

# Hegel and 'The End of History'

Nicholas Boyle

In September 1989, while the dominoes were falling in the Soviet Empire in Eastern Europe, a very minor revolution occurred in our national newspapers: the face of the German philosopher Hegel suddenly and briefly, and surely for the first time, was allowed to dominate the centre pages.

The deputy director of the American State Department's policy planning staff, Francis Fukuyama, had published an essay entitled 'The End of History' in the right-wing journal *The National Interest*, suggesting that contemporary events were vindicating Hegel rather than Hegel's unruly disciple, Karl Marx: that ideas and ideology were a genuinely motivating force in history, rather than mere economics; that Hegel had seen the ideas of the French Revolution, which Fukuyama identified with modern liberal democracy, as the ultimate goal of history; that we were witnessing the worldwide extension of those ideas through the collapse of the Soviet bloc; and that since no further ideological conflict or development was possible, history had come to an end. In other words — and though Fukuyama did not say it, it was soon enough said — America had won the Cold War and though things would undoubtedly continue happening, nothing much, nothing big, would ever change again. In the *Independent* the much-regretted Peter Jenkins aptly quoted Arnold Toynbee's childhood memories of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897:

I remember the atmosphere. It was: well here we are on the top of the world, and we have arrived at this peak to stay there — forever! There is of course a thing called history, but history is something unpleasant that happens to other people.

It was not very easy to work out what Fukuyama was actually saying in his article, and when you worked it out it usually seemed to be wrong. However the article had what it takes to make a fashion: a good title. And that title, despite its suggestion of aggressive paradox, rightly pointed to two important things about the bewildering state of world politics as clouds of obscuring dust rose all about us from the collapsing tyrannies:

one was the feeling that something large scale and fundamental had changed, and that things could not be the same again; the other was that Hegel might be of some value in explaining to ourselves what was going on.

In this article I want to take up those two points of value in Fukuyama's original article. I will take his phrase, 'The End of History', as shorthand for the new world order or disorder which burst upon us or seemed to burst upon us in 1989, and will set out both to analyse what has happened and to ask what this implies for the future of the Church. But I will also take up Fukuyama's suggestion that Hegel is the right figure to guide us on this quest, though for a rather different reason from that which Fukuyama gives. Hegel is not only an immensely broad and deep thinker about mind, politics, art and history — he is also a religious thinker, a Christian thinker. He saw himself as a modern, that is Christian, Aristotelian, or since he was not a modest man, as a modern Aristotle. That perhaps makes Hegel an appropriate guide to choose for our celebration today of the greatest of Christian Aristotelians.

First then let us turn to the events of 1989, and their aftermath, and ask what sense we can make of them — not initially any particularly Hegelian sense. Just sense. And if we ask that question I think it is immediately clear that Fukuyama's answer does not come into that category.

The events of 1989, and subsequent developments in Russia and around the world, cannot be represented as the triumph of the idea of liberal democracy, or indeed of any idea alone and unaided.

The East German state, for example, had long ago ceased to enjoy the intellectual assent of the majority of its citizens if it ever possessed it — but it remained in existence for decades and gave every appearance of being capable of lasting indefinitely, even in the summer and autumn of 1989. The removal of the Soviet military guarantee may have spelled the end of the puppet regime, as in Poland, Czechoslovakia and elsewhere in Eastern Europe, nations which were then free to enjoy their more or less velvety revolutions, but it did not necessitate the end of the East German state. The survival of the East German state ceased to be conceivable at the moment when the free movement of people and money between the two German states was allowed. The wall between the two Germanies and across Europe had been built to safeguard the Soviet-imposed state structure against the threat posed by the free movement of labour and capital. In 1961 Khrushchev recognized that the existence of a single leak or loophole posed a threat to the economic and so the political stability of East Germany, and so the wall was completed virtually overnight to staunch the last possibility of haemorrhage through the open wound that

was Berlin. The wall as it developed with its death-strips and razor wire and chained dogs and searchlights and sanitized zones deep into the territory behind it was a monument not to the lengths to which tyranny will go to shackle the free human spirit, but to the absurd and so ultimately unsustainable measures to which the political will is constrained when it seeks absolute control of economic activity.

It is strange that Fukuyama gives no place among the victors of 1989 to the economic factor, even though the presidents from his own party, Bush and especially Reagan, consciously or unconsciously made systematic use of it to win the final round of the Cold War. By intensifying technological competition in the military sphere, above all with the Star Wars programme, and even by overheating the Western economy as it entered the boom phase of a cycle in order to exaggerate the manifest difference between Western and Eastern productivity, they put, and perhaps intended to put, intolerable pressure on the Communist governments from their own captive populations. The demand to deliver the — consumer — goods became all the more insistent and all the more impossible to meet as the Western economies seemed to be sprinting away into the distance. In the current slump we are now paying back the debts incurred in that last strenuous effort to unseat the dictators by appealing to the economic interests of their victims.

But of course Reagan and Bush could make use of the economic weapon only because it was there to be used. They could not invent it, they could only magnify, at a politically critical moment, an effect which was already at work and which would eventually have brought about roughly the same results, if not in the present economic cycle, then in a future one. The political will to control, symbolized and effectuated by that monstrous iron fence across Europe, was already being undermined at a myriad points. It was not just a matter of increased tourism bringing an increased black market in secondhand jeans and an increased desire for Walkmans and Marlboros; nor even of the acknowledgement of failure represented by state chains of Intershops selling Western goods for hard currency. It was the brute fact on the large scale that, try as they might to establish a watertight, self-contained alternative economic system — and only Albania really succeeded in being watertight — the communist regimes could not cut themselves off entirely from the world market: that was where they had to sell their gas and their oil, their sugar and their gold and their other industrial metals; that was where they had to buy their grain in time of dearth; and that was where some of them, notably the Polish regime, involved themselves in the Western financial system by seeking loans. In the area where the technological gap between West and East was greatest — electronics and computing — the communist world

was reduced to parasitism and piracy and made no pretence of offering an alternative. And all the while in the background, partly a consequence, partly itself a cause, the telecommunications network was extending itself, and the Comecon countries were entangled in a proliferation of cables, television channels and interconnected computers. The rising tide of information, as of ever more freely flowing capital, was washing at the subsoil on which the iron fence was founded, and in 1989 the sandcastles crumbled away into the global market.

That global market, that economic interconnection of all human beings across the whole surface of the planet, had been establishing itself manifestly since 1945 and its historical roots lie a good deal deeper in the past. After the Second World War however — and nothing brings people together like having a war with each other — the founding of the GATT was a first serious attempt to give that global interconnection institutional expression. But even without institutions to guide it, the global market had long since begun to transform our world. Already by the end of the 19th century, telegraph, transport and trade had brought almost all human beings, including even some of the most remote and primitive, into potential interrelationship, and it required only the development of the mass-production of consumer goods and durables from cars to Coca Cola, and the arts of mass distribution and mass advertising, to make that potential interrelationship a real one. Long before it destroyed the Soviet empire, the global market, as it grew, destroyed the colonial empires, notably of Britain and France, which had initially fostered it: even in 1950 Britain was still the largest car exporter in the world — an indication of the power both of Imperial preference and of the forces which have since put an end to it. 1945 however is the most natural turning-point to look back to and not only because 1989-90 so obviously saw the end of the Cold War which began then, and because so much of the unfinished business of 1945, deep frozen under Stalinism, returned from the dead in 1989-90 to haunt much of Eastern Europe, especially Yugoslavia.

1945 is also the turning-point because those immediate post-war years also saw the beginnings of other consequences of the globalization of economic activity. Obviously the Cold War years saw a huge growth in the significance of what came to be called the multinational corporations, a development headed by firms whose business was of its nature international, such as oil companies, but which has come in our own day to embrace such standard forms of industrial manufacture as car-production, which used to be one of the staples of national economy and, along with an airline — now also internationalized as like as not —, a symbol of national pride and independence. A little less obviously this is also the period of an explosive development of multinational political

agencies, whether for defence, trade or cultural co-operation, some but not by any means all sponsored by the political figurehead of the new era, the United Nations Organization. The UN may be derided as practically ineffectual — though other multinational bodies such as NATO, the IMF, or OPEC certainly are not — but the effect of its existence on our consciousness is immeasurable. It is a very difficult exercise of the imagination to think oneself back into a world without that shared and universal talking-shop, a world in which the biggest conceivable human units were nations and their empires, unequal, no doubt, but absolutely sovereign, engaging in mutual relations only by choice not by necessity, considering the views and interests of allies, if there were any, only occasionally and in the context of some particular and temporary treaty. (What a difference it has made to our national thinking to be in a close military alliance with the same nations for half a century.) In that half-forgotten world such phrases as 'human rights', 'the world community', 'responsibility for the planet', belonged to the vocabulary of philosophy, not of politics.

Since 1945 there has been a shift, deep down, in the way we think about ourselves and our cultural and ethical activities, of which people have seriously become aware only in the last 20 years or so and to which the label 'postmodernism' has been attached. But that is something I want to talk about later. For the moment the point which I want to stress is that since 1945 a single overriding economic fact, the development of the global market, has determined not only the economic but the political and cultural life of the human world, and has been responsible for all the most striking changes those years have seen. In particular the development of an integrated world economy has meant the gradual obsolescence of nations as significant economic and even political units. (Note that I do not say the obsolescence of nationalism — nationalism is an irrational emotion and belongs therefore to cultural life. I am talking about the hard realities of finance, manufacture and employment, all of which are, as I have already indicated, now essentially international, as any Black Monday, Wednesday or Friday will show, and as no doubt Black Sundays will show in the not too distant future.)

The reluctance of intellectuals to attribute these changes to changes in the economic structure is surprising. Perhaps it is because such an analysis is regarded as Marxist, and Marxism — not entirely adventitiously — was until 1989 closely, indeed criminally, associated with an authoritarian political creed of utopian socialism, from which many quite properly wished to distance themselves. Jean-François Lyotard, in a most influential treatise on postmodernism first published in 1979, attributed many of the cultural features of the post-1945 era to the growth of

communications and computing, cybernetics as it was called then, which was to mistake a symptom — albeit a facilitating symptom — for a cause. And Fukuyama ten years later still seems to regard what he calls liberal capitalism as a kind of ideology in practice, something that people choose to do, a system of economic order that people choose to impose on themselves because they are convinced on rational grounds that it is right, rather than as what it is: the way human beings, as economic units, in fact behave, which is always changing and developing. If by capitalism you mean a particular theory or system, capitalism does not exist. Capitalism is not an -ism at all; it is not a theory; it is not a matter of choice. If by capitalism you mean the economic facts of life, then there is, as the lady famously said, no alternative.

This is perhaps the moment to interpose a reflection — you might say, an afterthought — on Thatcherism, which is not irrelevant to something I shall have to say in a moment. With hindsight — from which in this case one is particularly relieved to learn — one can see more plainly the single great contradiction that was the foundation of that greatly contradictory phenomenon. Thatcherism was based on two incompatible assumptions. The first was that Britain needed to be drawn more effectively into the global market, to adopt its principles more wholeheartedly and to abandon all inherited forms of protectionism. This radical espousal of free-trading was, historically speaking, simply swimming with the tide, and so seemed to have a mesmerizing irresistibility about it which many attributed to the personality of the prime minister herself. The second assumption however ran directly counter to the first: it was the assumption that Britain needed to be transformed into a strong nation-state. In the post-1945 world however this goal was an impossibility, politically, militarily, and above all, economically. You cannot run a seriously independent line different from that of people with whom you have been allied for 50 years and who supply your weapons, or different from that of people who own large parts of your industry, large parts of the products of which are in turn made in a dozen different countries around the world. The development of the world market saps the foundations of nations as surely as of empires. From the point of view of the market, any act of a national government is a restrictive practice, an unwelcome act of protectionism, and national central government itself, the raiser of taxes, the spender of other people's money, the originator of regulations, the fixer of bank rates and would-be fixer of exchange rates, is just another vested interest, another unjustified obstacle to the free flow of capital. Nations are growing obsolete, not as a matter of fashion or opinion, which could be altered by a determined personality, but as a result of the operation of the same economic trends

that Thatcherism acknowledges and endorses. In swimming *against* that tide, Thatcherism, in its nationalist guise, made itself irritating, embarrassing, or absurd. That fundamental contradiction — between the free world market and nationhood — expressed itself even in Mrs Thatcher's time in bitter divisions within her party and those divisions will continue for as long as the party lives off her intellectual legacy.

Let us now return to our main theme. 'All that is solid, melts into air' Marx says, in the Communist Manifesto, of the impact of bourgeois capitalism on traditional society. Because since 1945 the world market has seriously begun to dissolve protective national structures, the ring fences and Chinese walls that go under the name of national identity, all the smaller structures within nations have begun to feel themselves permeated by some disintegrating fluid. Large and ancient institutions — national churches and monarchies, and aristocracies — smaller institutions of varying antiquity — universities and local authorities, organized interest groups like professions and trade unions, the less organized but similar groups such as national peasantries or other favoured occupations (miners, for example), even established commercial entities with a traditionally non-commercial further role — such as banks or building and friendly societies, or even just traditionally 'good employers' — all feel the impact of a new demand for what is rightly called account-ability. For it is only on condition that you are accountable, that is auditable, that you are allowed to become part of the global market — and you cannot refrain from becoming a part of it without withdrawing from economic life altogether. If you are paid in money, or in any of the market's products, you will eventually — it is the logic of our age — be subjected to the rule of participation in the market: that your activities be quantified, that they be broken down into measurable units, comparable with the units into which the behaviour of others, anywhere in the world, has been broken down, and that you are allowed no standing in this new world order — for standing itself has to be a quantifiable good — that is not transparently related to your performance indicator, your input-output ratio. The globalization of human interrelationships is the strongest of all forces making for their quantification, for, even if they want to, the central organs of a modern — that is a dissolving — nation-state cannot hold out against the global market: as the French farmers have recently learned. More or less gradually, every non-quantifiable, every contractually non-definable, element is leached out of the system of exchange — the value of solidarity, for example, represented by a shared day of rest — is redefined as a free lunch, paid for further down the line by somebody else.

All these collective sub-national institutions, and nations themselves, used to circumscribe individual lives but also to provide the context and

the markers for individual achievement. ('He never made much money but . . . he was a good husband / looked after his employees / won an MC in the war / did a lot for the youth-club / wrote a great book on bee-keeping.') The demand for accountability either reduces the diversity to the uniformity of different calculations in the same currency of somebody's costed time, or dismisses the substantial life these institutions seemed to offer as an anachronistic tissue of idle privilege, restrictive practices, exploitation and oppression.

Three consequences follow: First, the political world shrivels. Public affairs hardly seem to exist any more. Privatization, which is the form in which the demand for accountability affects local natural monopolies, means what it says: large areas of what used to be the national life cease to be an area of public discussion. Elected or representative bodies are seen as incompetent to make managerial — that is, economic — decisions. The affairs of non-economic national institutions — church, monarchy, judiciary, the national newspapers, the BBC — no longer seem quite serious as concerns for the central organs of government. Those seem increasingly taken up with the issues of economic management, which they are increasingly obliged to acknowledge are beyond their control anyway. What role could politicians have when what really matters is accountancy?

Second, as the institutions disappear, the definition of an individual life becomes reduced, or clarified, to the sequence of economic roles the individual performs. No longer do we define ourselves by the church we go to, the party we vote for, or the paper we read; as there is little any longer in the way of public life, we can scarcely be defined by our contribution to it, either on the large or on the small scale. We are at best the series of consumer choices we have made (first an Escort, then a Sierra, then a loft conversion) and the series of jobs from which we have been made redundant — but it is of no great significance to the auditing accountant whether the Escort and the Sierra were bought by the same person, or whether it is only a coincidence that this sales executive and that training manager had the same name.

The concept of a vocation, of a job — or task — for life, that defines a large part of what a person is, loses its value, and is actively persecuted. We may still say 'she is a printer', 'he is a teacher' but what we mean, and what in future we shall increasingly say, is, 'she is doing some printing, at the moment', 'he is on a three-year teaching contract'. The question what 'he' or 'she' permanently is does not arise: even gender is irrelevant — for the market what matters is the performance indicator that 's/he', the production unit, can show.

So third, traditional concepts of value and truth are changed. In the



market, time is compressed into an ever more narrowly defined present. What you have done is an irrelevance. What matters is the choice and the performance *now* — past choices matter only as a guide to present behaviour, future choices matter only as the objects of present calculation. The question of what you permanently are, or what permanently is, and is permanently valuable, does not arise. When it is raised, it has a strangely factitious air: when politicians start talking about the values of our society, or even the lack of values in our society, we have a strong suspicion there is humbug around. Talk of values we don't have is being used to conceal values we do have. Despite what the politicians say, we know that our society is coming down with values, that everyone and every activity in it is multiply and precisely valued, quantitatively valued — productivity, efficiency, performance, cost/benefit and P/Y, credit and audience ratings, popularity polls: has there ever been a society which knew so precisely what it valued and how much? And subconsciously we know that and see through the pretence. The politicians know, and deep down we know too, that nobody really does believe very much that the most important things about our *collective* lives are inexpressible in market terms. Certainly not if under the heading of the market you include the communications network. That is now the real repository of truth, as of value. I guess that if you were to ask people — and not only in the West now — what is the best thing you can imagine happening to you and your family, what it would be like for you to live like the gods, most answers would include, alongside being rich and happy, which is only honest, being famous: living, as it were, in the television set, being royal, being omnipresent in the telecommunications network, which is the instrument and expression of the global market. 100 years ago, by contrast, I suspect a substantial proportion of the answers would have included a reference to heaven. Equally, if you were to ask the present Prime Minister or President of the USA whose judgement they fear most they would, if *they* were being honest, say: the judgement of their electorate — *their* performance appraisers, *their* customers. But if they were being sententious, they would say: the judgement of History — and what is History for the global market but the TV audience of tomorrow, a transcendentalized version of the poll ratings of today? A hundred years ago, however, their predecessors would no doubt have announced, with equal sententiousness, their fear of the judgement of God, or at least of their conscience. Ultimate truth is now not — for most people, really — the word from the mouth of God, but the image on the screen, whether of the TV or of the database. Which is why Watergate was a great, real and truly modern tragedy: Nixon was seduced by the desire for the approval of History into entering as much of his presidency as he could into what was effectively an electronic databank

and that very desire brought him infamy. His unforgivable crime was not to burgle the Democrat headquarters, but to cover up: to seek to withdraw from the global information network to whose judgement he had submitted himself. He was brought low by the very gods he had invoked.

Of course, there are a lot of people around who think they have what are called 'alternative' values: neither the values of the market, nor the values which the market has destroyed. One of the characteristics of the world since 1945 has been the generalization of eccentricity — what is sometimes called pluralism but is really the desubstantialization of *all* values except those of the market. The moral world, like the material world, is supremely represented as a shopping mall: it is now open to us to stroll between the shelves and pick out, or opt for, as the phrase has it, whatever takes our fancy — Buddhism, scientology, environmentalism, feminism, gay liberation, animal rights, Jehovah's Witnesses: in the emporium of pluralism you can have what you want and it is politically incorrect — that is, a restrictive, anti-market practice — to suggest that some commodities should not be put on sale. But the good is not something that we choose to acknowledge — it is something that we have to acknowledge. A true, a substantial value, is not something we have opted for, it is something that has imposed itself on us — as an obligation. And that is why I see the rainbow of minority and alternative cultures or values as a rainbow of delusions. There is not a professor of black studies lecturing to all black classes, and not a hard-line feminist critic chronicling the oppression of half the human race, who is paid, whether by university or publisher or radical protest group, in anything other than green dollar bills. More to the point, they *cannot avoid* being paid and offering payment in that currency: it is what you cannot avoid that are the values you live by, the rest are just — options. We all live in and by the global market and the best we can do is to understand our position and not succumb to delusions. As the lady might have said, there are no alternatives.

The collapse of the Communist Empire in 1989 was the most dramatic step hitherto in a process which began to be the dominant geopolitical process in 1945: the establishment of a truly global market. The existence of a world economic system threatens, and its development gradually undermines, the autonomy of nation-states. As nation states become obsolescent, so the institutions of national life lose their hold on the identities and even the interests of citizens, who are more and more determined by global factors, operating from China to Peru. The political world seems an irrelevance, individuality is fragmented, and the past is lost. The old transcendent certainties fade and are replaced by the harsh realities and tangible rewards of the global marketplace in the global

village. New transcendent certainties do exist, however, if we look for them: the fantasy of a perfect life on the box, (which corresponds roughly to what used to be thought of as the life of the soul) and the fantasy of a perfect life on the box hereafter, called History (which corresponds to what used to be thought of as immortality). History, having wholly ceased to refer to the past, and referring now only to this future fantasy, may truly be said to have ended.

*To be concluded*

## Prophecy and Myth in *Daniel Deronda*

George Every

*Daniel Deronda* is the last of George Eliot's novels, and the one that describes her contemporaries. Mary Anne Evans, who became Marian, Polly to her intimates, and concealed her feminine identity under the pseudonym of George Eliot, was a schoolgirl at the time represented in *Middlemarch*. The religion described in *Scenes of Clerical Life* and in *Adam Bede* was in substance hers until 1841. When in 1856 she began to tell tales about it she had already translated *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* by D.F. Strauss and *The Essence of Christianity* by Feuerbach. But she could write of 'the real drama of Evangelicalism'<sup>1</sup> as one who had experienced it from within when the Evangelical revival stood for serious religion, for the conviction of sin.

In *Daniel Deronda* 'hurrying march of crowded Time towards the world-changing battle of Sadowa'<sup>2</sup> where Prussia defeated Austria in July 1866, dates Daniel's wait in Genoa for his unknown mother, who will tell him that her father and his were both Jews, like Mirah who in the July of the year before stepped into his boat opposite Kew Gardens with the cloak that she had soaked in the river to hasten her drowning. Something has been told beforehand of his background at home with Sir Hugo Mallinger at Topping Abbey, at Eton and at Cambridge and a German university, and of his suspicion of his illegitimacy; but his meetings with Mirah, with