

**Hegel and the Metaphysical Frontiers of Political Theory. By Eric Lee Goodfield (Routledge Taylor & Francis Group London and New York 2014) ix + 251pp.**

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Hegel is perhaps the most remarkable of all philosophers, at least for some people. Yet Richard Bernstein wrote in 1977: "If there is one philosopher who had been thought to be dead and buried, who embodied all the vices of the wrong way of philosophizing, who seemed to have been killed off by abuse and ridicule, it was Hegel." (quoted 81). At the beginning of his dense, rich book Eric Lee Goodfield asserts that:

"Ludwig Feuerbach's intolerance of Hegel's metaphysics of the absolute, as presented primarily in his (Hegel's) two volumes on logic, is intensive and thoroughgoing. From his (Feuerbach's) critical vantage point, Hegel's idea of history and its unfolding of a master narrative takes up and subsumes all human thought, feeling and purpose. In so doing, Feuerbach held that Hegel derided the very essence of what it is to be human, taking what is most substantial out of the developmental history of the subjectivity he wishes to defend." (11)

I was surprised at first in reading this book by Goodfield's use of words like "doing violence", "assault", or "destroy", when "criticize", "falsify", or "disagree with" might be perfectly sufficient in discussing philosophical debates. Perhaps however that reflects the intensity of philosophical argument in mid-nineteenth century Germany. As Marx claimed, to paraphrase him, what the British and the French had done in practice the Germans did in thought. There is an extraordinary ferocity within much German philosophical criticism in the nineteenth century, which suggests it was all deeply connected with real social, cultural, emotional-psychological and political currents. There is a disturbance and excitement of the soul. (Even in 1962 the German scholar Carl Joachim Friedrich wrote that Hegel's logical thought was a "relentless trouble-making".) Yet the vehemence declined only slightly, in respect of Hegel "criticism", when it later passed into the Anglo-American academic world.

The claim of Feuerbach and others, that Hegel could not encompass "lived experience" (whatever that was supposed to mean) nor "empirical reality" (whatever that too was believed to mean), is at the heart of most subsequent rejections of Hegel, but not completely in the case of Marx's critique, as we shall see.

There could surely be little more naïve or simplistic than W.V. Quine's assertion of 1954 that "We cannot significantly question the reality of the external world, or deny that there is evidence of external objects in the testimony of our senses." But the point is surely: what *is* this reality, *how* do we know it, what relationship exists between our "senses" and "reality", how does our "knowledge" change over time, and so on. These are issues Hegel tried to address. Anglo-American "empiricism" and "positivism" simply eliminated philosophy and asserted a pseudo-scientific "common sense" knowledge of "reality", always to be understood according to simple, timeless "hypothetico-deductive" searches for causal relations between "objects" or "facts" without any thought about how, if at all, the latter split up within the structures and moving processes in which they subsist. A central point in this book is that these "positivist boundaries and prejudices of the fledgling discipline of American political science" are connected to the assaults on Hegel made by Quine, Moore, and Bertrand Russell. With respect to G.E. Moore, Goodfield says: "In the face of the assumption of the idealistic metaphysic as Moore has presented it (in his *Refutation of Idealism* of 1902, although Moore afterwards said this article was confused and mistaken), a vast gap between it and our ordinary and commonsensical view of the world

is made apparent. This commonsensical view Moore himself held as a standard which needs no further foundation or ground. In essence it grounds itself in perceptual immediacy as the givenness of experience universally, i.e. in the "natural" way humans experience and think about the world.... Only with idealistic thought does the question of mind, spirit or consciousness arise and it is here alone that spirit is made attributable."(32) This is what Wilfred Sellar called the "myth of the given."(45)

One wonders what Moore would have thought, or did in fact later think, about Einstein's Relativity or Quantum Physics! Obviously he was completely ignorant of the findings of anthropology or the historical sociology of thought and knowledge. Most facile of all was Moore's "comprehensive refutation of hitherto existing idealisms.... by reducing idealism to a primary proposition: to be is to be consciously experienced or perceived."(34) Moore's critique of Hegel backed him "into the corner of a naïve realism where mind becomes passive agent for the perception of mind independent objects. Such a version of consciousness as Moore's was already problematized in Kant's analysis of the necessary cognitive conditions of knowledge.... The rejection of the unity of perceiver and perceived... inevitably lapses into the sceptical problem of perception as elaborated by Hume which had originally inspired Kant's Copernican idealist turn." Moore completely misrepresented Hegel's "notion of transformation which allows the parts to participate and merge into a new unity or be released from one. For Hegel the logical analysis that Moore participates in is itself part and parcel of an evolution of thought which is bound towards a reconciliation of subject and object, perceiver and perceived."(37)

According to Feuerbach, Hegel wanted to claim the "Idea" as the primary entity, the truth behind reality(13). But then Feuerbach simply inverted this relation, placing "being" as the determinant of consciousness, the "Idea". Marx took this up but wanted to make "being" historical, as "social being", which meant real people in real societies continuously changing themselves, their social relations, their consciousness and their relationships with nature, none of which are eternally fixed entities. (Here, from one point of view, was the birth of modern sociology.) The problem for Marx with Feuerbach's critique of Hegel was that it placed "being" as a fixed, static "nature" to be the determinant of human thought and activity. For Hegel, although he conceived of "thought" (the "Absolute") as the underlying reality of nature and society, at least he understood that all things were historical, dynamic and interactional, i.e. in processes of dialectical change and flux through contradictions; so that in this respect Hegel was superior to Feuerbach according to Marx. Thus were born "historical" and "dialectical" materialism, terms coined by Engels, not Marx himself, though in accord with Marx's philosophical innovations.

Some readers might be disappointed that Goodfield does not discuss Marx's distinct "inversion" of Hegel more, through which Marx felt he had discovered Hegel's "rational kernel". But although Goodfield recognizes the enormous historical-political importance of that philosophical move he does not pursue it, as he takes things in a different direction, which we therefore follow in this review.

Instead we are taken through Moore's "pseudo-critique" of Hegel, then Anglophone positivism, and then behaviourism and American political science. Thus "the likes of Moore and Russell and their empirical rebellion against Hegelian speculation.... would recirculate in later critiques (by)...Catlin and Easton in the twentieth century. For these empirically oriented political scientists, political theory remained mired in a subjectivism, historicism and idealism.... traceable to Hegel."(48) The "scientific method" that came to dominate these disciplines came not from within them, but largely from critiques not actually of Hegel, but of what Goodfield describes as "straw men" like Bradley and McTaggart. (Yet Goodfield shows that such "positivistic" dogmas in American political science long outlived their importance within other disciplines).

Rather quaintly, the scientization of political science became intimately bound up with a liberal-democratic agenda that would immunize it against authoritarian or illiberal uses. Goodfield points out the irony inherent in Charles Merriam's notion that scientific inquiry and control may be "susceptible to human adaptation and reorganization"(quoted 51), not recognizing the authoritarianism implied. "The scientific turn in American politics during the interwar years was implicitly a means of protecting the democratic masses from themselves through the advent of a strict regimen of scientific research and control."(51) Thus science was to be a neutral tool in the hands of a beneficent liberal democratic state. Modernity required new techniques of political inquiry and control and the sciences formed an essential basis for progress. Yet at the same time the science of politics was no mere neutral or academic observatory of human action.

George Catlin was a colleague of Merriam. Writing in 1927, he "took aim at a corner-stone of the nineteenth-century humanities: the widely held view that natural rules of mechanical causality do not apply to the spiritualized and intentional realms of society and history."(54) Rather, a scientific view of "the method of the natural sciences" was to be the basis of political science. By the time David Easton was writing in the 1950s, the target was also "political theory, (which) would have to convert itself to an empirical orientation or see itself dismissed from the discipline as both untheoretical and unscientific."(56) "The latter project's own metaphysical assumptions (are that) existence is synonymous with the sensorially observable, (yet contradictorally) to the end of a "political synthesis or image of a good political life.""(57-8)

There is a similarity in this thinking to Emile Durkheim's conception of a causal, "objective" empirical scientific sociology that yields results which could aid social reform; but Durkheim is not mentioned in the book. Nor is Max Weber, yet the point made above concerning Catlin's rejection of non-mechanical interpretation in the social sciences, might have been well balanced by a reference to Weber's idea of welding interpretations in sociology at the level of meaning in human actions with explanations through adequate causality. Of course the book is about political, not sociological theory, but on the level at which Goodfield is considering issues, the two might seem to be very much entwined.

Much of the book's argument is summarized in the following: "...many of Hegel's Anglophone commentators since Moore and James carried out largely one-sided and myopic readings of Hegel, finding his political thought anathema, his moral foundations wanting and his philosophical views nonsensical. This whole line of Hegel bashing would find its apotheosis, of course, in Karl Popper's anti-Hegel response to Nazi expansionism."(78) And, "Hegel's anti-positivist vision of individual and collective life has been plagued by a *perceived* association with multiple wars, genocide, anti-scientific and mystical obscurantism, reactionary romanticism and all manner of violence justified in the name of the collective good."(84) Such philosophically mediocre thinking, sometimes also rather deficient in honesty as well as being in a ranting tone (Walter Kaufman stated in 1951 that Popper's "method is unfortunately similar to that of totalitarian 'scholars'"), could also be implicated in discussions of earlier Prussian authoritarian statism and militarism (Hobhouse attributed "the bombing of London" during World War 1 to Hegel's "false and wicked doctrine"), as well as of Stalin's Soviet Union, which would then be taken to represent "socialism" as such. This was now Cold War ideology. An interesting spin-off from this has been the many attempts that Goodfield discusses to separate Hegel's logic and metaphysics from his political theory, to make him appear a "liberal, rational, and mainstream political thinker" and bury the metaphysics that have come to "seem dark, dangerous, and distant in light of our liberal-democratic and empirical commitments" due to "a host of under- and unexamined prejudices...which, directly and indirectly, impugn his metaphysics."(84-5)

A major example of such misrepresentations is ably discussed with respect to Popper's claim that for Hegel "everything that is reasonable must be real, and everything that is real must be reasonable." (quoted 79) But Goodfield explains that on the contrary, "Hegel's end of history is the realization of the ongoing and underlying plan of rationality as an expression of the spirit – a vision of the living and progressive growth of human historical thought and idea towards ideal fulfilment... The Prussian state from this point of view is as much a rational apotheosis in its time as was the Greek democratic state in its own, and both... are bound to be swept away for the ephemeral instantiations of the rational ideal they are. As M.W. Jackson has brought out, "No political theorist has suffered more distortion because of a single sentence than Hegel." (84)

Goodfield writes that for Hegel "action participates in its own dialectical chain driving it towards greater rationality. Far from interfering with political action, Hegel's metaphysics impute an ethical intentionality into rational agency... the dialectic is not merely an impersonal scheme of action for Hegel, but reflects will, agency and subjectivity... Hegel's logic of political action does not coerce agency to the metascript of a supra-personal metaphysical rationality... Far from a deterministic matrix of impersonal forces (there is) subjective contingency in Hegel's developmental appreciation of historical experience and action... the lattice of possibility bind(s) together the creative oppositions of the categories of thought. Hegel's philosophy of history may crystallize the past into a representative web of necessary outcomes... (but the future) has yet to crystallize itself through us... The idea of history in lived thought thus precedes the Idea of history as its resolute consummation." (89-90)

Hegel's "Idea" arises partly from his critique of Reformation Theology, as although Luther had wanted to temporalize man's "mediation" with God, and conceive it as developmental, Hegel felt Luther had not done this sufficiently thoroughly. For Hegel the whole process of "becoming" is an historical, complexly dynamic, self-creation. Human time is not repetitious or quantitative, nor external, but is rather the consequence of, is constituted by, conscious activity. Hegel seeks the possibility of qualitative history within the unity of Thought and Being. Consciousness is creative rather than repetitive.

If Hegel's overall philosophy embraced an unfolding Absolute Spirit within nature and human history, which should, or might lead to the Absolute becoming one with and understanding itself through human consciousness in an "*Aufhebung*" (transcendent leap beyond alienation), Karl Marx's conception of history was one of the self-growth of human potential, through increasingly conscious *praxis* – which might, could, or should attain a condition of unalienated social existence, metabolizing with nature in harmonious form, free now from socio-economic and other forms of exploitation and oppression (and with increasing philosophical-scientific understanding of nature, especially in Engels' formulations). The attempts of Pelczynski, Knox and others to break and wrench Hegel's political ideas out from his vast metaphysical vision, which was intrinsically against positivistic, empiricist separations of scientific disciplines that strain to understand disparate particularities alienated from Truth as a whole, hold a strong similarity with the attempts of Louis Althusser and Colletti to separate Marx's "early", "philosophical", "humanistic" writing from his "later", "economic", "scientific" work. Both of the latter theorists wanted in particular to expunge Hegel from Marx's "mature" work, though in different ways. Of course in neither the case of Hegel nor Marx does this kind of operation work. In both Hegel and Marx there is a unitary, though complex developmental process over their lifetimes, though of course there are important changes in emphasis and mindset, but not as if two different personalities operated inside each one's mind. (This is not to say that one is obliged to agree with the entirety of any thinker's worldview, but one should surely not refer to an Hegelian or Marxian viewpoint when what is being referred to is nothing of the kind. In the case of a "philosopher" like Nietzsche the case is perhaps different. As a thinker whose thoughts were sometimes quite deliberately fragmentary, conflictive, and incompatible, his whole thrust is *not* to attempt an integral, totalizing, coherent philosophy).

As Goodfield says, “to sacrifice the tissue of Hegel’s metaphysics in order to salvage the bone of his “practical” political thought” results in a “diremption” to use Hegel’s own term, in which process we “witness one era peeling away unattractive and alien elements in a philosopher which it must, nonetheless, rehabilitate and ultimately, assimilate.”(84-5) Thus politics is rooted in the same dilemmas of thought – such as the awareness of the divergence of appearance and reality – as are science, epistemology, or any other intellectual undertaking. This realization cannot be simply abandoned: “Hegel’s interest in the practical implications of the resolution of the problems of philosophy was taken up as a prelude to his intent to return to the world of common sense in the wake of the deeper awareness of the shifting ontological sands upon which all seeming and appearance depends... Primary impressions... do not do justice either to the phenomenal aspect of the impression on the one side, nor to the intent for comprehension on the other.”(109) Later Goodfield writes: “The problem of universals is thus not merely an abstract metaphysical problem (for Hegel).... it is also at the very heart of the intellectual engine which generates his dynamic of self and other relating through ideas. In other words, the problem is not merely metaphysical, but social, psychological and linguistic as well, and, by extension, inevitably political.”(127)

Hegel holds much in common with Plato, in whose conception of the polis truth “as the fulfilment of the whole is attained in the proper working out and fruition of the individual parts in coordination with the universal.” (128) Similarly “all individuals... are made rational in their awareness of a like completed universality in the laws of one’s nation”.(130) Dialectics and logic for Hegel are “the very working of life and of all change”(129), and are present throughout the entire universe as they are in all human thought and in every human individual. The logic of the human mind is in some way part of the logic of the Universe, thus allowing, in the overall long run, an increasingly approximate human understanding of “reality”. Ontology and epistemology are integrally and dialectically interrelated in Hegel, as they are also, but in subtly different ways, in Marx, as well as in so much of post-Relativity and post-Quantum physics.

Eric Goodfield’s book is not so much about Hegel’s actual political theory in itself, although there is a good deal that the author does say about it, as about how it has been misunderstood, even abused in ways that have especially in the twentieth century been “political” in the bad sense, that is, falsely bandied about for ideological purposes rather than for any genuine wish to derive from Hegel what he was actually dedicated to say. The book is less orientated to the vindication of either Hegel’s grand metaphysical system or his insights into political theory, although it is very illuminating on both these last fronts, as to show the extraordinary vicissitudes that the ideas of this most important philosopher have undergone. The last chapter of the book is prefaced by a quotation from the American philosopher C.P. Pierce:

“Find a scientific man who proposes to get along without metaphysics.... and you have found one whose doctrines are thoroughly vitiated by the crude and uncriticised metaphysics with which they are packed. A man may say “I will content myself with common sense”. I, for one am with him there, in the main.... But the difficulty is to determine what really is and what is not the authoritative decision of common sense and what is merely *obiter dictum*. In short, there is no escape from the need of a critical examination of “first principles.”(quoted 221)

For Hegel the “ideal circuit of philosophy lends the various branches of philosophy their truth value or content in view of their organic relation to reflection of the greater unity. Philosophy as a whole itself then is just this system of integrated universals in a single science and its primary condition. Parts are only true in terms of their being integrated and non-isolated wholes themselves, that is they too must possess their own universality.”(123)

Hegel's "political theory" does involve an interesting "political sociology" of his contemporary Germany (concerning the state, civil society, the agricultural class, the business class, and the "universal" bureaucrats of the state); but much more important, surely, is his theoretical, totalizing philosophy (his "metaphysics" of contradictory, dynamic, integrated wholes, in which all levels and elements are engaged in infinitely complex interactions), within which all branches of knowledge, and all reality, find their place. This involves what the Marxist philosophical sociologist and literary critic Georg Lukács called "organic totalities", a concept which he considered essential in the carrying over from Hegel into Marx. Such thinking is also a precursor to various modern currents of thought, from systems theory to complexity theory, from bootstrap philosophy to the philosophies of science of David Bohm, Fritjof Capra, or Rupert Sheldrake. How much Hegel opened the door for the developmental sciences of geology and evolutionary biology in the nineteenth century is a matter for conjecture, but his ideas certainly favoured their emergence.

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