

## G. W. F. HEGEL OVERVIEW

The most important of the German Idealists, whose heyday was in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, was Hegel. The work by him most often read today is The Phenomenology of Spirit (1807) which he viewed, at least initially, as an introduction to his grand system and which has had an extraordinary impact on subsequent social and political thought. Though an idealist (i.e. a philosopher of the view that our consciousness is to some extent at least autonomous of material determinants such as the brain's physiology or the social and historical context), Hegel's views were an important catalyst in the development of historicism in the nineteenth century and his influence is particularly felt in several schools of contemporary Continental philosophy, of which Marxism and Phenomenology are two of the most important. Hegel is also famous for a number of works, not least his Science of Logic (1812-1816), an incredibly complex work which details his concept of the dialectic; his Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences (first published in 1817 but revised in 1827 and 1830), the 3 volumes of which he came to view as a better introduction to his system; his Aesthetics (1820-1829; published in 1835), an influential series of lectures on the fine arts; and his Philosophy of Right (1821) which has had an enormous impact on political philosophy. A work which provides some useful insights into his thinking is The Philosophy of History (thoughts first aired in lectures during the period 1805-1806 but only published, based on his students' notes, in 1830-1831).

### The Pre-History of Hegelian Phenomenology

Hegel is arguably the first to coin the term 'phenomenology.' It is evidently derived from a combination of the Greek roots of the terms *phenomenon* (Kant drew a distinction between phenomena and noumena, the things of this world and those things not of this world) and *logos* (the study of something) and as such denotes the study of our knowledge of worldly phenomena or, more precisely, how things in the empirical world appear to the consciousness of human beings. To delve into epistemology, the study of the nature of knowledge and the possibility of truth necessitates that one also enters into the field called the *philosophy of mind*, that is, epistemological speculations almost inevitably also lead to speculations on the nature of consciousness as a result of which coming to grips with what and how we know anything (the object and method of knowledge) invariably involves coming to grips with the nature of the mind which knows (human consciousness). At the risk of simplifying and reducing various views to a single over-riding theme, it can be said that Hegel in particular and phenomenologists in general argue, in a nutshell, that the knowing subject and the object known are caught up in a dialectical synthesis as a result of which knowledge is neither entirely objective nor subjective in nature, but a synthesis of these two extremes. From this point of view, a knowledge of the object casts much light on the structures of the conscious subject and, inversely, a knowledge of these subjective structures cast much light on the properties of the external world.

There is an important pre-history which needs to be grasped, even if only in the barest of outlines, if Hegel's concept of phenomenology is to be understood.

René Descartes Discourse on the Method (1637) (Rationalism):

The starting point of phenomenology is Descartes's quest to determine an unshakeable foundation or indisputable truth upon which all knowledge can be based. Initially plagued

by innumerable doubts, Descartes believed that he found this foundation in the existence of the *cogito* (Latin for 'I think' and, thus, a term that has become a synonym for the thinking or rational self). Descartes was of the view that even if he were able to think up doubts about something, one thing which he could not doubt was that even in the act of doubting he continued to think. That he continued to think, regardless of any doubts which this thinking might prompt, was proof that he existed because something had to be the source of this thought (hence, 'cogito ergo sum' or 'I think therefore I am'). The thinking self is accordingly, in the Cartesian schema, the one certain thing and, thus, the foundation of all certainty. Upon this stable and secure foundation, Descartes felt it was possible to build an edifice of various knowledges, that is, knowledge about a variety of things in the world. Knowledge derived from the senses was unreliable, he thought, by contrast to one's reason.

John Locke An Essay on Human Understanding (1660) (Empiricism):

According to Locke, on the other hand, sense experience is the only source of knowledge, the mind being a passive receptor of sense impressions derived from the outer world and entirely formed in fact by the very external stimuli which it absorbs in this way. He compared the mind to something of a mirror, a sponge, a piece of malleable wax, or even a *tabula rasa* (or blank slate) prior to the crowding in of sense impressions.

Immanuel Kant The Critique of Pure Reason (1781):

Kant came up with what he thought was a solution to the Rationalist / Idealist vs Empiricist / materialist debate by synthesising their respecting views. He concluded, by means of a complex argument, that our consciousness is *in part* derived a posteriori from the sense impressions derived from external reality (Locke's view). This he thought was at least partially undeniable. He also concluded, however, that the mind is *in part* pre-given or a priori for the simple reason that there are certain innate categories of knowledge (humans have a tendency to think primarily in term of space and time) and at least twelve sub-categories (such as the notion of cause and effect) with which humans would seem to be born and which necessarily shape our awareness of things irrespective of social historical context. These fundamental conditions of thought exist *a priori*, that is, are not derived from experience itself but, rather, exist independently or in advance of it. From this point of view, the mind is an organising agent that pre-exists, sorts out and classifies sense data in order to render them intelligible. In other words, the mind is pre-equipped with forms and categories which are the concepts which lend order and meaning to experience. Our minds, as a result, at least in part determine how we know the world precisely because our consciousness pre-exists the world. From this perspective, consciousness would seem to be partly a given and partly a product, partly creative and partly reactive, and partly the product of nurture, partly the product of nature. For this reason, aspects of the mind are thought to *transcend* the physical world as we know it

The question which consequently arises is: how exactly did Kant conceptualise 'nature'? Are we talking, from a materialist point of view, purely about biology as a result of which humans are merely flesh and blood? In this case, these epistemological categories would seem to be a product of the physiological functioning of the brain. Or is nature to be defined from an idealist point of view as a result of which human nature is the product of more than mere biology and the self arguably *transcendental*? Kant's thinking has given rise to two divergent interpretations and, thus, traditions of philosophical thought, both of which cite Kant as their ultimate inspiration. In the UK and, later, the

USA, the tradition that has come to be called 'Anglo-American Analytic philosophy' and which is still the dominant style of philosophising in the English-speaking world has developed out of the biologicistic interpretation of Kant's conception of human nature. From this point of view, epistemological categories are partly physiologically-derived, partly socially acquired (not least in the form of language).

On the European continent, however, Kant's theories gave rise to an alternative tradition that has come to be called 'Continental' or sometimes simply 'European philosophy' to distinguish it from that which prevails in the Anglophone world, especially the UK and the USA. At least initially, Continental philosophers or, more specifically, the German Idealists such as Hegel, developed the transcendental aspects of his argument. For the German Idealists, the source of these categories and sub-categories that form human consciousness is the *noumenal* world (Kant distinguished between the term 'noumena' [the things of the world beyond] and 'phenomena' [the things of this world].) It is also true, however, that this transcendentalism would come to be rejected by later so-called Existentialists in the nineteenth century such as Nietzsche who would take Continental thought in a materialist direction.

### The Philosophy of History

Space does not permit me to offer here more than a cursory and inevitably simplistic discussion of Hegel's views. Briefly, Hegel sought to synthesise the Enlightenment belief in a universal human nature with the Romantic emphasis on human diversity by arguing that humans, while alike in many ways, in fact also differ greatly in others. He contended that each culture peculiar to a particular place and time manifests a different attribute of Geist, Hegel's term for the principle of rationality (variously translated as Reason or Spirit or Mind or Idea and synonymous more or less with God) which informs the universe. Each culture constitutes, from this point of view, an 'expressive totality' every aspect of which (including the thoughts which its inhabitants entertain as well as the practices in which they engage) is expressive of one single aspect of Reason as a whole. In other words, each gathering of humans is dominated by one main idea, the so-called 'zeitgeist,' which manifests itself in all that they think and do. From this perspective, while we are in many ways different from each other, we also paradoxically share an underlying identity in that a common principle of rationality is manifesting itself, albeit in different ways, through the cultural identity unique to each community.

Moreover, Reason in the Hegelian schema is not static but dynamic; it does not exist in a fixed state of *being* but is engaged, rather, in a perpetual process of *becoming*. It expands, grows in self-knowledge, coming to know and thus to perfect itself on a *macrocosmic* goal by expressing itself in material form, to be precise, through the expansion or growth in knowledge on a *microcosmic* scale of the 'geist' of human beings (often translated as reason or spirit but perhaps best thought of in terms of the individual's mind) as they come to understand the world and their own role therein. As the reason of each individual develops, so too does and, by extension, civilisation develops, Reason as whole expands. The question is: what causes change to occur in this way? In a way that would prove very influential (e.g. upon Karl Marx), Hegel contended that the engine driving this process of development is the dialectic: the manifestation of one particular aspect of Reason in the cultural practices of a given people at a particular time (this would be the thesis) is counterbalanced by its inverse in the culture of another people (the antithesis). The conflict which ensues between these two opposing cultures produces a synthesis that retains only the best aspects of both the thesis and antithesis. In other

words, a new culture of a higher order than the previous two (precisely because it amalgamates their best qualities) is produced which in turn functions as a thesis that is then opposed to a subsequent antithesis, and so on. It is in this way that, humanity progresses towards enlightenment and Reason expands and thereby comes to know itself.

#### The Dialectic:

The key concept which Hegel bequeaths to Continental thought, not least Marxism and Phenomenology, is the notion of the dialectic. This is a term first coined by Plato to denote a process of argumentation by which the absolute truth may be arrived at. Plato used the dialectical method of arguing (what logicians call the 'method of the contrary case') in order to elicit from the person to whom it is applied information which s/he is unaware s/he possesses. For example, in a famous exchange in The Republic, a *thesis* (or truth-claim or proposition) about justice is proposed by someone named Cephalus who equates justice with telling the truth. This is followed by finding a contrary case to the thesis--the *antithesis*--in which the opposing assertion is made (that justice has nothing to do with telling the truth). When thesis and antithesis are weighed against each other, the outcome is not a contradiction but a reconciliation of these two seemingly contradictory propositions: what Hegel would term a *synthesis* in which the truthful aspects of each opposing claim are retained and the false aspects dismissed. This synthesis in turn functions as a new thesis at a higher level which is in turn weighed against another antithesis, and so on. This process is carried out until the highest truth is arrived at.

Hegel uses the term in this sense here to denote the conscious process by which we arrive at the truth but, as we shall see, given that the universe is in his view the manifestation of God or Spirit, which he thinks of as something akin to a universal consciousness, human consciousness writ large, as it were, it also denotes a process and a pattern inherent in all life. The dialectic is the pattern of being and becoming constitutive of all life. Hegel is a very difficult thinker to understand but it is possible to isolate the most important claims he makes.

Located in the Rationalist tradition founded by Plato and continued by thinkers like Descartes, Hegel offers an idealist theory of culture and history. Hegel is not unlike many nineteenth century thinkers who are increasingly aware that humans, while alike in many ways, in fact also differ greatly in others. However, unlike Herder who believes that such differences are a function of localised environmental influences, Hegel contends that each culture manifests a different attribute or aspect of the principle of rationality which informs the entire universe. (At times, indeed, this Reason appears to be synonymous with and, thus, is often personified in familiar religious terms as God himself.) The cultural practices peculiar to a given culture are expressive, Hegel thought, of one basic or underlying set of principles or ideals (the 'zeitgeist') which is in turn but one aspect of Reason as a whole. To put this another way, while we are in many ways different from each other, we also paradoxically share an underlying identity in that a universal principle of rationality is manifesting itself, albeit in different ways, through the cultural identity unique to each community.

#### Dialectical Model of History:

Metaphysics, you might recall, is the branch of philosophy concerned with theorising the nature of the universe. Philosophy of History is a related field (or perhaps even a sub-field) concerned with exploring whether things truly change and, if so, whether there is a discernible pattern to this process. For earlier thinkers, the universe is conceptualised in essentially *static* terms (the focus of thinkers like Aristotle is on trying to identify the essential properties of the natural world which do not, he believed, change in any

substantial way). However, thinkers in the nineteenth century became aware that not only does nature evolve (see, in this regard, Darwin's theory of evolution), but so too does human civilisation which is by nature *dynamic*. Things change and so too do people. There occurs a shift in emphasis, in other words, from a focus on *being* towards *becoming*, from the *natural* towards the *social* world, as a result of which the nineteenth century is synonymous with the advent of what has come to be called *historicism*, a propensity to see things in temporal terms.

Hegel is particularly remembered for his contention that history is *dialectical* in nature. For Plato, you might also recall, the term dialectic denotes the process of rational argumentation by which one arrives at the truth by comparing propositions or truth-claims (*theses*) with opposing points of view (*antitheses*). The truthful elements in each are retained (this becomes the *synthesis*) which in turn functions as a fresh thesis that is then compared to its antithesis, and so on. In this way, one works one's way ultimately towards the truth. (For further information on Hegel's concept of the dialectic, see his Science of Logic.)

For Hegel, given that history is nothing less than the process by which Reason expands, historical events follow a dialectical pattern similar to this. In a model that would prove to be very influential (e.g. upon Karl Marx), Hegel contends that all historical change takes place in accordance with the law of the dialectic: the manifestation of one particular aspect of Reason, or *zeitgeist*, in the cultural practices of a given people at a particular time (this would be the thesis) is counterbalanced by its inverse in the culture of another people at another time (antithesis). The conflict which ensues between these two opposing cultures produces a synthesis that retains only the best aspects of both the thesis and antithesis. In other words, a new culture of a higher order than the previous two (precisely because it synthesises their best qualities) is produced which in turn functions as a thesis that is then opposed to a subsequent antithesis, and so on. It is in this way that, as humanity progresses towards enlightenment, Reason expands and comes to know itself.

Progress derives in this schema from the dialectical conflict (sometimes termed 'contradiction') that occurs between the component parts of the social totality in question, to be precise, the process whereby the conflict of thesis and antithesis is overcome or transcended by the resulting synthesis, only for this to repeat itself at the next and 'higher' stage, and so on.

For Hegel, roughly, the history of humankind up to this time is divisible into three broad stages which succeed each other in a dialectical fashion. Each of these stages is in turn sub-divisible into component stages that also succeed each other in a dialectical fashion. The cultures unique to each stage or sub-stage are expressive of a particular *Zeitgeist*, that is, the manifestation of one particular aspect of Spirit to the exclusion of others. In Hegel's scheme of things, the culture of the ancient Asian world (by which he means principally China, India, Persia) was the antithesis of classical European civilisation (Greece and Rome). The best elements of each of these cultures were synthesised to form modern Western European civilisation. Hegel argues that modern European history itself has advanced dialectically: the long, dark night of Feudalism during which the Catholic church held sway was succeeded by the culture which emerged out of the Protestant Reformation. Out of the clash of these two cultures, the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, epitomised by Hegel's own Germany, emerged which, far from being the end-point of history, will in turn function as a thesis that will eventually conflict with its antithesis, and so on. It is in this way that humankind (and, by extension, Spirit) draws ever nearer to perfection. (For further details on the preceding, see Hegel's The Philosophy of History [1805-1806; pub. in 1832].)

### The Social Formation:

For Hegel, society takes the form of what subsequent Hegelians have come to call the 'expressive totality.' This involves what Frederic Jameson, in The Political Unconscious, describes as the

isolation and the privileging of one of the elements within that totality . . . such that the element in question becomes a mastercode or 'inner essence' capable of explicating the other elements or features of the whole in question. (27-8)

For Hegel, the 'essence' *expressed* by all the components of a culture located at a given social and historical conjuncture is one particular aspect of the universal 'Geist' (often translated into English as Mind or Spirit or Reason) in the course of its progressive march towards ultimate self-realisation.

### Human Being (Body, Mind and Self) and Knowledge:

Philosophy of Mind is concerned with theorising the nature of human consciousness, what earlier thinkers like Plato would have called the 'soul,' and, thus, what distinguishes humans from other creatures. Epistemology is concerned with the nature and possibility of knowledge. For Plato, the soul is tripartite in nature, consisting of the appetites or desires, the emotions and, most importantly, the reason. Like Plato, Hegel believes that the reason is the most important element. He contends that the history of human civilisation is the history of what Hegel calls 'Geist' (perhaps best translated as Reason, but often rendered as Spirit or Mind and most often synonymous with God) expanding, growing in knowledge, coming to know and thus to perfect itself. It accomplishes this *macrocosmic* goal by expressing itself in material form, to be precise, through the expansion or growth in knowledge on a *microcosmic* scale of the 'geist' of human beings (often translated as reason or spirit but perhaps best thought of as individual human consciousness or mind) as they come to understand the world and their own role therein. The individual's mind, reason, consciousness or spirit is, as it were, a small part of the Universal Mind, Reason, Anima Mundi (or Spirit of the world) as a whole. Reason as a whole expresses itself through our reason. The mental (or spiritual) growth of each human contributes for this reason to the growth of Reason (or Spirit) in its entirety. As humans grow in knowledge, in short, as their reason or consciousness expands, Reason as a whole expands.

It is important to note in this regard that because humans do not live in isolation of each other but always in social gatherings unique to particular places and times, Hegel has in mind less the expansion of the consciousness of individual humans per se than that of the collective rationality, that essential 'spirit' or nature (a *zeitgeist* or 'spirit of the age') expressive of and, thus, unique to particular communities. For Hegel, in short, human consciousness is less a solipsistic than a communal affair, shaped by our relations to each other.

Much of this is Hegel's focus in his immensely difficult Phaenomenologie des Geistes (1807) (the title of which is translated as either The Phenomenology of Mind [trans. Baillie] or The Phenomenology of Spirit [trans. Miller]) in particular. Hegel conceived, at least initially, of this as the first exposition of his grand system (A. V. Miller translates the title as The Phenomenology of Spirit while an earlier translator, J. M. Baillie, renders it as The Phenomenology of Mind because the German word 'geist' can mean both 'spirit' and 'mind'). It can only be summarised in a way that does an injustice to the complexity of his argument. If the term 'phenomenology' is derived from the terms *phenomenon* and *epistemology* and as such denotes the study of our knowledge of worldly phenomena or, more precisely, how things in the empirical world appear to the consciousness of human beings, the very title (Phenomenology of Spirit) indicates the study of how the material

phenomena through which Spirit manifests itself presents themselves to consciousness. The Phenomenology of Spirit, then, is first and foremost an epistemological study. It is also, as such, one of the most important studies historically of the nature of subjectivity as a discussion of the nature of knowledge (i.e. what it is possible to know) implies the necessity to understand the nature of the knower (i.e. the structures of consciousness).

The Phenomenology of Spirit is intended to trace the "stages in the mind's necessary progress from immediate sense-consciousness to the position of a scientific philosophy" (v) capable of knowing the absolute truth, as Findlay puts in his Foreword. That is, it traces the phases in the development of consciousness from uncertainty to absolute certainty. 'Consciousness' here means two things: Spirit or Mind on a macrocosmic scale as well as the individual spirit or mind through which Spirit or Mind manifests itself on a microcosmic scale. The individual's spirit (or mind) is caught up in an intellectual / spiritual odyssey that transcends the individual who is consequently rarely able to realise (unless you are Hegel, of course) his role in and current location on this journey. The journey in question is nothing less than the progress of Spirit (Mind) towards full self-consciousness and it is from this totalising perspective that it is possible to understand man's quest for certainty and the failings thereof as various stages on the way to a position of absolute certainty or scientific knowledge. The various degrees of certainty which individuals and, by extension, the cultures they form possess correspond to one's location at different stages of this development. The predominance of Rationalism in the seventeenth century, followed by Empiricism in the eighteenth and by Kant's attempted synthesis of these positions, each of which is not without its failings, may be seen as examples of the incomplete knowledge peculiar to particular phases. In Hegel's schema, at the endpoint of this journey there is a coalescence of the knowing subject and the object known, where consciousness corresponds to and is at one with reality and vice versa. To put this another way, the boundaries between subject and object disintegrate as the knowing subject discovers himself in the object known and the object known in the knowing subject.

#### Section A: Consciousness:

Here, Hegel identifies three important ways (or stages) in which subjective consciousness relates to the objective world. Findlay identifies these three stages as:

the Sense-certainty which merely confronts an object in what seems to be its rich individuality without making anything definite of it, the Perception where it begins to distinguish properties or qualities in the immediately given, but is unable to integrate them in the unity of the perceived thing, and finally the Understanding, where the nature of things are seen as fixed patterns of mutual interference and interaction behind their manifest, phenomenal surface. Sense certainty is dialectically flawed . . . since it is impossible to pin down the qualities which are thus felt to be rich and various or the individuality which is thus felt to be wholly unique. For in the flux of experience one quality is constantly yielding place to another, and it is impossible to seize what is individual by pointing gestures or by demonstrative words such as 'This,' 'Here,' 'Now,' 'I,' etc. which are irremediably general in meaning. Perception, likewise, is dialectically flawed by its incapacity to integrate the separate characters it picks out with the unified individuality of the object to which it seeks to attribute them. Both lead on to the Understanding . . . [which is also] dialectically flawed by its inability to explain the comprehensive dovetailing of essential natures,

forces, and laws into one another, so as to form only one system of interacting essentialities. (xvi)

#### Section B: Self-Consciousness:

The next stage on the journey of consciousness is the realisation that such explanatory unities are imparted to objects by the conscious mind. The consciousness of objects is henceforth replaced in importance by self-consciousness, that is, by the need to have a consciousness of consciousness. The focus switches from the objects per se to the "rational creatures around oneself, who are all interpreting the same objects, without identifying their interpretive acts with the interpretations embedded in things" (xvi). There is a switch from saying "Things are interacting in a manner X' to 'We all are understanding things as interacting in a manner X'" (xvi).

The most important section here is that devoted to what has come to be called the 'Master-Slave Dialectic.' It is important to realise in what follows that Hegel's interest is not in the nature of slavery per se but is using the relationship of master to slave as a metaphor for the specular relationship of recognition that binds one consciousness (what is sometimes called the subject Ego) to another (the object Ego). In other words, we are caught up in a mirror-like relationship with one another from which we derive a sense of who we are. Hegel's thesis here is that self-awareness, that is, a sense of self, an awareness of one's identity, is only possible through one's relationship to the Other, a notion that has been profoundly influential upon a whole host of materialist thinkers (not least Marxists and Phenomenologists who are, of course, hostile to Hegel's idealism). For these, if Hegel is wrong about everything else, he is not wrong about the way in which our consciousness is formed by our relationship to each other. This is, in their view, a constitutive feature of all inter-personal relationships.

Hegel's parable here is designed to argue, in a nutshell, that human relationships are basically of the nature of that of master to slave. Human relationships are rarely, if every, based on the social equality of the individuals involved. As Friedrich Nietzsche would put it later, human relationships are marked by what he called a 'will to power,' that is, the desire of each person to dominate or 'lord it over' the other. However, this will to power disguises the mutual dependency which binds us all to one another: while it is easy to recognise that the slave's dependency on the Master's acknowledgment (in the form of praise, etc.) of his / her service (through which, importantly, s/he derives almost entirely his or her sense of self, an identity), it is not always immediately obvious that the master too craves the slave's acknowledgment of his / her authority from which s/he derives almost entirely a sense of his own identity. As a result, self-consciousness is inextricable from what some would term nowadays the *gaze* of the Other, the people whom we encounter functioning somewhat as mirrors in which we come to see an image of ourselves, as it were.

Hegel's views in this regard are exemplified by Jean-Paul Sartre's play Huis Clos (In Camera) in which each character is shown to be entirely dependent (even when they deny it) for a sense of self (this is their self-consciousness) on the perspective which others have on him / her. Self-consciousness (i.e. awareness of one's self, self-knowledge) is entirely dependent, paradoxically, on our relationship to the *Other* from whom we demand recognition.

Hegel argues that this essentially flawed quest for domination (which masks the relationship of dependency between self and other which in fact obtains) is eventually transcended and replaced by an "unflawed universality where every subject recognises and promotes active universality in every subject, where we all equally recognise and cooperate with each other" (Findlay xvii). The world will come to be so arranged that "all can be servants and thus also lords to one another" (xvii).

#### Section C:

Here, which is divided into sub-sections devoted to Reason, Spirit, Religion, and Absolute Knowing, respectively, Hegel contends that, though the magical synthesis of knower and known has not been achieved to this point by individuals at any stage on the path, this endpoint represents the ultimate destination of human civilisation as a whole, the history of which is nothing less than the self-realisation of Spirit. Absolute certitude is achieved when Spirit reaches full self-consciousness because the material *objects* in which Spirit manifests itself are the means precisely by which it attains *subjective* self-awareness. Spirit (the Self in Hegel's dialectic triad) explores or mediates itself through material phenomena (its Other) from which it derives a sense of what it inherently is in fact (this would be the synthesis). The knowing subject and the object known, because they both form part of one, all-embracing, ubiquitous Spirit, are each in the final instance inseparable from the other, caught up in a dialectical relationship with each other. It is in this way that absolute (self-)consciousness is achieved.

#### Conclusion:

All in all, Hegel's views represent a significant departure from earlier forms of Rationalism. M. H. Abrams argues in The Mirror and the Lamp in the nineteenth century there occurred a change in the dominant metaphor by which human beings conceptualised themselves and their world. Hitherto, the *mirror* predominated, that is, a tendency to understand things as *reflections* of other things. Plato is a good example of this kind of thinking: for him, the physical world has meaning only as an imperfect reflection of an ideal world in which the essences of all physical objects on Earth are to be found. In the nineteenth century, however, the mirror gave way to the *lamp*, a tendency to understand the outward appearance of things as the *expression* of an inner essence (in much the same way that light shines forth or emanates from within the lamp). It is from this point of view that Hegel argues that the physical world has meaning only as the manifestation of an inner principle of rationality which he calls 'Mind' or 'Spirit' and which is, in his view, synonymous with God.