Rauch's translation of chapter IV of the *Phenomenology* ultimately brings a refreshing clarity and straightforwardness to Hegel's chapter on self-consciousness, yet it is never undertaken at the expense of a fundamental fidelity to Hegel's actual discourse. Rauch's efforts are to be greatly welcomed by all English-speaking Hegel scholars, not only those approaching Hegel's text for the first time but all who continue to struggle with Miller's great yet flawed translation of the *Phenomenology*. His subsequent commentary on this chapter is both clear and insightful and a very welcome addition to the extensive canon of scholarship on Hegel's account of self-consciousness in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Rauch's and Sherman's overviews of the readings and repudiations of Hegel and self-consciousness offer a fairly incisive introduction to the multifarious critical trajectories present within contemporary Continental philosophy. They both manage to provide a useful, concise and economic introduction to the crucial Hegelian substrata running through the complex geology of 20th-century Marxism, Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, Deconstruction, Materialism and Psychoanalysis.

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This is a monumental book, an imposing and impressive work of scholarship, the culmination of 40 years of study so the author tells us (xxvi). At its core is a section by section commentary, or perhaps one should say 'description', of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. It is the most detailed account of this work available in English. Where the same ground is covered in the third volume of Hegel's *Encyclopaedia an equally detailed account is given of that work. However, there is no coverage of the 'Preface' to the *Philosophy of Right*. This has already been the subject of an earlier work by Peperzak (1987). For all its length and detail, however, many readers will feel that there are problems with the way in which Peperzak handles his declared topic, Hegel's 'legal, moral, and political philosophy'.

As Peperzak stresses, Hegel's philosophy is an all-embracing metaphysical system:

Hegel's basic postulate is that the totality of all beings coincides with the oneness of the Absolute that permeates all parts of the universe. This implies that the truth of each and every part of the universe depends upon its connection with everything else... Nothing can be comprehended in isolation. (43)

This philosophy is set out in systematic order in the three volumes of the *Encyclopaedia*. The issues in ethical, social and political philosophy with which the *Philosophy of Right* is concerned occupy just one small part of volume 3, *Philosophy of Mind* (Geist), the section on 'mind objective' (Hegel, 1971, §483-552). Starting in 1817, Hegel devoted a course of lectures specifically and exclusively to these topics, and he published his handbook for these lectures, revised and extended, as a separate book in 1820.

In recent years, particularly in the English-speaking world, a number of writers have advocated what has come to be called an 'anti-metaphysical' way of reading Hegel. They have been openly sceptical of Hegel's metaphysics and particularly of its theological dimension. Nevertheless they acknowledge that the *Philosophy of Right* is one of the great classics of political thought. Hegel's questionable metaphysical ideas should not therefore be allowed to obscure the important analyses of ethical, social and political issues which that work contains. An understanding of Hegel's metaphysical system and the place of the *Philosophy of Right* in it, they argue, adds little of philosophical importance to our understanding of Hegel's moral, social and political ideas.

Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought* (1990) and more recently Knowles, *Hegel and the Philosophy of Right* (2002) are examples of this approach. According to Wood, for example, Hegel's 'speculative logic is dead'. Hegel's system 'has never won acceptance outside an isolated and dwindling tradition of incorrigible enthusiasts... The Hegel who still lives and speaks to us is not an... idealist metaphysician but a... political and social theorist, a philosopher of our ethical concerns and cultural identity crises' (Wood 1990, 4-6).

Peperzak is one of those 'incorrigible enthusiasts'. His approach is the diametric opposite of Wood's. This is announced at the outset. The work begins with a violent and bitter polemic against the anti-metaphysical approach of the likes of Wood. Characteristically, this is carried out mainly in an extended footnote (11-16n), though the theme recurs frequently throughout and, indeed, implicitly structures the entire work as we shall see. Peperzak's explicit arguments against the anti-metaphysical writers miss their targets for the most part. He takes 'the claim that Hegel need not be read as a metaphysician' to be tantamount to the denial that Hegel is a metaphysical thinker, which he rejects as 'incredible' (6). Indeed it is. However, Wood simply does not make this claim, as Peperzak himself acknowledges (14n), nor do most other proponents of the anti-metaphysical approach. They say rather that Hegel's metaphysical and theological ideas are unacceptable, whereas Hegel is a moral, social and political thinker of major importance. His metaphysical theories add nothing to what is important in Hegel's political philosophy, these are the 'dead' aspects which must be set aside if we are to salvage what is 'living' and important in it.

The idea of trying to separate what is living from what is dead in Hegel is not new. This is the main way in which Hegel's philosophy has been appropriated and exerted influence ever since the time of the young Hegelians and Karl Marx. Though Peperzak never loses a chance to express his antipathy to this approach, he offers little by way of argument against it. He dismisses those who want to separate the living from the dead in Hegel with the assertion that they do not answer
the questions of (1) how it is that they themselves are so knowledgeable about the difference between life and death in philosophy, and (2) how one can separate certain parts, without destroying or distorting them, from a system that strongly emphasises the solidarity of the parts with one another and the whole (5).

Just as pruning alters a plant, so the anti-metaphysical approach results in some alteration or distortion of Hegel's philosophy. There is no denying this. But far from leading to its 'destruction' this is the only way in which to rescue what is of value in it. So the anti-metaphysical case goes.

Peperzak demonstrates at length that there is another, metaphysical story to tell about the Philosophy of Right. This is one of the central purposes of his book. But what he and other such Hegel 'enthusiasts' need to demonstrate is that the metaphysical reading provides an understanding of Hegel's ethical, social and political philosophy which is not available if his overall system is left out of the picture. He is less successful at this.

Peperzak's declared aim is faithful 'exegesis' of Hegel's text (35). He wants to 'set the text free' and let it 'speak for itself' (37). If, as Hegel says, philosophy is the 'child of [its] time' (Hegel 1991, 21) then how does a text written in the early years of the nineteenth century 'speak' to us at the beginning of the twenty-first century? Peperzak does not say. There is little about the political context in which Hegel was writing, or about ours. 'Experience is only as large as the mind that comprehends it', says Hegel. How a text 'speaks' to us depends in part upon what we are prepared to hear. Peperzak, it seems, is as limited in his approach as the non-metaphysical writers he opposes. Indeed his approach is the mirror image of theirs. Where they discard Hegel's metaphysical assumptions and arguments, Peperzak concentrates on them inordinately. He outsides even Hegel himself in this respect. Whereas Hegel was prepared to detach his treatment of 'objective spirit' in the Philosophy of Right from the rest of his system and publish it as a separate work, informing the reader where necessary that he was presupposing results which could be established only elsewhere in the system (e.g. Hegel 1991, 2, 26), Peperzak seems unable to do this. He is obsessively focused on the system as a whole and the exclusion of questions of right. A huge chunk of the beginning of his book is devoted to a general account of Hegel's logic, his metaphysical system, and his concept of spirit. It is only on page 174 that Peperzak at last gets round to his commentary on the Philosophy of Right. Even then, his account is so far skewed to the pre-metaphysical approach that ethical, social and political issues tend to be treated in a cursory manner, and one might at times be forgiven for thinking that Peperzak takes the Philosophy of Right to be primarily a work of metaphysics or logic.

Perhaps because he sees his job as confined to mere 'exegesis', the account he gives of the Philosophy of Right is a pretty bare description of Hegel's argument. This is full and often very helpful given its self-imposed limitations, particularly about the logic and structure of the argument. Discussion of alternative interpretations, the work of other commentators, etc., is relegated to footnotes. These make up a sizeable proportion of the text. They constitute in effect a second commentary, running along the foot of the page in small print. Cumulatively these footnotes make up a remarkably full set of references to and discussions of the recent literature on the Philosophy of Right. The coverage is impressively comprehensive, taking in a huge range of work not just in English but in German, French, and Italian as well.

These footnotes are one of the most valuable features of this strange and perplexing work. It is curious that their contents should have been relegated to footnotes, as though Peperzak feels that they might sully the pristine 'exegesis' of Hegel's text which is supposed to be going on in the main body of the work. As a result, the book has a strangely inverted character. It seems almost as though, by some inexplicable error in the printing process, the text has been turned upside down, so that the book has come out like a capsized ship in which much of what is most important has disappeared below the waterline, and the mechanisms that propel the argument are exposed on the surface and have become unduly prominent.

In any case, the result is that the treatment of specific issues of ethics, social and political theory is often brief and sometimes problematic given the length of the book. A couple of examples must suffice here. One of the most influential and widely discussed passages in the Philosophy of Right is in §133-5, where Hegel criticises Kant's ethics for its 'formalism'. Peperzak gives only a brief, bland and straightforward summary of this passage (364-5). He does not provide any discussion of different possible interpretations of this much discussed passage, not even in a footnote, nor does he attempt to assess the validity of Hegel's criticisms or possible Kantian responses. Perhaps Peperzak regards all this as beyond his exegetical remit, but many readers will be puzzled by the absence of such discussion in a commentary of this length.

Another example is provided by Peperzak's account of Hegel's treatment of 'estates' and 'classes' (448-53). This raises problems in a different way. There is a full and helpful account of Hegel's use of the terms 'Staat' (State) and 'Klasse' (class) and of the problems of modern translation in a long footnote (449-50n), but Peperzak's description of the concepts themselves is cursory and flawed, with little reference to the literature on this topic. For example, there is no discussion of the view that Hegel's notion of an Estate is an archaic conception which involves a vertical division into different sectors of society according to the source of their means of livelihood (agriculture, manufacture and commerce, civil service work), rather than the horizontal stratification which is involved in modern notions of social class, including the Marxist one. Moreover, Peperzak appears to believe that membership of the 'first', 'substantial' or 'agricultural' Estate is confined to wealthy land owners. 'The first class comprises the hereditary owner of large tracts of land (the so-called Junkers)' (450). However, it is clear that for Hegel this Estate comprises all those whose livelihood derives from the land, not just land owners. But as always, these sections of Philosophy of Right are described in a bare sort of way without any exploration of different interpretations or critical discussion.
Since Peperzak’s main purpose is exegesis, criticism of Hegel’s argument is minimal in the main commentary sections. However, as he makes clear, Peperzak himself is not a fully paid up ‘Hegelian’. He sums up some of his major points of disagreement in a relatively brief ‘Epilogue’. This raises some fundamental and important issues, and one can only wish that these had been treated at greater length throughout the commentary.

There is a fundamental tension in Hegel, Peperzak argues, between the anti-cosmopolitanism of Hegel’s political philosophy and the universality of reason. Individuals are supposed to be unified in the state; however, the state for Hegel is not a universal (or even a global) community, but only a particular, national entity, opposed to others: ‘Hegel’s “world” of right is much smaller than worldwide humanity’ (647). There are anomalies in this picture, as Peperzak observes. The modern economy is ‘necessarily international’ and exceeds the borders of the nation-state. The problem is even more evident in the sphere of religion. ‘How can the Christian religion and its transformation into philosophy, both of which are universal par excellence, constitute the subjective and ideological side of the particular objectivity that is realized in the nation-state?’ (647)

In the end, Peperzak maintains, the claims of the universal and of humanity are sacrificed to Hegel’s ‘totalitarian’ theory of the human community. ‘The fact that all individuals are in the first place members of humanity is not acknowledged in Hegel’s ethics’. In this way, according to Peperzak,

[the articulations of the Philosophy of Right manifest the secret of Hegel’s logic, according to which all differences are oppositions, contradictions, or separations that ultimately must be absorbed in the absolute unity of the totality, because they are nothing other than the self-unfolding of an original unity. (649)]

This is a fundamental and important criticism of Hegel’s approach. It is true that the closed system of the Philosophy of Right presents the particular nation-state as the resolution of these problems, and that this is in conflict with the universal aspirations of reason. In response it might be argued that Hegel is aware of these issues. Indeed, he was one of the first philosophers to pose them in these terms. Cosmopolitan economic forces and even universal (global) religion and philosophy are social creations which emerge only historically. Until they do there can be no universal ethic. Even when they do, an ethic of universal humanity does not reside simply in principles of abstract universal reason. Cosmopolitan principles can be sustained only on the basis of a global ethical life (Sittlichkeit). The need for such global ethical institutions is an important lesson for the regimes of President George W. Bush (and for Tony Blair), trampling on the United Nations and on global Treaties which do not suit the narrowly conceived interests of America, as the Democrats pointed out in the recent US presidential election campaign.

Despite the length of his commentary, Peperzak does not go into such questions at any length, nor does he engage with contemporary issues. These are not the jobs he has set for himself. The title, ‘Modern Freedom’, is misleading. He reserves his main fire for defending the view that Hegel’s metaphysics is the central pillar of his system. Peperzak is no doubt right: to criticise the cavalier attitude to Hegel’s system adopted by writers like Wood. However, few students interested in Hegel’s legal, moral and political philosophy will be won over by the alternative that Peperzak offers. For Peperzak focuses on the metaphysics in an equally, though oppositely, one-sided way. He focuses on the metaphysics to the exclusion of ethical and political concerns. And he fails to show how an understanding of Hegel’s system sheds useful light on his political philosophy and contemporary debates. We need to find a middle way here, which recognises the systematic character of Hegel’s philosophy and shows how this enhances our understanding of his political philosophy.

Nevertheless, Peperzak has provided the fullest and most detailed commentary on the Philosophy of Right available in English and for that we should be grateful. It will be a valuable point of reference for students of the Philosophy of Right for years to come.

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Bibliography


Note

1 The idea that Hegel may regard Estates (Stände) as ‘horizontal’ or occupational divisions and classes (Klassen) as ‘vertical’ divisions of wealth and power is rightly rejected (449n). It should be noted that Peperzak employs the metaphors of ‘horizontal’ and ‘vertical’ here in the opposite way to which I and, I believe, most others do (e.g. Knowles 2002, 271).


Amongst Hegel scholars, a revival of interest is currently underway in Hegel’s philosophy of nature, long the part of his system which has been most neglected and – as Stephen Houlgate documents in his introduction to this volume – derided and ridiculed. In