CHAPTER FIVE

POLITICS, ECONOMICS, AND THE GOOD LIFE
Two lines of thought emerge and develop in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries in Europe. For the sake of convenience they may be identified with John Locke and Adam Smith respectively. (a) Locke held the view that man is naturally endowed with faculties necessary for moral maturity and material development and that he reaches his State of Maturity without the State help. (b) Smith's economic thought tried to show how perfect competition among self interested, rational individuals has the unintended beneficial consequence of providing the society with the goods and services it wants. The Lockean idea of extra-political moral maturity of man and the Smithian idea of providential advantage arising out of competition come together in Kant. Maintaining the epistemological distinction between the phenomenal realm and the noumenal realm Kant could say, on the one hand, that as members of the free, noumenal world we are worthy of highest respect; he could also sing, on the other hand, the praise of our unsocial sociability:

"Thanks be then to Nature for this unsociableness, for this envious jealousy and vanity, for this unsatisfiable desire of possession, or even of power! Without them all the excellent capacities implanted in mankind by nature would slumber eternally undeveloped."

It is through antagonism and discord that the powers of men are developed and progress made.
The discovery of the 'economy' was a related development. Of course, we are now being told by scholars that the Scottish enlighteners were not simple-minded dogmatic advocates of laissez-faire and that they saw an important role for the statesman. But the fact remains that, that there was a sphere of human interaction with its own laws and tendencies which were best left undisturbed, was being announced for the first time. From Mandeville to Steuart, Ferguson, Smith and Kant, acquisitiveness and competition were being presented as the wheels of a moving economy.

We can see the thought of Rousseau, Hegel, and Marx as straining itself against these dominant positions of their times. Each of these thinkers rejects, one way or the other, the natural maturity of man. In their rejection they produce a subject matter called 'history'. Whether it is progress towards plenty and peace or sliding towards voluptuousness and decadence, whether it is alienation and de-alienation of man or the self-positing, self-alienating, and self-returning movement of the cosmic spirit, it is in history that it takes place; or, rather, history is the name of these momentous happenings. This has two consequences. First, the idea of unchanging human nature and the eternal (divine) order become increasingly unavailable for placing constraints on the politics of the present. Second, it
enhances, in principle, human responsibility and the efficaciousness of politics. It is another matter that the positions of these thinkers - utopian Rousseau, contemplationist Hegel, and revolutionary Marx - diverge on the question of politics.

3. All three of them rejected the idea of autonomous, self-equilibrating economy as either ethically inadmissible, inadequate, or empirically unsustainable. In arguing for secular containment of the economy, Rousseau proposed an undynamic, frozen economy, Hegel saw the State as regulating the economy without hampering individual freedom, and Marx visualized the unity of civil and political societies. Their thought resisted the view which, celebrating the disintegration of the traditional social order, accorded primacy to the relations between individual men and things. They opened up an alternative approach giving priority to relations between men. On the question of the meaning of this priority and the terms on which the human relations were valued, the three, of course, diverged.

4. If the discovery of market, individual rationality, and belief in progress could be said to be the marks of early modernity then Rousseau, Hegel, and Marx are the three trenchant critics of that modernity. It is not so much by questioning each of these tenets from a gloomy perspective as by highlighting central problems of the modern society
that they put in doubt the self-confident proclamations of the Age of Reason. Rousseau found the modern man vain, false, imitative, and incapable of being at peace with himself. Hegel thought that the modern freedoms were one-sided in that they emphasized only one dimension of our social existence and led us to ignore our connections with the stream of larger life which alone gives meanings to our practices and goals. Marx insisted that it was a scandal and a virtual calumny that man should be enslaved by the dynamism of his activities. Thus, inauthenticity, separation, and alienation were the deeply disquieting features of modernity.

5. The three thinkers, however, converge on the malaise they see as symptomatic of inauthenticity, or separation, or alienation; this malaise is the dichotomy, typical of the modern society, of the public and the private. In philosophical language, they spoke of the opposition between the universal and the particular. One sense of the 'particular' is 'that which cannot be generalised', that which therefore violates some rule, that which therefore is against fairness. So generality (or universality) here stands for egalitarian fairness. This is the sense in which Rousseau uses these terms. For Marx, universality consists in the needs and powers of the species which become concrete in the needs and powers of specific individuals, individuals who regard each other as the extension of their humanity.
And particularity is the unshared appropriation of specific resources leading to division and discord. For Hegel the particular is particular because it expresses, in a falsely self-subsistent way only one aspect of the spiritual richness available to man; at the same time it is deluded that it can make claim to independent existence. That which incorporates all such aspects is the universal. So universality is totality, it is that which is truly self-subsistent, absolute (i.e., not suffering any limiting barriers). It is clear that such universality can be attributed only to the Geist. But Geist is embodied spirituality. Because, if Geist is pure spirit, uncontaminated by any worldly, human material, then we have heaven and earth, God and Man, spirit and matter, in short we have two worlds, each absolute in its own way, fixed and irreconcilable. That means Geist, though infinite, is limited by the material world in which it cannot pass over. Hegel wanted to provide a conception of Spirit free of this limitation. He wanted to show how Geist is essentially embodied or how human institutions are expressions of Geist. It is in this context of overcoming dualism that Hegel reflected on the relationship between the public and the private. Whereas Marx’s concern was with establishing a communitarian society, each member of which would be a free individual. It is important to remember the principal concerns of both the thinkers which provide context to their analyses of the State and Civil Society. Briefly put,
Rousseau suggests complete denaturing and remoulding of Man after the image of the Spartan warrior-citizen. Hegel wants to preserve the State - Civil Society distinction without permitting both to be separate and indifferent to each other: that is a sure recipe for either of the domains being eventually swallowed by the other. So Hegel proposed the unobtrusive presence of the part of the State within Civil Society itself. Finally, Marx insisted on transforming both the spheres because, he diagnosed the public - private split as a symptom of an exploitative and divided society which has not yet learned to grasp and control its material forces.

6. A serious problem with Rousseau’s position is that his 'people' are the petty-bourgeois classes of the Ancien Régime: the artisans, small peasant-farmers, etc., whereas his model is Spartan. The 'people' donot want to participate in political affairs which they see as dominated by the rich and the powerful. They want to be left alone, their possessions secure and the enjoyments of their private lives unmolested. In contrast, the Spartan citizen's life is consumed by public interests. These two elements are drawn from different worlds, they cannot sit easily together. But removing the republican element will make Rousseau's analysis less than general in its application, confined to the Ancien Régime society. Removing the ‘popular’ content of the General Will will make it formal
and its politics abstractly negative. It will invite Hegel's famous charge that Rousseau tried in vain to derive ideal society from pure will and that such attempts must end up resembling the destructive fury of the Jacobin terror.

7. Kant transformed the Rousseau-problematique by replacing his politics of the General Will by the personal ethics based on universalisability criterion. Rousseau's denunciation of the manifold increase in men's needs did not impress Hegel and Marx, both of whom regarded this development as realization of human possibilities. All the same, it was Rousseau who gave the first classic formulation of the public-private dichotomy.

8. Before examining the analyses of Hegel and Marx we must take note of the inadequacies of the commentaries of some of the scholars because their criticisms hamper a fuller appreciation of the concerns of Marx and Hegel. Popper's two volume work, The Open Society and Its Enemies is the first such commentary I will take up here.

Popper's basic contrast, as the title of his book suggests, is between tribal, organic, authoritarian society which accepts certain beliefs in an unquestioning way, and, associational, individualistic society which institutionalizes criticism and experimentation. He regards Plato, Aristotle, Hegel, and Marx as enemies of this latter
kind. Suspending the use of reason, they preach return to the magical reconciliation with the world typical of closed tribal societies.

Popper has several things to say about Hegel which are not exactly complimentary. He wants us to know that Hegel was intellectually a fraud, politically a reactionary, a paid agent of the Prussian monarchy, and his State-worshiping as directly responsible for the hideous political crimes of this century. Fortunately, the works by Avineri, Marcuse, Taylor, etc. have refuted these wild charges and corrected the distortions. We now know that the infamous Hegelian claim of the State being the march of God on earth is a false report based on mistranslation. We know Hegel's crucial distinction between the two senses of the 'state'. We know his active opposition to xenophobic, anti-semitic German nationalism. The testimony of Schopenhauer (given by Popper) about Hegel's philosophical charlatanry fails to impress us because it misunderstands the way the speculative logic works.

It is helpful to recall that Popper took the decision to write his criticism of Hegel and Marx on the day his native Austria was invaded by Fascist Germany (March, 1938), it was completed in 1943, and that between 1947 and 1977 his book was brought out (as reprints or new editions) more than a dozen times. The second World War, the Cold War, the
perceived Manichean struggle between the forces of freedom and the forces of totalitarianism: this is the eloquent context of the work.

The second kind of discussions I have in mind are the evaluations of Marx's theories in the Analytical tradition of philosophy, for example the commentaries by Flamenatz and Acton. Their interpretations of Marx's historical materialism are not borne by the texts read either literally or imaginatively; and they give excessive attention to The German Ideology, The Communist Manifesto, and the 1859 Preface. They regard all relations of determination as causal, all causality as one directional, temporal; they insist on separating concepts from one another and they evaluate Marx's claim to scientificity on the model of verificationist, inductive natural sciences. The commentaries by Sayer, Ollman, Miller, etc. have remedied the situation by bringing fresh perspectives to bear on Marx's theses.

Let us now turn to some more useful discussions of the political philosophies of Hegel and Marx.

In the chapter on Hegel (ch.3) it was mentioned that the German word 'Bürger' has a convenient ambivalence that Hegel exploits. While Marx followed Rousseau in contrasting 'bourgeois' and 'citizen', Hegel revived the old protestant
conception of the 'bürgerliche Gesellschaft' in the sense of an integral political economic community. He shared with the major intellectuals of the Eighteenth century the concern with the declining civic ethos while he could not turn his back on the rising commercial civilization. Property, contract, and exchange were indispensable for individual freedom but economy could generate only unconscious community with abstract universality, not a genuine community. Hegel's larger concern was with overcoming the division between the real and the ideal and any split between the economic and the political (more precisely, the State, the divine community) without any bridge would have only reproduced that dualism. Hegel's solution was to start from the German conception of the bürgerlich and present Civil Society as system of needs plus public authorities (Polizei) and the system of justice.

10. But Hegel's model of 'unity with differentiation' is too neat. German lands were backward during the time he wrote, which meant that along with some modern institutions there also existed some old ones surviving from the Medieval past. Hegel cashed in on this peculiarity and constructed his State and Civil Society freely combining the old and the new. But it arouses the suspicion of arbitrariness. Rule of law and monarchy, representative democracy and corporate representation, freedom to alienate property and primogeniture, individual freedom and corporate membership:
many such examples can be given. In each case what we have is a forced synthesis of elements or practices which are not incompatible in themselves but which cannot be brought together on Hegel's terms. Hegel's positive attitude to the Estates is perhaps the starkest illustration. Hegel must have been aware of the emergence of classes in England and France. In his own country, Estates had ceased to be the principle of social organization and had become reactionary relics from the medieval past. But Hegel chose to see in them representation of distinct ways of life and gave them place in his system.

Since Hegel was writing the history of the actualization of the concept (with profane history serving as expressive illustration), he had the freedom to 'pick and choose' but as a result the truth value of his imposing edifice became dependent on an act of faith: either you believe human history as the emanation of cosmic spirit or you don't.

11. Hegel's remarkable ability to see meaning or significance where naked eye can see only mundane earthly activities is the source of another problem. Geist or no Geist, the line separating recollection of lost meaning from rationalization is very subjectively drawn. Hegel is too clairvoyant when he tries to show how the modern economy generates freedom, culture, and solidarities; ultimately the reconciliation of unity and freedom is purchased through
mere philosophical redescription. Ascribing suitable significance to various institutions and practices is the crucial strategy in the overall project of uniting the real and the ideal. Once seen as sharing in the divine current of Geist—a cosmic life (Geist, understood as conceptual thinking), marriage, commerce, colonial expansion cease to be patriarchy, exploitation, or imperialism and are transsubstantiated into moments of the cosmic Mind.

12. Marx’s view of the bourgeois State as a collective coercive instrument wielded by the capitalists is well known. In fact his analysis of the State is often reduced to this claim. But in the Jewish Question he also depicted it as an imaginary space, populated by formally equal citizens where the supposedly general, communal interests are articulated and promoted. He argued that a society that is divided in its productive and economic affairs requires the illusion of such a domain. This analysis gets support from the critique of commodity fetishism Marx later developed. A society where the social nature of privately carried out labour appears to men as determined in an alien, incomprehensible way, men must resort to a political way of conceiving themselves as a society.

In the light of the distinction, drawn in the Eighteenth Brumaire, between the ruling class and the governing class, the Jewish Question analysis of the State as a necessary
communitarian illusion becomes crucial. With the distinction
between those who control the conditions of production in an
immediate way and those who are supposed to manage the
common affairs of the whole society, the illusion of the
universality of the State becomes not only sustainable and
necessary but it is also no longer a pure illusion:
politics, including the State, emerges as the arena of
conflicting interests, each one of which must be translated
into a general interest before it is backed by a government
policy. 13. However, there are some problems with Marx's
overall position which must be acknowledged. Kolakowski19 is
right when he says that the Marxian transition from
socialism to communism cannot come about without using one
of the three following devices: material incentives,
competition, etc., moral motivation, and physical coercion.
The first and the third are evidently incompatible with the
ideal of communism whereas the second presupposes a
stupendous moral revolution which we are not told how to
bring about. Kolakowski concludes that the Marxian idea of
the unity of civil and political society is likely to result
in an overgrown bureaucracy and a totalitarian State.20

14. Related problems have been raised by Taylor21 at a higher
level of abstraction. Taylor says that Marx had a 'terribly
unreal notion of freedom.' In capitalism men are enslaved by
the logic of their activities which confronts them as the
laws of the capitalist economy. When capitalism is
overthrown, there are no laws to constrain men who presumably leap towards untrammeled freedom. But freedom is not spontaneity, it is not something that can be characterized merely negatively as the absence of constraining factors.

"Marx seemed to have been oblivious to the inescapable opacity and indirectness of communication and decision in large bodies of men, the way in which the dynamic of their interaction always partly escapes men, even in small and simple societies, let alone those organized around a large and complex productive system."  

Freedom can only be experienced in situations and to think of a free society is to visualize situations which men will create and in the process, express their freedom. Marx's freedom, Taylor says, 23 is situationless freedom.

15. Francois Furet 24 says that throughout his intellectual career, Marx was obsessed with the visibility, momentousness of the French Revolution and the backwardness of Germany. The Germans contemplated what the other nations did. Marx tried to get over this feeling of inferiority by consoling himself that the French Revolution was only political, it established the bourgeois rights; the real revolution is social, which Germany, given its political backwardness, could experience.

Furet's general point, which is more persuasive, is that
Marx valued revolution as a privileged form of action, 'a new form of man's reconciliation with the world'. All his thought and activity was aimed at making revolution possible on the model of the great 1789 Revolution. Berlin tells us how Marx was always looking for political and economic crises in various European countries that would trigger off radical upheaval. He predicted it in 1842, 1851, 1857, and 1872, but on all these occasions, full-scale revolution failed to materialize. Initially, around 1848, Marx thought of revolution as an insurrection or a coup d'état carried out by a small band of disciplined and dedicated revolutionaries. Later he came to regard a wider support of politically enlightened proletariat necessary for the revolutionary seizure of power to be sustained. After the hopes of coups made possible by purely political crises were dashed to the ground, Marx started looking for evidence of economic crises precipitating revolution. And, after the failure of even those anticipations, Marx concentrated on the organization of a revolutionary party. From this account it seems that the tribute paid by Engels to Marx, that he was above all a revolutionary, may have unwittingly drawn attention to a weakness of Marx's political temperament and strategic thinking.

However it is Marx's enduring achievement that he forced us to look at the various inhuman forms of labour in the past and present societies. Whatever the validity of the
materialist claim that social relations of production determine politics, ideas, and art, it is true that labour and the provision for the satisfaction of needs are vital functions. He highlighted the tendency of the modern capitalist societies to subordinate human values to the instrumental rationality of the economy. Marx scoffed at attempts to transform Civil Society by politics, and ridiculed those who thought that politics was capable of everything. His own preference for political i.e. human, command over economic processes might seem inconsistent with his alleged 'importance of politics' view. But there is no contradiction between the claim that politics is determined by the material relations and processes and the claim that the ideal of, free, collective regulation of the material is a realizable ideal. For, what the first claim denies is not human freedom in the material realm but the hope, either that the revolutionary subordination of the economic to the political can be brought about anytime (i.e. that revolution specifically, and the building of socialism generally, have no objective pre-conditions), or that politics can reign supreme without restructuring the economic.

17. The positive legacy of the political philosophy of Hegel and Marx can be appropriated for conceptualising Civil Society in the Indian context. But before I try to do that it is necessary to clarify expressions like, 'political control of the economic' 'politics in command of the
economic', etc., which I have frequently used.

I am avoiding the expression 'economy' because as a net flow of goods and services passing through market, it obviously excludes those productive activities which take place outside the market. At the same time the term 'material' has too comprehensive associations ranging form 'matter-material' to physical reproduction.

I am using the term 'economic' to refer to all the activities, outside households, related to production - distribution - consumption. Moreover, these activities as they take place in the modern society, are being identified here.

The 'political' is not coterminus with the 'state': it is that which is open, public, collective, critical of established relations of domination; it is not necessarily procedurally democratic nor institutional.

A few words about 'control' and 'regulate'. To control or contain a set of processes or activities is to limit their influence, force, or scope of operation. Controlling in this sense is consistent with a continued, separate existence of those processes/activities within a demarcated sphere.
When we say, 'the police fired teargas shells to control the mob', we assume that people have a right to assembly and that the police had to resort to lathi charge or firing because the crowd became unruly. Similar usage is possible concerning economy, for example, as regards the stock market boom. In using the word 'control' or 'contain' we assume that that which is to be controlled has the acknowledged right (or the strength) to go on with its functioning but only with certain rules or limits. That which needs to be controlled has often become, in other's perception, a threat to other persons/groups/spheres.

'Regulate' also has the sense of enforcing limits but not only in unusual, extreme, crisis situations, but also on a day-to-day basis. This rule enforcement is such that without it the functioning of that sphere is impossible. 'Regulation' here has the sense of anonymous coordination of complex interactions through the maintenance of numerous rules.

Any economy of a modern kind will always need a supervising and regulating authority. There will be the central bank, labour commission, rate, public financial institutions, perhaps stock exchange board, and so on. If this economy has a large number of private actors, or if the economy is operating within a system of economies, then the regulating authority will have to manipulate periodically, certain
prices, interest rates, use of foreign exchange, and so on.

The idea of Welfare State goes beyond 'regulating State'. Its premise is that there are certain things which we value, or are politically sensitive, and given its logic, market cannot take care of these things and therefore the State has to step in as the other agent and provide for them. But it does not abolish market and private enterprise.

The political regulation of the economic is minimal in the laissez-faire model of economy, and considerably extensive in the regulating State, but the sense in which I am using the expression, 'politics in command of the economic' begins to be expressed only with the Welfare State, and given Hegel's model of Civil Society (with its public authority), this is the first articulation of the 'politics in command' position. However, it is only with Marx that we have the first major, fully developed argument along this line.

In this fully developed sense, 'subordination of the economic to the political' means that a collectively arrived at idea of 'the good' dominates the way we organize our production and distribution. This idea of 'the good' itself may continuously evolve and not be a final utopian state. Politics will thus strive to oppose, change, reform all those economic practices which the people participating in
that politics consider as inconsistent with their conception of individual and collective good life.
NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Immanuel Kant, Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose (1784), Fourth Proposition. This work is included in Hans Reiss, (ed.), Kant’s Political Writings, tr. H.B. Nisbett (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1970); see pp. 44-5. I have, however, taken the translation cited in Lucio Colletti’s From Rousseau to Lenin: Studies in Ideology and Society (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1978), p.160.


3. For a most helpful collection of Hegel’s remarks on dualism and the need to overcome it philosophically, see Lucio Colletti, Marxism and Hegel (London, NLB, 1973), ch.1.


University Press, 1986). Houlgate's explanation of speculative sentence is very instructive: Hegel's logic tries to establish the meaning and validity of universal, logical categories like quantity, quality, negation, necessity, possibility, etc. In his analysis Hegel uses sentences which directly express the nature of these categories. For example, 'Being is the indeterminate immediate', or 'real necessity is determinate necessity'. These are called philosophical or speculative sentences. In a speculative sentence the subject-term and the predicate term are both logical categories or universal concepts. They are related to other categories and are not primarily representations of reality outside them. A speculative sentence is a statement of identity between subject and predicate, they are not particular and universal terms respectively (as in 'This rose is red'), but one universal term identifying the intrinsic character of the other. Failure to appreciate this arouses the suspicion, as in Schopenhauer whose testimony Popper gives, of bluffing, charlatanry, intellectual fraud, etc. See Houlgate, ch.5, esp. pp.144-51.


12. Richard Miller, Analyzing Marx: Morality Power and


15. This is the expression used by Raymond Plant. See Raymond Plant, Economic and Social Integration in Hegel’s Political Philosophy in Donald Verene, (ed.), Hegel’s Social and Political Thought: The Philosophy of Objective Spirit (Sussex, Harvester Press, 1980), pp. 69-87.

16. See Colletti, n. 1. ch. XII


18. Karl Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte' in Furet, ibid, Selection 22.


20. Ibid., p. 31.


22. Ibid., p. 544.


24. Furet, n. 17, pp. 41-3.

25. Furet, n. 17, p. 49.


27. Ibid., p. 183.

28. Ibid., p. 137.

29. Ibid., p. 146.

30. Ibid., p. 147.