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Source: *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (Spring, 1992), pp. 165-195

Published by: Wiley

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2265231>

Accessed: 31-10-2018 03:18 UTC

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The Project of Reconciliation: Hegel's Social Philosophy

The central aim of Hegel's¹ social philosophy (the *Rechtsphilosophie*) is to reconcile his contemporaries—the men and women of the nineteenth century—to the modern social world.² By “the modern social world” I mean the central social institutions of that era: the family, civil society, and the state. Hegel seeks to enable his contemporaries to overcome their alienation from this world by providing them with a philosophical theory that will reveal its true nature (*PR*, Preface ¶14). “The project of reconciliation” is the name I have given to this enterprise.

To my mind, the project is tremendously interesting—for at least three sorts of reasons. The first kind are personal and political. Many of us who live in contemporary Europe and America feel alienated.³ We feel “split” from the social world. Not everyone feels this way, of course, but, to those who do, the problem that pushes Hegel's project—alienation—and

I am grateful to David Brink, Stephen A. Erikson, Mary Devereaux, Raymond Geuss, Paul Hoffman, Robert Pippin, John Rawls, Ken Westphal, and the Editors of *Philosophy & Public Affairs* for comments on earlier drafts. I profited from reading this article at the Pacific Division meeting of the American Philosophical Association and the Philosophy Departments of the University of Illinois at Chicago, Stanford University, and Yale University. The bulk of the work on this article was completed with a fellowship from the Ford Foundation's Postdoctoral Fellowships for Minorities program. I owe the Ford Foundation a debt of gratitude for their financial and moral support.

1. A list of abbreviations used to refer to Hegel's texts, along with information about the method of citation, appears at the end of this article. All translations from the German texts are my own.

2. I follow the standard German practice of using the word *Rechtsphilosophie* to refer to the social philosophy Hegel presented in *PR*, the section “der objektive Geist” of *EL*, and the lectures in Heidelberg and Berlin between 1817 and 1831, which include *VPRG*, *VPRHO*, *VPRHN*, and *VPRW*.

3. I provide a provisional characterization of alienation on p. 167 and a more precise account of the notion in Section V. For a useful discussion of the philology of the term, see Richard Schacht, *Alienation*, with an introductory essay by Walter Kaufmann (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1970).

the ideal that pulls it—reconciliation—are of urgent personal concern. The project does not, it is true, speak *directly* to us. The social world Hegel seeks to reconcile his contemporaries to—the social world of the nineteenth century—is rather different from our own. But the basic issues Hegel addresses are issues many of us care about deeply. Even if we cannot accept the answers Hegel gives, we can be gripped by the problems that moved him.

The second sort of reasons are scholarly. Reconciliation is the main goal and central organizing category of Hegel's social philosophy (*PR*, Preface ¶15, §360). In fact, reconciliation is the main goal and central organizing category of Hegel's philosophy as a whole (*VA*, 1:81/1:51; *VG*, 78/67; *VGP*, 3:69/165).⁴ In order to understand his social philosophy, we must understand the role that reconciliation plays within it. Moreover, the fact that his social philosophy is organized around this goal is, arguably, its most distinctive feature. Scholars have generally recognized that reconciliation is central to Hegel's social philosophy, but no one has discussed this matter in a way I find satisfactory.⁵

The third sort of reasons for looking at Hegel are philosophical. Reconciliation is an important philosophical topic, even if it is unfamiliar. The claim that reconciliation ought to be a central organizing category of social and political philosophy deserves serious consideration. Equally worthy of attention is the claim that reconciliation constitutes a significant social ideal.

In this connection, it is worth observing that Hegel's concern with reconciliation is not idiosyncratic. Although it has not been generally recognized, reconciliation represents an important concern within the tradition of modern political philosophy: Rousseau, Kant, Marx, and Rawls all offer visions of reconciliation, broadly understood.⁶ Hegel's social phi-

4. The project of reconciling people to the social world is one part of the larger project of reconciling people to the world as a whole, which in turn is a part of the still larger project of reconciling *Geist* (spirit, mind) to the world as a whole and thereby to itself.

5. Recent commentators include Robert Pippin, "Hegel's Political Argument and the Problem of Verwirklichung," *Political Theory* 9 (1981): 510; Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 430; and Allen Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Theory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 6.

6. Indeed, if one expands the idea of the project of reconciliation *far enough*—to the completely general idea that the task of political philosophy is to show that modern institutions are worthy of allegiance—then almost every modern form of political theory can be regarded as being *implicitly* committed to the aim of reconciliation. If we think about rec-

losophy provides the best place to begin thinking about the philosophical importance of this ideal. He was the first modern thinker explicitly to claim that reconciliation is the proper aim of social philosophy. And his social philosophy provides the deepest and most comprehensive philosophical treatment of the topic available. If understanding Hegel provides a *historical* reason for looking at the project of reconciliation, understanding the project of reconciliation provides a *philosophical* reason for looking at Hegel.

My aim in this article is to introduce Hegel's project. I shall neither attempt to present the project nor attempt to assess it.⁷ My aim is simply to explain what the project is. I begin by considering the *problem* the project addresses and the sort of *solution* it proposes, and devote the remainder of the article to an examination of the project's *goal*.

I

The problem the project addresses is, of course, *alienation* (*Entfremdung*).⁸ Hegel believed that his contemporaries were alienated from the modern social world and that their alienation manifested itself in their feelings and beliefs. On his view, they felt “split (*entzweit, getrennt, zerissen*) from the family, civil society, and the state. And they regarded these institutions as alien, incomprehensible, and hostile or indifferent

onciliation in this very broad way, what distinguishes Hegel's approach from mainstream political philosophy is his explicit commitment to the aim of reconciliation, his insistence that reconciliation is the central organizing category of political philosophy, and his specific conception of reconciliation—which is far richer than the general idea of regarding institutions as worthy of allegiance. It is also worth noting that it is precisely Hegel's project that puts us in a position to see that almost every modern form of political theory is committed to the broad aim of reconciliation. For in *explicitly* making reconciliation the goal of his social philosophy, Hegel provides a perspective from which we can see that reconciliation is a goal *implicit* within modern political philosophy.

7. I provide a full-blown presentation of the project in *Hegel's Social Philosophy: The Project of Reconciliation*, forthcoming from Cambridge University Press.

8. Hegel does not, it is true, use the word *Entfremdung* to describe this form of division; moreover, the structure of this form of division differs from the structure of the form of consciousness he discusses in the section of the *Phänomenologie* under the rubric “der sich entfremdete Geist” (Self-alienated Spirit) (*PhG*, 359–441/294–363). Nonetheless, it is clear—and uncontroversial—that Hegel's social philosophy is meant, among other things, as a response to the problem I am calling “alienation.” For Hegel's general view that modern social life is characterized by splits or divisions, see the early *D* (21–22/89–91) and the much later *VA* (1:81/1:55), constructed from Hegel's lecture notes by H. G. Hotho.

to their needs. In short, they were not “at home” (*bei sich, zu Hause*) in their social world.

The reason they were not at home, Hegel maintains, was that their social world *appeared* to be hostile, alien, and incomprehensible (*PR*, Preface ¶15). Civil society represented a new and troubling social formation, distinct from both family and state (*PR*, §182Z; *VPRHO*, 565). By “civil society” (*Bürgerliche Gesellschaft*) Hegel means, roughly, the depoliticized sphere organized around the modern market economy within which people pursue their own separate and particular interests.⁹ Civil society appeared to be anarchic and incomprehensible, on the one hand, and atomizing and fragmenting, on the other (*PR*, §§184Z, 238; *VPRHO*, 571). It seemed to sever people’s connections to family and state, transforming them into isolated individuals who lacked psychological unity and personal harmony. During this period, largely as a result of the emergence of civil society, the state had taken on a new and problematic form. It appeared to be too large and complex to be intelligible or afford any kind of meaningful participation. It also appeared to be radically insensitive to the claims of individuality. The modern bourgeois family, on the other hand, appeared all too traditional (*PR*, §164Z; *VPRG*, 437), and, like the state, seemed to offer no room for individuality. The upshot of all this was that there appeared to be a striking *lack of fit* between the modern social world and its members: Civil society and the state did not appear to foster community. The state and the family did not seem to promote individuality. Civil society and the state did not seem to be comprehensible. And the family, civil society, and the state did not appear to form an intelligible whole.

Hegel argued that this appearance (that the social world is hostile, alien, and incomprehensible) was false. The fact of the matter was that the family, civil society, and the state formed a single coherent, intelligible system that promoted both individuality and community (*PR*, §§157, 260). This system made it possible for people to realize themselves both as full-fledged individuals and as full-fledged community members (*PR*, §§153, 154, 260). In the modern social world, people could lead free and rational lives and “be at home.” The social world was, Hegel maintains, “a home”—a place where its members could *be* at

9. Civil society, as Hegel understands it, is not just the market. It also includes the legal and judicial system (*PR*, §§209–29), a public authority (*PR*, §§231–49), and a system of corporate groups (*PR*, §§250–56).

home (*PR*, §§4, 23; *VPRG*, 399; *VPRHN*, 122). Because of this, he argues, it was *worthy* of reconciliation. The central task of Hegel's theory of the modern social world (the *Rechtsphilosophie*) is to make good on this claim.

II

Unless we remember that Hegel took the modern social world to be a home despite its apparent foreignness, his proposed solution to the modern predicament of alienation will seem, at best, bizarre. On the face of things, the idea that alienation can be overcome through theory is quite implausible. For if the form of alienation that Hegel's contemporaries experienced was genuine,¹⁰ it is far from clear how it could be overcome through anything other than a transformation of their social arrangements.¹¹ But once we get a grip on Hegel's understanding of his historical situation, his solution no longer seems bizarre. *If* his contemporaries were alienated because they *failed to understand* their social world and *if* their social world could not be understood without the aid of philosophical theory, then a *philosophical account* of their social world was precisely what they needed.¹² Such an account would allow them to grasp that their social world was a home: by grasping (*begreifen*) this fact, they could come to be reconciled to its arrangements (*PR*, Preface ¶15). Hegel's diagnosis of his contemporaries' plight may have been wrong, but relative to his understanding of their plight, the solution he proposed was quite reasonable.

10. I address the question whether Hegel can defend the view that his contemporaries were genuinely alienated in Section V.

11. The reader will recall Marx's oft-quoted eleventh thesis on Feuerbach: "Philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point however is to *change it*." "Thesen über Feuerbach," in *Marx Engels Werke* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1983), 3:535 ("Theses on Feuerbach," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2d ed., ed. Robert C. Tucker [New York: Norton, 1978], p. 145).

12. Hegel recognizes that his contemporaries may also have been alienated in part because they lacked a proper understanding of *themselves*. One of the aims of the project of reconciliation is to provide that self-understanding. It seeks to show that modern people are essentially family members, members of civil society, and citizens. The *Rechtsphilosophie* is not just a social theory. It also provides a moral psychology: an account of the modern self that shows that the modern self can be at home in the modern world. As Hegel understands it, becoming reconciled is both a matter of coming to understand the world and a matter of coming to understand the self, but I cannot pursue this aspect of the project of reconciliation here.

Many people, most famously Marx, have held that Hegel believes that reconciliation to the social world is *always* possible.¹³ What has not been sufficiently appreciated is that Hegel denies this. While Hegel does think that theory *can* reconcile, he maintains that it can do so *only if* certain objective social conditions are in place, namely, those that make the social world a home.¹⁴ Hegel takes world history (*Weltgeschichte*) to be the process that brings these conditions into place.¹⁵ He maintains that the social world was not a home during the time of the Roman Empire (*PhG*, 355–59/290–94; *VPG*, 380–85/314–18) or the Middle Ages (*VPG*, 440–91/366–410): the Roman world failed to provide community, and the medieval world failed to allow for individuality.¹⁶ To have attempted through theory to reconcile people to the social world during those eras would have been pointless. What was needed then was not a transformation of people's consciousness but a transformation of their objective social arrangements.

Once we recognize that Hegel thinks that theory can reconcile only when the requisite objective social conditions are in place, we can better understand his relation to Marx. For then it becomes clear that the basic difference between them does not—as has commonly been thought—concern the importance of objective social conditions. That is a point about which they agree. Hegel, like Marx, thinks that *if* the social world is alien, its social arrangements must be transformed in order for it to become worthy of reconciliation.¹⁷ He also agrees with Marx in main-

13. Karl Marx, "Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie: Einleitung," in *Marx Engels Werke* 1:384–85 ("Contribution to Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law: Introduction," *Marx Engels Collected Works* [New York: International Publishers, 1975], 3:180–81).

14. I should note that what is at issue here is *social* and not *religious* reconciliation. Hegel thinks that religious reconciliation—reconciliation with God—is possible during periods in which the social world is not a home. But he also maintains that religious reconciliation is no replacement for social reconciliation (*VGP*, 2:588/3:95–96).

15. It is because Hegel believed that world history had changed the world—that is, made it a home—that he could maintain that the point in his time was to interpret it.

16. Hegel thought that the social world of the ancient Greeks was a home—albeit a primitive one. It was *primitive* because it provided no place for "subjectivity"—that is, the exercise of conscience and critical reflection on one's social roles and institutions. Hegel maintained that it was precisely because the Greek world was primitive that it had to be superseded and that humanity was forced to enter a long period of alienation, including the era of the Roman Empire and the Middle Ages, ending only in the modern world (*PR*, §185R).

17. That the arrangements of the social world had to be transformed in order for it to

taining that the social world could not be made a home without a revolution.¹⁸ But, unlike Marx, who thought that that revolution was still to come, Hegel thought it had already taken place—in France in 1789. The basic difference between them is that Hegel affirms and Marx denies the proposition that the modern social world is a home. A secondary difference between them concerns the objective conditions that the modern social world must satisfy in order to be a home. Marx maintains that the modern social world cannot be a home so long as it is capitalist. Hegel contends that a modified form of capitalism is a precondition of the modern social world's being a home (*PR*, §§189–208).

Now if we generalize the idea of the project of reconciliation, we can think of Hegel and Marx as being engaged in different forms of the same basic enterprise. For then we can say that Marx is engaged in the “political” project of reconciliation and Hegel is engaged in the “philosophical” project of reconciliation.

The *political* project gets its start from the proposition that the modern social world is not a home. It seeks to secure the objective conditions of reconciliation by transforming the central social institutions so as to make them worthy of reconciliation. Instead of seeking to reconcile people to the social world directly, it seeks to change the social world so as to make it worthy of reconciliation. It is “political” in that it seeks to make reconciliation possible through political change.

The *philosophical* project gets its start from the proposition that the social world is a home even though it does not appear to be one.¹⁹ The philosophical project is “philosophical” in that it attempts to reconcile people by providing them with a philosophical account of their central

become a home is a central thesis of Hegel's philosophy of history. See VG. For the corresponding Marxist view, see Marx, “Kritik,” p. 384 (“Contribution,” pp. 180–81).

18. For useful discussions of Hegel's views on revolution, see Jürgen Habermas, *Theorie und Praxis: Sozialphilosophische Studien* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1963) (*Theory and Practice*, trans. John Viertel [Boston: Beacon Press, 1973]); Joachim Ritter, *Hegel und die französische Revolution* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1965) (*Hegel and the French Revolution*, trans. Richard Dien Winfield [Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1982]); Michael Theunissen, “Die Vewirklichung der Vernunft: Zur Theorie-Praxis Diskussion im Anschluß an Hegels,” *Philosophische Rundschau*, Special Issue, 6 (1970): 1–89.

19. This is not to say that Hegel simply *assumes* that the social world is a home, for, as we have seen, one of the central tasks of his social theory is precisely to *show* this. The point is rather this: the claim that the best way to overcome people's alienation from the modern social world is to provide them with a philosophical theory finds its ultimate justification in the philosophical theory the project provides.

social institutions that will allow them to see that their world is a home despite appearances. The project attempts to reconcile by providing *rational insight* (*vernünftige Einsicht*) into the true nature of the social world (*PR*, Preface ¶15).²⁰ There is, of course, a sense in which the philosophical project is “political” too, since, in recommending reconciliation, it recommends a particular political attitude, one of acceptance and affirmation.

Marx takes the philosophical project of reconciliation to be inherently *ideological*; for he thinks that if the social world were a home, there would be no need for social theory.²¹ To say that a project is “ideological” is to say that it is or promotes a form of “false consciousness” (a false account of the social world or its members that stabilizes or legitimizes oppression). Marx argues that the social world is a home only if its workings and the fact that it is a home are *transparent*. On his view, if you need theory to be at home, the world you inhabit is not a home. Hegel, on the other hand, maintains that the social world can be a home without being transparent. His conception of what it is for a social world to be a home is thus strikingly different from Marx’s. It is a conception on which the social world can *both* be a home *and* be in need of theory. Hegel maintains that the historical transformations that made the modern social world a home—which include the emergence of civil society and the modern state—also made the social world appear to be alien, and so gave rise to the need for social theory. He also argues, more generally, that the very conditions of modernity—which include the scale and complexity of the modern state and the fact that modern people demand “rational insight” into their social arrangements—make theory indispensable.²² Let us turn now to the goal of this theory.

20. Hegel goes so far as to identify rational insight with reconciliation, speaking of the rational insight that “is” reconciliation (*PR*, Preface ¶15).

21. Marx, “Kritik,” pp. 378–91 (“Contribution,” pp. 175–87); “Thesen,” pp. 533–35 (“Theses,” p. 145). For an excellent discussion of this point, see G. A. Cohen, *Karl Marx’s Theory of History: A Defence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), pp. 326–44.

22. If Hegel’s understanding of his historical situation is correct—if the modern social world is a home—then there is nothing ideological about his enterprise. But if his understanding of his historical situation is wrong—if the modern social world is not a home—then his project will turn out to be ideological. But the reason the project will be ideological is that it seeks to reconcile people to a social world that is not a home—not that it is philosophical. We need to say against Marx, then, that the philosophical project of reconciliation is not *inherently* ideological. And we need to say with Marx, or in a Marxist vein, that the *risk* of ideology is inherent in the enterprise.

III

The goal, of course, is *reconciliation*. I want to begin by approaching the concept negatively, considering what it does not mean. My concern in this section is to locate the concept of reconciliation. In the next section, I will provide a positive account of Hegel's philosophical concept of reconciliation.

Reconciliation is the English word I am using to represent the German word Hegel uses, namely, *Versöhnung*.²³ Now the English differs from the German in a number of important respects.²⁴ In its ordinary use, *reconciliation* can mean “submission” or “resignation,” which may suggest that the real aim of Hegel’s project is surrender and acquiescence—something that would, of course, be objectionable.²⁵ If reconciliation is a matter of submitting to the powers-that-be or resigning oneself to the status quo, who wants it? Better to be alienated than to submit or resign.

But in fact the features of *reconciliation* that give this impression are not shared by *Versöhnung*. *Versöhnung* simply does not mean “submission.” Nor does it mean “resignation.” You can become *reconciled* to a circumstance that is completely contrary to your wishes, but you cannot (grammatically) become *versöhnt* to it. German does have a word for this sense of *reconcile*—reconciliation as resignation—but it is *abfinden*, not *versöhnen*. Think of it this way: if *Versöhnung* is possible, resignation is unnecessary.

Versöhnung is quite different from resignation. To be *versöhnt* to the social world is to view it in a positive light. *Versöhnung* involves something like complete and wholehearted acceptance or, more precisely,

23. The word *Versöhnung* derives from *Sühne*, which means expiation or atonement. Contrary to appearances, there is no etymological connection between Christian doctrine that God’s son (*Sohn*) is the reconciler (*Versöhnner*) and the composition of the word *Versöhnen*. Nor is there any etymological connection between *Sühne* (whose Middle High German forms were *süeme* and *suone*) and *Sohn*. See Jacob and William Grimm, *Deutsche Wörterbuch* (Leipzig: von S. Hirzel Verlag, 1854).

24. I am indebted to Gisela Striker for discussion of these matters.

25. The negative tone of *reconciliation* is especially clear when the verb is used with the preposition *to*, a usage that suggests that the process of reconciliation is asymmetrical and that the object of reconciliation is a state of affairs that is viewed negatively. One becomes reconciled *to* the loss of a child. The use of the preposition *with*, on the other hand, suggests that the process is symmetrical and that the object of reconciliation is a person who is viewed positively. I become reconciled *with* my friend.

warranted complete and wholehearted acceptance. Implicit in the idea of *Versöhnung* with the social world, then, is the thought that in order for *Versöhnung* to be possible, the social world must be *worthy* of such acceptance.

My point here is that nothing in the word *Versöhnung* suggests that Hegel's project is invidiously conservative or that its aim is surrender or acquiescence. It is crucial, then, that we remember that the English word *reconciliation* carries baggage that the German word does not. This linguistic point does not, of course, settle the substantive question whether the project of reconciliation ultimately collapses into a project of submission or resignation. But it should remove one powerful source of the sense that it *must* come to this.²⁶

Let me also observe that the meaning of *reconciliation* (*Versöhnung*) differs from that of *consolation* (*Trost*).²⁷ These two words are, it is true, very close in meaning. Indeed, if we speak loosely, we may use them interchangeably. Consolation, like reconciliation, is a response to prior disappointment and, like reconciliation, involves a form of acceptance. But, unlike reconciliation, consolation involves *continuing disappointment* at the failure of the world to live up to some deeply rooted expectation. Your spouse dies but you find consolation in the continuing existence of your children. Their existence does not negate the loss, but it does console you. In becoming consoled, you come to accept a situation because you find real but partial compensation for your loss or disappointment (EL, §147Z; VG, 78/67). If, however, you are truly reconciled—reconciled in the sense of *versöhnt*—you have no need for consolation, because, in being reconciled, you have fully accepted the situation. There is no thought: “Things would be better were they otherwise.” It is significant, then, that the aim of Hegel’s project is *reconciliation* and not consolation (VG, 78/76).²⁸ When the project is complete,

26. I return to the substantive question in Section VI.

27. Freud might usefully be thought of as a resignation-consolation theorist. In *Civilization and Its Discontents* he attempts to persuade people to *resign* themselves to the discontents that inevitably result from the conflict between the instincts and the demands of society and to find *consolation* in sublimation. He argues, in effect, that this conflict generates a split between people and the social world that would make anything that could be properly called reconciliation impossible. See Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. Joan Riviere (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953).

28. Thus Hegel insists: “Philosophy is not consolation, it is more, it reconciles . . .” (VG, 78/67).

there should be no lingering disappointment. People should be in a position to fully embrace the modern social world.

If the negative connotations of *reconciliation* make the goal of the project sound too bleak, the positive connotations of *Versöhnung* may make the goal sound too cheery. This worry grows even stronger once we recognize that Hegel's use of the term is even more positive than the ordinary use. For Hegel, *Versöhnung* is more than a matter of acceptance, even full acceptance: to be *versöhnt* to something is to *embrace* it. So, it may well sound as if Hegel must think that being reconciled is a matter of thinking that everything is wonderful.

But Hegel doesn't think that everything is wonderful. Far from it. His outlook is by no means Pollyannaish. He insists that becoming reconciled is compatible with recognizing that the social world contains features that are problematic. More specifically, he maintains that reconciliation is compatible with recognizing (a) that the fundamental features of the modern social world include divorce (*PR*, §176), poverty (*PR*, §§244–45), and war (*PR*, §324R) and (b) that particular families, civil societies, and states will inevitably exhibit defects and imperfections, some of which are quite serious (*PR*, §258Z; VPRG, 633).²⁹

Indeed, to say that Hegel thinks that becoming reconciled is compatible with recognizing that the social world contains problematic features is at best an understatement. For he thinks that recognizing and accepting this fact is integral to the process of becoming reconciled. You cannot become genuinely reconciled by putting on rose-colored glasses; reconciliation is instead a matter of accepting the social world as a world that contains features that are problematic.³⁰ In this respect Hegel's conception of reconciliation exhibits two qualities I find attractive: realism and sobriety. If there is to be any hope for a conception of reconciliation, it must be one on which reconciliation can be combined with clear-eyed

29. Thus Hegel says: “The state is no pure artwork, it stands in the world, it stands thereby in the sphere of caprice [*Willkür*], contingency [*Zufalls*], error [*Irrthums*] . . .” (VPRG, 633). More generally, he says, “Where there is finitude, there opposition [*Gegensatz*] and contradiction [*Widerspruch*] always break out again afresh, and satisfaction never gets beyond the relative [*das Relative*]” (VA, 1:136/1:99).

30. Hegel maintains that people attain reconciliation by recognizing (*erkennen*) “reason as the rose in the cross of the present” (*PR*, Preface ¶15). You cannot recognize reason as “the rose in the cross of the present” without also seeing the cross in which the rose is placed.

recognition of the defects of the world. Part of the appeal of Hegel's project is that it tries to combine these elements.

Clearly there is a tension here: how can Hegel's conception of reconciliation remain realistic without collapsing into a conception of resignation? If, as he argues, divorce, poverty, and war are inevitable, perhaps *resignation* would be appropriate. But Hegel wants more than this: he wants *affirmation*, "das versöhnende Ja" (the reconciling yes) (*PhG*, 494/409). How can he provide an argument for the inevitability of these problematic features without opting for resignation? And how can he suggest that people should accept these features without affirming evil? Why doesn't it turn out that what Hegel ultimately commends is accommodation to evil?

The first thing to note is that Hegel is keenly aware of these difficulties. His social theory is, among other things, a "social theodicy"—a social and political variant of the traditional theological enterprise.³¹ As traditionally conceived, theodicy seeks to justify the ways of God to man. Hegel's social theodicy seeks to justify the ways of society to its members.³² By showing that the world is ultimately good, traditional theodicy seeks to reconcile man to God; by showing that the social world is ultimately good, social theodicy seeks to reconcile people to the social world. A central task of both enterprises is to account for the negative features of the world. Traditional theodicy seeks quite generally to account for the existence of evil in the world. Social theodicy seeks more narrowly to account for the existence of social evils in the world.

The basic line Hegel takes is that divorce and war both have a rational element in the light of which they can be affirmed.³³ He argues that the

31. Thus Hegel says, speaking of world history: "Our investigation is in this respect a theodicy" (*VG*, 48/42). The term "social theodicy" is my own.

32. This contrast is somewhat artificial. Hegel actually thinks that social theodicy is part of a more general philosophical project of theodicy, which resembles the traditional theological enterprise in seeking to reconcile man to God (*Geist*).

33. One of the striking facts about Hegel's treatment of the modern social world is that he does not maintain that poverty has a rational element in the light of which it can be affirmed. Just as divorce is a structural feature of the family and war is a structural feature of the state, so, Hegel claims, poverty is a structural feature of civil society (*PR*, §§185, 244, 245). But Hegel thinks that poverty, in contrast to divorce and war, represents a real evil. The evil of poverty consists in part in material deprivation, but much more fundamentally in the fact that poverty cuts people off from participation in the ordinary practices of social life and thus from the social and spiritual means of reconciliation (*PR*, §242; *VPRHN*, 194–95). On Hegel's view, poverty is an evil first and foremost because it is alien-

possibility of divorce flows out of the fact that marriage is a unity of feeling (*PR*, §§158, 163, 176) and that feelings are contingent (*PR*, §176). Feelings being contingent, it is always possible that husband and wife may become “totally estranged” (*total entfremdet*) (*PR*, §176). People being as they are, it is only to be expected that such conflicts will occur. Divorce is, in effect, the external, legal expression of an irreparable internal split. War, Hegel argues, is necessary in order to preserve the “ethical health” (*sittliche Gesundheit*) of the state (*PR*, §324R). Periods of prolonged peace, he contends, result in ethical stagnation: people become overly involved in their private affairs, coming to see themselves exclusively as private persons. And war, he argues, uniquely makes it possible for people to come to a concrete appreciation of the fact that they are members of a political, organized community and the importance of the existence of the state (*PR*, §324R). Hegel also argues that war cannot be prevented by the sort of international organization Kant proposed in his *Perpetual Peace* (a league of nations), since the possibility of such a body is precluded by the sovereignty of the state (*PR*, §§324R, 333R). He also argues that there must be a plurality of individual states and that this requirement precludes the possibility of forming one common, sovereign world-state. The reason there must be a plurality of individual states has to do with the relation between “individuality” (*Individualität*) and “recognition” (*Anerkennung*) (*PR*, §§330–31). Very roughly, Hegel’s idea is that in order for individual states to realize themselves as individuals they must be “recognized” as individual states by *other* individual states from which they distinguish themselves (cf. *PhG*, 145–55/111–

ating. Hegel allows that it might be appropriate to try to convince any given married couple not to divorce, but he thinks that there would be something misguided about trying to eliminate the possibility of divorce—the possibility of divorce being intimately connected to marriage’s character as a unity of feeling. And while he allows that it might be appropriate to attempt to prevent the occurrence of any given war, he thinks that there would be something misguided about attempting to prevent wars from ever occurring—war being necessary on his view for the ethical health of the state. But Hegel does not think that there is anything misguided about attempting to provide a general solution to poverty. And indeed, he himself canvasses a number of possible solutions (*PR*, §245,R), none of which appear to be satisfactory. The fact that poverty represents a structural feature of civil society for which there is no apparent solution poses a fundamental threat to the project of reconciliation as a whole. It also deepens the worry that Hegel’s project of reconciliation will turn out to be ideological after all. I discuss this problem in my forthcoming book. See also Shlomo Avineri, *Hegel’s Theory of the Modern State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), pp. 147–54; Wood, *Hegel’s Ethical Theory*, pp. 247–54.

19). Given this basic structural situation—that there is a plurality of individual, sovereign states—and given the fact that in the normal course of events states are likely to enter into grievous disputes that cannot be settled through peaceful means, war, Hegel concludes, is inevitable.

Hegel also argues that the defects of particular families, civil societies, and states do not undermine the modern social world's claim to be a home. He maintains that the world is a home because the ideals that underlie the family, civil society, and the state—and are articulated in the *Rechtsphilosophie*—are realized to a significant degree (*PR*, Preface ¶13).

Now this line clearly needs elaboration—I have done no more than sketch it—and obviously it raises serious difficulties of its own. Among other things, it may heighten the natural suspicion that what Hegel really wants us to do is embrace certain forms of social evil. But, threatening though this line may be, it contributes to the tension that makes Hegel's view interesting: the tension between realism and affirmation, and affirmation and accommodation.³⁴ This tension reflects Hegel's response to a problem we can recognize as real, a problem that arises for anyone who grasps that the social world will inevitably exhibit serious defects and imperfections: how are we to come to terms with this fact?

Reconciliation, in Hegel's sense of the term, must not be understood as a state of "perfect harmony." He maintains that people will inevitably come into conflict with the modern social world, even if it is well ordered and even if they are reconciled (*PR*, §148). More precisely, they will experience conflicts between the separate and particular interests they have as individuals and the obligations they have as family members, members of civil society, and citizens. There will be times when parents will not want to stay at home with their children, workers will not feel like going to work, and citizens will have no desire to pay their taxes.

That such conflicts will occur is no accident. Hegel argues that a well-ordered modern social world will raise its members to have separate and

34. Whether Hegel can *maintain* this tension—whether he can have affirmation without falling prey to accommodation, whether he can have realism without sacrificing affirmation, whether he can have affirmation without sacrificing realism—is a fundamental question of Hegel interpretation I cannot hope to settle here. My aim in this section is to present the perspective within which these questions arise in a way that is sensitive to and expressive of the conflicting strands of this perspective. I am trying to suggest that, whether or not Hegel succeeds in maintaining the tension, the very fact that his project contains the conflicting strands it does makes it interesting.

particular interests—some of which will inevitably come into conflict with the demands of their social roles (*PR*, §§189–209; *VPRHO*, 488). He also allows that the obligations people have, say, as family members, will occasionally come into conflict with the obligations they have, say, as members of civil society. A well-ordered social world is a world that generates conflicts.

On Hegel's view, being reconciled essentially involves accepting—in-deed embracing—these tensions. His social theory is supposed to show us that the tension between our separate and particular interests and the demands of the social world is a necessary by-product of our individuality. We are also supposed to see that the conflicts between the demands of the family, civil society, and the state are necessary by-products of the social differentiation required for the complete unfolding of the human spirit. Thus conflict and antagonism are internal to Hegel's conception of reconciliation.

They are not, however, final. What is crucial to being reconciled, according to Hegel, is that there be no *fundamental* conflicts between the interests people have as individuals and the demands of the family, civil society, and the state (*PR*, §§147, 151). Hegel takes this fundamental unity to be a hallmark of a well-ordered modern social world. Such a world will raise its members to identify with the roles of family member, member of civil society, and citizen (*PR*, §187,R; *VPRHN*, 125). It will also teach them to embrace the norms internal to these roles and regard them as the “substantial” (*substantiell*) component of their self-conception and take the good of their family, civil society, and the state to constitute the “substantial” component of their own individual good (*EL*, §515; *PR*, §145Z; *VPRHO*, 485). At the same time, in a well-ordered social world, the family, civil society, and the state will function so as to promote and foster the individuality of their members and provide them with community (*PR*, §260; *VA*, 1:136/1:98). Hence it will be *reasonable* for the members of the social world to embrace the norms internal to the social world's institutions and to regard the good of the social world's institutions as part of their own good. Also, the demands of the family, civil society, and the state in a well-ordered modern society will be organized in such a way that no tragic conflicts between them can occur (*PR*, §150R): no members of a well-ordered modern social world will face the predicament of Antigone and Creon (see *PhG*, 327–42/266–78). Moreover, the demands of a well-ordered modern social world will be suffi-

ciently well integrated as to allow its members to lead coherent and non-fragmented lives.

Hegel's conception of reconciliation is thus one that understands itself as preserving conflict at one level and overcoming it at another. Both elements are attractive. The fact that his conception seeks to preserve conflict is attractive because the idea of a perfect harmony is both utopian and dangerous: utopian because unrealizable, dangerous because invidiously anti-individualistic. Moreover, the fact that Hegel is willing to embrace conflict makes his thought quite appealing. He is far too often placed in the camp of the enemies of conflict.³⁵ In fact, Hegel, in contrast to Marx, is one of the great friends of conflict.³⁶ But it is important that Hegel argues that at the most fundamental level conflicts are overcome, for, in so doing, he secures the status of his conception as a conception of reconciliation. Furthermore, the idea that there might be conflict-embracing forms of unity is itself quite appealing (VA, 1:82/1:52). The search for a conflict-embracing higher unity may be in vain, but it is far from obvious that such unity is a crazy thing to look for.

Having located the ordinary and Hegelian concepts of reconciliation, I now want to provide an account of the latter.

IV

Reconciliation, in Hegel's technical sense of the term, refers to both a process (VA, 1:81/1:55; VPRJ, 5:107/3:172)³⁷ and a state: the process of

35. See Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 51–84; Bernard Williams, "Conflicts of Values," in his *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 72.

36. Marx did, it is true, think of class conflict as a fundamental motor of human history and to that extent affirmed conflict. But the world the revolution was to bring about was to be essentially free of conflict. The point I have just been emphasizing is that, according to Hegel, the social world at which world history "aimed"—the modern social world—was a world that contained conflict.

37. It is possible to distinguish among a family of processes of overcoming alienation. There is for Hegel: (a) the *historical* process of reconciliation (world history), through which the objective conditions of being at home in the social world are first secured; (b) the *social* process of reconciliation (the normal operation of the modern social world), through which the objective conditions of being at home in the social world maintain and reproduce themselves; (c) the *speculative* process of reconciliation (the result of learning the philosophical theory provided in the *Rechtsphilosophie*) through which people come to be at home in the modern social world. On Hegel's view, the social process presupposes the historical process; the speculative process presupposes the social process and the his-

overcoming alienation from the social world and the state of *being at home in the social world* that is its result.³⁸ Being at home in the social world (*Beischsein, Zuhausesein*), then, is the linchpin of Hegel's project.³⁹ It is the basic concept out of which the concepts of both reconciliation and alienation are constructed. By clarifying it, we can deepen our understanding of the ideal that pulls Hegel's project and the problem that pushes it. I will return to the problem in the next section, after elucidating the notion of being at home in the social world.

My first task, then, is to provide an account of the notion of being at home in the social world. According to Hegel, people—modern people, anyway—are *at home in the social world* if and only if

1. the social world is a home;
2. they grasp that the social world is a home;
3. they feel at home in the social world; and
4. they accept and affirm the social world.

Being at home in the social world (and hence reconciliation) is both an objective and a subjective matter. It is not wholly subjective, since there is an objective condition the social world must meet—that of being a home—if people are to be at home there.⁴⁰ (I specify what it is for the social world to be “a home” below.) But being at home in the social world is not wholly objective either, since there is a set of subjective conditions

torical process; and the speculative process completes both the social process and the historical process.

38. Hegel says that “reconciliation is the movement of making . . . alienation [*Entfremdung*] disappear” (VPRJ, 5:107/3:172), and characterizes the final stage of *Geist*'s reconciliation as that in which it is “reconciled in the object with itself” (*in dem Gegenstand versöhnt bei sich selbst*) (VPRJ, 3:85/1:177).

39. Hegel also uses *Beischsein* and similar phrases to refer to his special conception of freedom. Hegel thinks that in order for the social world to be a home, it must be free and that a social world that is a home is a world in which people can be free. It might be argued that what I shall present as the conditions of the social world's being a home represent what Hegel takes to be the conditions a social world must meet in order to provide freedom. The relation between freedom and being at home in the social world is clearly of enormous importance for Hegel, but I cannot pursue the matter here.

40. This point is worth emphasizing because many people, Marx being the most famous, have maintained that for Hegel reconciliation is purely subjective. The basic mistake people make in thinking about the idea of being at home in the social world is that of conflating it with the idea of *feeling* at home in the social world; the basic mistake they make in thinking about the aim of the project of reconciliation is that of conflating it with the aim of allowing people to *feel* at home in the social world.

people must satisfy in order to be at home (conditions 2 through 4). By “grasping that the social world is a home” I mean coming to know or truly believe that the social world is a home. “Feeling at home” in the social world is a matter of feeling connected to its central arrangements. It involves feeling that one “fits into” the social world and feeling that one “belongs” there. By “accepting the social world” I mean accepting that the social world is arranged as it is, not denying that its central arrangements are as they are, not fixing one’s thoughts on other ways in which it might ideally be arranged, or dwelling on its shortcomings. “Affirmation” is stronger and more positive than “acceptance.” In “affirming the social world” I consent to its central arrangements. To “affirm the social world” is to say yes to it and the way it is arranged. “Affirmation” also involves endorsing and embracing the world’s central social institutions.

We can see from this that on Hegel’s view, the process of coming to be at home—and hence the subjective process of attaining reconciliation—is a matter of *subjective appropriation*. It is by grasping that the modern social world is a home, coming to feel at home there, and accepting and affirming its arrangements that people become reconciled to the modern social world.

Speaking of the social world as “a home” may sound quaint, sentimental, or naive, but this way of speaking is extremely apt. For, as we have seen, on Hegel’s view, a well-ordered social world is a world in which people can *be* at home. The next task is to provide an account of what it is for the world to be a home. I hope it will become clear in the course of this discussion that Hegel’s understanding of what it is for the social world to be a home is neither quaint nor sentimental nor naive.

According to Hegel, the social world is *a home* if there is no significant objective dimension along which people are “split” from it. This reflects the intuitive idea that alienation is a form of *being split* from the social world, that being at home in the world is the circumstance of *not being split* from it, and that reconciliation is the process of *overcoming splits*.⁴¹ Hegel maintains that there are three significant objective dimensions along which people could be split from the social world: *value*, *need*, and *cognition*. These dimensions are “objective” in the sense that people

41. Thus Hegel speaks of reconciliation as the “negation” (*Negation*) of “division” (*Trennung*) and “divorce” (*Scheidung*) (VPRJ, 5:107/3:172).

might be connected or disconnected along them without realizing that they were. Hegel's view, then, is that the social world is a home if it guarantees connection along the dimensions of value, need, and cognition.⁴² Let us consider these dimensions in more detail.

People are connected to the social world along the dimension of *value* if its central social institutions—the family, civil society, and the state—express the basic social values of its members. An institution “expresses” a value if it promotes that value and if that value must be invoked to explain its normal operation. Thus civil society might be said to express the value of individuality; the state, the value of community. People are connected to the social world along the dimension of *need* if they are able to meet their basic social needs by participating in its central social institutions in the normal way. Let us consider the notions of basic social value and basic social need more closely.

The first thing to note is that the basic social values and basic social needs are not needs and values that people have solely in their capacity as social members. They are needs and values people have both as social members *and* as individuals. Thus the basic social needs and basic social values are also basic *individual* needs and basic *individual* values. The point of characterizing them as “social” is to contrast them with needs and values that are “aesthetic,” “religious,” or “philosophical.” “Social values” are values that can be appropriately expressed by institutions such as the family, civil society, and the state. “Social needs” are needs that can be appropriately satisfied within the same institutions.⁴³ Hegel maintains that the social world—civil society and the state in any case—need not express its members’ aesthetic, religious, or philosophical values or meet their corresponding needs in order to be a home. He also

42. A fundamental aim of the *Rechtsphilosophie* is to show that the modern social world secures connection along these three dimensions. More specifically, it seeks to show (a) that were the central social institutions of the modern social world (the family, civil society, and the state) ideally realized, they would secure connection along the dimensions of value, need, and cognition; and (b) that the modern social world actually secures connection along these dimensions despite the fact that particular families, civil societies, and states will inevitably exhibit defects and imperfections.

43. The contrast I am drawing between “the social,” on the one hand, and “the aesthetic,” “the religious,” and “the philosophical,” on the other hand, corresponds to a systematic distinction Hegel draws between the sphere of “objective” *Geist* (in which *Geist* attains external but finite expression in the social world) and the sphere of “absolute” *Geist* (in which *Geist* attains complete and perfect expression in the practices of art, religion, and philosophy).

thinks that it is essential that the state be separate from the church. He associates the demand that church and state be unified with “oriental despotism” and argues that separation between church and state is a precondition for the full and complete development of both.⁴⁴ Thus there is an important respect in which Hegel’s conception of social connection and being at home in the social world is secular.⁴⁵

Hegel maintains that the basic social needs and values come to the same thing: *individuality* and *community* (*PR*, §§260, 270Z; *VRP*, 717–18). This overlap reflects Hegel’s anti-Kantian view that (empirical) need and (moral) value do not represent two fundamentally different domains (for example, the empirical and the transcendent). “Individuality,” as Hegel understands it, involves having a set of separate and particular interests (*PR*, §§182, 187), having the capacity to question one’s social roles and institutions (*PR*, §5), being able to pursue one’s own separate and particular interests (*PR*, §§182, 187), being able to assert one’s individual rights (*PR*, §36), and being able to act in accordance with individual conscience (*PR*, §136). “Community,” as Hegel understands it, involves identifying with one’s social roles and institutions (*PR*, §147) and participating in social arrangements characterized by shared trans-individual ends (for example, the survival of one’s family or nation). It

44. Thus Hegel says: “It is therefore so far from the truth that the separation of the church is or has been a misfortune for the state, that it is *only through* the separation that the state could realize its vocation [*Bestimmung*], self-conscious rationality and ethical life [*Sittlichkeit*]. It is equally true, that this separation is the best piece of good fortune that could befall either the church or thought with respect to their freedom and rationality” (*PR*, §270R).

45. It must, however, be added that there are other important respects in which Hegel’s conception of the social world is *not* secular. He maintains that the church and state share the “same content” (truth) (*PR*, §270R) and regards the state (or the fact that the state exists) as “the march of God in the world” (*der Gang Gottes in der Welt*) (*PR*, §258Z; *VPRG*, 632). He thinks that religion—more specifically, Christianity—functions as the “moment which integrates the state at the deepest level of sensibility and habit [*Gesinnung*],” and he holds that people can become fully and completely reconciled to the social world only if they regard it as the finite expression of a higher form of spirit (God) (*PR*, §270R). He argues that because religion serves an irreplaceable unifying function, the state can require that its citizens belong to a church—that is, some church or other. On the other hand, Hegel holds that a strong and healthy state can tolerate sects such as Quakers, who reject direct duties to the state on religious grounds (*PR*, §270R). And he insists that within civil society people must be recognized as having equal rights, whatever their religion. In this sphere, he says, “a man [*Mensch*] counts as such because he is man [*Mensch*], not because he is a Jew, Catholic, Protestant, German, Italian, etc.” (*PR*, §209R).

would, I think, be natural to say that there was a lack of fit between people and a social world that failed to express the values of individuality and community or meet the corresponding needs.

People are connected to the social world along the dimension of *cognition* only if they can in principle understand the organization, operation, and underlying principles of its central institutions. This condition is not wildly intellectualistic. It reflects the intuitive idea that in order to be at home in the social world, people must *understand* (*begreifen*) their basic social arrangements, and hence that in order to be at home, the social world must allow of comprehension. Of course, Hegel is not saying that a transparent social world that utterly thwarted people's needs would be better than an incomprehensible social world that fully met them. His point is simply that people cannot be fully at home in the social world unless they understand its social arrangements. Human beings, in his view, have a basic cognitive need to understand the world in which they live (*PR*, Preface ¶¶3, 8; *VA*, 1:135/1:98). The world is a home only if it can answer to this need.

This condition does not, however, require that the social world be "immediately" intelligible, that is, intelligible without the aid of theory; the force of the qualification "in principle" is that the social world must be accessible to the intellect through theory. This reflects Hegel's general view that a social world can be a home despite the fact that it cannot be fully understood without the aid of theory. But, I should add, Hegel also maintains that an *ideally realized* social world would include institutions that would foster understanding of social life. Thus in the ideal case, civil society will include corporate groups that will enable their members to understand their place in the social world and see that they are indeed *members* of civil society (and not isolated social atoms) (*PR*, §§250–56). And the state will include an assembly of estates whose public discussion of political affairs will enable citizens to gain insight into the workings of government and come to view themselves as citizens (*PR*, §§314, 315).

Now if we gather together the dimensions of value, need, and cognition, it would be plausible to say that the list they form is *comprehensive*. If people are connected to the social world along these dimensions, they are connected to its arrangements, both epistemically and practically. There would appear to be no significant objective dimension along which people could be *split* from the social world. And so we might ask:

if the social world secures connection along the dimensions of value, need, and cognition, what more could you ask for?

You might say: happiness.⁴⁶

Happiness is not mentioned in the three conditions of objective connection, and so it might seem that Hegel simply leaves happiness out of his conception of what it is for the social world to be a home. But he does not. Hegel contends that in meeting the conditions of need and value, the social world will also promote happiness, for in meeting these conditions it will provide the social preconditions of happiness (the preconditions of happiness that social arrangements can guarantee). A well-ordered Hegelian social world will contain a social sphere—civil society—within which people can effectively pursue their own separate and particular projects and meet their material needs (*PR*, §§182–256). It will also include a system of public administration, whose functions include the provision of welfare and the prevention of unemployment (*PR*, §242,R). And one of the central tasks of the state will be to maintain and support the sphere of civil society and so indirectly support its citizens' pursuit of their happiness (*PR*, §§260,Z, 261, 287, 288; *VPRG*, 635; *VPRHO*, 717–18).⁴⁷ Thus happiness is a goal of a well-ordered Hegelian social world.⁴⁸

But to say that happiness is a goal is not to say that it is guaranteed. Even if the social world met Hegel's three conditions for being a home,

46. Hegel follows Kant in thinking of happiness (*Glückseligkeit*) as the maximal satisfaction of desires. His conception of happiness is thus subjective in that it holds that (a) the content of an individual's happiness is determined by the desires of that individual (and not by the individual's talents and capacities or by the function of a human being) and that (b) the content of happiness may vary from individual to individual. But he does not hold the extreme subjectivist view that identifies happiness with a purely subjective state such as pleasure or euphoric feeling. I am supposing that the interlocutor who raises the question “But what about happiness?” shares Hegel's subjective conception of happiness. On Hegel's view of happiness, see Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Theory*, pp. 53–74. On the distinction between objective and subjective conceptions of happiness, see R. Kraut, “Two Conceptions of Happiness,” *Philosophical Review* 88 (1979): 167–97; Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Theory*, pp. 53–56.

47. Hegel denies, however, that providing happiness is the main function of the state (*PR*, §258R). He maintains that the main function of the state is to provide freedom (*PR*, §§257, 258, 260).

48. Hegel says: “It is often said that the goal [*Zweck*] of the state is the happiness of the citizens; this is certainly true: if they do not fare well, if their subjective goal [*Zweck*] is not satisfied, if they do not find that the state as such is the mediation [*Vermittlung*] of this satisfaction, then the state itself stands on insecure footing” (*PR*, §265Z; cf. *VPRG*, 639).

this would not guarantee that people would be happy. Careers would still fail, friends would still leave, illness would still strike, children would still die. And so you might ask: why doesn't this show that the social world could satisfy the three conditions and yet not be a home?

Hegel could reply as follows: Happiness has an essentially individual aspect. It is also especially sensitive to luck. Whether people are happy is partly up to them—how well they manage their lives as individuals within the free scope that the central social institutions allow them—and partly a matter of chance—whether they happen to suffer from accidents or misfortunes that are beyond the control of any scheme of social institutions, however well organized. But since happiness depends partly on factors beyond the control of any scheme of social institutions, it would be unreasonable to demand that the social world guarantee it.⁴⁹ The unhappiness that results from individual decision, accident, or chance—bad though it may be—does not reflect a defect in the social world. If your misfortune results from your own decision, accident, or chance, you have reason to be dissatisfied with your lot, but not with your social world. Purely individual misfortune does not provide a reason for hating or rejecting the social world.

And, in any case, to say that the social world is a home is *not* to say that it meets our each and every wish. It is, rather, to say that there is no significant objective dimension along which we are split from it. What is at issue here is alienation, not happiness. The social world is a home if there is no significant objective dimension along which its members are alienated. You can be at home in the world despite the fact that you are unhappy.⁵⁰ Being at home in the social world and being happy are simply

49. It is perhaps worth noting that Hegel's claim that the social world cannot guarantee happiness does not turn on the subjectivism of his understanding of happiness. Aristotle, who holds an objective conception of happiness (one that identifies human happiness with the fulfillment of the function of a human being), explicitly and famously recognizes that happiness—*eudaimonia*—is prey to a range of contingencies—such as the loss of wealth, honor, and friends.

50. Hegel recognizes, of course, that the person who is at home in the social world and happy is better off than the person who is at home in the social world and unhappy. Hegel is not denying that happiness is a good or that it is a great good. But he wants to insist (a) that a person can be at home in the social world despite being unhappy, and (b) that the person who is at home in the social world possesses a good—indeed a great good—despite being unhappy. And it goes without saying that Hegel does not think that the sort of unhappiness that results from a *correct* understanding of the world is compatible with reconciliation. See n. 52.

different notions. The social world need not guarantee happiness in order to be a home. What it must guarantee is the possibility of being at home.

You might say: Fine, the social world can be a home without guaranteeing happiness. But if the social world's being a home does not guarantee my happiness—or the happiness of its members generally—what's so great about it?

What's so great about it is, in Hegel's view, that it meets a *vital human need*: the need to be *connected* to the social world. When people are at home in the social world, they meet this need and enjoy a very great good. This view reflects Hegel's acceptance of the famous Aristotelian doctrine that the human being is a political animal (*PR*, §§4, 75Z; *VPRHO*, 266–67). It is because human beings need to be connected to the social world that alienation is an evil.⁵¹ Think of it this way: Happiness is not the only thing people care about. They also care about being at home in the social world. Being at home in the social world represents an important human good in its own right.⁵²

V

The account of being at home in the social world we considered in the last section allows us to provide a relatively precise characterization of

51. This point requires qualification. Hegel thinks that humanity had to undergo a long period of alienation, which extended from the collapse of the Greek polis to the emergence of the modern state, in order to fully develop its powers and attain complete self-knowledge. He also thinks that, in the modern world, alienation typically plays an important role in the normal development of the individual: it is a stage a person must go through in order to think of herself as an individual. Viewed from *this* perspective, alienation is not a bad thing, but rather a good one. Within a Hegelian framework it is also possible to say that the felt experience of alienation is the only authentic reaction to the objective circumstance of alienation. When the social world is objectively alien, it is fitting and appropriate to feel alienated.

52. Hegel thinks that freedom is the greatest good and that freedom and being at home in the world are coextensive (see n. 39). One is free if and only if one is at home in the world. He also thinks that freedom, unlike happiness, *can* be guaranteed by the social world. A social world guarantees the freedom of its members just in case it satisfies the conditions of being a home. Thus Hegel has a response to the person who says: "Since the social world cannot guarantee happiness, it cannot guarantee what matters most, and so reconciling myself to the fact that the social world cannot guarantee happiness would amount to resigning myself to the fact that the social world cannot guarantee what matters most, and so reconciliation collapses into resignation after all." He can say that reconciliation does not collapse into resignation, since the social world *can* guarantee what matters most, namely, freedom.

alienation: people are alienated if and only if they are not at home in the social world. We can distinguish between three forms of alienation: objective, subjective, and complete.

People are *objectively alienated* if the social world is not a home. Objective alienation is an evil in its own right, apart from its contribution to the feeling of alienation. For, as we have seen, Hegel maintains that people have a deep and abiding need to inhabit a social world that is a home. If this need is frustrated, people suffer an evil, whether they recognize it or not.

The members of the Frankfurt school (Horkheimer, Adorno, and Habermas) believe that under the circumstances of contemporary capitalism, people suffer from “pure objective alienation,” that is, objective alienation unaccompanied by feelings of alienation.⁵³ Because it is capitalist, the social world they inhabit is not a home. But because of the influence of ideology, they are blinded to this fact. And so they fail to see their true predicament. Under such circumstances, people do not need a theory of *reconciliation*. What they need is a theory of *ideology* that will provide the enlightenment necessary to begin the task of transforming their social arrangements.⁵⁴

The existentialists (Heidegger, Sartre, Camus) take the view that objective alienation—or something like it—is part of the human condition.⁵⁵ On their view, it is a metaphysical (fixed, nonempirical) fact that

53. Hegel himself may not have recognized the possibility of pure objective alienation. He may instead have thought that objective alienation would always somehow show up in (and for) the person as what I shall call “subjective alienation.” In any case, the notion of pure objective alienation plays no role in his thinking. On the other hand, it is clear that pure objective alienation represents a logical possibility within the logical structure of his conception of alienation. Moreover, the members of the Frankfurt school have presented compelling arguments for thinking that pure objective alienation—or, in any case, something close to it—may represent a real possibility. They raise the possibility that to the extent that our social world is not a world of felt alienation, it may be one of pure objective alienation. Let us say, then, that the idea of pure objective alienation, even if not Hegel’s, is manifestly Hegelian. For it is clearly built into the logical structure of his thought. We can think of the Frankfurt school as having seen the logical space Hegel provided for this notion and having developed a theory of pure objective alienation—*Ideologiekritik*—that gave content to the notion and connected it to the world. For the observation that Hegel may not have recognized the possibility of pure objective alienation, I am indebted to Frederick Neuhouser.

54. For an excellent discussion of the concept of ideology and the idea of a critical theory, see Raymond Geuss, *The Idea of a Critical Theory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

55. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962); Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E.

the universe (including, in particular, the social world) is not a home for us. Part of what it is to be “authentic” is to grasp, accept, and perhaps even affirm this fact. For the existentialists, the task is not to overcome the feeling of alienation by seeing that the world is a home, but rather to have the courage to live in full consciousness of the fact that the world is not a home.

People can be *subjectively alienated* both when the social world is a home and when it is not a home. If the social world *is* a home, people are subjectively alienated if they *fail* to grasp this fact. If the social world is *not* a home, people are subjectively alienated if they *do* grasp this fact. They are also subjectively alienated if they fail to meet any of the other subjective conditions of being at home in the social world. In the standard case, these items go together. It is because people *believe* that the social world is not a home that they feel alienated, and reject the social world.

Hegel thought that his contemporaries suffered from “pure subjective alienation.” People experience pure subjective alienation when they are subjectively but not objectively alienated.⁵⁶ Pure subjective alienation is possible on Hegel’s view because the social world can appear to be alien despite the fact that it is a home. He maintains that part of the task of becoming reconciled consists precisely in grasping that the social world is a home—and accepting it—*despite* the fact that it is subjectively alienating. This is yet another respect in which Hegel’s conception of reconciliation incorporates conflict and antagonism.

Hegel recognizes the logical possibility that the concept of pure subjective alienation may be empty. He understands that he must *show* that the concept has content and that it applies, in particular, to his own historical situation. This is, in effect, the task of demonstrating that the modern social world is a home despite the fact that it appears to be alien, or, in other words, the central task of the *Rechtsphilosophie*.⁵⁷

Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956); Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. Justin O’Brien (New York: Vintage Books, 1955).

56. To say that people suffer from a form of subjective alienation that is *pure* is not to say that the form of alienation from which they suffer has no roots in the objective features of the modern social world. For, presumably, pure subjective alienation will be rooted in certain objective features of the modern social world (e.g., the scale of the modern state, and the complexity of civil society). To say that the form of subjective alienation from which people suffer is pure is rather to say that none of the features in which their alienation is rooted are such as to make the social world objectively alienating.

57. I do not think that Hegel would maintain that pure subjective alienation could be a

People are *completely alienated* if they are both subjectively and objectively alienated. Hegel thought that people in ancient Rome and medieval Europe were completely alienated.⁵⁸ Marx thought that his contemporaries were.⁵⁹

It is worth emphasizing that Hegel does not take alienation to be a purely subjective phenomenon; some thinkers, most notably Marx, have taken him to hold this view.⁶⁰ It is also worth observing that Hegel takes subjective alienation—including pure subjective alienation—to be a genuine form of alienation. This observation blocks the natural objection that instead of freeing people from alienation, the project of reconciliation shows people that they are not alienated. For on Hegel's view, people who are subjectively alienated do not merely *think* they are alienated or merely *feel* alienated. They *are* alienated. If you are subjectively alienated, you are not at home in the social world; for, as we have seen, being at home in the world includes an essential subjective dimension, and not being at home in the world *is* what it is to be alienated. Thus it would be wrong to say that the project of reconciliation seeks to free people of the *mistake* of thinking that they are alienated when they are not. What it seeks to free them of is a form of alienation that is real.

VI

I would like to close by considering briefly whether the acceptance and affirmation internal to reconciliation preclude engaging in criticism or progressive social action. This is, in effect, to ask whether the project of reconciliation turns out *substantively* to be a project of submission or acquiescence.

It must be said that reconciliation, as Hegel understands it, is incompatible with certain forms of radical or revolutionary action. To be reconciled is, among other things, to believe that no *fundamental* social

prominent feature of an *ideally realized* social world. For, as we have seen, such a world would contain institutions designed to foster understanding and integration. These institutions would serve to prevent or overcome pure subjective alienation and so function as devices of reconciliation. But Hegel clearly does think that pure subjective alienation *can* be a prominent feature of a social world that is sufficiently well ordered so as to be a home. He thought that his social world—while not ideally realized—was sufficiently well ordered so as to be a home, and he took subjective alienation to be a prominent feature of its social life.

58. See p. 170.

59. See p. 171.

60. Marx, "Kritik," pp. 384–85 ("Contribution," pp. 180–81).

transformations are necessary; for to say that the social world is a home is to say that the central arrangements of the family, civil society, and the state—that is, the arrangements described in the *Rechtsphilosophie*—are acceptable. To be reconciled is also to believe that particular families, civil societies, and states do, generally speaking, realize their underlying ideals to a significant degree. As I have said, Hegel believed that the revolutionary transformations required to make the social world a home had already taken place. Accordingly, he maintained that no further revolutionary transformations were necessary.

But being reconciled does not by any means involve accepting each and every feature of the social world. We are to accept particular families, civil societies, and states *only* to the extent that they realize their underlying essential structures (VPRHO, 482). At no point does Hegel endorse the status quo merely because it is in place. To the extent that particular families, civil societies, and states *fail* to realize their underlying essential structures, they are defective and hence the proper object of criticism and reform (EL, §6; PR, §§3, 258Z, 270Z; VPRG, 633; VPRHO, 727). To say that being reconciled involves the belief that no fundamental social transformations are necessary is not to say that being reconciled involves the belief that no social transformations whatsoever are necessary. The very theory that makes it possible to accept the world formed by the family, civil society, and the state—the *Rechtsphilosophie*—also provides a set of standards on the basis of which defective families, civil societies, and states can be criticized.

And so we can see in a general way how Hegel's conception of reconciliation makes it possible to combine acceptance of the social world with clear-eyed recognition of its defects.⁶¹ Within the framework he provides, we can both be reconciled to the social world and struggle to overcome its failings. And we can also both struggle to overcome its failings and be reconciled. The project of reconciliation does not amount to a project of surrender or acquiescence. In this respect, at least, it is not invidiously conservative. My aim in this article has not been to suggest that we should accept Hegel's project of reconciliation. I have simply tried to show that it is worthy of serious consideration.

61. It is not so clear that Hegel's conception of reconciliation makes it possible to combine acceptance of the social world with clear-eyed recognition of the problem of poverty. See n. 33. I address this issue in my forthcoming book.

Abbreviations

Note: Where there are standard English translations, they are listed along with the original. In the text, English pagination follows German pagination and a slash (/). In works cited by paragraph (§), a comma before “R” or “Z” means “and.” Thus, for example, “PR, §33,Z” means “PR, §33 and the addition to §33”; “PR, 270,R” means “PR, §270 and the remark to §270.”

- Werke* *Hegel: Werke Theorie Werkausgabe.* Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970. Cited by volume number.
- D* *Differenz des Fichte'schen und Schelling'schen Systems des Philosophie* (1801). *Werke*, vol. 2. Cited by page number.
The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy. Trans. H. S. Harris and Walter Cerf. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977. Cited by page number.
- EG* *Enzklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften III* (1817, rev. 1827, 1830). *Werke*, vol. 9. Cited by paragraph (§) number.
Hegel's Philosophy of Mind. Trans. William A. Wallace and A. V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971. Cited by paragraph (§) number.
- EL* *Enzklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften I* (1817, rev. 1827, 1830). *Werke*, vol. 8. Cited by paragraph (§) number.
Hegel's Logic. Trans. William Wallace. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975. Cited by paragraph (§) number.
- PhG* *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (1807). *Werke*, vol. 3. Cited by page number.
Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit. Trans. A. V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977. Cited by page number.
- PR* *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (1821). *Werke*, vol. 7. Cited by paragraph (§) number. Remarks are indicated by “R,” additions (*Zusätze*) by “Z.” Preface cited by paragraph (¶) number.
Elements of the Philosophy of Right. Ed. Allen W. Wood. Trans. H. B. Nisbet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

1991. Cited by paragraph (§) number. Remarks are indicated by "R," additions (*Zusätze*) by "Z." Preface cited by paragraph (¶) number.
- VA *Vorlesungen über Ästhetik*. Vols. 1 and 2. *Werke*, vols. 13 and 14. Cited by volume and page number.
Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Arts. Vols. 1 and 2. Trans. T. M. Knox. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988. Cited by volume and page number.
- VG *Vernunft in der Geschichte*. Ed. J. Hoffmeister. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1955. Cited by page number.
Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction. Trans. H. B. Nisbet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975. Cited by page number.
- VGP *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*. Vols. 1–3. *Werke*, vols. 18–20. Cited by volume and page number.
Lectures on the Philosophy of World History. Trans. Elizabeth Haldane. New York: Humanities Press, 1968. Cited by volume and page number.
- VPG *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*. *Werke*, vol. 12.
The Philosophy of History. Trans. J. Sibree. New York: Dover, 1956. Cited by page number.
- VPRG *Vorlesungen über Rechtsphilosophie*. Ed. K.-H. Illting. Stuttgart: Frommann Verlag, 1974. Transcription from K. G. von Griesheim. Cited by page number.
- VPRHN *Philosophie des Rechts: Die Vorlesung von 1819/20*. Ed. Dieter Henrich. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1983. Cited by page number.
- VPRHO *Vorlesungen über Rechtsphilosophie*. Ed. K.-H. Illting. Stuttgart: Frommann Verlag, 1974. Transcription from H. G. Hotho. Cited by page number.
- VPRJ *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion: Ausgewählte Nachschriften und Manuscritps*. Vols. 1–5. Ed. Walter Jaeschke. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1983. Cited by volume and page number.
Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion. Vols. 1–4. Ed. Peter

C. Hodgson. Trans. R. F. Brown, P. C. Hodgson, J. M. Stewart, with the assistance of J. P. Fitzer, and H. S. Harris. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984. Cited by volume and page number.

VPRW *Die Philosophie des Rechts: Die Mitschriften Wannemann (Heidelberg 1817/18) und Homeyer (Berlin 1818/19)*. Ed. K.-H Illting. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta Verlag, 1983. Cited by page number.