced the spontaneous persecution of Christians, as in Lyons. In fact, the so-called monster, Emperor Domitian, while he reinforced some anti-Christian legislation, was himself married to a Christian, and had a Christian daughter.

Yet, in the span of twenty years, after the Emperor's decree, the masses of pagan society converted to Christianity and forgot all about their old ways.

THE RISE OF CHRISTIANITY

Could Christianity have overwhelmed the Roman Empire if it was not psychologically superior to paganism? Was this not a proof of Divine forces behind Christianity?

Hegel believes otherwise. In his view, Rome fell to Christianity by way of the Emperor's bureaucracy.

Rome developed the most massive, most efficient Bureaucracy of the time. It was enormous, and although it suffered from the same abuses which plague every bureaucracy, it served to manage the affairs of the ancient world's largest army, largest highway system, largest economy, largest welfare system, all on an international scale.

It worked well, but no single person knew exactly how it all worked. So the authorities were very reluctant to tamper with it. It became sacrosanct. Critics of the State were dealt with severely, perhaps justifiably, since this State was the most productive and humane state ever developed in the ancient world. It served the greatest good for the greatest number, and to denounce it was to attack the good of all.

Unfortunately, the price paid for the bureaucracy was mass passivity. The bureaucracy was as impersonal as it was efficient. No individual could ever have more value than the State machine. The Emperor was the personal representation of the Bureaucracy, and so he assumed all value, but only by proxy.

The individual lost value, and could never compare well with the power of organized groups like the bureaucracy. Heroes no longer looked so heroic. Compared with the benefits which the Emperor's State could now grant, the individual had little to offer besides doing his or her little job as a tiny cog in a huge wheel.

A slave no longer looked up to his master as a hero. There were no more heroes. Those slaves who were better educated than their warrior masters now had fewer reasons to admire them. Class tensions arose.

The individual became a property-acquisition-unit. The State's relation to this unit was the role of property-protection-unit. Long before our society of money-based relationships, impersonalism and alienation had already reached new heights under the Roman bureaucracy.

The gods of joy were useless in this new realm. Only a god who was remote, untouchable, totally serious and solemn, who held all good while people were all worthless, and who graced people arbitrarily, by his undeserved kindness, bore any relation to this new reality.

The devaluation of individual action seemed to prove that human nature was worthless and corrupt. Only by attaching to something larger than itself, like the State bureaucracy, could the individual find any value for his or her actions.

The pagan gods only ruled nature. Now, with the doctrines of individual worthlessness, anti-heroism and human corruption, the god which fit the spirit of this time would demand to rule the individual will as well. The right

theology appeared at the right time. Christianity began to spread.

The poverty of impersonalism was felt as a crisis which only a serious God could resolve. Once people accepted that, the Second Coming became the focus of every wild and futile hope. The free morality of the past was gone, and Christians promised to restore morality. The masses flocked to it, and the old paganism was abandoned en masse.

The Emperor would learn to appreciate that Christians placed all desire for social change in God's hands, that they resigned to wait passively for centuries. Perhaps this was not such a bad development after all, he mused.

Constantine proclaimed the official Christianity of the Roman State. It seemed to fit like a glove. The Roman Empire quickly adapted.

When the State entered this arena, the aristocracy created a hierarchy of privileged Christians above the masses, the hierarchy of priests and pontiffs. Perhaps this is the source of authoritarian Christianity. The class of privileged Christians fit in snugly with the wheel of State. All the ills that attend State power, like ambition, greed and envy, replaced the original Ethics of the originator of the movement.

Roman literature became dominated by theological themes. But instead of love, tolerance and reconciliation, dogma and doctrine became the obsession of the Roman legal system. Heresies became the most important political issues of the day, and massacres resulted from differences of theological opinion.

THE STATE WITH NO FREEDOM

The Church-State is a state with no freedoms. In a state with no freedoms, citizens live without souls. This is because freedom is the very condition, the very definition of the human soul.

In such a state, total sacrifice seemed like a little sacrifice since the citizen had little to lose, anyway. Martyrdom seemed a reasonable career, since life without freedom is a kind of martyrdom.

For those without souls, the image of the crucified Jesus has its own value as a cathartic image.

The masses were never well educated in the ancient world. But now even the educated were falling from the Hellenic ideals of Reason and Liberality. Belief in miracles replaced Reason. Convictions replaced decisions.

THE ROMAN CHURCH ADOPTS THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Gospel portrays Jesus as a Jewish critic of Jewish society. But the Christian religion which adores him is largely Roman. This Roman religion sought somehow to appropriate the Jewish Old Testament for its own purposes. Why?

As noted above, Hegel sees Christianity as a religion developed from the path of Greco-Roman civilization. Not only the pagan influences (which the Hebrews noted), but its later support of sculpture (which Hebrews avoided, since it reminded them of graven images), finer paintings, finer architecture, finer music, drama, tragedy, and finer literature--these were the beautiful hallmarks of Catholic Christianity. In Hegel's theory of Art, Christian Art was only an extension of Greco-Roman Art. This was evidence of its deepest roots.

Why bother, then, incorporating the Hebrew Testament into the Roman Catholic Bible? Hegel avoided this question. He didn't spend much time with the Old Testament. It seemed to him to be completely overshadowed in spirit and in substance by the New Testament. It was completely fulfilled, so he saw no point going back to it for anything. He thought Matthew's Gospel was beating a dead horse in trying to justify Jesus' career by repeating, "In order to fulfill the Scripture..."

I think it's worthwhile to explain why Rome decided to make the Hebrew Testament into part of its own State Religion. I have my own theory which I'd like to share with you. It focuses again on the State.

Rome was not the first Imperial World Power. It took that power from Greece. But Greece was not the first Imperial Power, either. Greece took it from Persia. Persia had taken it from Babylon, Babylon took it from Assyria and Assyria had taken it from Egypt. Egypt, as archeologists have shown us in our own generation, inherited much from Sumer, which was not Imperial, but was the first culture to develop an advanced system of city-states more than 6,000 years ago near Babylon. Imperialism doesn't begin with Rome, but was very well developed when Rome took it over.

The Hebrews, the Bible says, came into conflict with every single Imperial Power from Egypt through Rome. This is because its location was exactly in the center between Egypt, Arabia, Mesopotamia and Asia Minor, and tended to be in the way of the larger nations as they fought for world control. Although the Hebrews had a tiny state, it was at the crossroads of all civilization. In its relations with all the world powers of History, the Hebrews kept a diary, a library of books we call the Bible. Of course, all diaries are biased. But the Hebrew Testament is a remarkable record of the past, and is perhaps the most valuable of all archeological materials.

Modern scholarship suggests that many parts of its Bible are taken directly from the archives of these Imperial Nations.

Some experts say some Psalms are taken from Pharaoh Ikhnoton. Some say Moses borrowed much from "all the wisdom of the Egyptians." Some say the first chapters of Genesis are taken from Sumerian and Babylonian archives, and its later chapters from Arabian traditions. Some say the books of the prophets are different in content from Moses' books, not because of new revelations, but because the Assyrians and Babylonians had a profound influence on the prophets.

The Persians, the Hebrews' only Imperial friends, relayed much of their culture to the Hebrews when they rebuilt the Hebrew Temple. The proof is that the Persian doctrines of angels, the End of Time and the Resurrection, were taken up by the Hebrew Pharisees after this period.

Hellenist influence on later Hebrew works is well known.

My point is that the Old Testament is a testament to all the Imperial World Powers. It's an eye-witness diary of World Power. It makes sense that the latest Imperial Power, Rome, would not only demand it for its Imperial Library, but would seek to transform it into its own possession by a religious explanation. The New Testament provided this transformation for Rome.

The Hebrew Testament is a truly priceless Imperial history. It unconsciously catalogues the transition of power from the ancient Semitic Empires of Assyria and Babylon to the younger Indo-European Empires of Persia and Greece. This is one reason Rome had to appropriate the Hebrew Testament. It was valuable as a common Imperial archive, though compiled and edited by an articulate nation

which never realized its own Imperial calling.

I think my interpretation supports the Hegelian claim that Christianity is a Greco-Roman religious development, modified by the need to dip into international Imperial history to give its own status legitimacy.

Rome was an Imperial nation above and inclusive of all other nations. It was important that Roman religion be the same. The teachings of the Ethical Gospel were simply so much more grist for its mill. The Imperial State Church included all these elements. If Hegel is right, we may reasonably lay the blame for the authoritarian element in Christianity at the feet of the Holy Roman Empire.

THE ROTTEN FRUIT OF STATE RELIGION

The problems of Christendom are a splendid example of why a State should never become a Church nor a Church a State.

Morals, ideally, are the domain of an Ethical community. Law enforcement, ideally, is the realm of the State. When these become confused, chaos results. Force is the great possession of the State. Love is the great possession of an Ethical community. Conformity is the song of the State. Freedom is the song of a choir of free, Ethical people.

The State should stay out of the business of monitoring morality. No society can afford the number of police officers that would require, nor the bother that would entail.

The State should be able to tax me to contribute to a legal Fund for the Poor, but should not be able to spy on me to prevent me from encouraging panhandlers. Nor does a panhandler, who is the State's problem, have a right to ask me directly for money. If I give him anything, it's a completely free moral decision I make with my own inner counsel.

The State does have an interest in the honesty and integrity of its citizens, with an eye to good business practices in its jurisdiction. But how can it guarantee high morality when it barely collects enough taxes to ensure a minimum of crime-stopping? Traditionally the State goes to the local Church for moral support, tacitly admitting that morality is outside its natural scope.

Unfortunately, when Church and State sleep together, the resulting system of Ethics isn't a self-evident system of axioms for living in society, but a strange brew of Doctrines one would never guess on one's own. Only indoctrination can relay them. Duty is that which is pleasing to God, but the authoritarian Church-State reserves the exclusive right to define God's pleasure.

The Roman Church State developed an embarrassing neighborhood-watch morality. One's neighbors spied upon by every petty, arbitrary choice. The State, via the Church, snooped into every private thought, every emotion, every glance, every friendship and social contact.

No amount of prostration was ever enough. If I confessed my sins and worthlessness daily, it profited me nothing at all. No amount of inhibition sufficed. The Pharisees only told people what to do. The Roman Church State also told people how to feel.

In defense, millions retreated into hypocrisy and phoniness. Unworthy people posed as true believers, and freely moved within the Church-State as long as

they followed all the rules on how to act and appear to feel. No wonder so many Christian holidays are hollow, spiritless and void of true feelings. The work-place is happily free from such asceticism. If secular morality catches on, we can hope for a diminishing of this kind of hypocrisy.

The Church-State has given us mass phoniness, mass self-deception, mass false security, and eventually promises to bring us mass disillusion, disorientation and lonely frustration. The State can never produce anything except legalism. At its worst it may cow people into lying and hypocrisy. When Christianity took over the Roman State, it itself was sadly reduced to this legalism.

THE JOY OF SECTS

The most intelligent Christians attacked this legalism, not with philosophy, but by making a radical breach in the State. They created splinter groups, smaller sects which could practice the ideals of the earliest Christian communes, where equality and morality had some meaning and tangible application.

People have an uncanny intuition that they must have the right to determine their own morality.

As these sects grew to enormous sizes, their leaders grew into new authorities. The three great schismatic sects began along national boundaries. Luther's German sect, Henry VIII's Anglican sect, and Calvin's Swiss sect, all began as moral protests to Rome's State Church, but soon became State Churches themselves, with all the dogmatic and legalistic problems of Rome. So, new sects, in rebellion against State encroachment upon morals, sprouted up again. And so it goes.

I think sects are good. They keep the big bully Churches from taking too much political power. They are a controlling, limiting factor in the politics of religion. We should allow them, even encourage them, to flourish.

I mock the folly of the USSR which spent good tax dollars to dissuade people from being religious. First, stomping on one religion usually serves only to make other religions stronger. Second, stomping on all religions is useless, since most people see their religions as the home of their morality, the most valuable thing in life to them. Religion bashing only makes martyrs.

I'm astonished once again at the brilliant wisdom of the Founding Fathers of the US Constitution. By granting to all citizens a carte blanche freedom of religion, they ensured that religious sectarianism would forever keep itself in check, that religion might never overtake the State, and that the State would more often keep its nose out of private morality.

CONCLUSION

The Gospel portrays Jesus as one who wished to inspire us to a free morality which arises from within our own hearts, rather than from the Law. Observance of the Law isn't nearly enough to constitute morality and Ethics. He wished people to be free from authoritarianism, legalism, to act in goodness freely, without force or obligation. This is Ethical religion. For Hegel, this is the only true religion.

This is the heart of the debate between the Left and Right Hegelians, the debate which ruined the prospects of Hegelian philosophy for 150 years.

We must make a choice. If we believe that the essence of Christianity is pure Ethical philosophy, then we can say Hegel was an orthodox Christian. But we

can't say he was authoritarian.

On the other hand, if we believe that the essence of Christianity is a mystery which we should not argue about, but faithfully believe on the authority of Church-State, then we can say Hegel was an atheist. But we can't say he was unethical.

I'd like to propose an answer to the question of the Left and Right Hegelians. Hegel's position is not ambiguous. The debate arises from differing opinions about how to define Christianity itself.

Hegel was one of the first great liberal believers. These liberal believers rationalize so much Scripture that no fundamentalist doctrines are left. The reason the Hegelian School split into Left and Right is because of a confusion in the theology department. This made the issue political, and the politics of that era confused everything for more than a century.

The great theological debate was taken up by Hegel's most brilliant pupil, Bruno Bauer (1809-1882), theologian, ex-theologian, and Nietzsche's elder confidante. Leader of both Right and Left Hegelians when he bothered to belong to either, Bauer gave the world the most controversial pronouncements about Christianity ever written. His important works are available only in German. Albert Schweitzer's summaries of his books are the English reader's primary peek into his creative mind.

I tend to agree with Hegel. Religion should be a celebration of pure Ethical freedom. If it isn't that, then perhaps we're better off as atheists, since in a state of authoritarian religion, only dissenters are free.

There is nothing authoritarian in Hegel's philosophy. The Absolute Idea is a flexible, bending, compromising and all-inclusive idea. It isn't based on Hegel's authority, still less is it based on the authority of the Laws of Identity and Contradiction.

Dialectics, we may find, is the greater Logic of synthesis and reconciliation, and complements a complete philosophy of Ethics.

Paul E. Trejo

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