FOUNDATIONS OF
HEGEL'S SOCIAL THEORY

Actualizing Freedom

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the goodness of a particular society's institutions and practices can be judged.

Yet despite these fundamental differences, the widely perceived affinities between Hegel and communitarians are not merely illusory. What makes Hegel's theory more than just another version of liberalism is that it accords central importance to the need of human individuals—call it a spiritual need—to experience themselves as belonging integrally to a greater social reality, a reality whose significance and being transcend their own particular projects and finite life span. Although, in my view, the best examples of liberal thought do not, strictly speaking, rule out the possibility of satisfying this need within a liberal society, part of what makes them liberal is that they do not count it among the fundamental concerns of political (or social) theory. Indeed, the precise opposite is more nearly the case, since a good deal of the liberal tradition can be understood as motivated by a desire to avert the familiar dangers bound up with the powerful human longing to have a part in the life of a being larger than oneself. But, despite these indisputable dangers, a social theory that fails to take notice of this human need—or, even worse, denies it—runs a risk of at least equal gravity. For, as the thinkers immediately following Hegel were to recognize, when human needs of this magnitude and durability are disavowed, rather than acknowledged and addressed, they do not simply dissipate but reassert themselves instead in estranged and more malevolent guises. Hegel's social theory continues to deserve our attention today, not least because it represents modern philosophy's most comprehensive attempt to do justice to this human need while accommodating the concern for the moral dignity of individuals that motivates liberal political thought. In the end, of course, we may be forced to conclude, in agreement with postmodernists and many liberals, that a synthesis of this sort is destined to fail, whether because the longing to find one's social order a home cannot in principle be satisfied, or because such a social order is no longer a possibility for us. Even in this case, though, Hegel's social theory would retain a certain value as a testimony to the powerful, perhaps inextirpable urge of human beings to find their social world hospitable, coherent, and good. Rather than being a philosophy of reconciliation, Hegel's theory would then represent, at best, the keeping alive of a now unsatisfied but hope-inspiring utopian impulse or, at worst, a defiant cry of protest at the forlornness of an alien, godforsaken world.

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Hegel's Conception of Social Freedom: Preliminaries

In this chapter my aim is to begin to articulate the conception of freedom that grounds Hegel's account of the three basic institutions—the family, civil society, and the state—that together make up the social realm he calls Sittlichkeit, or ethical life. The first order of business is to situate this conception of freedom—"social freedom," as I refer to it here—with respect to other conceptions of freedom that figure prominently in Hegel's philosophy. Second, I shall attempt to elucidate the general project of Hegel's social theory by briefly sketching the philosophical problems that the idea of social freedom is meant to solve. As we shall see, this project has both a historical and a logical (or conceptual) formulation. That is, social freedom is Hegel's response to a question about whether and how a variety of historically significant conceptions of freedom can be reconciled with one another, as well as to the more abstract question of what constitutes a coherent and fully adequate conception of (practical) freedom. The third and fourth sections of this chapter deal with two questions that have ultimately to do with the relation between Hegel's conception of social freedom and his notoriously obscure doctrine of absolute spirit, or Geist. The first of these has to do with who, or what, is properly regarded as the bearer of social freedom: Is it individuals, or only some supra-individual social entity, that embodies freedom in this sense? The second concerns the extent to which the intelligibility of Hegel's conception of social freedom depends on his view of the historical mission of absolute spirit: Can this conception of freedom be recognized as such outside the context of Hegel's theodicy, or does it amount to nothing more than the idea of individuals realizing
their “true” nature by serving the ends of absolute spirit. Finally, the chapter closes with a brief and preliminary account of what I call the “dual nature” of social freedom.

Other Conceptions of Freedom in Hegel’s Philosophy

Like abstract right and morality, the topics of the first two divisions of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right, Sittlichkeit is characterized as a “realm of actualized freedom” (§4). Hegel’s claim is not simply that the rational social order brings about the social conditions that make freedom possible; rather, Sittlichkeit is itself said to be an actualization,1 a making real, of freedom (§142): “In Sittlichkeit freedom is” (VPR1, 248). But what conception of freedom is at work in Hegel’s claim that freedom is realized in the family, in civil society, and in the state? What sense does it make to say that freedom is in these social institutions? What will emerge in the course of addressing these questions is that Hegel’s theory of Sittlichkeit is founded on a distinctive conception of freedom—the “social freedom” referred to earlier—that, according to that theory, is realized only in a rationally structured society. Social freedom is to be understood as distinguishable from, though not conceptually or existentially independent of, the other two main conceptions of practical freedom that appear in the Philosophy of Right and serve as the grounding concepts of abstract right and morality, namely: personal freedom and moral freedom (or, equivalently, the freedoms of personhood and moral subjectivity). But before sorting out the three kinds of practical freedom that figure most prominently in the Philosophy of Right as a whole (personal, moral, and social freedom), it is necessary to say a few words about the concept of freedom in the most general sense in which it appears in Hegel’s thought. In this widest sense, the concept of freedom extends beyond the boundaries of practical philosophy (the sphere treated of in the Philosophy of Right) to include nonpractical—that is, theoretical or, more precisely, “speculative”—forms of freedom.

The idea most fundamental to Hegel’s general concept, or “formal definition,”2 of freedom is self-determination (Selbstbestimmung). In general, an entity is free, on Hegel’s view, when it is determined by itself—when it is the source of its own determinations, or properties (Bestimmtheiten)—rather than determined by an “other” (that is, by something alien or external to itself). A being whose determinations come from itself can also be said to be independent of, or unlimited by, anything other than itself. It is independent, or free—one could also say “self-sufficient”—in the sense that it relies on nothing outside of itself in order to be what it is. A being of this sort, then, would stand in no essential relation to anything other than itself but rather would be wholly self-related or, in Hegel’s language, “with itself” (bei sich). In fact, Hegel sometimes defines freedom as the absence of all genuine externality, or foreignness,3 and he commonly employs variations of the term ‘being-with-oneself’ (Beisichbesteinen) to designate this essential characteristic of freedom in its most general sense (§87, 23; E §384Z: VPR1, 215). Yet this formula by itself is misleading, insofar as it suggests that a free being must be—and therefore also that it is possible for something to be—purely and immediately self-related. Such a view, however, stands in conflict with one of Hegel’s fundamental metaphysical doctrines, namely, that there are and can be no “immediate” entities or, in other words, that every being acquires its determinacies—every being is what it is—only through its relations to some other.4 But if this is indeed the case, it would appear that no determinate being could possibly qualify as free according to Hegel’s definition, since determinacy requires otherness, and freedom requires independence from the same.

That Hegel recognizes this dilemma and means to resolve it is made clear in his expanded version of the formula cited earlier, which defines freedom not simply as “being-with-oneself” but as “being-with-oneself-in-an-other” (Beisichbesteinein einem Anderen).5 This expanded definition of freedom (freedom still in its most general sense) is supposed to give expression to the possibility of reconciling an entity’s necessary relatedness to an other with its being “with itself” and therefore self-determined. As Hegel conceives it, essential independence from the other can be achieved not through the abolition of that other—not by simply making the other cease to be—but only by doing away with (“negating”) the otherness, or alien character, of the other. “Spirit’s freedom is an independence from the other that is achieved not outside the other but in the other” (E §382Z; emphasis added). Freedom, then, is a state of being-with-oneself that is attainable only through a process best characterized as the overcoming of otherness. It is an important consequence of this view that, ultimately, only a being endowed with consciousness—and not, say, Spinoza’s immediately self-identical substance—can achieve true self-determination. This is because only a conscious being is capa-
ble of the complex feat required of something free. For only a conscious being can allow its other to continue to exist while simultaneously negating its otherness by taking a certain view of it—that is, by comprehending it in such a way that it ceases to appear as alien. Throughout Hegel’s philosophy, then, freedom is always thought of as the end point of some process in which a being becomes constituted as what it is through its relations to an other and then abolishes the alien character of its other by apprehending it as identical to itself (in a sense in need of further specification), thereby becoming related only to itself. (It is perhaps helpful to note in this context that the young Hegel took love to be the paradigm for freedom conceived of as being-with-one-self-in-another. There is an obvious sense in which a loved one continues to be another for the person in love, while at the same time, through an act of conscious identification with the loved one’s needs and well-being, the demands those needs place upon the lover cease to appear as something foreign or limiting.)

This characterization of freedom can be made less abstract by considering one of the forms in which being-with-one-self-in-another appears in Hegel’s philosophy. For Hegel, as for Aristotle, the highest activity human beings can engage in is philosophical contemplation. But unlike Aristotle, Hegel thinks of this contemplation as a form of freedom, indeed the highest, most complete form of self-determination possible: speculative freedom. Philosophical contemplation can be regarded as a species of freedom because, as Hegel conceives it, it is a process through which individuals come to be reconciled to a world that initially appears to them as radically “other”—that is, as hostile or indifferent to their basic aspirations as rational subjects. In other words, the task of Hegelian philosophy is to show that a world that originally appears to be both dominated by evil and impervious to rational comprehension is in fact, in its basic features, both good and thoroughly intelligible to human reason. To apprehend the fundamental rationality and goodness of reality as a whole is to learn that, contrary to appearances, the world we inhabit is not alien to our deepest aspirations but is instead a realm within which rational subjects can be “at home,” or “with themselves.” For a subject to achieve freedom in the speculative sense, then, is for it to overcome its original alienation from the world by finding itself (its aspirations as a rational subject) to be fully realized in an other (the world), which, when comprehended philosophically, ceases to confront the subject as an external, inhospitable other.

It is very important to distinguish the speculative freedom just described from the practical freedom that is supposed to be realized within the rational social order. Whereas the former could be considered a type of theoretical freedom (since reconciliation is achieved by comprehending the world philosophically), the freedom at issue in the Philosophy of Right—the sphere of “objective spirit”—is explicitly practical in character. This is to say that it is a freedom that pertains to the will and is realized through real activity within the external world. (This explains why the Philosophy of Right must be founded on an introductory account of the nature of the will and its freedom [883–88].) The distinction between speculative and practical freedom must not be taken to imply that the latter is somehow blindly voluntaristic, in contrast to the intellectual character of the former. Practical freedom, too, will involve certain cognitive relations to oneself, to others, and to the world. (Free social participation, for example, will require a certain understanding of oneself and one’s relation to others if being bound by a general will is not to turn out to be subjection to an external other.) The point here is not that practical freedom is voluntaristic but that, unlike the speculative freedom achieved through philosophical contemplation, it is primarily a phenomenon of the will and realized through action.

Articulating what practical freedom is turns out to be an extremely complicated enterprise, since, as indicated previously, it appears in a number of distinct forms (personal, moral, and social freedom). The task of understanding practical freedom in its various forms (but especially as social freedom, the basis of the theory of Sittlichkeit) will occupy us for the remainder of this book. For now, however, it is sufficient to bear in mind that, in all its guises, practical freedom differs from speculative freedom in that it always involves—is always realized through—practical engagement with the existent world. Subjects who are practically free enjoy a species of being-with-themselves-in-an-other, but unlike speculative freedom, it is a being-with-self that comes about through some practical relation to the world. Such subjects relate to a world that has been, and continues to be, determined by them—that is, transformed by their own activity and in accord with their own wills. Thus, formulated very generally, the aim of Hegel’s treatment of the various forms of practical freedom in the Philosophy of Right is to provide an account of the different ways a subject’s activity within the world can be its own, proceeding from its own will rather than from an external source.
Although my principal aim here is to understand Hegel's conception of social freedom and the foundational role it plays in his social theory, it is impossible to do this without briefly considering the two species of practical freedom that precede "Ethical Life" in the Philosophy of Rights: personal and moral freedom. This is necessary for two reasons. First, what is distinctive about social freedom is best brought to light by contrasting it with the two other configurations of practical freedom. Second, reconstructing Hegel's conception of social freedom requires articulating its relation to these other forms, since, as we shall see in more detail in chapter 5, one of the constitutive features of a social order in which this freedom is realized is its capacity to secure the social conditions of practical freedom in its other guises. In other words, part of our account of social freedom will consist in showing how it plays an essential role in realizing the types of freedom appropriate to persons and moral subjects.

Before examining what distinguishes personal from moral freedom, though, it will be helpful to say a bit more about practical freedom in general. I mentioned earlier that practically free subjects are "with themselves in another" because their activity makes the world into something determined by them: through that activity their willed ends become determinations of the world. But there is a further, more substantive sense in which the forms of practical freedom represent a kind of being-with oneself-in-an-other. In all three of these forms the practical activity at issue not only determines the world but also plays an essential part in the self-actualization of its agents—that is, it is activity through which individuals actualize, or give reality to, certain conceptions they have of themselves. This means that each type of practical freedom is based on a distinctive self-conception that, when successfully expressed in action, acquires a real existence in the world. I shall say more in chapter 3 about what it is for individuals to actualize their self-conceptions in the institutions of Sittlichkeit, but even prior to that account it is not difficult to appreciate how self-actualization might be regarded as a form of being-with oneself-in-an-other: when I give reality to my self-conception by acting upon the world, the reshaped world no longer confronts me as something alien but instead reflects back to me a confirmatory image of who I take myself to be. Practical freedom, in this conception, could be said to consist in the fact that "I can intuit and recognize myself in my activity or in the products of this activity in the world."  

It is important to add, however, that Hegel's account of practical freedom cannot be fully explicated by this notion of self-actualization alone. For it is not the case that actualizing any self-conception whatever constitutes practical freedom. Rather, in all three forms of practical freedom that Hegel considers the self-conceptions acted upon also have freedom as their content. In other words, even apart from the question of whether they are realized in the world, the self-conceptions at issue here can be recognized as conceptions of the subject as free, where 'free' means, very generally: possessing a self-determining will, a will that is the source of its own determinations (the ends it resolves to act upon). The crucial implication of this—a point that is completely obscured in Hegel's own exposition—is that 'freedom' enters into an account of each of the forms of practical freedom at two places and in two distinguishable senses. In the first sense, being free is a matter of successfully translating one's self-conception into the world (and thereby achieving a kind of being-with oneself-in-an-other). In its second usage, freedom is defined simply, and in terms less distinctively Hegelian, as having a self-determined will—as the will being the source of its own determinations, or ends (in a variety of senses to be further specified later). Thus, in all three of its forms practical freedom will involve (1) successfully acting upon a conception of oneself as (2) a being who possesses a self-determining will in one of the three senses recognized by Hegel's social theory, namely: as person, moral subject, or social member (of ethical life).

Since appealing to the idea of a self-determining will is an intuitively plausible way of giving content to the concept of freedom, Hegel's inclusion of that element in his understanding of practical freedom means that it will be easier than is commonly thought to recognize the alleged freedoms of personhood, moral subjectivity, and ethical life as genuine configurations of freedom without invoking his unique metaphysical views, including his definition of self-determination as being-with oneself-in-an-other. The point of this observation is not to deny the importance or legitimacy of the claims Hegel means to be making in connection with the idea of being-with oneself-in-an-other. On the contrary, the aspiration this idea points to—the aspiration to experience the world as a home—is both fundamental to Hegel's thought and a topic that philosophy in general cannot afford to ignore or ridicule. The point, rather, is that the idea of being at home in the world—which, one could argue, is more aptly captured by the phrase 'absence of alienation' than by 'freedom'—does not exhaust Hegel's understanding of practical free-
dom, which, because it also incorporates the more familiar notion of a self-determining will, turns out to be much closer to ordinary conceptions of freedom than it initially appears to be.

In summary, then, each configuration of practical freedom will have two components, which (in a discussion of personhood) Hegel characterizes as: “[1] something subjective that knows itself as free and ... [2] an external realization (Realität) of this freedom” (E §3832). In other words, each configuration will consist of both a distinctive conception of what it is for the will to be self-determining and an account of what it means for that conception to be actualized in the world we inhabit, taking into account the basic features of that world, including natural laws, the basic facts of human psychology, the plurality of individual subjects, and so on. Perhaps it is best to illustrate the dual structure common to all forms of practical freedom by considering the example of personal freedom, the first and simplest configuration of freedom treated in the Philosophy of Right.

Personal freedom is the concept that grounds Hegel’s theory of individual rights, which is the main concern of the first main section of the Philosophy of Right, “Abstract Right.” The type of self-determination at issue in personhood is the will’s choosing of its own ends. Persons are characterized by a set of given drives and desires that have the capacity to motivate them to act, but they are persons by virtue of the fact that their wills are not simply determined by the drives and desires they happen to have. Rather, persons have the ability to reject some of their desires and to embrace others; they possess, in other words, a “resolving” (or deciding) will (ein beschließender Wille), a will whose mode of self-determination consists in deciding which among one’s given inclinations to satisfy and in which concrete ways to do so (§12). Hegel also calls this conception of the self-determining will the “arbitrary will” (Willkür) (E §492) in order to emphasize that such a will qualifies as self-determined (on this conception) simply by virtue of its having chosen which ends to act upon, regardless of the reasons for having chosen as it did. The basic thought underlying the idea of personal freedom, then, is that an act is my own—it proceeds from my will rather than from an external source—if it is the result of a desire I resolve to act on, a desire that affects my will (provides me with a possible motive for action) but does not by itself determine it.

The doctrines of abstract right are arrived at by asking how individuals who conceive of themselves as self-determining in this sense could actualize their self-conceptions in the world and, most important, how the social order must be constituted if its inhabitants are to be able to do so. Hegel’s answer is that an individual realizes the freedom of the arbitrary will by having at his disposal a portion of the external world, made up of will-less entities, or “things” (Sachen) (§42), within which his own arbitrary will has unlimited sovereignty and from which other wills, as potential sources of obstacles to his own freely chosen ends, are excluded. The thought of an exclusive, external domain of activity that is subject to an individual’s arbitrary will is the central idea behind Hegel’s theory of abstract right, and it is the boundaries of such a domain that the principles of that theory are supposed to define. The principles of abstract right accomplish this end by ascribing to individual persons a set of rights guaranteeing them the liberty to do as they please with those things that are properly regarded as subject only to their own wills—their lives, their bodies, and the material things they own—all of which together constitute their property (Eigentum). Individuals realize their personal freedom, then, when they inhabit a social world that secures for them a private sphere of action within which they are unhindered by external agents, both other individuals and the state, from pursuing the ends that, as possessors of arbitrary wills, they choose as their own. In having exclusive say over the things that make up their private external spheres, persons enjoy a certain kind of being-with-one-self-in-another and, thus, are (practically) free.

Moral freedom, the concept that grounds “Morality,” the second division of the Philosophy of Right, is a more complex configuration of freedom and is based on a correspondingly more complex conception of a self-determining will, which Hegel calls the moral subject. Moral subjects are self-determining not only in the sense that they are able to choose which among their given desires they want to take as ends for action; they also have the capacity to determine their wills, not merely arbitrarily, but in accord with their own principles or, more precisely, in accord with their own understanding of what is (morally) good. The self-determination associated with moral subjectivity is more complex than that of personhood, not only because it involves determining one’s will in accord with normative principles (principles that define one’s understanding of the good), but also because those principles themselves count as “one’s own” in the sense that, as a moral subject, one has the ca-
capacity to reflect rationally on such principles and to affirm, reject, or revise them. Individuals actualize moral freedom, then, when they subscribe to a rationally held vision of the good, determine their ends in accord with it, and successfully realize that vision in the world by bringing about the good through their own actions. According to this conception of practical freedom, such actions count as the subject's own—as proceeding from its own will rather than from an external source—because they follow from normative principles that the subject itself rationally endorses.

It is more difficult in the case of moral subjectivity than in that of personhood to see how social institutions are implicated in the actualization of freedom. One connection between social theory and moral freedom becomes clearer if we bear in mind that the latter requires that individuals' wills be subject only to principles they themselves recognize (and affirm) as good. In Hegel's words, one implication of his view of moral subjectivity is that "ethical ... determinations ought not to make claims on the behavior of the human being merely as external laws or as the dictates of an authority. Instead, they ought to find assent, recognition, or even justification in his heart, disposition [Gesinnung], conscience, insight, etc." (E §803A). Thus, the rational social order will need to satisfy what Hegel describes as the most important right of moral subjects (§132), namely, that all practical dictates governing their lives, including the prevailing laws and imperatives of social life, be accepted as good and affirmed as such by the subjects whose actions they determine. (One way the rational social order accommodates this right of moral subjects is addressed by Hegel's doctrine of the subjective component of social freedom—the "subjective disposition" of social members—which is the topic of chapter 3.) But there is a further respect in which this account of the self-determining will is relevant to social theory: from the perspective of moral subjectivity, it is not enough that social members in fact regard their social order as good and therefore worthy of their support; that perspective also requires that this attitude be rationally defensible, that the factually affirmed social order also be worthy of that affirmation. A set of institutions that actualizes moral freedom, then, must be capable of withstanding the rational scrutiny of its members. A social order that prohibits rational criticism, or whose appearance of worthiness could not survive such questioning, might be capable of gaining the actual assent of the majority of its members, but it is not one that satisfies the demands placed on it by the moral subject. (This aspect of moral subjectivity and its implications for social theory will be the topic of chapter 7.)

Social Freedom and the Project of Hegel's Social Theory

Thus far I have spoken of the three configurations of practical freedom as though they were separate and unrelated phenomena. In fact, however, Hegel thinks of them as constituting a hierarchically ordered ensemble, with social freedom at the top, followed (in order of decreasing rank) by the freedoms of moral subjectivity and personhood. Understanding what Hegel means to convey by this picture will help to bring into focus the project he takes himself to be carrying out in his theory of Sittlichkeit. The fact that Hegel locates a form of freedom above another in the hierarchy says two things about its relation to the lower form: first, that it represents a "richer" (§32Z)—a more complex and substantive—configuration of self-determination; and, second, that the lower form is dependent on the higher in the sense that, without the higher form, the lower cannot be actualized in the world in a manner fully consistent with the essential character of a self-determined will. This second point implies that it is possible to arrive at a full account of the configurations of practical freedom through a single series of ("dialectical") arguments that, beginning with the lowest form of practical freedom and proceeding to the highest, investigates the conditions required for each to be adequately realized (realized in a manner fully consistent with the essential character of a self-determined will). In each instance, a consideration of those conditions will reveal how lower form falls short of being completely adequate to the concept of self-determination and thus point out the necessity of the configuration immediately above it in the hierarchy.

Let me now spell out these points in the case of the two forms of practical freedom just defined. First, Hegel regards the freedom of moral subjectivity as higher than that of personhood because it embodies a more complex and substantive form of self-determination. The species of will associated with personhood—the arbitrary, resolving will—is self-determining in the sense that it, and nothing outside it, determines (chooses) the particular ends it will act upon. But the sense in which these chosen ends "come from the will itself" can be very weak indeed. Since all that
is required for such a will to qualify as self-determined on this conception is that its ends not be determined by something other (not be immediately determined by its given desires), this form of self-determination is compatible with caprice or whim—in other words, with a choosing of ends that is nothing more than unregulated spontaneity. (It is important to remember here that, despite his claim that personal freedom is the least substantive form of practical freedom, Hegel regards the self-determination of the arbitrary will as a genuine instance of freedom and therefore as having a value to which the rational social order must give its due, a task it accomplishes by enforcing the principles of abstract right.) The will of a moral subject, in contrast, determines its ends in a more substantive way: it chooses in accord with an understanding of the good that is its own in the sense that it regards its principles of the good as open to rational criticism and subject to revision. The intuition behind Hegel's claim that moral subjectivity involves a higher form of freedom than personhood is that an action determined in accord with a subject's rationally grounded understanding of the good represents a more substantive expression of who that subject is—more of itself is invested and embodied in such a deed—than an action undertaken arbitrarily or for reasons peripheral to the subject's self-understanding.

The second point implicit in the assertion that the freedom of moral subjectivity is higher than that of personhood is that the latter requires the former in order to be actualized in a manner consistent with the essential character of a self-determined will. This claim is not spelled out in a straightforward manner in Hegel's text but is inscribed in one of its structural features, namely, the fact that "Abstract Right" precedes "Morality" in the text's progression toward a fully adequate conception of practical freedom, the later stage allegedly emerging out of the earlier with the necessity characteristic of Hegel's notorious dialectical transitions. Although the workings of such transitions in Hegel's texts are highly obscure and controversial, his general intent in the present case is relatively clear. It is to show that, on its own, the form of the self-determining will associated with personhood falls short of the ideal of complete self-determination in some way and therefore must be supplemented by another, more complex configuration of freedom, that of the moral subject. Hegel's argument for this claim can be reconstructed as follows.

As I said earlier, personal freedom, when actualized, consists essentially in a relation between an arbitrary will and the will-less entities (things) that such a will can appropriate and make use of in pursuing its freely chosen ends. Thus, the freedom of a person is actualized when it has exclusive, arbitrary control over a determinate portion of the external world that constitutes its property. If it were possible to imagine a world inhabited by a single arbitrary will, its freedom actualized in its dominion over things, there would be no basis for regarding the freedom of the arbitrary will as incomplete and in need of some further configuration of the will in order for self-determination to be fully realized. But when we consider the conditions under which the freedom of the arbitrary will can be realized in a world shared by more than one person—when we take into account the plurality of individual wills—we see that personal freedom cannot be the only kind of self-determination the inhabitants of such a world enjoy. More precisely, it cannot be the only freedom they enjoy, if they are to achieve the ideal of having wills that are fully self-determined. A person living in a world in which the personal freedom of a plurality of individuals was guaranteed could not be fully self-determined if he possessed only an arbitrary will, for there would be a respect in which his actions would be subject to laws that were not internal to his own (merely arbitrary) will. The reason for this is that realizing the personal freedom of a plurality of individuals requires that the actions of all be subject to constraints. That is, their actions must be bound at least by those principles (the principles of abstract right) that specify which of an individual's actions are inconsistent with the personhood of others. Thus, one of the conditions for the actualization of personal freedom in a world shared by more than one person is that the actions of individuals conform to what Hegel presents as the fundamental command of abstract right: "Respect others as persons" (§36). The rational social order will codify the principles of abstract right into a system of laws and make use of external legal sanctions to enforce them, but if the persons whose actions are governed by those principles are to be fully self-determined (and therefore not bound by external constraints), they must be able to grasp the rational purpose behind the principles of abstract right, affirm them as their own, and determine their actions in accord with them. They must, in other words, possess the more complex structure of will that Hegel associates with moral subjectivity.
dom, it will be impossible to articulate satisfactorily how it represents a
case that the social order as a whole, regarded as a living, self-reproducing
A more complex and substantive conception of self-determination than its
The transition system, itself embodies the characteristics essential to a self-deter-
predecessors and how it is required for their actualization. On the basis
mined will. (This feature of Hegel’s view, a part of the doctrine of objec-
the preceding, however, we can say something of a general and pre-
tive freedom, will be examined in chapter 4.)
liminary nature about how a consideration of the conditions under
of Hegel’s account of Sittlichkeit. The transition
which the first two forms of freedom can be actualized helps to define
the Philosophy of Right to social theory proper—to an account
the basic tasks faced by Hegel’s account of Sittlichkeit. The transition
of the institutions that constitute the rational social order—is motivated by
within the institutions that constitute the rational social order—is motivated by
the insight that the lower forms of freedom can be realized only if a
number of social conditions obtain. (These conditions will be discussed
in more detail in the chapters that follow, but for now it is sufficient to
have in mind, as examples, how legal institutions are required for the
enforcement of abstract right and how institutions, such as the family,
form their members into individuals who possess the subjective capaci-
ties necessary for the exercise of their freedom.) One of the principal
tasks of rational social institutions, then, will be to secure those con-
tions that make it possible for their members to realize personal and
moral freedom. (This set of issues will be treated in chapter 5, as part of
the objective component of social freedom.) Further tasks of Hegel’s so-
tial theory come to light when we recall that the conditions of the lower
forms of freedom must also be brought about in a manner consistent
with the essential character of self-determination. In other words, the
means by which social institutions secure those conditions may not
themselves violate the ideal of a self-determined will. This requirement,
as Hegel interprets it, translates into two further criteria the rational so-
cial order must meet. The first concerns the wills of the individuals who
make up that order: individual social members, as the bearers of the in-
stitutions of Sittlichkeit, must be able to relate subjectively to those insti-
tutions in a way that is consistent with their being determined only by
their own wills at the same time that they participate in, and reproduce,
their social order. (This requirement is the subjective component of so-
cial freedom, the concern of chapter 3.) The second of these criteria, by
far the least intuitively evident aspect of Hegel’s social theory, is based on
the following thought: if the ideal of self-determination is to be fully re-
alized in the process of securing the conditions of the lower forms of
practical freedom, it is not enough that the human individuals who
make up the social order have self-determined wills; it must also be the

Let me now reformulate these points in a way that makes clearer how
Hegel’s doctrine of social freedom can be understood as the necessary
final step of a quasi-logical project that seeks to arrive at—or dialecti-
cally “deduce”—a fully adequate conception of practical freedom, start-
ing only with the bare idea of a will that is undetermined by anything ex-
ternal to it. The deduction begins with the simplest possible conception
of a self-determined will—the arbitrary will characteristic of person-
hood—and demonstrates the necessity of supplementing that concep-
tion with a more complex form of freedom (moral freedom) by showing
how personal freedom by itself is inadequate to the task of eliminating
all subjection to a foreign will. (Since personal freedom cannot be uni-
versally realized unless the actions of all accord with the principles of
abstract right, persons can avoid determination by a foreign will only if
they are also able to will those principles that constrain their actions—
that is, only if they are capable of the kind of self-determination that
constitutes moral subjectivity.) This more complex form of freedom
remedies the shortcoming of its predecessor, but it also gives rise, in typ-
ical dialectical fashion, to a new set of problems that require their own
solution via an even richer conception of self-determination.

What, then, are the deficiencies of personal and moral freedom that
necessitate the introduction of social freedom? As was the case in the
previous transition from personal to moral freedom, the inadequacies of
an earlier conception of freedom come to light by envisaging the condi-
tions under which they can be realized in the world. The relevant prob-
lems associated with the realization of personal and moral freedom are
of two main types: first, the wills that characterize persons and moral
subjects fall short of complete self-sufficiency—they depend on some-
thing outside of themselves in order to be real—in the sense that ac-
tually being constituted as a person or a moral subject presupposes that
one has undergone various social processes of character formation, or
"education" (Bildung). Among other things, social members must learn
to think of themselves as discrete individuals with their own particular
interests and sovereign wills (in order to be a person), and they must ac-
quire the capacity to internalize the principles that govern their interac-
tion with others (in order to be moral subjects). Second, moral subjectivity falls short of true self-sufficiency in a further respect: considered on their own—in abstraction from their places within the basic institutions of society—moral subjects lack the resources they need in order to give concrete, nonarbitrary content to the concept of the good. While socially detached moral subjects may sincerely desire to realize the good, in the absence of a more concrete vision of the projects and forms of life that best promote the freedom and well-being of all (the good), they cannot know what specific actions their allegiance to the good requires of them. As Hegel formulates the critique, moral subjectivity is “abstract,” “empty,” and “formal” (§§134–137, 141); it fails to satisfy the criteria for a fully self-determining will because it cannot by itself give sufficient determinacy to its own reigning concept.30

The thought that leads to Hegel's doctrine of social freedom is that the solution to both of these problems lies in an account of good (or rational) social institutions. Thus, for Hegel, rational social institutions are charged with the dual task of socializing their members into beings who possess the subjective capacities required to realize the freedoms of personhood and moral subjectivity, and of providing a social framework that gives definition to the particular projects that imbue their individual lives with purpose and provide determinate content for their understanding of the good. Each of these tasks points to an important respect in which the systematic realization of personal and moral freedom depends on the existence of rational social institutions. That such institutions secure the conditions necessary for realizing personal and moral freedom should not, however, lead us to think that Hegel's theory values social membership for purely instrumental reasons (merely as a means to the realization of the two lower forms of practical freedom). This is emphatically not the case. On the contrary, if the problems posed by the lower forms of freedom are to be solved in a way that remains true to the ideal of complete self-determination, this solution must itself give rise to a new and more substantive configuration of the self-determining will, one that finds expression, in this case, in the idea of social freedom. In other words, the means by which the rational social order secures the necessary conditions of personal and moral freedom must themselves embody a kind of self-determination of the will; more than being merely means to the realization of freedom, they are at the same time an instance of it. (Here it may help to recall Hegel's claim: "In Sittlichkeit freedom is.")

Bringing together the various requirements this new form of self-determination is supposed to meet will provide us with a concise statement of its essential features, as well as an outline of the structure of much of the discussion to follow: In addition to (1) securing the necessary conditions of the lower forms of freedom (part of the objective component of social freedom and the subject matter of chapter 5), social freedom will incorporate self-determination in two further, distinctively Hegelian senses. These are (2) individual social members will be self-determining in the sense that, because their self-conceptions are linked to the social roles they occupy, their participation in the institutions of Sittlichkeit is not only voluntary but also an activity through which they constitute—give real determinacy to—their very identities. (This is the subjective component of social freedom, the concern of chapter 3.) And, (3) the social order itself—the ensemble of institutions together with their members—constitutes a self-determining whole, one that is more thoroughly self-sufficient than any individual on its own can in principle be. (This is a further part of the objective component of social freedom and the topic of chapter 4.) Thus, the actions of socially free individuals will count as their own—as proceeding from their own will rather than from an external source—in a dual sense: first, their social participation will be expressive of their own consciously held self-conceptions (for example, as mother, teacher, and citizen of a particular state); and, second, in acting in accord with their self-conceptions they actually produce the totality of social conditions that make their own (personal and moral) freedom possible, along with the holistically defined "self-determination" (or self-sufficiency) of the social whole. (As we shall see in more detail later, these two senses in which the actions of socially free individuals can be considered "their own" form the basis of what I call the subjective and objective aspects of social freedom.)

We have just seen how Hegel's doctrine of social freedom can be understood as the culmination of a kind of logical inquiry, one that seeks to develop a concrete conception of practical freedom that is fully adequate to its core notion of complete self-determination. There is, however, a second way of viewing Hegel's philosophical project here—not as a conceptual investigation into the nature of freedom but as the response to a sociocultural problem that arises at a particular point in history and defines the basic predicament of a new world-historical age (Hegel's, as well as, presumably, our own). On this reading, the central task of Hegelian social theory is to find a way of bringing together three distinct
and potentially conflicting visions of freedom (personal, moral, and social freedom) that the post-Enlightenment age has inherited from its past and continues, even now, to find compelling. Implicit in this understanding of Hegel’s project is the thought that, for us today, a social order that excluded one or more of these forms of freedom could not be regarded as a fully rational, satisfying world. Indeed, from this perspective, the rational social order could be defined as one that fulfills the aspiration of its members to achieve self-determination in all three of its guises.

Hegel himself endorses this reading of his project. That he does so is evidenced both by his general claim that “world history is nothing but the development of the concept of freedom” (PH, 456/XII, 539-540) and by his practice of identifying each of the forms of practical freedom with a particular historical era. (Moreover, as these points make clear, this understanding of his project does not at all conflict with the first, since for Hegel the movement of world history simply reflects the logical structure of reason itself; in other words, each of the moments of the “Concept” (der Begriff) has its day, as it were, in the march of world history.) Hegel’s claim is that the idea of personal freedom, with its emphasis on “the abstract freedom of the individual,” comes to us from ancient Rome (PH, 279/XII, 340). It first finds expression in the Roman legal practice that recognized all citizens of the empire (with the exception of slaves) as personae possessing a determinate set of personal and property rights. The idea of moral freedom, in contrast, is a product of the modern world. It first appears in the theology of the Reformation (in the view that the word of God is present in the heart of all believers), but it is most clearly articulated in Kant’s conception of the autonomous moral subject that is bound only by principles immanent to its own reason.

The third conception of freedom that Hegel’s social theory attempts to incorporate is more difficult to characterize. It comes from classical Greece—or, more accurately perhaps, from the picture Hegel and his contemporaries had of that world. This kind of freedom—the classical forerunner of Hegel’s social freedom9—is bound up with the circumstance that the inhabitants of ancient Greece (at least its free male citizens) had such a deep subjective attachment to their polis that their social membership could be said to constitute a central part of their own identities. For the ancient Greeks, participation in the life of the polis was valuable for its own sake (and not simply as a means to achieving external, egoistic ends), as well as the source of the goals, projects, and social roles that were central to their understanding of themselves. Hegel regards the subjective relation Greek citizens had to their polis as a kind of freedom for two reasons. First, the fact that citizens did not regard the good of their polis as distinct from, or antagonistic to, their own good enabled them to obey the political laws that governed them—laws directed at the good of the polis as a whole rather than at the particular good of its members—without experiencing those laws as external constraints on their wills. Second, the classical polis was the source of a distinctive and important kind of satisfaction for its members. It provided a social framework that gave meaning to their individual lives and served as the primary arena within which, by fulfilling their roles as citizens, they won what Hegel calls their “sense of self” through the recognition of their fellow beings. In short, the social world of ancient Greece was experienced as a “home” by those who inhabited it.

For Hegel one of the central questions facing post-Enlightenment culture is whether it is possible for a social order to realize all three of these conceptions of freedom. His social theory is an attempt to show that, contrary to appearances, the three basic institutions of modernity—modern forms of the family, civil society, and the state—are able, working in concert, to accommodate each of these ideals. The idea of social freedom plays a central role in this argument, for, in its modern form, it integrates the freedom of ancient Greece with the two forms of freedom that precede it historically. Modern social freedom achieves this integration in two different respects: First, socially free individuals have a subjective relation to their social order that is similar to the one Greek citizens had to theirs but also crucially different from it in that, in the case of modern social members, having identity-constituting attachments to one’s institutions is compatible with conceiving of oneself as an individual—that is, as a person with rights and interests separate from those of the community and as a moral subject that is able and entitled to pass judgment on the goodness of existing social norms and practices. Second, the institutions within which modern individuals achieve their particular identities objectively promote personal and moral freedom in the sense that, when functioning properly, one of their effects is to bring about the various social conditions that make the realization of those freedoms possible.

In the next sections of this chapter, before beginning the extended discussion of social freedom that is to follow, I want to turn to two ques-
tions, both of which have to do with the relation between Hegel's conception of social freedom and his doctrine of absolute spirit, namely, who, or what, is the bearer of social freedom? (Is it individuals, or some supra-individual social entity, that is properly said to be socially free?) And, can social freedom be recognized as a plausible conception of freedom independently of Hegel's understanding of absolute spirit and its historical mission, or does the idea of social freedom simply reduce to the view that human individuals are most free when they realize their "true" nature by serving the ends of absolute spirit?

In order to gain entry to these issues, it will be helpful to consider what the answers to these two questions would be if posed with respect to personal and moral freedom. First, it is quite easy to regard both as genuine instances of freedom without appealing to distinctively Hegelian views about the nature of reason, history, or absolute spirit. This is because, in contrast to other conceptions of freedom that figure in Hegel's thought, personal and moral freedom are grounded in easily recognizable conceptions of the self-determining will. As indicated previously, persons possess self-determining wills in the sense that they choose which of their desires are to determine their actions, and moral subjects are self-determining in the sense that their wills are determined by principles they recognize as their own. Second, both are clearly species of individual freedom. The freedoms characteristic of persons and moral subjects are individualistic in (at least) the sense that 'personally free' and 'morally free' are predicates that can be, and typically are, meaningfully applied to individual agents. It is (for the most part) individuals rather than groups who qualify as persons and moral subjects, and hence individuals are also the principal bearers of the freedoms associated with each.

It is more difficult to find answers to these questions in the case of social freedom. That is, it is far from clear whether social freedom can be understood as a kind of self-determination of the will (and hence as a genuine species of practical freedom) and whether it, like personal and moral freedom, is a property of individuals. Until now most interpreters either have explicitly answered these questions in the negative—denying both that social freedom is a species of self-determination of the will and that individuals are its bearers—or have failed to spell out in sufficient detail how the freedom realized in Sittlichkeit can be otherwise understood. This circumstance has had a significant impact on the philosophical reception of Hegel's social theory, both present and past, for without being able to show how social freedom is a form of practical freedom enjoyed by individuals, its account of the rational social order ends up looking highly unattractive. If, for example, the freedom actualized in rational social institutions turns out to be something other than a freedom of the will (for example, something akin to realizing one's true "spiritual" nature as a vehicle of absolute spirit), then Hegel's theory appears to be thoroughly dependent on a metaphysics—indeed, a theodicy—that few of us today are willing to accept. Alternatively, if social freedom, said to be the highest form of practical freedom, is only the property of a social order considered as a whole and not also of individuals, it becomes difficult to resist the familiar charge that Hegel's theory ends up sacrificing the essential interests of individuals to the collective ends of the social organism.

That such positions have unattractive consequences does not, of course, prove that Hegel did not hold them. In my reconstruction, however, I shall try to show that traditional readings of Hegel's account of Sittlichkeit have gone astray with respect to both of these issues. I shall argue, in other words, that social freedom can be understood as a species of self-determination of the will (in a sense that is independent of Hegel's theodicy of absolute spirit) and that it can be meaningfully predicated of individual social members (or, equivalently, that individuals in a rational social order can meaningfully be said to enjoy a distinctive form of practical freedom beyond the freedoms of personhood and moral subjectivity). By way of clarifying the two main pitfalls my account of social freedom means to avoid, I shall examine two recent interpretations—those of Karl-Heinz Itting and Charles Taylor—that attribute to Hegel the very positions I am claiming he (rightly) rejects. I shall begin with the second of these issues, whether social freedom can be ascribed to the individual members of a rational social order.

Is Social Freedom a Freedom of Individuals?

Hegel begins Part III of the Philosophy of Right with the pronouncement: "Ethical life is the Idea of freedom" (§8142). This statement is reformulated in the same paragraph as the claim that ethical life is the "concept of freedom" that has acquired a real existence in the world and in the consciousness of its members. The question I mean to address here is,
whose freedom is it that gets actualized in the institutions of Sittlichkeit? Is this freedom a property that belongs only to the social whole in question, or does it also pertain to the individuals who compose the whole? In other words, is it the ensemble of ethical institutions itself—the family, civil society, and the state—that is free (in some peculiarly Hegelian sense of freedom yet to be determined), or is it the individual members of those institutions who enjoy the freedom distinctive of Sittlichkeit? The question whether social freedom is a property of a social order as a whole or of its constituent parts (human individuals) is ultimately a question about the extent to which Hegel's social theory embraces a holistic account of the basic values that rational social institutions are supposed to achieve. So before addressing this question directly, it will be helpful to make the concept of holism more precise by distinguishing three ways in which the properties of composite entities (such as a social whole) might relate to the units of which those entities are made up (in our case, the individual members of society).

Consider a group of differentiated cells, each of which on its own lacks the basic capacities essential to the sustenance of life but which, when united in the appropriate way, constitute a living organism capable of carrying out the biological functions necessary for its continued survival. It is possible to ascribe a number of kinds of properties to such an organism; we could say of it, for example, that it has mass, that it is alive, and that it is self-sustaining. If we now ask whether and under what conditions these properties of the organism can also be ascribed to its individual cells, we see that a different response is called for in each of the three cases. The first of the organism's properties, that of having mass, also holds of each of its constituent cells and does so regardless of whether those cells are organically united into a living being. Having mass, then, is a property individual cells have on their own, independently of their relations to other cells. The second property, that of being alive, can also be ascribed to the organism's individual cells—it is possible to characterize a single cell as "living" and to distinguish it from a neighboring cell that is now dead—but being alive is an attribute each possesses only when joined together with other cells so as to constitute a whole that is capable of the basic functions of life. Being alive, then, could be considered a holistic property in the sense that it pertains to the parts of a composite entity only by virtue of their having a certain relation to the whole of which they are the parts. The third of the organism's properties, its being self-sustaining, is holistic in a stronger sense: it can be ascribed only to the organism as a whole, not to the individual cells that compose it. We can say of an individual cell that it participates in, or is a member of, a self-sustaining entity but not that it itself is self-sustaining. Since Hegel's conception of social freedom is clearly not a property of the first type, the question before us is whether it is best understood as holistic in the stronger or weaker of the two senses distinguished here: is social freedom something that individual social members achieve by virtue of being situated within a rationally structured society, or is it a property of their social order considered as a whole?

There is ample textual evidence to support the view that Hegel conceives of social freedom as a strongly holistic property in the sense just distinguished. In one typical passage Hegel refers to Sittlichkeit as "the free whole" (das freie Ganze) (VPR 1, 271), and in another he identifies "the ethical whole" (das sittliche Ganze) with "the actualization of freedom" (258Z). The same idea is expressed even more explicitly in the following quotation: "The rationality of ethical life [das Sittliche] resides in the fact that it is the system of the determinations of the Idea. In this way ethical life is freedom, or the will that has being in and for itself as something objective . . . The determinations of ethical life constitute the concept of freedom" (§145 + Z; emphases omitted). Since there is clearly some force to the claim that the freedom distinctive of Sittlichkeit is first and foremost a property of the rational social order considered as a whole rather than of its constituent parts, I shall first spell out this idea in enough detail to be able to see how it might be developed into a plausible interpretation of Hegel's position. (I shall expand upon these thoughts in chapter 4 with the aim of making them more compelling than they will appear to be here, but a preliminary discussion of them is necessary now in order to give some minimal content to the suggestion that social freedom is a strongly holistic property.) In spelling out this interpretive possibility I shall refer to the work of one interpreter who emphasizes this aspect of Hegel's view, Karl-Heinz Ilting.

The claim that social freedom is a strongly holistic property immediately raises questions about the intelligibility of such a notion: Under what conception of freedom could social wholes be said to be free and to be so independently of whether or not the individuals who compose them are also free in that sense? What could it mean to say that the family, civil society, and the state are themselves, in Ilting's words, "configu-
rations... of the free will," or that "freedom exists as a concrete ideally community" and resides in "the structure" of that community? The key to making sense of this position lies in understanding Ilting's interpretive claim that only the ethical community as a whole is fully adequate to the 'concept' of freedom.38 Making use of the terms employed earlier in the discussion of the concept of freedom in general, this claim can be reformulated as follows: among all entities that can plausibly be counted as wills, the rational social order as a whole most fully embodies the qualities that define the ideal of (practical) self-determination;39 that is, the rational social order as a whole comes closer than other configurations of the will to being the source of its own determinations and independent of anything external to itself. Implicit in this claim is the thesis that the more individualistic forms of will that precede Sittlichkeit in the Philosophy of Right—the person and the moral subject—approximate but do not fully correspond to the concept of self-determination. Not surprisingly, giving some content to this claim will help illuminate the view, alluded to earlier, that social freedom is a richer and more substantive type of freedom than the two preceding forms.

A fully satisfying reconstruction of the arguments underlying the position that social freedom is a property of the social order as a whole would require a more tortuous excursion into Hegel's metaphysics than can be undertaken here. Nevertheless, it is possible for us to get a sense of the general idea behind that view by returning to the concept of self-determination and taking a closer look at what Hegel believes to be contained within it.38 As Hegel understands it, the concept of self-determination entails two properties that are especially significant for his account of a fully self-determined will: such a will must (1) have a self-sufficient existence and (2) exhibit the distinctive logical structure possessed by what Hegel calls "the Concept" (der Begriff).39 Explaining the requirement of existential self-sufficiency is relatively straightforward: it derives from the thought that if a being were dependent on anything external to itself for its continued existence, then it would not be fully self-determined. In the context of Hegel's social theory, self-sufficiency refers primarily to the capacity for self-reproduction.40 A self-sustaining society, one that is capable of reproducing itself with all of the qualities essential to it, is self-sufficient, then, in the relevant sense.

The requirement that a self-determined will exhibit the structure of the Concept is considerably more difficult to explain because it is more intimately bound up with a distictively Hegelian metaphysical thesis. The Concept is Hegel's name for the basic structure that informs all of actuality (Wirklichkeit)—that is, all of existence that is susceptible of rational comprehension. Since the free will is taken to be a part of that existence, it too must exhibit the structure of the Concept. Hegel characterizes this structure in a variety of ways,41 but for our purposes here its most important feature is what he calls "the interpenetrating unity of universality and individuality" (die sich durchdringende Einheit der Allgemeinheit und der Einzelheit) (§258A), a feature that he also, in the same passage, identifies as the essence of rationality in general (die Vernunftigkeit... abstrakt betrachtet). Hence in order to qualify as self-determined in the sense at issue here (and therefore also as rational), a will must be composed of universal and particular42 elements that are arranged so as to constitute a specific kind of (rational) unity, the nature of which must still be explicated.

The thought that is supposed to make sense of this second requirement of a self-determined will derives from a metaphysical claim, fundamental to all of Hegel's thought, about the form any self-determined being must assume if it is to have a real existence in the world. Hegel's idea is that, in contrast to an abstract, universal concept (such as the bare concept of self-determination with which Hegel's philosophy begins), any real existing entity is necessarily a particular being with particular properties, or determinacies (Bestimmtheiten). But if a really existing being is fully to realize the ideal of self-determination, its particular properties must be more than external or contingent; they must be "self-determined" particular properties, which in this case means that they are determined by—or, better, fully adequate to—the being's abstract concept, or essence. It is primarily this match between a being's essential nature and its particular qualities that Hegel refers to when he invokes the notion of an interpenetrating unity of universality and particularity. As will be described in more detail in chapter 4, self-determination in this sense amounts to what we would be more likely to call organic structure. A being that is self-determined in this sense is an articulated, ideologically organized whole (§260A)—that is, a being made up of distinguishable, relatively autonomous components, each of which contributes in its unique way to the well-being or proper functioning of the whole. (In Hegelian language, a part that can be understood as having the specific properties it has because of their suitability for furthering
the ends of the whole is a particular that is (qualitatively) "determined" by the universal, and the being so organized is, regarded as a whole, "self-determined." Although it no doubt strikes us as odd to think of organic structure as a kind of self-determination (and as even odder perhaps to regard it as a species of freedom), it is easier to appreciate Hegel's reasons for associating this structure with rationality. On this view, a social whole is (in at least one significant respect) rational, or intelligible to reason, when its various parts fit together so as to constitute a coherent, organized whole. Since the idea of self-determination understood as teleological organization does play a major role in Hegel's social theory, it will be useful to point out briefly two principal ways in which it does so.

First, "the interpenetrating unity of universality and particularity," applied to the rational social order, designates a unity of universal and particular wills, understood in the following sense: the particular ends pursued by the individuals of a rational social whole are in harmony with, and contribute positively to, the achievement of universal ends, the content of which is defined by what the social whole requires in order to exist and to reproduce itself as the kind of being it essentially is. (To take one of Hegel's simplest examples: in civil society, the individual's pursuit of his particular ends through his own productive labor is harmonious with, and contributes positively to, the achievement of a universal end of civil society, the production of the societal wealth required for the community to reproduce itself.) But the "interpenetrating unity" said to exist among universal and particular wills refers not only to a harmony of the two; it also points to their mutual dependence. The social whole's universal will is dependent on the particular wills of individuals, since it is only through them that its universal ends can be realized. Conversely, the particular wills of individuals are dependent on the universal, because their particular ends can be achieved only by participating in the life of the social whole.

Understood in this sense, the unity of universality and particularity designates a relation among wills that exists (in slightly different forms within each of the three main spheres of Sittlichkeit). Yet the idea of an interpenetrating unity of universality and particularity plays more than this intra-institutional role in Hegel's social theory; it also specifies the relations that hold among the three social institutions themselves. The second aspect of Hegel's view comes to light in those passages (for example, §260+Z) where he associates the family and civil society with particularity, identifies the state with universality, and then locates the rationality of the ethical social whole in the fact that the spheres of particularity stand in a relation of harmony and mutual dependence to the sphere of universality. Identifying the family and civil society with particularity expresses the idea that these two spheres, in their own distinct ways, serve the purpose of fostering and accommodating the particularity of individual social members. Through their participation in civil society and the family, individuals develop and express identities as distinct human beings and acquire and pursue specific interests that distinguish them from other members of society. As citizens of the state, on the other hand, individuals attain a universal existence in the sense that they gain an identity that is shared with all other citizens and learn to discern and to be moved by the best interest of the whole, even though this may conflict with some interests they have by virtue of their particular positions within civil society or the situations of their own particular families. In this context the demand that the social world exhibit a "self-determined" unity of universality and particularity translates into the requirements that the three principal spheres of Sittlichkeit coexist in basic harmony and that they depend on one another for their continued existence as stable, well-functioning social spheres.

Thus, Hegel's conception of a self-determining will, when fully articulated, translates (roughly) into the thought of a plurality of particularities that are qualitatively determined by the universal and unified into an organism that is capable of reproducing itself as a whole, along with the diverse particularities required for its continued existence as the kind of being it essentially is. My primary purpose here is not to defend this conception of self-determination or the metaphysical views upon which it rests but merely to show how it enables us to give some meaning to the claim that social freedom is a property of the rational social order considered as a totality. If the essential features of a self-determined will are its being self-sustaining and its possessing the (Conceputal) structure of a teleologically organized whole, then it is not difficult to see how the institutions of Sittlichkeit, taken together, meet the standards for practical self-determination more adequately than any merely individual will. Moreover, it becomes clear (on the assumption that this is all there is to social freedom) why one might claim that the type of freedom distinctive of Sittlichkeit belongs only to the social world as a
whole and not to the individuals who compose it. On this view individuals could be said to participate of social freedom, insofar as they belong to a social order that, considered as a whole, embodies the essential features of a self-determined will. But since individual social members do not themselves exhibit the qualities required of a fully self-determined will—individuals, for example, are not existentially self-sufficient—they cannot properly be said to be bearers of social freedom.

The question that confronts us now is whether the conception of the self-determined social whole just outlined exhausts Hegel's conception of social freedom, or whether there is also a sense in which individual social members could be said, through their membership in the institutions of **Sittlichkeit**, to achieve a species of self-determined will beyond the freedoms they enjoy as persons and moral subjects. If the latter is the case, then social freedom will not merely be a holistic property of the third type distinguished earlier; it will also be a holistic property of the second, weaker type (a property that can be ascribed to the individuals that make up the social whole but only insofar as they are united within that whole in the appropriate manner). A common response to the question, perhaps even the most natural one, is to opt for the first of these alternatives and ascribe social freedom exclusively to the social whole and not to the individual members who compose it. This view, which I shall call the strongly holistic interpretation of social freedom, is unambiguously endorsed by Ilting in passages such as the following:

What is designated as “free” [in **Sittlichkeit**] is no longer the “free individual” but the ethical [**sittliche**] “substance” as the “universality (community) in which individuals live as “organic moments” in such a way that their individuality is recognized and has acquired a “being”. ... [T]he abstract “concept” of the free will of an individual has not developed into the “idea” of freedom as an ethical community, i.e., freedom exists now as **Sittlichkeit**. In the ethical community, freedom has reality through and in the disposition [**Gestimmung**] of a subjective will, and the latter has its foundation and substance in the freedom of an ethical community.65

According to Ilting, then, the freedom of **Sittlichkeit** is a quality possessed exclusively by the ethical community as a whole; individuals are said to find in the community their “foundation and substance,” as well as a recognition of their individuality, but not social freedom itself.

What is immediately striking about the strongly holistic interpretation is that it appears to attribute to Hegel a conception of freedom that is blatantly unattractive as a foundation for social theory. The view Hegel is alleged to hold appears to be unattractive in two respects. First, the conception of freedom said to be realized in **Sittlichkeit** derives from an abstract notion of self-determination that it is difficult to see what connection the described phenomenon has to anything human beings normally recognize and value as practical freedom. Even if we grant that the ethical community Hegel describes instantiates the formal qualities it attributes to the fully self-determining will, what reason does that give us for regarding the “freedom” of such a community as something good? Second, ascribing to Hegel a strongly holistic conception of social freedom appears to commit him to a highly objectionable view of the relation between the good of a rational society and the good of its individual members. For if the highest good realized in **Sittlichkeit**, social freedom, consists in properties that can be ascribed only to the community as a whole, not severally to the individuals who compose it, then the primary good of the rational social order appears to be realizable independently of the good of individuals. This point concerns more than just the theoretical issue of how Hegel conceives of collective goods. It has a more practical relevance as well, for it is closely connected to the much discussed question whether Hegel's social philosophy is inherently totalitarian: if the primary good of society is thought to exist independently of the good of individuals (and if the collective good has priority over individual goods), then the philosophical groundwork seems to be in place to justify the view, often attributed to Hegel, that the good of the community may (and perhaps even must) be achieved at the expense of the good of individuals.66

To a sympathetic reader these considerations alone might seem to be a good reason for calling Ilting's strongly holistic interpretation of social freedom into question. In fact, however, the situation is more complex than it appears, for both of these objections can be met (at least in part) by the defender of the strongly holistic view. Although I shall ultimately reject this interpretation of social freedom, I shall do so not because it necessarily saddles Hegel with a hopelessly reactionary social theory—but rather because it misrepresents the position Hegel actually held and in doing so overlooks one of the most important (and appealing) features of Hegel's social philosophy, namely, his...
account of the distinctive kind of freedom that individuals enjoy as members of the rational community. In order to get clear on precisely what is at issue in rejecting the strongly holistic account of social freedom, we must first see why this account need not be as indifferent to the good of individuals as it initially seems to be.

Although the strongly holistic interpretation locates the primary good of the social order in properties that can belong only to the community considered as a whole (self-sufficiency and organic structure), it need not regard this collective good as achievable independently of the good of individuals. On the contrary, it is open to the strongly holistic interpretation—and this is the route taken by all plausible versions of that interpretation, including Hitting’s—to make the realization of the good of individual social members indispensable to the attainment of the primary social good. A justification for positing an essential connection between the good of individuals and the good of the whole can be derived from the basic requirement that the fully self-determining social whole unify universal and particular wills in accord with the structure of the Concept. For, as mentioned earlier, the interpenetrating unity of universality and particularity implies an interdependence of the universal and particular such that the ends of the universal will can be achieved only insofar as individuals pursue and attain their own particular ends. What the strongly holistic interpretation does imply is that the good of individuals that is necessarily realized within the rational social order is not to be conceived of as a distinctive type of freedom (social freedom) but rather as what Hitting describes as the development and recognition of social members’ individuality. On this interpretation, then, the institutions of Stiftlichkeit are good for individuals not because they are the source of some distinctive species of freedom (beyond the freedoms of personhood and moral subjectivity) but because they allow them to realize their individuality—that is, the rational social order secures the conditions necessary for individuals’ freedom as persons and moral subjects and constitutes a social world within which they can pursue and satisfy their own particular ends, including their need to be recognized by fellow social members as individuals of value and standing within the community.

This account of how the good of individuals is realized in the rational social order is not, strictly speaking, incorrect, for Hegel does regard individuality in the sense articulated earlier as an important good that in-