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The Limits of Political Culture: An Introduction to G.W.F. Hegel's Notion of *Bildung*

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One hears much today about the relation between culture and politics and, more specifically, about the significance of culture in and for politics. This is true on the side of both theory and practice. The notion of culture increasingly informs mainstream political science,¹ while in many countries, especially Western liberal democracies, the claims of culture (or more frequently cultures) are heard more and more frequently and taken more and more seriously. In the German-speaking world, for example, in what might appear to be a vindication of Kant and Schiller following more recent misuses of the notion of culture, the idea of a *Kulturstaat* has again become respectable.² Culture seems to have done much more than just survive its du-

¹ Three recent volumes which show the breadth of its application in contemporary political science are: L. Crothers and C. Lockhart, eds., *Culture and Politics: A Reader* (New York: St. Martin's, 2000); L. Harrison and S. Huntington, eds., *Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress* (New York: Basic Books, 2000); and R. Ellis and M. Thompson, eds., *Culture Matters* (Boulder: Westview, 1997).

² For a somewhat opposite conclusion see G. Bollenbeck, *Bildung und Kultur* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1996), pp. 305-9.

bious twentieth-century associations. Having been conceptually refined and purified of ideology by modern social science, culture seems more than ever to be accepted as an essential aspect of political life.

In this essay I try to cast some critical light on this flourishing of culture in political theory and practice. I do so by means of a critical discussion of political culture theory, a school within modern political science, especially American political science, and by discussing Hegel's notion of *Bildung*, which animates his still meaningful attempt to resolve the typical modern dualism between politics and culture. I show that there are tensions within the political culture approach to political explanation that reveal fundamental problems attending the introduction of culture into modern political thought and practice generally. These problems, I argue, point back to Hegel's attempt to supersede what might be called the cultural critique of modern politics, and in the last part of the paper I give an introductory account of the Hegelian understanding of *Bildung* as the active process of formation that takes place within the modern state. I suggest that Hegel's attempt to resolve the modern tension between culture and politics may have much relevance even for an age greatly devoted to the notion of culture, and perhaps especially for such an age.

Political Culture Theory.

The term "political culture" first appeared in modern empirical political science in the late 1950s or early 1960s and is chiefly associated with the American political scientist Gabriel Almond.³ In a 1956 essay, Almond states that "every political system is embedded in a particular pattern of orientation to political actions."⁴ In *The Civic Culture* (1963), this claim is formalized under the heading of political culture, which is defined as "the specifically political orientations – attitudes toward the political system and its various parts, and attitudes toward the role of the self in the

³ Almond and Verba, *The Civic Culture* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1963), esp. ch.1, "An Approach to Political Culture"; Pye and Verba, eds., *Political Culture and Political Development*, esp. chs. 1 and 12. Two more recent theoretical studies of political culture are Michael Brint, *A Genealogy of Political Culture* (Boulder: Westview, 1991) (surveying variations on the notion in French political sociology since Montesquieu, German cultural philosophy since Goethe, and recent American political science) and Stephen Welch, *The Concept of Political Culture* (New York: St. Martin's, 1993) (a case study approach that discusses political culture's origins in structuralism and modern anthropology).

⁴ Almond, "Comparative Political Systems," *Journal of Politics* 18; quoted in Pye and Verba, op. cit., p. 7.

system,” and the political culture of a nation as “the particular distribution of patterns of orientation toward political objects among the members of the nation.”⁵ Three modes of political orientation are then identified – the cognitive, the affective, and the evaluational – which refer to what Almond and Verba take to be the three major kinds of belief that influence the character and policy outcomes of political systems. Thus political culture refers to something like the psychosociological limits or conditions within which individual political agents act. More generally expressed, it refers to the belief structure of a given polity, outside of which structure political action would be incoherent.

As Welch points out, the concept of political culture derives from the structuralist anthropology of Claude Levi-Strauss.⁶ Its origins may be traced more generally to neo-Kantian thought about symbolic forms and structures of meaning such as that of Ernst Cassirer. But its deployment in twentieth-century political science has not taken the hermeneutical course that the notion of culture has taken in modern anthropology, notably in the “interpretivist” approach of Clifford Geertz.⁷ Rather, political culture was brought in as an ally of, and soon became a crucial term within, a behavioralist political science whose basic mode is strict causal explanation, not interpretive description. As Brint remarks, “Almond believed in the promise of the behavioral revolution to open up the field to the examination of cultural factors that had been previously left to the fringes of analysis or excluded entirely.”⁸ The introduction of culture into modern empirical political science did not replace or displace behavioralist analysis of individual political decision, but was thought to supplement and indeed to complete such analysis.⁹ Pye explains most clearly: “Concern with the phenomenon of political culture represents a significant development

⁵ Almond and Verba, *op. cit.*, pp. 12, 13.

⁶ *The Concept of Political Culture*, pp. 136-41.

⁷ We should note that originally, the use of culture in modern anthropology was strongly positivist, as it has continued to be in political science. For example, see A.L. Kroeber and C. Kluckhohn, *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* (Cambridge: Harvard Museum Press, 1952), who think culture is the key to “a possible unified science of human behavior (p. 36).”

⁸ Brint, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

⁹ Cf. Welch, *op. cit.*, p. 4: “The concept of political culture offers itself as an ideal token of and catalyst for behaviouralism since it fulfills the two central aims of the approach: it can be defined so as to be measured quantitatively, and it marks the ultimate expansion of the territory of political science.”

in contemporary political analysis for it signals an effort to return to the study of the total political system without losing the benefits of individual psychology.”¹⁰

Political culture therefore appeared to be something like a new context of human relational complexity surrounding an epistemology of political-psychological individualism. But this new context was not just a vague backdrop against which to view the hard data of individual motivations, but was itself measurable and susceptible of full incorporation into the causal analysis. Hence it was thought to fill a major gap in explanatory models in political science based on the rational interest of the political actor. For there was, according to Pye,

a danger that in the process of uncovering the human underpinnings of public actions all sight would be lost of the equally important reality of the political community as a dynamic, collective entity. There has been a need to discover a method for working back from the complex subtleties of individual psychology to the level of the social aggregate which is the traditional plateau of political science.¹¹

Political culture was thought to redress this danger and satisfy this need. The successful inclusion of culture within a behavioralist political science would not only curb certain distorting tendencies of the latter, but would yield a much greater correspondence between political reality and its explanation. That is, it would make political science more scientific, and for this reason its praises were sung with an exuberance uncharacteristic of sober modern social scientists devoted to the analysis of concrete facts.

The first difficulty for this behavioralist political-cultural enterprise is to include culture in political explanation without allowing it to become so important that it begins to absorb the political phenomena themselves. The context, the limiting condition in all its complexity, cannot be allowed to overwhelm the explanatory importance of universal and rational motives that attach to the individual qua political actor. Were this to occur, political science would lose its distinctive subject matter. The problem is addressed with the claim that there is “reciprocal causality” between political institutions and structures on the one hand and cultural practices and beliefs on the other, a claim that both establishes and limits culture’s place in the political (or perhaps political-cultural) whole. Crothers and Lockhart, for example, claim that “relations between culture and institutions are interactive and mutu-

¹⁰ Pye and Verba, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

ally supportive,”¹² and Almond, in a more systematic account of the political culture approach, states that “the causal arrows between culture and structure and performance go both ways.”¹³

In positing a reciprocal causality political culture theory might seem to introduce a sort of dialectics into a decidedly non-dialectical political science that proceeds by means of rigorous analysis of political facts. It might even seem to return to a basic assumption of classical Aristotelian political science – which is why for Aristotle people and constitution must be carefully fitted together – but with the assistance of the more scientific anthropology represented by the notion of culture. This is what Pye seems to have in mind in the above passage when he speaks of “the traditional plateau of political science” and calls for an “aggregation” that would complement the individualism of the behavioral analysis. Similarly, Almond speaks of the “almost indestructible” “primordial values and commitments” “associated with ethnicity, nationality, and religion” even while asserting that causation is reciprocal between politics and culture. He implies therewith that a bottom-line concern with ultimate values presents no obstacle to a specifically political causal analysis.¹⁴

But Almond’s terms, “primordial value” and “indestructible commitment”, recall not the traditional political science of Aristotle, but a more recent founder of political science, Max Weber, who is the true ancestor of the political culture approach. For classical political science, custom, habit, and tradition are not indestructible, for they are constantly shaped and influenced by the political laws and constitution. And while good laws must, in turn, take custom and convention into account (*nomos* means both custom and law), this situation is thought of not as reciprocal causality between two given factors, but as the movement of political nature whose spring is the partial and questionable character of the various conceptions of the political good. Reciprocity between law and custom is not a self-standing fact of political life that is analyzable in itself, but merely a consequence of the imperfection of the political community. In the perfect regime law becomes superfluous because a condition of complete justice obtains. Otherwise, which is to say practically always, there must be laws that take account of the partial opinions of the citizens concerning the political good. And this same partiality is why, in turn, the laws may

¹² Crothers and Lockhart, op. cit., p. xvii.

¹³ Almond, “The Study of Political Culture,” in *A Discipline Divided: Schools and Sects in Political Science* (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage, 1990). (This chapter is reprinted in Crothers and Lockhart, op. cit., pp. 5-20.)

¹⁴ In Crothers and Lockhart, op. cit., p. 16.

influence opinion and either improve or corrupt the political community. Almond's approach exhibits the Weberian scientific spirit of objective certainty, not the dialectical or pedagogical scientific spirit of Aristotle. (His claims that "the effort to explain politics and public policy by political culture theory goes back to the very origins of political science" and that "Aristotle is a more modern and scientific political culturalist than Plato" only confirm this.¹⁵) An epistemology of strict causal explanation remains in place in this approach. However, the approach is distinguished by the special emphasis it places on the reciprocity between politics and culture. The innovation of this political-cultural science would seem, then, to be its permitting the variety of cultures to work their effects upon political structures that are also themselves causal agents, and in this way give a complete account of politics.

At first this all seems quite in keeping with Weber. Politics and statecraft comprise a definite part of the social world for Weber, and like all aspects of social behavior they involve reference to certain fundamental values which, although they are themselves not susceptible of rational analysis, must be recognized as values and given their proper place in any scientific analysis. But Weber would perhaps be skeptical of political culture theory's up-front assertion of reciprocal causality between politics and culture. For him, the important causality in politics appears to be that of the professional politician who builds and moves the state by reference to an established political faith or ideology (i.e., a fundamental value, which Weber thinks in the modern world tends to be some version of mass democracy) and not some kind of matrix between general propositions about individual political behavior on the one hand and a specific cultural whole on the other. There is a reciprocity in Weber's approach in that he thinks responsible politicians must appeal to the values of the society's inhabitants, if only to alter those values. However, the ability so to appeal is only part of the politician's overall force. Weber locates considerations about values deeply and integrally within the political actor. He is concerned with human types as coherent wholes, not the relation between the abstract human actor and his "cultural" background or limiting condition. In this way he is more thoroughly individualistic in his methodology than are his political-cultural epigones, for he does not think value considerations inhere essentially in the broader collective context of social behavior. The "political culture" to which Almond attributes independent causal power would be for Weber an abstraction from the real

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 5.

political situation, useful perhaps for general conversation but not for scientific explanation.

What, then, should one make of this muddying of the objective Weberian waters that attention to culture as a complex and separate collective entity brings? The political culture approach seems to understand itself as having staked out a middle position between the methodological individualism of positivist social science and the hermeneutical insights of structuralism, combining the advantages of both. But in fact political culture theory does not depart seriously from Weberian political science and its positivist premises. It maintains firmly that politics can be explained by means of logical analysis of empirical fact. However, it also shows doubts about the coherence of positivist political science when it allows culture to stand apart from the political actors as an independent agency. We wonder whether we are really integral actors after all, or whether we are not rather some inharmonious composite of generic shrewdness and particularist habituation, the nature of whose union, or rather of the entity in which they are unified, remains obscure. Political culture theory seems to divide the scientific whole – and along with it the political person or citizen – into rational and irrational halves, so that the values Weber thinks must be led into the analysis with exacting rigor are allowed to roam free in their own large “cultural” pasture. Hence, for this approach to political explanation, culture is like a *deus ex machina* that appears when “structural and institutional explanations can be shown to be insufficient.”¹⁶ It is the something else, the limitation, the other-than-rational-choice that supplements the theory of rational choice. But here the *limitation* of culture or values is employed by the social scientist *without limit* – that is, without having been rigorously subordinated within a science of a unitary political actor. From the standpoint of scientific objectivity, this seems to be a fatal error.

The Significance of Political Culture Theory.

I wish to suggest, however, that on a different plane, the attraction to culture on the part of modern political science may be seen as a response to Weber’s banishment of political dialectics. In its uncouth way political culture theory gestures toward fundamental questions about the modern social-scientific outlook that binds it.

¹⁶ D. Elkins and R. Simon, “A Cause in Search of its Effect, or What Does Political Culture Explain?” in Crothers and Lockhart, op. cit., p. 37.

And in its supra-individualism it even seems to glance back toward the old continent of philosophy and metaphysics from the stern of the modern-scientific ship. More specifically, it seems implicitly to ask whether the view of political life as a mass of individual facts to be carefully sifted through does justice to this world as it really is. At least it seems to show a certain doubt about or dissatisfaction with this view, which is a problem given that this view does in fact constitute its horizon. But this doubt may be less surprising when we recall that the resolute objectivity and abstemiousness of the modern social scientist constitute a certain response or decision in the face of a crisis in human self-knowledge, and moreover that Weber and others do not tire of telling us how demanding and difficult this decision is. Modern social science does not arise spontaneously; it is a determined response to a certain spiritual condition that appears only once humans have been disabused of their pretensions to knowledge of the whole, a condition best defined negatively as life without any transcendent authority. This condition is therefore a kind of crisis.

To recognize this condition or crisis is to have a sort of knowledge, however negative or indeterminate, of human affairs that is prior to and of a different kind than the knowledge of modern social science. Moreover, it is to be forced to ask what man is in this condition of radical indeterminacy or freedom from authority. We know the answer of modern social science, which says that man is the effect of a complex configuration of social causes, among which are certain unquestionable values that may or may not be shared by his fellows – that is, may or may not be associated with a distinct “culture”. But political culture theory betrays a certain uneasiness with this answer even though it is very far from rejecting it or even deviating from it with any clear awareness. As is proper to any political science, it strays from the radical individualism of modern social science and speaks of values as something essentially collective – that is, it speaks of them in the guise of a shared culture, which might be as broad as “liberal-democratic culture” or as narrow as “Vienna coffeehouse culture”.

The cost of this recovery of a more genuine and reciprocal political world, however, is great imprecision in culture’s referent, or as we already saw, much indeterminacy alongside whatever determinate knowledge might be gained. This is so despite efforts of political culture theorists to specify their cultural object, for this object always derives from an irreducibly peculiar cultural situation. The exacting Weber does not make culture, so freighted with modern-philosophical baggage, such a pivotal term in political analysis, and the political culture school can place culture in the center only because it asks no serious questions about this most problematic modern notion, treating it merely as an obvious human entity and remain-

ing oblivious to its historical and intellectual origins. Almond, for example, asserts that “political culture change is one of the most powerful themes of classical literature”¹⁷ – by which he means ancient political philosophy – and shows no awareness of any conflict between culture and the express concern of this “literature,” political *nature*. While there may be some quibbling over definitions, the question of (so to speak) the nature of culture is not touched by this school.

Thus the question for this school becomes something like how culture taken as a vague given whole of manners, mores, opinions, traditions, etc. (or some politically relevant part of such a whole) affects political behavior, and vice-versa (although in practice the former question is usually the more important). But this question, natural as it might be if only as a starting point that leads to more definite inquiries, does not seem to pass social-science muster. We remember, however, that we are dealing with an effort of *political* science to give a more truthful or objective account of its object. This necessarily means of politics in the here and now, which is to say modern politics, the politics of the modern state. The cultural turn in political science is first of all an attempt to give a better account of the modern state, and this is indeed the express claim of the first elaborations of the political culture approach.¹⁸ Political culture theory is an attempt to improve on the thin, strictly determinist accounts of the modern state that characterize modern empirical political science.¹⁹ This is why it often joins forces with what might seem to be a rather different school of contemporary political science concerned with “social capital” – i.e., the empirical linkages among political actors in a given society that contribute to the society’s civic integrity – not only in the service of political explanation, but also as part of a moral critique of contemporary political practice.²⁰ In turn, members of this latter school speak of such things as a “culture of civic engagement” and a “culture of trust.” In common between the two schools is a concern with what are often termed the affective requirements and presuppositions of the modern state and especially liberal democracy. Both show a concern with the relation between

¹⁷ In Crothers and Lockhart, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

¹⁸ Almond and Verba, *The Civic Culture*, pp. 1-2.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

²⁰ E.g., R. Putnam, “Bowling Alone: America’s Declining Social Capital,” included in the Crothers and Lockhart volume, pp. 223-34. The editors’ first example of a political culture is significant in this connection: “[P]eople in Western societies since the Enlightenment period constitute a culture defined by its “[v]aluing ... humans for their unique capacities (p. xv).”

the constitution of the modern individual and the constitution of the modern state, the social context or collectivity in which he resides.

Political Culture Theory and the Culture-State.

Political culture theory is therefore basically about what all modern discourse about culture has been about since its beginnings in the 18th century: the formation or education of human beings understood as autonomous and spontaneous individuals, which is to say of citizens of the modern state, or perhaps residents of the modern condition. This is not so clear nowadays, when “culture” refers to anything and everything human and even to animal phenomena. The prestige of the cultural viewpoint obscures the essentially pedagogical character of what might be called the cultural critique of modernity, a critique in the name of the freely developing subject, individual or collective, who has an “identity” and directed against the abstract man of modern science (including modern political science in its original Hobbesian statement) who is only the sum of his passions and desires. Modern social science removes the teleology from this critique but retains its basic thrust, to wit, that human life is the result of self-formation from out of indeterminacy into a morally meaningful and essentially historical whole.

Political culture theory therefore corresponds to the “culture-state”, the state in which an official can prudently call for “more culture in politics and less politics in culture.”²¹ It is also the state where differences of principle, opinion, or party are spoken of as and reduced to cultural differences.²² But in both the theory and the practice there is an ambiguity as to whether culture is something general that completes or elevates the collective life of the state, or something intransigently particular at the root of the divisions within the state. Culture seems to refer to both the common end of the state and the irreducibly different values that preclude a common end. It refers both to a common good and the fact of many irreconcilable ideas of the good. Culture in current political usage reflects a dual legacy of idealism and positivism, of the Kantian cultural enlightenment on the one hand and the cultural

²¹ A statement by Peter Marboe, former Vienna City Councillor for Cultural Affairs, occasioned by disputes over a proposed holocaust memorial.

²² For a systematic attempt, see S. Huntington, “Patterns of Response,” in Crothers and Lockhart, *op. cit.*, pp. 348-57, explaining partisan cleavages in modern liberal democracy as cultural; for a contemporary application, see G. Himmelfarb, *One Nation, Two Cultures* (New York: Knopf, 1999).

science of Kant's nineteenth-century interpreters, including Weber, on the other. As modern human beings, we have to ask whether this dualism concerning culture is acceptable or adequate for our needs.

That is, we must treat the question of culture and politics as a philosophical question of the first order, taking neither term for granted in the modern condition. For there is another dualism here, or rather an evasion of the question whether politics or culture is the primary or more choiceworthy entity, and this evasion suggests a need for another way of conceiving things that is also not the causal-deterministic realm of modern social science from which the doubts that lead to the halfway house of "political culture" arise. The politician and political scientist call on culture to enrich and humanize the modern state, but in what results, politics is depreciated once again: "less politics in culture, more culture in politics." In a sense, culture is a political response to the depoliticization of the human condition effected in and by the modern state for which the abstract man of interests is the basic analytic unit. But in another sense, it confirms and completes this depoliticization by challenging the political practice of the modern state in the name of a more genuine self-actualization. Thus to ask the question of culture and politics most adequately means to ask about nothing less than the nature of the modern state and the subjects who constitute it, while admitting that neither politics nor culture, nor both together in reciprocal causality, may be adequate for coming to terms with our situation.

The Political-Philosophical Significance of Hegel's Notion of Bildung

Hegel was not the first to ask and answer this question; perhaps Rousseau deserves that honor. However, Hegel was the first to answer it as a critic of the notion of the modern notion of culture put forward by Kant and sustained in the past two centuries by neo-Kantian philosophy and its most important offshoot, modern social science. Hegel's critical stance towards culture is not usually appreciated, for two contrasting reasons. First, because he is not a *Kulturphilosoph*, the word *Kultur* plays virtually no role in his philosophy, a fact of note to those who see in Hegel an enemy of healthy human diversity. Second, because Hegel *is* a *Bildungsphilosoph*, a German philosopher in the tradition of Humboldt for whom *Bildung* – the purposeful formation of the human mind which elevates the human being above the vulgarity of modern commercial life – is a key term. These two facts together often yield the conclusion that Hegel comes down on the discredited universalist side of the dispute over whether culture is something particular or something universal in

the human condition, culture as distinct form of life and culture as complete education. Hegel chooses *Bildung* to the exclusion of *Kultur*, obscuring the “pluralist” insights of his predecessor Herder with a doctrinaire “philosophical science.”

However, this conclusion fails to appreciate the radicalism of Hegel’s notion of *Bildung* and its central place in his attempt to supersede all thinking about culture. Hegel anticipates the problems that arise when one attempts to complete politics or political science by means of some notion of culture. His use of *Bildung* is not just another dogmatic humanism, but an attempt to work through the modern tendency to look to culture to elevate, restore, complete, or understand the human condition. Hegel’s “state-science” is not so much an analysis of the workings of constitutional monarchy (although on the surface it is that) as an elaboration of a social form characterized both by the priority of the individual and by an immanent pedagogical process. He attempts in full awareness the synthesis of Hobbes and Aristotle that political culture theory merely (and unsuccessfully) asserts in response to the ultimate cancellation of political dialectics effected by its parent, Weber. This implicit self-undoing of social-scientific positivity directs us, therefore, back to Hegel – not out of historical interest, but as the seemingly unvanquished modern opponent of modern social science.

Let us then give a brief account of Hegel’s thinking about *Bildung* and how it might be useful or valuable in addressing the problems discussed above. Hegel’s political thinking begins from the problem of estrangement that results from a condition of individual or what he calls abstract right. He thinks this condition calls for a political or social philosophy or science that is also a universal pedagogy which forms a divided condition of abstract individual right into a meaningful human whole. Hegel regards the first architects of the modern notion of culture – Kant, Herder, and Schiller – as aesthetic heralds of his own formative undertaking, his *philosophic* solution to the problem of estrangement in which he radically diminishes the claims of culture in favor of those of science.

Bildung, which Hegel conceives as an immanent process of self-completing division in the modern state, is at the heart of this solution. The relation between fragmentation and completion implicit in *Bildung* shows his basic agreement with his predecessors concerning the inner relation of corruption and formation. Schiller, for example, says that it was “culture itself that struck the wound in modern humanity.” But this was *Kultur*, culture in the historical sense of the development and perfection of the human species through the antagonism of forces, a notion Schiller takes directly from Kant. With Hegel we have the novelty that *Bildung* – the free, purposeful self-formation that is supposed to resolve the conflicts in *Kultur* – *itself*

appears to bring ambiguous results. Thus Hegel seems to push the higher education that follows the historical development and corruption of the species back into that history, so that *all* education, the highest included, is divisive and alienating.

This has led some scholars to claim that Hegel thinks culture as such is destructive, and that his employment of *Bildung* is therefore ironic: what is taken to be culture is actually decay, fragmentation, alienation.²³ But this claim is contradicted by Hegel's clear rejection of this view. *Bildung*, he says, is "an immanent moment of the absolute" and has "infinite worth"; those who regard it as corruption or a means of satisfying selfish desires show a "lack of acquaintance with the nature of spirit and the purpose of reason."²⁴ Hegel agrees with Rousseau about the tendency of modern knowledge and modern production to cause social disintegration, but quite unlike Rousseau he not only envisages a solution to this problem, but claims that the problem is already resolved in the historical present of the modern state. Moreover, *Bildung* seems to play some definite role in this resolution, and in the actualization of the "absolute" that Hegel finds present before him in the light of day. *Bildung* – the ideal of modern culture, formation, education – is not usurped by this absolute, as it might be in a religious response to modern enlightenment, but seems to participate in it.

How else then might one explain the ambiguity of Hegelian *Bildung*? The explanation is indicated already in the passage just quoted, which continues:

Spirit has its actuality only in that it divides itself within itself [*sich in sich selbst entzweit*], that it gives itself this limitation and finitude in the form of natural needs and the interdependence [*Zusammenhang*] of this external necessity and precisely *in conforming itself to these limitations* [dass er sich in sie hinein bildet] also overcomes them and thusly gains its objective existence.²⁵

The ambiguous character of *Bildung* has to do with the self-dividing and self-limiting character of spirit or *Geist*. Spirit refers to the being of rational truth, the actualization of what in its purity is articulated in the "realm of shadows" of logic. More precisely, then, the ambiguity of *Bildung* as both refinement and decay has to do with its connection to a process of spiritual self-actualization that involves divi-

²³ See Judith Shklar, *Freedom and Independence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 44.

²⁴ Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1955), p. 168 (§187).

²⁵ *Ibid.*

sion and limitation. “Lack of acquaintance” with this process leads one to see education as mere adaptation to contingent desires, but according to Hegel this adaptation is part of a larger movement that issues in a final resolution. *Bildung* is work towards fulfillment of the “rational goal” of elevation above both natural simplicity and crude self-assertion, and its connection to the larger movement of spirit lies in this work. It is not only the simple liberation of satisfying contingent needs, but also “the work of a higher liberation” – of realizing spirit in “the *infinitely* subjective substantiality of ethical life.” That this work of *Bildung* is no abstraction is clear from Hegel’s statement that on the part of the individual, it entails resistance to “merely subjective behavior,” “the immediacy of desire,” and “the subjective vanity of feeling.” Thus education not only produces but requires or presupposes the decadence and subjective caprice for which it is condemned. One must “work away” this caprice, and this is “hard work.”

Now, how does this rather abstract argument pertain to the issue of political culture discussed above – the issue of fundamental values as an independent variable in political explanation? For Hegel *Bildung* means something like formation from out of a condition of limitation and finitude, and as we saw, political cultural theory is a science of how political wholes are formed within particular cultural limits. In the passage just discussed, this condition of limitation refers mainly to the “system of needs” of modern society or in a word commerce, whose finitude consists in the mutual interdependence of the participants, exchanging what they have for what they lack. This interdependence is compounded by the circumstance that the satisfaction of needs engenders new needs that make the participants even more dependent. The natural needs of the body become the artificial needs of an awakened vanity. But *Bildung* does not only refer to modern commerce. It is also the “working away” of natural simplicity as such; hence it belongs to all of human history. It is not just self-formation in the feverish activity of modern society, but self-formation in limitation in general. *Bildung* coincides with history, and because in Hegel’s view history has distinct epochs, *Bildung* takes different shapes at different times. Whereas in the modern epoch, whose “principle” is subjectivity, *Bildung* is the attempt to create cohesion in an unruly society of liberated individuals dominated by economic concerns, in epochs oriented to a transcendent object it took the shape of beautiful works animated by this unreachable transcendence. There is a close relation between *Bildung* and religion or what one today might call “values”.

Thus Hegel’s reworking of *Bildung* is an attempt to resolve just the problem we have been looking at in political culture theory, the problem of the relation between the rational actor and the “pattern of orientation” he inherits from his political con-

text. Hegel insists on a systematic account of this relation because he sees that a truly modern political science – i.e., a science of the modern state in which the individual will is the prime mover – requires one. It cannot just turn its back on its implicit claim to ahistorical and universal validity and begin speaking of irreducible political values as if to do so would not fundamentally alter the basic situation of the modern state it seeks to explain, and therewith its own situation. (This is the reproach Hegel made against Herder.) Weber understood this when he sought to thoroughly unite the particular value and a universal political rationality within the same individual will in a way that preserved the primacy of the state. But this required the unyielding resolve of the social scientist himself, and Weber’s political-cultural descendants manifest a failure of the will to comprehensive knowledge of social phenomena in the context of the modern state. In their deference to culture, they implicitly acknowledge that the Weberian synthesis has not held up. However, they offer no real alternative to it, and instead slide into a partial social science that claims to be as comprehensive as – or more comprehensive than – that of its ancestor.

Hegel openly claims what these quasi-Weberians (or latter-day proto-Hegelians) tacitly assume:²⁶ that there is an overall, universal development in culture from the beginning of history up to the present in the course of which humans work their way out of their natural simplicity toward ever greater freedom and self-determination, and that at the end of this development emerges a state characterized by both individual freedom and immanent social cohesiveness. Hegel’s philosophy of history is not a eurocentric dogma, but a consequence of a scientific confidence shared by the “political culturalists”. If we are to give a complete rational account of the whole human situation when the human being is understood as a metaphysically free individual who likewise belongs essentially to a society – for this is the radical move away from the Hobbesianism of modern social science that political culture theory unknowingly attempts – then we need a doctrine that shows how “values” come to be only the generic background condition of a stable rational order.

Hegel accounts for this transformation by conceiving human history as a process of conflict that replays itself infinitely, and thereby completes itself, in the modern state. For Weber, on the other hand, there is no *process* of conflict, but only a *static*

²⁶ In most cases; but cf. the title of the Harrison and Huntington volume mentioned in footnote 1.

“war of the gods,” a conflict among innumerable ultimate values that continues into the democratic present. But these two modern thinkers do not differ so radically as it might at first seem. Hegel thinks that near the end of the conflictual process, *Bildung* enters a state of crisis because there is no longer any transcendent object to orient and limit it, so that it paradoxically becomes a *limitless* cultivation *in* limitation. The result is something like a conflict of many opposed values or rather wills. This is why Hegel associates *Kultur* with a specifically modern condition of fragmentation and romantic longing. This association can be extended to the epistemological longing of political culture theory, especially since he does not dismiss cultural thought, but sees it as the final phase in the development of the comprehensive human science. Hegel sees *Kultur* as a sort of anti-nature that serves as a bad replacement for both nature and religions and the cultures associated with them – for the kingdom of natural law in general. At the end of its course, *Bildung* becomes a proud, fractured, ever-expanding *Kultur*. Hegel’s use of the latter term has to do with its closeness to *Kultus*, cult. By using *Kultur* in this way he indicates that even in its irreligion, self-conscious culture has not freed itself from the condition of limitation or finitude from which genuine religion arises. It avoids religion only by deifying or attempting to deify itself in its finitude. Culture by itself is a cult whose objects of worship are the diverse productions or values of liberated subjects.

Although culture may have more faces today than two centuries ago, Hegel’s approach remains relevant. Cultural thought now speaks the Nietzschean-Weberian language of values, while avoiding Nietzsche’s radicalism by indifferently pluralizing values and thus confirming the condition of nihilism against which Nietzsche directed his “revaluation of all values.” But this condition of fragmentation and indifference wrought by the liberation of the individual will is precisely Hegel’s philosophic or scientific starting point. It is the *Bildung* appropriate to an age in which the autonomous reasoning subject has attained his full right and been liberated from all other-worldly authorities. This *Bildung* is a consecration of finitude as such, an elevation of mere empirical humanity to the highest rank. But for Hegel this represents a beginning as well as an end, for out of it arises a “metaphysics of subjectivity” – i.e. culture elevated to a philosophy – that completes the entire historical process of *Bildung* and makes possible the emergence of a final state and a final philosophy – i.e., the science of the final state.

The metaphysicians of subjectivity – for Hegel, Kant and Fichte; for us, Nietzsche and Weber – express culture in philosophy. What remains is to express philosophy in culture. This does not mean that philosophy is to be made an aspect of some larger entity called culture. On the contrary, it means that culture itself is

to become philosophical by being taken up into speculative thought. The diverse educations of history culminate in the philosophic education that takes place at the end of history in the modern state. Although he rejects the notion of a cultural whole, Hegel does not reject culture as such, for despite and even because of its destructive tendencies, *Bildung* makes it possible for the free individual find a home in the state. Hegel aims to preserve *Bildung* by grasping it as what it in fact is, a sphere of conflict and transition that in itself could not possibly constitute a self-sufficient whole. He conceives it as the *pure process* of estrangement and reconciliation – a process expressed with utmost diversity in the course of history, but which is still *one* process – through which a free and rational condition comes into being.

The taking up of culture into philosophy does not just mean that all history is grasped as the *Bildungsroman* of the present. To grasp *Bildung* as process of estrangement and reconciliation also means to grasp it in its eternal and non-historical essence. We recall that for Hegel *Bildung* is an “immanent moment of the absolute” and has “infinite worth.” The enduring significance of *Bildung* is that through it, particularity raises itself out of the stubbornness of its finitude to the form of the universal, whose content it then becomes. In ages past this meant that particularity entered into relation with the absolute through acts of worship; in the modern age, it means that the stark opposition between the finite and the infinite is set in motion and formed into a thoroughly articulated whole in which particularity becomes “free subjectivity existing *infinitely* for itself.”²⁷ This whole is modern *Sittlichkeit*, the community of free individuals that becomes a reality only as a result of the “working away” of the modern condition of fragmentation that results from the assertiveness of free subjects.

Something akin to Hegelian *Sittlichkeit* is lacking in political cultural theory and other current discourse about the importance of culture in politics – not only according to Hegel’s standards, but also its own. Like his modern philosophical predecessors and his modern social-scientific successors, Hegel is a theorist of the rational liberal state. But the vital core of the Hegelian *state* is precisely *cultivation* and *development* of the diversity of its phenomena. The state’s stability depends on a more essential and highly conflictual formative process that must be worked out systematically. In his view, a state that fails to do this will disintegrate as it develops, for it will engender more and more desires or values less and less compatible with each other. However, for Hegel it is not sufficient just to supplement this state and

²⁷ Emphasis added.

its science with something called culture. Perhaps our “cultural differences” are small enough that we can get along with a mode of social thought that moves non-dialectically back and forth between rational institutions and motivations on the one hand and irrational values and predispositions on the other. But then we must admit that, finally, we can neither understand nor control our situation. “Political culturalists” propose that we circumscribe all social-scientific results within certain cultural borders, not realizing that this entails the loss of the theorist’s privileged position with respect to the social phenomena. Hegel reminds these loyal partisans of science and reason that in their attempts to restore the rich variety of the modern political world, they erect divisions that stifle their generous aims. For this reason if for no other, it is perhaps worth revisiting Hegelian “state-science” at length.