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# Analysis of Hegel's Philosophy in the Light of German Idealism

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### Abstract

In the second half of the eighteenth century, German Philosophy came for a while to dominate European philosophy. It change the way in which not only Europeans, but people all over the world, conceived of themselves and thought about nature, religion, human history, politics and the structure of human mind. George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel was most dominant western philosopher and is the greatest German idealist.

Hegel's philosophy is generally known as absolute idealism. He was one of the greatest systematic thinkers in the history of western philosophy. Hegel's system was an historical culmination of all previous philosophical thought. Hegel's philosophical system is divided into the science of logic, the philosophy of nature and the philosophy of spirit.

Among the German idealists, Hegel attempted to formulate a complete system of philosophy that would account for the differences and similarities of all previous philosophies. Hegel's principal achievement lies in his development of a distinction articulation of idealism sometimes termed absolute idealism. His published his first independent contributions to German Idealism, 'The difference between Fichte's and Schelling's system of philosophy in 1801. In this book Hegel distinguishes Fichte's subjective idealism from Schelling's objective idealism. The absolute has been described as a system of categories arranged dialectically in triads.

**Keywords:** Spirit, metaphysics, idealism, freedom, right, rationality

### Introduction

German idealism is a form of idealism. Idealism is a metaphysical doctrine which teaches the supremacy of the spirit over matter. The idealism espoused by the German idealists is, however, different from other kinds of idealism with which contemporary philosophers may be more familiar. German idealism is the most creative philosophical movement in the history of German philosophy in the age of enlightenment that began in Germany. From the late eighteenth century until the middle of the nineteenth, German philosophy was dominated by the movement known as German Idealism, which began as an attempt to complete Kant's revolutionary project: the derivation of the principle of knowledge and ethics from the spontaneity and autonomy of mind or spirit <sup>[1]</sup>. It developed out of the work of Immanuel Kant and is closely linked with the Romantic Movement and the revolutionary politics of the enlightenment. It is one of the most fruitful and influential movements in the history of philosophy. There was a great importance of this movement In German philosophy. Hegel was the final product of this philosophical movement that known as German idealism. German Idealism mainly arose in response to Immanuel Kant's critical philosophy. In the context of the German Idealism Kant's main aim was to resolve the impasse between British empiricism and French rationalism. German idealism is remarkable for its systematic treatment of all the major parts of philosophy including logic, metaphysics and

epistemology, moral and political philosophy, and aesthetics. All of the representatives of German idealism thought these parts of philosophy would find a place in a general system of philosophy. The best-known thinkers in this movement, besides Kant were Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, Arthur Schopenhauer and George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. All of the representatives of German idealism thought these parts of philosophy would find a place in a general system of philosophy. Among the German idealists, Hegel attempted to formulate a complete system of philosophy that would account for the differences and similarities of all previous philosophies. Hegel's principal achievement lies in his development of a distinction articulation of idealism sometimes termed absolute idealism. He published his first independent contributions to German Idealism, 'The difference between Fichte's and Schelling's system of philosophy in 1801. In this book Hegel distinguishes Fichte's subjective idealism from Schelling's objective idealism. The absolute has been described as a system of categories arranged dialectically in triads.

In the second half of the eighteenth centuried, German philosophy came for a while to dominate European philosophy. It change the way in which not only Europeans, but people all over the world, conceived of themselves and thought about nature, religion, human history, politics and the structure of human mind. George Wilhelm Frederic Hegel was an important figure of German philosophy. He was a

German Idealistic philosopher. His philosophy is generally known as absolute idealism. Hegel is also regarded as one of the most influential figures in modern political philosophy. Hegel was one of the greatest systematic thinkers in the history of western philosophy. Hegel's philosophy begins with an abdication of the empiricist philosophical tradition initiated by Locke and consummated by David Hume, the 18<sup>th</sup> century English Philosopher. As we seen have earlier, according to Locke knowledge is matter of direct sensory experience about the given facts where mind or thinking has hardly any creative role. Thus, reality is what lies strictly within the realm of our objective experience and in the context of such a belief the object of knowledge is naturally treated as external to its subject, that is to say no identity is envisaged between the knower and the thing known. David Hume drove this position one step further. Since he agreed with Locke that all our knowledge essentially result from our sense impressions he straightway refuted the possibility of general ideas. Hume's attempt to discard general ideas is, in fact means to undermine the autonomy of man as a thinking agent. Hegel however refuses to accept this position. He looks at a man as a thinking being who cannot just be left at the mercy of facts, who is powerful enough to organize reality on the strength of his free rational thinking and bring to fulfilment his own potentialities as well as the potentialities latent in the external world and thereby establishes a fundamental unity between himself and the later.

German idealism which have started with the emergence of Kantian philosophy culminated in the Philosophy of Right. It began as a reaction to Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason. And we see the most remarkable application of idealism in *The Philosophy of Right* written by Hegel. According to German idealism, all fundamental principles are derived from the spontaneous operation of human understanding. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel made major contributions in German Idealism. Hegel responded to Kant's Philosophy by suggesting that the unsolvable contradictions given by Kant in his Antinomies of Pure Reason applied not only to the four areas Kant gave but, in all objects, and conceptions, notions and ideas. To know this makes a "vital part in a philosophical theory". Given that abstract thought is thus limited, he went on to consider how historical formations give rise to different philosophies and ways of thinking. For Hegel, thought fails when it is only given as an abstraction and is not united with considerations of historical reality. In his major work *The Phenomenology of Spirit* he went on to trace the formation of self-consciousness through history and the importance of self-consciousness through history and the importance of other people in the awakening of self-consciousness.

German idealism has been called the theory of the French revolution. This does not imply that Kant, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel furnished theoretical interpretation of the French Revolution, but that they wrote their philosophy largely as a response to the challenge from France to reorganize the state and society on a rational basic, so that social and political institutions might accord with freedom and interest individual. The ideas of the French Revolution thus appear in the very core of the idealistic system and to a great extent, determine their conceptual structure. As the German idealistic saw it, the French Revolution not only abolished feudal absolutism, replacing it with the economic and political system of the middle class, but it completed what the German Reformation had begun emancipating the individual as a self-reliant master of his life.

Hegel himself related his concept of reason to the French Revolution, and did so with the greatest of emphasis. The concept of reason is central to Hegel's philosophy. The core of Hegel's philosophy is a structure the concept of which-freedom, subject, mind notion are derived from the idea of reason. According to Hegel the French Revolution enunciated reason's ultimate power over reality.

Hegel was one of the most influential philosophers of all time in the history of western tradition. Hegel was one of the most dominant western philosophers. For some he was romantic critic of the enlightenment and the source of anti-rationalism, and, for others, he was an opponent of romanticism and a defender of modern reason. Similarly, for some Hegel was theological philosophers trying to uphold Christian orthodoxy, while other see him as a radical seeking to undermine religious faith. Moreover, his comprehensiveness and ability to bring diverse, even contradictory element of reality together into a unified system of unparalleled. For Hegel the history of philosophy is an organic process in which previous philosophies converge towards the goal of universal enlightenment<sup>[2]</sup>.

Hegel's philosophy always has been a type of theology i.e., its essence is the absolute being it meant God and its relation to the nature and human being. For understanding the philosophy of Hegel, it is necessary to know the Absolute. In fact the main subject of philosophy is the Absolute Being. But the Absolute is totality, namely the universe. Philosophy deals with true being, and "true" means the whole, integrity, total. Moreover, this whole or totality, is infinite life and a process of self-development. The Absolute is the process of its becoming, it is like a circle; its end is the same as its beginning. It can be said that; the absolute can be real or objective only through developing itself and its end. In fact, the absolute is a result, i.e. the end of this process is manifestation of the nature of the Absolute. Of course, the whole process is that very (same) Absolute; but in a teleological process, it is the Telos or the End that shows the nature i.e. meaning of that process; and here, it is the philosophy that should understand systematically this teleological process. The life of Absolute consists of three main phases (stages):

1. Logical idea (Concept or Notion)
2. Nature
3. Spirit

For Hegel, it is the task of philosophy to study the life of Absolute; therefore, the philosophic system of Hegel for studying the Absolute, is accordingly dividing into three parts:

1. Logic that, for Hegel is the science of metaphysics, studies the nature of Absolute in itself.
2. Philosophy of Nature
3. Philosophy of Spirit (Mind).

These three parts together organizes the philosophic life of Absolute. The nature and the sphere of human spirit is the same realm in which an eternal idea or everlasting substance manifests itself. So, the distinction can be made between the idea or the virtual substance and the realm of its virtuality. Then, there is an image of eternal idea or Logos which presents itself in the nature and in the spirit. Logos, so to speak enters into objectivity in the nature i.e. in the material world. Material world is as the antithesis of Logos. Logos, turns to itself in the spirit i.e. in the sphere of human spirit, namely Logos manifests itself such that it is in its essence.

Thus, as the mention was made above, the life of Absolute consists of three main phases Logical idea (Concept or Notion), Nature and Spirit.

Hegel's system was an historical culmination of all previous philosophical thought. Hegel's philosophical system is divided into three parts: logic, the philosophy of nature, and the philosophy of spirit. Hegel's philosophy based upon Logic. Logic always furnishes the presupposition of every line of questioning of every possible epistemic challenge to any given claim. Neither a formal logic, nor linguistic, nor a psychology or neurology, this area discusses the categories of thinking, so it explores what we do when we think when we thereby try to find out the truth, so in this area we think about thinking. As this also includes to reflect what is scientific in what we do when we do science, you could also call it the science of science. According to Hegel, only a fundamental logic can furnish the basis of Philosophy. Logic for Hegel is the absolute idea in itself before it becomes external nature. The most comprehensive triad of the logic consists of the categories of Being, Essence and Notion. In being reality manifests itself most abstractly; in antithesis, in the categories of Essence the inner nature of thought is revealed as the outcome of reflection; the synthetic of the Notion or Concept. In the Notion the opposition between Being and Essence is reconciled and overcome in a large synthetic. Being is the abstract external aspect of things, their most general characteristics, while Essence is their inner constitution. The most abstract conception of Nature are the triad of Space, Time and Motion. In Phenomenology, he introduces his philosophical system and exhibits the historical process through which spirit acquires an adequate concept of truth. In his Logic, as well as the Encyclopedia, which he compiled as a textbook for his lectures, he further expands upon the different parts of his system. Many of the ideas in his system are further elaborated upon in his Elements of the Philosophy of Right and in posthumously published lecture notes on the philosophy of art, the philosophy of religion, the philosophy of world history, and the history of philosophy.

This area is about the philosophy of nature, discussing about the terms, concepts, axioms and methods we use when we practice science of nature. While Hegel had a good overview of the science of nature of his time, this area is the one that needs most work in order to include the finding of modern science. Logic, Science and the Idea of logical categories, Philosophy of Nature, the science of the Idea of Nature in developing external and the Philosophy of Spirit, student discipline, the return of the idea to her itself, from its external existence, correspond to the three spiritual moments.

There are three types of spirit in Hegelian philosophy. The subjective spirit which deals with human mind as such, especially the individual mind. The objective spirit which deals with the human spirit transforming the objective world according to its concepts and the absolute spirit that deals with those areas where we reflect our thought and actions, especially our reason, values or goals.

Hegel's philosophy must embrace everything, to understand reality in its totality, think history and things, "Insight and understanding what is". In Hegel's time, the idea that philosophy had a historical development had only recently come into focus. Both Fichte and Schelling had discussed the idea of a history of reason following Kant's allusion to such a notion in the closing pages of *Critique of Pure Reason*. According to Hegel Philosophy is its own time comprehended in thoughts. Hegel was the last of the great philosophical system builders of modern times.

Hegel's work to contemporary thought lies in the fact that his philosophy can shed some light on many contemporary problems. More specifically he has contributed to the formation of philosophical concepts that are indispensable for tackling some modern dilemmas<sup>[3]</sup>.

Hegel built a wider system in philosophy ordering all knowledge. Hegel's goal was comprehended all reality philosophically. In order to probe the nature of reality, he investigates the whole spectrum of human life-art, religion, philosophy, history, morality, politics and science. Philosophy is able to support the rigorous self-scrutiny of thought, and is thus uniquely able to render concepts in a conceptually adequate fashion. Since philosophy provides a cognitive framework for discerning the pattern of development in all spheres of human activity, Hegel thinks that it can be designated as the truest source of understanding of the world<sup>[4]</sup>. Philosophy is not merely historical in a chronological sense, rather it is historically constituted in a profound sense. Each philosophy has its own time, place and context, and since it is temporally and culturally situated, it cannot be understood properly if removed from its context. Nevertheless, for Hegel, all past philosophical projects collectively make up the whole of philosophy<sup>[5]</sup>. Simply put, the task of the philosopher is to observe the "Dialectic of consciousness", and Hegel assures us that a system-the organized totality of all the stages of consciousness-emerges from this dialectic<sup>[6]</sup>.

Hegel built a vast system ordering all knowledge of his time Among his main works: The Phenomenology of Spirit (1807), Philosophical Propaedeutics (1809-1816), Science of Logic (1812-1816), Handbook of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences (1817), Principles of the Philosophy of Law (1821), Lectures on the Philosophy of History, Lectures on Aesthetics and Philosophy of Religion. In the first phase we encounter a non-professional Hegel, who could hardly be more different from his popular image. His earliest writings-drafts and essays from his twenties-were first published in 1907 under the misleading title *Hegel's early theological writings*. In some of them, notably 'The positivity of the Christian Religion', his style is brilliant, eloquent and picturesque.

The Encyclopedia contains his entire system in outline form. A shorter version of Logic, slightly rearranged (sometimes called the Lesser Logic) comprises part one; part two contains The Philosophy of Nature, subdivided into mechanics, physics and organics; and the Philosophy of Spirit forms part three. This too is divided into three parts, and each of these into three sub-parts; but this tripartite divisions cannot be reduced to theses, antithesis and synthetic. (p-155, concise encyclopedia). Hegel himself published only four books:- Phenomenology of Spirit (1807), Science of Logic (1812-16), Encyclopedia (1817), and Philosophy of Right (1821). Hegel's philosophy may be divided into three phases, the first antedating the phenomenology, the second represented by the book and the third by his later works, beginning logic. (P-152, concise encyclopedia). Hegel emerges in human history and culture, the gradual genesis of the Absolute, which has, in itself, its foundation. The universal idea, the superior form of the Spirit, is at the end of the process, the absolute term.

Hegel's method of exposition is dialectical. It often happens that in a discussion two people who at first present diametrically opposed points of view ultimately agree to reject their own partial views and to accept a new and broader view that does justice to the substance of each. Hegel believed that thinking always proceeds according to this pattern: it



begins by laying down a positive thesis that is at once negated by its antithesis; then further thought produces the synthesis. But this in turn generates an antithesis, and the same process continues once more. The process, however, is circular: ultimately, thinking reaches a synthesis that is identical with its starting point, except that all that was implicit there has now been made explicit. Thus, thinking itself, as a process, has negativity as one of its constituent moments, and the finite is, as God's self-manifestation, part and parcel of the infinite itself. This is the sort of dialectical process of which Hegel's system provides an account in three phases. It exists primarily as thought identical with itself (first moment). Then it goes out of itself and externalized (second time). Finally, during the third time, the Idea returns to itself and as Spirit unfolds, that is to say as Thought is gradually clarifying and reaching finally to the Absolute. Hegel developed a dialectical scheme that emphasized the progress of history and of ideas from thesis to antithesis and thence to a synthesis. Hegel's method in philosophy consists of the triadic development in each concept and each thing. Thus he hopes, philosophy will not contradict experience, but experience will give data to the philosophical, which is ultimately true explanation.

In the ultimate analysis, Hegel's philosophy, indeed, appears to be a philosophy of the whole. It discards the particular as unreal so long as it is confined within its given state of discrete existence and it shows that when this particular is integrated with its essence by means of the creative power of reason or spirit there emerges true reality in the form of a synthetic whole. One of Hegel's basic conceptions is that of the relation of a whole to its parts. Any part of a whole is what it is because of its relation to the system as a whole and to the other parts. This is perhaps most clearly seen in organism. In any living being, each organ is what it is because, it is part of a whole. No part can arise or survive unless it is part of whole. No part can arise or survive unless it is sustained by the others and helps to sustain them. The conception of the relationship between parts and whole in an organism is extended by Hegel to all truth and reality. Every truth or fact is dependent upon, and helps in its turn to determine, every other truth or facts. This doctrine has come to be known since Hegel's time as the organic theory of truth and reality as opposed to the opposite doctrine of the "externality of relations".

The systematic nature of his philosophical contributions is difficult to appreciate by contemporary standards. Few if any philosophers today create and defend philosophical system that attempt to unify logic, nature, ethics and other topic within the kind of systematic structure that Hegel provides. Hegel's philosophy matters because it underpins how one should attempt to reconstruct it. Hegel's way of doing philosophy involves a kind of rational reconstruction of the world.

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