COSMOLOGY without HEADACHES

(Lecture Series)

(compiling, transcribing, researching, editing always in progress)

LECTURE **XXV**: **Social Revolutions as Copernican Aftershocks (B):**

Historicism; Social Determinism; German Idealism and a Science of History

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel [1770-1831] and his co-editor for awhile of the *Critical Journal of Philosophy* Friedrich Wilhelm Josef Schelling [1775-1854] and the brilliant but disturbed romantic poet Johann Christian Friedrich Hölderlin [1770-1843] were roommates as young seminary students in the mid-1780s at Tübinger Stift, an evangelical Lutheran church in Wurttemberg. These three would produce extraordinary work, but it would be Hegel who would ultimately cast by far the longest shadow. All of them as boys were precocious beyond the doctrinal confines of religious teaching and managed to render eachother hopeless as candidates for any sort of Christian ministry. Instead they influenced one another toward the Romanticism of Goethe and Schiller and followed Kant onto the path of *German Idealism*, especially after exposure to the extreme view, beyond mere transcendentalism toward a sort of self-creationism, in the philosophy of Johann Gottlieb Fichte [1762-1814], under whom Schelling would study briefly after leaving the seminary. Fichte attempted to refute and exclude Kant's problematical 'thing-in-itself' idea, carrying this so far as to assert that "the knowing subject, or ego, is the cause of the external thing…" [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German idealism; p.3]. This is something we will hear echoing among modern quantists, seeming to some of them that observation by a perceiver is necessary for or actually causes existence of the object.

Another of his one-time former students said:

> …Fichte who, because the thing-in-itself had just been discredited [actually by Gottlob Ernst Schulze], at once prepared a system without any thing-in-itself. Consequently, he rejected the assumption of anything that was not through and through merely our representation, and therefore let the knowing subject be all in all or at any rate produce everything from its own resources. For this purpose, he at once did away with the essential and most meritorious part of the Kantian doctrine, the distinction between *a priori* and *a posteriori* and thus that between the phenomenon and the thing-in-itself. For he declared everything to be *a priori*, naturally without any proofs for such a monstrous assertion; instead of these he gave sophisms and even crazy sham demonstrations whose absurdity was concealed under the mask of profundity and of the incomprehensibility ostensibly arising therefrom. Moreover, he appealed boldly and openly to intellectual intuition, that is, really to inspiration.
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> [Schopenhauer, PARERGA AND PARALIPONENA, Vol. I, p.13;
> *found at* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German idealism; p.4]

By this time German Idealism was growing into a Christian religious substitute formed of Kantian or 'transcendental' idealism as a response to the nihilistic and atheistic tendency of English positivism (strict materialism). Most would not stretch as far as Fichte, instead seeing transcendent mind as World Spirit and identifying it with deity. The German idealist movement did have its own God-doubters who had connected with the pantheist (or perhaps atheist) cosmos of Spinoza—but usually in private.

Hegel, the most influential thinker of the German idealist school, had his own three-stage view of history, significantly different from preceding philosophers or the new French sociologists. His became more than merely a view based on a presumption of haphazard progress through some means of evolution. With him, the progress was *logically necessary*. At that time practically everything was being submitted to scientific examination, so Hegel sought a science of history, which he called (with a bow to Plato) the '*dialectic*'. The three stages or phases of his historical dialectic are *thesis, antithesis,* and *synthesis*. They were not really stages of history in the sense of 'ancient,' 'medieval', and 'modern', but a continuing interaction of prevailing ideas: something like what Thomas Kuhn refers to in his overview of the progress of science as 'paradigms' [THE STRUCTURE OF SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTIONS; Chicago, 1962], whereby scientific revolutions are seen as 'paradigm shifts'.

A discernable 'understanding' of reality or a 'notion' of society or traditional mythology concerning how the world works is always current in any established country or folk. To Hegel it represented their particular 'Spirit of the Age' (*Zeitgeist*). But all ideas have their opposites. That is a logical principle. In quantum mechanics even uncharged neutrons have their anti-neutrons (whatever 'anti-neutral' could mean). The dominant idea in a given era Hegel sees as its *thesis*. Its opposite immediately begins struggling against it, finding weaknesses (no idea is unassailable), exposing over time its contradictions and fallacies. This opposite idea is called *antithesis*. *Thesis* retaliates. Now we have what is essentially a war between ideas—which calls up a shouting match and may well extend to a physical conflict between their opposing human adherents, depending on the nature and importance and timing and/or the sacredness of these ideas.

The ensuing struggle, Hegel contends, refines the opposing concepts unto their utmost potential purity and the pressure builds, like the unrelenting interior pressure of the Sun on atoms of hydrogen or the 'irresistible force versus immovable object' scenario of Earth's tectonic plates, until the paradox is broken: the duel is overcome by unification. This is neither a compromise nor the yielding of one or the other contender, but a partial fusion into something new and unexpected; a new element or a new landscape, like the raising of a mountain range. The examples given are the *necessary* result of opposing physical forces according to laws of nature. Outcomes of causation in the material world are not necessarily advancements, of course. We could hardly label them progressive. But, for Hegel, in the noncorporeal world of mind or idea, the *meta*physical forces are rational, resulting in something benefitting from the best of both opposing ideas or paradigms while, presumably, rejecting or cancelling and scrapping the worst attributes. A new concept is thus born, necessarily an advance: a *synthesis* of opposites. He discovered a means of evolution in the world of ideas and so presents to us a *science of history*: history as process—now referred to as *historicism*.

Hegel's new philosophy of history grew mostly out of Kant through a deeper exploration of how the mind-world of pure and practical reason ('transcendental idealism') could affect the real world of matter. He was also motivated by ambition to pull the German confederacy into a national unit, thus to compete in the emerging 'great power' political world of prospering nation states like France and England (and, perhaps, to emulate in a way something like his political-philosopher hero of the past, Machiavelli, who had urged—unsuccessfully—the unification of Italy; maybe to be seen himself as the Machiavelli of Germany). A third impulse was his reaction against the individualist liberalism of England and the tragic aftermath of the French Revolution (the Reign of Terror, the rise of Napoleon, and the general European bloodbath in pursuit of a French Empire—and then, of all things, the restoration of the Bourbon throne—instead of establishing the promised *liberté, égalité, fraternité*).

Freedom itself had a somewhat different meaning in Hegel's Germany. There would be no German nation until Bismarck would pull it together in the 1870s under the aegis of Prussia. But Germans did have a long and storied almost-existence as a people, which they felt intuitively. With the rise of nationalism in Europe, the urge to German unity was growing. Their loose confederacy of principalities, however, begging comparison to the city-states of ancient Greece, could not seem to step beyond their long established independent customs to complete their nationhood. And why would princes, even of insignificant territories, willingly abdicate? This Greek socio-political concept, particularly as found in Plato, when mixed with their own heroic mythology became strongly influential in their evolving culture. You'll see it prominently displayed in the neo-classic power of the emerging architecture of the Third Reich.

Although deeply embedded in the folk, it was not a democratic or egalitarian spirit. Despite reverence for the philosophizing of Athens, it was the Spartan ideal that spoke more directly to Germans. Ruled always by kings or powerful nobles, their mythology, much of it carried out of Scandinavia by the expansion of the Goths, was that

of *eddas* and *sagas*: stories of Sigurd and Brynhild, Hogni & Gunnar; the *Nibelungenlied* with Odin and Loki, Thor and Frigga and Valhalla. It was about heroes and rulers, not workers and peasants. Wagner, later, may have combined and distorted the legends to fit the occasion of his music-dramas, but he did not invent them. In fact, part of the motivation behind his extraordinary plays was to promote the shared German historical experience for the same purpose as Hegel's: nationalization. So Germans, generally, did not tend naturally toward popular revolutions or demand recognition of natural rights. Freedom meant something quite different to them and equality was not high on their list of priorities. Nor did they base their notion of being free men on the mere pursuit of individual passions, as did the island English and the 'enlightened' French political philosophers. They did not consider the state to have been purposefully invented: an artifice erected simply to enforce the social contract; an agreement that somehow had been made to promote the satisfaction of personal desires; a social entity incredibly devised, deliberated, approved, and duly executed, as it were, by illiterate, cave dwelling, vermin infested proto-humans whose faculty of desire was pretty much limited to mating and getting the next meal.

Individual attitudes are at least partially conditioned by life-experience, of course, as social attitudes are affected by folk-experience. But Hegel was not much interested in the individual. He did not have an atomic view of society, but what might today be called a holistic view—a great social and historical being transcending the lives of men and expressing itself through the evolving customs and traditions and the ethics manifested by the group. The failure (or lack of sufficient interest) on the part of Rome to dominate Germans in antiquity; the extended experience of feudalism there through the Dark Ages; the ultimate submission to a somewhat distorted Catholicism; the particularly Lutheran character of their partial Protestant Reformation (while still tied politically to the very Catholic Holy Roman Empire); the formation of their confederation per the Peace of Westphalia—all these factors and more helped forge a unique German mentality: a spirit that was, by the early 19th century, generally more stoic than epicurean—not that it would be readily found in today's Germany. But that is a later story about the radical reform out of the defeat of Nazism and the total national submission; the closing of the wrong path taken by the 'Spirit of the (German) World'—a story beyond our present focus.

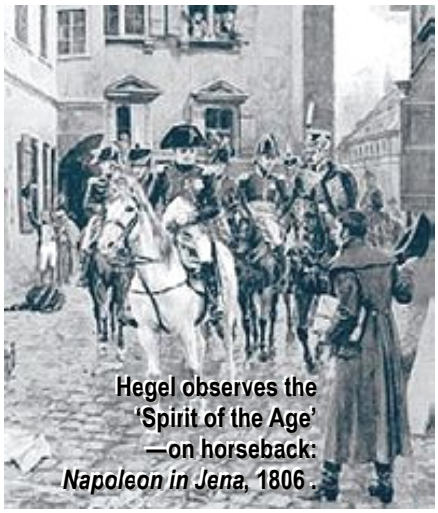
It was clear to Hegel and to Germans, generally, in the early 19th century, that the island nation of England was mastering industry and the sea, and that in France the earlier success at nationalizing by Richelieu had made possible the empire building of Napoleon to the embarrassment of the easily overwhelmed German military forces—not to mention those of Italy (also tardy in nation-building). He may have expected that the Hobbes and Locke device of natural rights was not likely to instigate a German revolt—nor was a violent revolution at all what he had in mind. France was giving a more than adequate display of the ineffectiveness of that madness. Instead he developed his concept of history as a process driven by reason, but not by the reason of individual philosophers who (until himself) had not understood the process—who failed even to understand that *history is a systematic process*.

The basic idea of gradual, biological change by evolution was a concept that long preceded Darwin. It was 'in the air', as it were. The difficulty of discovering how it worked is what plagued that notion. Hegel, however, already saw it operating socially, racially, politically, philosophically, all quite naturally through the unfolding of history.

Hegel's 'mechanism' was the dialectic: the fusion of opposites, rather than what was later to be asserted in the Darwin-Wallace concept of natural selection. The motivation basic to bio-evolution, generally, is also based on competition. But in the battle between ideas—in the ectopian realm of social and philosophical evolution—it was not Herbert Spencer's 'survival of the fittest' out of the common struggle of all species against eachother and against a changing and insensitive environment, that is to say life adapting over many generations to resist or deflect the blind forces of nature, but the emergence of a radically new *synthesis* via the direct conflict of opposing 'forces' of thought. Here was a kind of incorporeal cause-and-effect determinism; a *para*-force or *meta*-power acting in the immaterial world; a sort of transcendental energy that revealed by its action the laws governing the *mechanism* of history so that we could now have a *science of history*.

But why assume advance? What necessitated progress? Where in the world of pure logic was this 'arrow of time'? Why was it always pointing up rather than down; toward 'good' rather than 'evil'? An unbiased, unconscious Nature would favor neither—simply rolling on like the cosmos—and as it is determined in a non-physical realm beyond us, there is nothing we can do to deflect it or change it. So it would seem to be *up to us to change*—to adapt to each new synthesis of history. But Hegel's Nature was far from blind. She was perfectly rational, consisting in part of the ideal (thus of ideas), thereby directing history over the ages by means of the dialectic (much as Socrates did in his arguments: by not having—or pretending not to have—a goal; giving the illusion of susceptibility to the flow of logic engendered purely out of conversational interchange, all the while leading the inquirer into refutation of practically everything he thought he knew). By clash and resolution of ideas the dialectic of Nature prepares societies for civilization and civilizations for nationalization, engendering a *Spirit of the Age*.

Here we have, then, an immaterial base for determinism. Our way, then, as helpless humans, is submission: to accept the process as if we willed it—very much a proto-Nietzschean thought. Nietzsche, however, would stoutly oppose Hegel's concept of historicism, rejecting the idea that the will of nature is strictly rational and yet expressed through unintelligent social forces and the conflict of incorporeal ideas rather than through great and heroic individuals (*übermenschen*) seeking power. He did not like the thought of massive movements making history necessary and determined, like inertia in accordance with the laws of physics—but he also seemed powerless to become *a*historical.


Hegel observes the 'Spirit of the Age' —on horseback: *Napoleon in Jena*, 1806 .

Hegel, by investing the *Zeitgeist* with reason, endows Nature with consciousness—so 'will' guides the dialectic; thus, purpose. This 'Will of the World' replaces God—an idea that stirred Schopenhauer and Nietzsche to re-examine it; an idea still with us to the consternation of neo-Darwinists despite their wish to deny purpose in nature and perhaps the only way Hegel could derive continual progress out of the conflict of ideas. Otherwise he was left with insensible, accidental alternation or simple recycling. Hegel believed he had found that teleological process in the dialectic. The goal of the Spirit of Nature is human freedom from nature; the means to that freedom is man's submission to a proper and stable political state.

Does that sound contradictory? But the same contradiction is found in Hobbes. Hobbes' primitive man is totally free but his freedom is useless without civil society. To use his freedom, he must spend some of it on security. The more he spends on security, the more he can enjoy what freedom he has left. But, as with economics, one can overspend political freedom to the point where there is too little left to enjoy; until one is broke—or in this case, controlled: dominated by the contemporary regime. Is he really, under such circumstances, a man at all? For Hegel, in contrast to Hobbes, men were never free individually but always under social or civil restriction of one sort or another. Freedom was not to be found in nature, but only under the guiding hand of an advanced civil society. Even though he advocated monarchy and the existence of an aristocratic class, and although women were not included in this wealth of freedom granted by the well organized, modern society, males, at least, had found the freedom necessary to offer their obedience and to do their duty to the nation (while women, I suppose, were 'free' to fulfill familial obligations in support of their men); devotion of each part to the whole: the highest expression of the good, for which one achieved honor and respect.

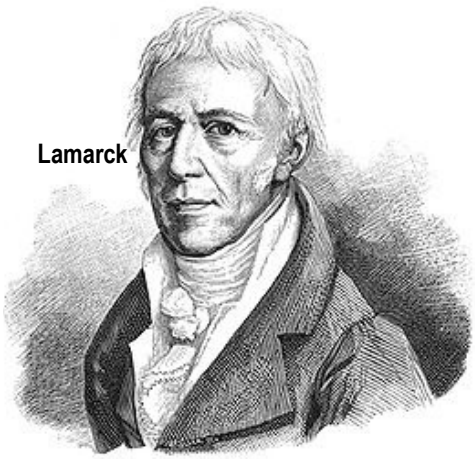
Thus history itself has come to an end. The last synthesis has been achieved—or almost, since it was very much toward German nationhood that Hegel was aiming, and that had not yet come to pass. Could this nationalistic purpose have colored his philosophy? But isn't purpose itself anathema to science—even to a science of history? Not for Hegel. For him reason and an end were included. Nature had a purpose and therefore a will (or the reverse). There must be, then, a sort of universal mind. And so this was (or would be when complete) the final synthesis, to which Hegel thought no opposite could be possible (apparently forgetting his own rules about the necessity of opposites). History has led us here by its previously hidden but rational natural process. We now know the process. The opposite idea would be to deny it, or to not know it. Non-Western societies or civilizations do not seem to know it. Perhaps that is why they are exempt from it (but how can they be?). Thus they live *a*historically, and we, of course, cannot un-know the truth of our concepts any more than we can un-know that the sum of 5 + 7 = 12.

If this science of history is not as logic-tight as mathematics, might it not then be denied? There were, in fact, denials. But the power of Hegel's philosophy was strong and the timing of its revelation could hardly have been better—e.g., his inclusion of a vital 'spirit' in his science of the ages during the blossoming of Romanticism. He was not surprised, since the timing, too, in accordance with historicism, must have been pre-ordained as a natural part of the process. Particularly for this loose German federation, struggling to compete for predominance in an exhausted Europe, he seems to have presented an impregnable barrier to denial of this 'truth' of *historicism*. We Germans are brought to this peak of knowledge, he proposed, by sheer reason, having gained our insight through reason's tool, science; all this developing necessarily via the *dialectic*.

Was Hegel's philosophy really so air-tight? The biggest hole was likely his 'end of history' claim. While all ideas have opposites and emerging from the clash comes the next idea, there was an exception: the idea that there is an end, leaving only the perfect and unopposed idea, the 'Absolute', finally exposed by reason: the idea of progressive history by dialectic. So he now held the absolute idea that all other ideas are imperfect and subject to alteration by exposure to their opposites. The whole notion of advancement or progress presumes an end: the Absolute; the last possible situation. How else can progress be measured? To accept the idea of progress is to accept the idea of purpose.

There is no doubting, of course, the fact of mere change over time, just as in evolution there is no doubt that the various species have started, ended, 'adjusted'. Change does seem the eternal, inescapable force of nature. But as Darwinists insist against today's 'creationists' and supporters of 'intelligent design', maybe even against the original intent of Darwin himself, evolution does not imply design or seek some predetermined final condition. It is not teleological. It is accidental within limits. Thus they attempt to evade the problem of God or the 'Prime Architect' by engaging Occam's razor: the simplest theory is best—in this case, 'the fit usually win over the unfit' *versus* 'God watching over the flight of every sparrow'. Granted, then: due to challenging environmental conditions, the fit survive and the unfit die. But is that enough? Doesn't that merely increase the *average* fitness of *individuals* of the species? How then is the whole species improved in strength and speed and prowess and organization—and even morphed into new and distinct species? That function (species advancement and the addition of new attributes—in some cases radically new) seems to be left to accident: random mutation, which is highly unlikely to be in any way progressive and has nothing to do with purpose. Furthermore, this seems to conflict with the laws of thermodynamics and entropy. Naturally, in accordance with classical physics, things should be degrading, disorganizing, dissipating; not progressing. Biological evolution is not really progress, then, but simply a naturally caused adjustment to a changing environment (also naturally caused). Darwin actually left the problem of explaining consistently higher organization levels without a really satisfactory solution; necessarily so, since he knew nothing of genetic theory (Gregor Mendel's work would not be rediscovered until nearly the 20th century) nor of thermodynamics (Helmhotz was just then formulating the 1st law: conservation of energy). Even with our great 21st century science and technology advances the question of progress is still mysterious. Hegel, without even the benefit of Darwin's tentative guidance, had to lean on a kind of natural world consciousness to bring about social and historical progress: an *a priori* spirit of history or *zeitgeist*. It is only vanity: our pride in our dominance that leads us to conclude we are better, higher, more advanced than other species when, speaking purely scientifically, there is no reason for such judgment—or for any judgment. We are all, theoretically, equally evolved.

Hegel may have lived in a pre-Darwinian era, but the idea of evolution was certainly in the air. The Romantic era's interest in the heart and the spirit—in *vitalism*—as a counterpoise the deadening effect of the materialist's demystification of the world, caused a significant increase in interest in biology as a means of discovering the riddle of life, of will, of emotion, of spirit through the ever probing, organizing, and knowledge-accumulating activity of science. Besides, the idea of evolution *per se* is not at all modern. It existed, as we have seen—and in some pretty strange forms—in ancient Greece and was discussed by (among others) Aristotle, who was essentially the founder of biology, though he would hardly recognize it today. Furthermore, the concept of evolution itself is not exclusively biological—that is genetic. As just mentioned, it simply means a controlled form of change due to a particular cause and effect process and is just as materialist and mechanistic as the billiard-ball cosmos, which is why the concept of evolution can be applied to the whole material universe. It was already being brought to the foreground by such respected minds as **Jean Baptiste** (Pierre Antoine de Monet, Chevalier de) **Lamarck** [1744-1829]. (Oh for the ancient world where men had only one name! Can this, too, be reflective of our 'progress'?) It was being promoted well in



advance of Darwin—as by **Herbert Spencer** [1820-1903] (although it must be interjected that Darwin held his 'natural selection' idea secret from about 1840, publishing it not until 1859 in his famous ORIGIN OF SPECIES). So Hegel was certainly under evolution's influence in conceiving his progress of history, which progress (as with the progress of human individuals from something pre-human—and likely still 'advancing') was, by this stage of Western civilization, generally assumed as self-evident. After all, the results were everywhere. It was only the search for the hidden 'mechanism' that was engaging the best minds in biology. But Hegel's mechanism needed a guiding principle in order to seek a particular end, especially as the environment called human society, with its fears and weaknesses; its wars and revolutions; its penchant for irrationality, was unpredictable in its possible response to each new synthesis of ideas.

If the results of evolution were everywhere, at least in Europe and in her colonies, how could he explain, then, that Europe was everywhere in ruins and in revolt? And a further problem not often discussed: Europe was *not* 'everywhere'. Why were non-Western societies and peoples and races exempt from this 'progress'? Had they been abandoned by their supposed 'Spirits of Ages' and were they thus unaffected by the *dialectic* that Hegel included as an attribute of universal Nature—and which would seem necessary for there to be history at all in accordance with his historicist scheme?

In any case, the tendency of evolutionary thought in Hegel's era (though not without serious, especially religious contention) leaned toward Lamarck and 'acquired characteristics', e.g., the well known example of the giraffe's neck stretching through time to capture the receding leaves of favored trees; this acquired stretchedness, being reflected in each individual's genetics (certainly not well understood at the time), then somehow passed to the offspring. This was criticized, naturally, as are all ideas not yet quite ironed out and not yet having won the respect of the majority of thinkers, but it was certainly in ascendency. Its power is demonstrated by its survival well into the 20th century and its continued development by the Soviets, even after most Western scientists had accepted 'natural selection' as the ultimate mechanism of bio-evolution. Be that as it may, Hegel believed he had already discovered the mechanism for historical progress: the evolution of human society through the conflict and adjustment or mutation of ideas.

This is not so easily sorted out. Hegel is, first of all, not easy to interpret. By reading Kant, claimed Hegel's nemesis **Arthur Schopenhauer** (1788-1860), "the public was compelled to see that what is obscure is not always without significance".

"Fichte and Schelling took advantage of this," says Will Durant, "and excogitated magnificent spider-webs of metaphysics."

"But the height of audacity", Schopenhauer continued,

> …in serving up nonsense, in stringing together senseless and extravagant mazes of words, such as had previously been known only in madhouses, was finally reached in Hegel, and became the instrument of the most bare-faced general mystification that has ever taken place, with a result which will appear fabulous to posterity, and will remain as a monument to German stupidity.

[*Schopenhauer quotes from* E. Caird, *Hegel*, *in* BLACKWOOD PHILOSOPHICAL CLASSICS, pp.5-8; *all as found in* Durant, THE STORY OF PHILOSOPHY; Garden City, NY, 1927; p.318]

Perhaps that is overstating the case, as was Schopenhauer's wont, but of course there is more to attack in Hegel than confusing verbiage. For one thing, the conflict Hegel sees is between the 'big' ideas of an era; not so easy to discern. In fact it is purely judgmental on the part of the investigator as to what constitutes an 'age', not to mention determining its dominant idea or 'spirit'. Does every age somehow know its own 'spirit'—or is it not the case that only the future can look back and identify it? And then, apparently, only Hegel can do it correctly, including finding the Spirt of the Present, by virtue of his discovery of the proper science of history. And what of the lesser ideas? All ages are chock full of ideas. Do they all have spirits, something like guardian angels? Just because they might not be predominant, are they then free from the dialectic? Is it not more likely that *all* ideas at *all* times are in fact subject, more or less, to conflict with their antitheses—as well as with other ideas only somewhat less directly opposed? Is this interrelation not a confusing jumble of tensions and pressures (to use purely mechanistic terms)? Could we not just as validly see history from an atomic point of view: as a continual internecine interaction of all ideas? But then, of course, we would have to deny purpose and rationality and accept the winning combinations, at least temporarily, as our guides to law and behavior. In short, sheer chance would produce a shifting, relativistic, meaningless morality. We would understand ethics as something of the moment rather than an absolute—and there could be no laws of history or morality. Essentially, as selected by the meaningless outcomes of continual and accidental interplay of ideas, the stronger would prevail: *might* would make *right*.

Hegel found this unacceptable—the very antithesis of his expectations—and so spent great effort developing, defending, and promoting his understanding of history. Despite the complexity of language and the contradictions, the strength of his overall presentation is undeniable. In the end, however, there is no way of being sure of its truth—the 'science' of history is 'synthetic' (according to Kant): an abstract science rather than empirical—*nonsensory* (to create a cheap play on words). Thus it has no capacity for experiments. Also the past is open to interpretation and the future will find even more room for *re*interpretation. Hegel wanted to found his system squarely on reason, on eternally true, mathematically rigorous logic; to find an absolute conclusion. But history changes in two directions. *The present changes* as time moves inexorably into the future; and, with new knowledge and a changing viewpoint, *the past also alters its 'appearance'*. The more we know, the more history changes. Is that not what our seemingly unending 'revisionist' history is about today, and the 'deconstruction' of art and literature prevalent in our institutions of higher learning? As my favorite historian Will Durant said, "The past is helpless in the hands of the present, which repeatedly remolds it to the hour's whim". So *our view* of history shapes our own thought and influences our present paradigm, as opposed to *actual* history or the views of those who happened to be living in (and documenting) any particular 'age' that we might arbitrarily

frame for our study. In fact, Hegel believed we now know more about the past in the present (by our ability to organize it from a 'higher' perspective on the mountainside of time) than those who actually lived it and could see only their limited surroundings, and thus we can understand even their thought better than they understood it themselves.

Obversely, such understanding is only relative to our present situation: framed, as it were, by the latest paradigm; censored by the Spirit of *Our* Age. The fact is we see the past through the distorting lens of our synthetic historoscope, not through the eyes of those who actually lived there. We can know nothing of the laws of refraction in the transcendental world; thoughts don't bend quite like light rays, so we cannot accurately focus on the ancient mind; cannot understand past humans as they understood themselves —even if it were true that we understand them 'better' (whatever that could mean). So each age has a unique awareness and attitude, thus its own temporary 'truth' (from which it derives its morality). Former ages (prehistoric/pre-historicism) were not aware of that law of history—as they were also ignorant of the laws of gravity and thermodynamics. So their ethics were derived from tradition, authority, and/or revelation and thus evolved gradually. But now we have been made aware, via our advanced level of reasoning born of science. Everything has changed. Even God (if there is one) is different again and estranged. With this new knowledge, this science of history, *we* are now responsible for facilitating its completion (or vainly trying to deflect Nature's predetermined course).

Hegel advocated compliance with the purpose of Nature, as humans were once expected to bend to the will of God. Since Nature intends us to be free, and freedom is only possible within a powerful and efficient state, and as the state is a product of the will of Nature, our morality is to be oriented toward obedience to the state. But if there is freedom of will at all, do individuals not partake in it? If so, are we not free to decide our own fate—including that of our societies? Hegel contends that the universal mind perseveres despite all resistance. A few ignorant dissenters will hardly deter the bulldozer of history. That leaves us with no grounding or responsibility for our own moral code, nor guidance for the structure of society and economics and politics. Everything is preordained or else history is serendipity. Hegel perhaps was offering his philosophy for our guidance, but his philosophy only clarifies the problem rather than solving it. We ought to be thankful for that much, but our sense of direction has been jammed.

So Nature is personified, now including will, and Hegel contended the will is free. It must, indeed, be free to be purposeful—to ever have established a purpose—how could 'will' *not* be free? Yet he contends that the process of history under Nature's aegis is determined, even while he tells us that end is freedom. But if a mechanistic Nature is *à priori* determined (which it must be if we can find the eternal laws of science), the end of history must be the freedom of humanity *from nature*—and this must have been the end even before the development of humans since Nature predates us and even predates organisms. Then humans, unwittingly serving Nature for millennia, have finally brought into being civil society and instituted government—perhaps as a kind of fortress to defend us against nature; an artifice within which we are free to submit to authority. So humanity *is* now free—free to be obedient to our anti-nature club; free to do our duty outside of nature: our duty to eachother *by design*—but it is all by *Nature's* design. So how then are we free?

He also says that religion is not logically necessary to reaching the Absolute but that it, too, developed nonetheless naturally and is useful in Nature's purpose for

controlling social behavior, especially for the unenlightened and non-philosophical. He contended Protestant Christianity (especially the Lutheran form) is the right or best religion because it frees individuals from the dogma of priests and lets them relate directly to God through their own interpretation of scripture. To that degree, then, it would seem humans are in charge of their own morality, making the moral code subjective rather than objective (basing it on passion rather than reason). Furthermore, ever-changing circumstances might well cause varying shades of interpretation. So individual moral codes would be liable to further adjustments to meet new situations, i.e., *relative morality*—that is unless their interpretation conflicts with the laws and needs of the state, to which they ought to comply, thus imposing a *political morality* that has nothing to do with religion. Do we find here the seeds of *political correctness*?

Another thing: Every age has its particular view and cannot see beyond its paradigm. So Hegel informs us that every age has its truth and truth is, therefore, always relative to the times—except for that particular truth: i.e., 'truth is always relative' is the absolute truth—and except for Hegel's particular time (and all time thereafter), wherein the truth has become absolute. He also claims 'mind is the only reality', yet tells us he does not mean the physical world is not real. Out of many others, perhaps the best known Hegelian contradiction is that all ideas have their opposites, excepting the idea that all ideas have their opposites. *No they don't! Yes they do! No they…*

So is Hegel cursed with contradictions? His philosophy is not only full of them, it is *based* on them. In fact, *contradiction is the way of the world*—so that one era's truth is another's falsehood, making truth relative to the times (the very argument posed by Paul Feyerabend in defending the Church in its prosecution of Galileo). Yet Hegel wishes to except his own time as having achieved *final truth* due to his discovery of historical process. But he fails to make the case. He has been proven wrong by the continued march of history as 'our truth' is already quite different—even the German truth is now different—though it suggests he may have been onto something regarding some major semi-truth being always relative to a given age. Then, almost immediately, as if he were being mocked by the Spirit of the Age, Hegel's audience split into two camps:

Fichte and Weisse leading the conservatives or 'right' Hegelians, believed his theory was a philosophical expression of the doctrine of Providence, justifying a politics of obedience, where honor and recognition are the prime motivators: vanity, rather than fear of death or unmitigated greed. But would that not defy the dialectic by creating a political and economic stasis whereby history would stop? Yet this is where Hegel himself gravitated; a strange ending for the 'philosopher of strife'.

Feuerbach, Moleschott, Bauer, and Marx took the 'young Hegelians' to the left, reflecting the youthful Hegel and the continual conflict implied by the dialectic: warfare, the class struggles, the head-butting in every phase of reality—animal, vegetable, and even inert material—that *must* occur between natural opposites. In philosophy and society all ideas have their opposites and the clash between them leads toward the middle (the dialectic tendency), but the middle cannot hold contradictions. The conflict breaks into a synthesis reflecting something of both, but twisted into something entirely new. This, especially for Marx, meant progress through unavoidable revolution of the economically oppressed—progress toward a socialism the likes of which was never before seen —also toward an end of progress called communism, which we will discuss later.

As for Hegel, he went to his grave dissatisfied. But shouldn't he have swallowed his dissatisfaction in the face of strict determinism? Legend has it that on his deathbed he complained "Only one man has understood me, and even he did not understand." He did not identify that man, but it might be asked: Did Hegel even understand himself? And, in accordance with historicism, should we not be able, in our advanced state, to understand him *better* than he understood himself? Some, like Alexandre Kojève, actually think so. While Hegel presents a horn-o-plenty of logical conundrums, he did say it was the business of philosophy to root out the flaws and untruths and contradictions in previous concepts as a service to the progress of history. His purpose, it seems, may have been to replace them with different and more confusing ones so that future philosophers, in the best interest of job creation, will have something to do—and nearly two hundred years later, they're still doing it.

And now we must grant that, just as destruction is easier than construction, criticism is much easier than creation. We have spent much time and effort in our lectures poking holes in the best efforts of thinkers who are not here to defend themselves—and we will continue to do it. That may seem unfair. In fact I am sure it is. On the other hand, it is all done in the interest of education. And these maligned philosophers from the past were here today, hardly any of them would now be considered the heroes of thought they have become for us historically. The very attempt at constructing a philosophic world-system for public display can be seen as both heroic and foolish. At the time Hegel built his monstrosity it seemed to have been as necessary as it was futile. We can be sure of this: no philosophy has all the answers; no system of thought can plug all the holes. As great ships on the ocean of thought, their information will all, ultimately, be stored in Davy Jones' locker. Living thinkers, like salvage divers, will descend to rescue bits and pieces: precious jewels of thought that seem promising and useful in weaving the mind-fabric of an emerging age. They will take pictures of wrecks from various angles and depths, depending on their own positions and intellect, and thus further distort rather than clarify the object of research. Hegel's system is among the most luxurious of such sunken vessels: the Titanic, as it were, of modern thought. Problems and contradictions are to be expected in every philosophy. The more complex and world-encompassing is the thoughtscape, the lesser it seems is the certainty; the greater the concern about the falsework left in place beneath the elaborate surface.

Philosophy, as the search for ultimate truth, is after all hardly more than logical speculation, proving little but illuminating much. In the course of our daily lives it doesn't seem to reach down to us from its ivory towers, at least not directly. But it does, unawares, link together the conceptual elements to form the very stage upon which we 'strut and fret' in delivering our insignificant parts. Is it not (per *Macbeth*) but "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing"? Great civilizations of the ancient world have been concocted out of the strangest mythologies. If we have advanced—even if that advancement has been in sheer technology—we have reached points at which such mythologies have had to be shed as too uninformed; too unbelievable; too psychically burdensome. Faith and/or best-guesswork only retreats after being challenged with something more reliable; something that at least seems to make more sense and is more appealing and useful. Science may not have seemed generally appealing in its infancy—may not seem so now in its bare-bones method. But its results; its gifts: the treasure-trove that grew from great mistakes into the foundation of the modern world will not be easily

relinquished. To keep that world; to further advance and refine it, we will continue to believe in the mechanistic cosmos and the logic of materialism—until we overpopulate the world through our inglorious success and ruin the Earth (or destroy ourselves on the way to its ruin) by means of the knowledge we have gained through the very science we are just now beginning to doubt will save us.

However that may be, and whatever are its weaknesses and complexities and disfigurements, the scientific, materialistic, mechanistic paradigm still manages to bear up the platform upon which we rest our magnificent culture. So "if it is not true, it is", quoth Giordano Bruno, "a happy invention". But for how much longer?

A final word is apropos from George Santayana concerning our topic:

> German Idealism, when we study it as a product of its own age and country, is a most engaging phenomenon; it is full of afflatus, sweep, and deep searchings of the heart; but it is essentially romantic and egoistical, and all in it that is not soliloquy is mere system-making and sophistry. Therefore when it is taught by unromantic people *ex cathedra*, in stentorian tones, and represented as the rational foundation of science and religion, with neither of which it has any honest sympathy, it becomes positively odious—one of the worst impostures and blights to which a youthful imagination could be subjected.
>
> [George Santayana (1863-1952), WINDS OF DOCTRINE, IV, i]

HANDOUT & require analysis of the following lines of Pope, to be handed-in next meeting:

See sulking Truth to her old cavern fled,
Mountains of Casuistry heap'd o'er her head!
Philosophy, that lean'd on Heav'n before,
Shrinks to her second cause, and is no more.
Physic of Metaphysic begs defense,
And Metaphysic calls for aid on Sense!
See Mystery to Mathematics fly!
In vain! they gaze, turn giddy, rave, and die.
Religion blushing veils her sacred fires,
And unawares Morality expires.
Nor public flame, nor private, dares to shine;
Nor human spark is left, nor glimpse divine!
Lo! thy dread empire, Chaos! is restor'd;
Light dies before thy uncreating word;
Thy hand, great Anarch! lets the curtain fall,
And universal darkness buries all.

[Alexander Pope (1786?-1872) *from The Dunciad*; book IV, lines from 641]

Also HANDOUT:

A. Chapter VIII (*complete*), *Herbert Spencer from* Will Durant; THE STORY OF PHILOSOPHY; Garden City Publishing (Simon & Schuster), NY, 1927; pp.381-434

B. *From the section*: *New Forces, New Ideas*: "Romanticism & After" (pp.859-871)
– and include:
"From Liberalism to Democracy" (pp.871-883) & "The Rise of Socialism" (pp.884-893)
in THE COLUMBIA HISTORY OF THE WORLD; Garraty & Gay, ed.; Harper & Roe, NY, 1972.
At least the first third (Romanticism & After) *to be read prior to next session;*
the remainder to be read as time permits, but prior to Lecture XXVII.

C. (recommended) *From* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romanticiksm_in_science (*5 pages*), *and*

D. (recommended) *From* http.//en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frankenstein (*9 pages*)

E. (Not handed out) *If you have ever considered reading* FRANKENSTEIN *by* Mary Wollstonecraft Shelly [1797-1851], *now is a great time to do it*.