

April 25, 1968

Dear Mr. Goodwin:

Because freedom is both the point of departure and the point of return of Hegelian philosophy, there is a great earthiness about its philosophy of religion as well. No matter how closed an ontological system it appears to be, History (with a capital H) pierces through its most abstract-sounding Absolutes and, therefore, even the heavens are bound by Actuality. Hegel could summarize his philosophy, phenomenology and history of mankind as well as of thought as a "progress in the consciousness of freedom." Finally, this was not only "theory" but praxis:

"When individuals and nations have once got in their heads the abstract concept of full-blown liberty, there is nothing like it in its uncontrollable strength, just because it is the very essence of mind, and that as its very actuality... The Greeks and Romans, Plat and Aristotle, even the Stoics did not have it. On the contrary, they saw that it is only by birth (as e.g. an Athenian or Spartan citizen), or by strength of character, education, or philosophy (---the sage is free even as a slave and in chains) that the human being is actually free. It was through Christianity that this idea came into the world. According to Christianity, the individual as such has an infinite value as the object and aim of divine love... man is implicitly destined to supreme freedom.: (Philosophy of Mind, pp.100-1)

What I referred to in Sunday's talk as the distinction Hegel made between Christianity as faith and philosophy vs. church is best expressed by him, as always, through history. Rather than quoting from Philosophy of Religion, I believe the most applicable statement appears in Philosophy of History:

"The Reformation resulted from the corruption of the Church. That corruption was not an accidental phenomenon; it is not the mere abuse of power and dominion. A corrupt state of things is very frequently represented as an 'abuse'; it is taken for granted that the foundation was good -- the system, the institution itself faultless--but the passion, the subjective interest, in short, the arbitrary volition of men has made use of that which in itself was good to further its own selfish ends, and that all that is required to be done is to remove these adventitious elements. On this showing the institute in question escapes obloquy, and the evil that disfigures it appears appears something foreign to it. But when accidental abuse of a good thing really occurs, it is limited to particularity. A great and general corruption affecting a body of such large and comprehensive scope as a Church, is quite another thing. The corruption of the church was a native growth."

Although Hegel here refers to the Catholic Church and so not only approves the Protestant revolt but seems to absolve that church, it really isn't true that he didn't see the contradiction between faith and established institution. Indeed, he began his adventures in religion by preferring the Greeks to Christians, then when he "returned" to Christianity he transferred his former dislike of it to the Jewish religion. The point is that he himself went through "the labor, patience, suffering and seriousness of the negative" he demands of all those who would plunge into serious thought. It is best, therefore, it seems to me, to not taken any single period of his life as the "final judgment", but rather to trace his own development. The most profound statement of that process of development has been written by Richard Kroner as his Introduction to Hegel's Early Theological Writings.

I trust this has been of some aid to your making a decision about chairing that philosophy colloquium. Perhaps there will be other opportunities to meet and discuss not only Hegel the philosopher of religion but of Mind, which I consider the objective and subjective preparation for revolution. Don't let that scare you just as I do not let Hegel's Lutheranism scare me from his dialectic

Yours,

12338