Multicultural Dynamics and the Ends of History

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Multicultural Dynamics and the Ends of History: Exploring Kant, Hegel, and Marx.

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A fully fledged philosophy of history can be found in the work of Hegel, a key inspiration for John Russon's account, as well as for the more general account, of the importance of the role and function of recognition for understanding the dynamics of social life, as well as its overall direction. I have already cited Charles Taylor's use of this theme of recognition and, more importantly, of the possibility of misrecognition, in speaking of the question of our identities. In the same essay, "The Politics of Recognition," Taylor claims (pp. 25–26) that:

our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves... misrecognition shows not just a lack of due respect. It can inflict a grievous wound, saddling its victims with a crippling self-hatred. Due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need.

I would like to temper Taylor's discussion in order to enable us to move beyond this particular mode of insistence, not because I do not think that what Taylor describes is true—misrecognition certainly can have devastating effects in any given case—but because of the particular role that recognition has in the composition or constitution of social life. Recognition needs to be seen as structuring the dynamics of social life. That is, misrecognition points to a social life whose dynamics are more or less dysfunctional. Russon's discussion allows...
us to see that quite clearly. If the implicit recognition afforded to members of particular families stifles or distorts the sense of “I-can” that families are meant to provide, then one can expect significant problems in the dynamics of the wider social life. I ask anyone now merely to think about the dynamics of their workplace to get an idea of what is being pointed to here.

Non-recognition, however, is quite different from misrecognition, in the sense that, if the latter can be said to disturb or disarrange the dynamics of social life, the former can be said to disrupt them. Thus, to recall Alain Touraine’s discussion, it is non-recognition that increasingly characterizes the “demodernizing” process at work in contemporary societies, where people increasingly interact economically and instrumentally, but retreat from interaction when it becomes a question of values, meaning, and significance. That is, the social dynamic of recognition is restricted to instrumental terms in the wider economic sphere, and its interpersonal and affective functions are split off from that wider sphere into increasingly isolated pockets of significance.

Another way of putting this is to suggest that, rather than point to the function of recognition the way Taylor does by calling it a “vital human need,” we would do better to consider it in terms of its function in a vital human dynamic, the relational structure of human interaction. Recognition threads together the social whole and fuels its overall functioning. Because it does so, the fabric of social life can be stretched and even torn when that recognition is dysfunctional. Similarly, the dynamics of social life can sputter and stall when that fuel is lacking.

If we push this analogy of recognition as fuelling the dynamics of social life a little further, we can begin to respond to the question of how and why the dynamics of social life should be understood within the wider dynamics of the historical life of human beings considered as a whole, or what is called speculative philosophy of history, the past-present-future complex within which our lives unfold. We have seen through our discussion of Russon that our lives do not merely mechanically unfold, each day giving way to the next, but rather take place within a particular narrative, “which is inherently propelled toward transcending and transforming” the given differences with other narratives “through establishing a communication between them.” We have also seen that what establishes this “communication” is the process of recognition, which includes its dysfunctional forms of misrecognition and non-recognition. What are we to make, however, of this idea that this whole process is “inherently propelled”? What kind of speculative move is being made here?

I have already mentioned that, if we focus on the individual’s development within his or her familial and social context, then the experience of maturation itself—literally, of growing up—can plausibly be interpreted as a process that “inherently propels” our development as human beings. Is it just as plausible to
extend this experience of being "inherently propelled" to the historical process considered as a whole? The plausibility of such an idea is indeed what Hegel's speculative philosophy of history was intended to demonstrate. Hegel does so by describing the historical process as a whole as the realization of reason. (What follows has been developed in my "Realizing Reason in History: How Cunning Does It Have To Be?")

One might understand the connection between the realization of reason and the historical process in two ways. First, one might want to show how reason has developed and "realized itself" within history. There is reason in history, and the task of the philosopher is to show that development. Hegel indeed wishes to do precisely that. In fact, that is the title given to the Introduction to his Lectures on the Philosophy of World History. However, one can also see the relation between reason and history as much more intimate than merely one in which reason develops itself over time, as it were. One might suggest that, not only does history show us that reason has developed over time, but the task of history is precisely to develop or realize reason in and through time. There is reason in history because that is what history brings about. Thus, the "realization" of reason in history is both something that is recognized and something that must be done. For Hegel this "realization" is accomplished through the doings and sufferings of concrete human beings in their attempts to live out their lives.

Hegel wants to show that history is not a cold, anonymous process that simply sweeps up human lives and never looks back. Indeed, his philosophy of history is primarily concerned with the concrete doings and sufferings of human beings, insofar as they are what embody the process of reason's realization. Now, we must note that philosophy is what can show this to us because philosophy is the self-conscious appropriation of the whole process understood as a whole. This is why philosophy is, and must be understood as, speculative thought. That is, philosophy, when it contemplates history, does not despair of it—Hegel is here following Kant. As we shall see, for Hegel the true story of history is the progressive realization of reason and freedom, which both express the Idea of history. Nevertheless, Hegel recognizes (p. 68) that:

An initial survey of history, however, would indicate that the actions of men are governed by their needs, passions, and interests, by the attitudes and aims to which they give rise, and by their own character and abilities; we gain the impression that, in this scene of activity, these needs, passions, interests, etc., are the sole motive forces. . . . When we contemplate this display of passions, and consider the historical consequences of their violence and of the irrationality which is associated with them (and even more so with good intentions and worthy aims); when we see the evil, the wickedness, and the downfall of the most flourishing empires the human spirit has created; and when we are moved to profound pity for the untold miseries of
individual human beings—we can only end with a feeling of sadness at the transience of everything.

However, we should not let such a feeling of sadness take over our thinking about this process of history. Indeed, Hegel warns (p. 69) against those who, becoming defeatist about the overall movement of history, “retreat into that selfish complacency which stands on the calmer shore and, from a secure position, smugly looks on at the distant spectacle of confusion and wreckage.” Hegel asks us what is to be thought when contemplating the spectacle of history:

But even as we look upon history as an altar on which the happiness of nations, the wisdom of states, and the virtue of individuals are slaughtered, our thoughts inevitably impel us to ask: to whom, or to what ultimate end, have these monstrous sacrifices been made?

In asking this question thought is making the distinction between the means of history and the end of history, another way of expressing what I have been calling the dynamics of history and the telos of history. It is this distinction that will allow us to get beyond the dismal spectacle of what Kant called “the idiotic course of things human.” A good part of Hegel’s Introduction is devoted to working out this distinction.

Hegel begins by discussing what he calls the “general concept” of a philosophical appreciation of history, or what is now called speculative philosophy of history. He notices right off (p. 27) that “the main objection levelled at philosophy is that it imports its own thoughts into history and considers the latter in the light of the former.”

However, it is not so much that philosophy imports its own thoughts into history, since, after all, philosophy, or philosophizing, takes place within history. Rather, it looks at history from a philosophical perspective. Essentially, what this means for Hegel is that “the only thought which philosophy brings with it is the simple idea of reason—the idea that reason governs the world, and that world history is therefore a rational process.” He elaborates (p. 28):

We must bring to history the belief and conviction that the realm of the will is not at the mercy of contingency. That world history is governed by an ultimate design, that it is a rational process—whose rationality is not that of a particular subject, but a divine and absolute reason—this is a proposition whose truth we must assume; its proof lies in the study of world history itself, which is the image and enactment of reason.
When we read this passage we need to remember that Hegel was lecturing in 1830, and could refer to a “divine and absolute reason” with relatively little comment. The point that needs to be emphasized in the context of this discussion is the idea that the “realm of the will,” that is, our lives as they unfold, should not be understood to be at the mercy of contingency. This is not to say that they do not have contingent features, such as the birth and death of each one of us. Indeed, in terms of the modal square, the contingency at the heart of our lives describes our present within the past-present-future complex. Not to be at its mercy is not to isolate that present from the past and the future to which it belongs. This is the philosophical idea that is being brought to our consideration of history.

Hegel also expresses his idea in the following sentence (p. 29): “Whoever looks at the world rationally will find that it in turn assumes a rational aspect; the two exist in a reciprocal relationship.” It is important to note here that Hegel does not say that the world as a whole has to be considered rational. Reason does not take up the whole of the world, it leaves behind the merely contingent, understood here, not in terms of the modal square, but, for example, with reference to such contingencies as my skin colour, or my receding hairline, or the size of my feet. The point to be developed is the idea of reciprocity between the rational dealing with the world and a world that responds in kind by displaying itself as rational.

This is how those who would focus on history as conflict can be shown to be mistaken. It is not that they are wrong to point to the various conflicts that traverse history. Nor are they wrong to insist on trying to come to terms with such conflict, or to regard it as a cause for concern. On the contrary, Hegel would agree that the appearance of conflict within history is what calls for our considered attention. However, a philosophical history cannot remain at the level of contemplating such conflict, nor should it pretend to offer “solutions” to the “problems” that such conflict, considered in this abstract fashion, poses. Rather, its point is to show how, within the appearance of conflict, reason is actually working itself out.

After the explication of the general concept, the next division in Hegel’s Introduction is “The Realization of Spirit in History.” This division is itself subdivided into four sections: “The Determination of Spirit,” “The Means of its Realization,” “The Material of its Realization,” and “Its Reality.” What Hegel does in these sections, to state it succinctly: is to argue that the “determination of spirit” is the freedom at the heart of human efforts to realize what human beings find within themselves to realize. It is a freedom precisely because their efforts depend only on themselves, and not on something like animal instincts. The means of this realization are the passions and interests that animate the particular lives of human beings. Its material is the social organization of those
passions and interests into a developing whole, which Hegel calls the "state." Its reality is the actually existing dynamics of the historical life of these developing wholes.

I cannot here go into the details of Hegel's account. My focus is on understanding what it means, and what it involves, to think of reason as actually working itself out within the conflicts of history. First of all, we need to ask if there is a general way in which we can define the conflict that history displays. That is, is there a general way to explain why there is such conflict in history? A fairly traditional way of doing so is to say that the conflicts of history arise out of, and are fuelled by, the passions of human beings. Human beings tend to get "carried away" in the things that they do when these are accompanied by strong beliefs and commitments. Of course, human beings also cannot do without these strong beliefs and commitments, for they are what human beings are animated by, making of them the particular engaged human beings that they are. (Human beings who are lacking in passion are lacking in engagement in the world. They are listless, passive, conformist, but, interestingly, just as prone to passionate outbursts as anyone else. Whether or not such outbursts can find channels of productive engagement, or merely spend themselves without being engaged in anything other than their own display, might be considered the principal question of education. But such a discussion will have to wait for another time.) In fact, this insistence on the passionate nature of human beings not only explains the prevalence of conflict within history, it can, in the context of our discussion of where we are headed in an increasingly multicultural world, be given an even more speculative twist that can serve as a contrast to Hegel's (and my) own.

The late Stuart Hampshire argued in his book *Justice is Conflict* that the presence of conflict in human affairs is ineliminable, and needs to be thought as actually providing for the conditions of human justice. To put part of his argument in my terms, Hampshire is saying that conflict is not an affront to the telos of justice but, on the contrary, is the arena within which the dynamics of human interaction can produce justice, by mediating conflicts in ways that make life livable. Conflict arises out of human interaction because human beings are diverse. Human beings are diverse because their experiences, as these are shaped by their memories and imaginations, are diverse. More forcefully, Hampshire says (pp. 37–38):

> the diversity and divisiveness of languages and of cultures and of local loyalties is not a superficial but an essential and deep feature of human nature—both unavoidable and desirable—and rooted in our divergent imaginations and memories. More fundamentally, our stronger sentiments are exclusive and immediately lead to competition and conflict, because our memories, and with them our imagination,
are focused upon particular persons, particular inherited languages, particular places, particular social groups, particular rituals and religions, and particular tones of voice; and hence our stronger loyalties are similarly focused. We want to serve and to reinforce the particular institutions that protect us, and to extend their power and influence at the expense of their rivals.

One might describe what Hampshire is pointing to and arguing for here as the primacy of familiarity. Each of us is passionately rooted in a particular and familiar world that we are committed to defending against the unfamilialities of worlds that conflict with it. Hampshire pursues this speculative line of thinking, fully recognizing its speculative character, as follows (pp. 38-39):

Men and women are naturally driven to resist any external force that tends to repress their typical activities or to limit their freedom. This is true of individuals, families, social classes, religious groups, ethnic groups, nations. This is the common order of nature. They are all, these different units, struggling, wittingly or unwittingly, to preserve their individual character and their distinctive qualities against the encroachment and absorption of other self-assertive things in their environment...

It is a natural necessity for each distinct entity to try to preserve its distinctiveness for as long as it can, and for this reason conflicts are at all times to be expected in the history of individuals, of social groups, and of nations, as their paths intersect. There is no end to conflict within and around the civil order.

Now, presumably, in an increasingly multicultural world such “paths” can be expected increasingly to “intersect,” and thus more and more conflicts can be expected as well. This is where Hampshire’s notion of justice arises. Because of the increased intersection of familialities and the conflicts they create, there arises an increased sense of the need to mediate such conflicts, in order to avoid mutual destructiveness, and to organize relevant institutions that can ensure the “negotiations” and “arbitrations” that will settle given menacing disputes, without arguing for, or even hoping for, the elimination of all conflict, insofar as the latter remains grounded in forms of social familiarity. Indeed, it is in recognition of that grounded familiarity that Hampshire argues (p. 40), first, “that bringing into existence institutions and recognized procedures should have priority over declarations of universal principles”; and, second, “that institutions earn respect mainly from their customary use and from gradually acquired familiarity.” The hope and the expectation are, then, that what will arise out of this process is:

a rough sense of fairness in the adjudication of conflicts, always given equality of access; not perfect fairness, but the kind of imperfect fairness that may emerge from
procedure s which are themselves compromises, from the relics of history. Nothing more is reasonably to be expected.

This all seems very reasonable, and that, of course, is the point. Like most forms of "reasonableness," Hampshire's is sceptical about the powers of human reason. Specifically, it is sceptical about the powers of human reason in the face of the powers of human passions. Hampshire should not, of course, be read as in any way denigrating human rationality or the articulation of principles. He merely wishes to contextualize such articulations within their actual conditions of emergence, in the dynamics of conflicting memories and imagination as these define social familiarities.

Near the end of *Justice is Conflict* Hampshire writes (p. 94): "Rationality is a bond between persons, but it is not a very powerful bond, and it is apt to fail as a bond when there are strong passions on two sides of a conflict." His "solution" to the problems generated by such situations is to promote those institutions and practices that are set up to hear the different sides of a particular dispute with a view to resolving it, not to the satisfaction of everyone involved, but in a way that all sides can agree is fair. In other words, for Hampshire the telos of justice needs to be subordinated to the dynamics of social life, rather than having those same dynamics subordinate themselves to justice articulated as a telos towards which social life is deemed to be ultimately directed. Hampshire himself says that in this he is merely recognizing the wisdom of the famous dictum of David Hume: "Reason is, and ought to be, the slave of the passions." Interestingly, I suppose because of the philosopher's commitment to rationality, Hampshire feels compelled to add (pp. xii-xiii):

> It is difficult to acknowledge the bare contingency of personal feeling as the final stopping point when one is arguing with oneself, or with others, about the ultimate requirements of justice. But I am now fairly sure that this is the true stopping point.

Now, the point I wish to make is this. If it is true that, at least as far as moral and political philosophy is concerned, we must accept the "bare contingency of personal feeling as the final stopping point," then moral and political philosophy—understood as arguments concerning the "ultimate requirements of justice," or the telos of social life—needs to be contextualized within speculative philosophy of history. It is precisely that "bare contingency" that we are that it seeks to make sense of by placing it in the wider movement of history, or, in the terms of the modal square, that "bare contingency" of any given present, recognizing the necessities of the past, and exploring the possibilities of the
future. Only in this way can we see how any roles that we might articulate can begin to play a directive role within the dynamics that otherwise characterize our social lives.

Hegel recognizes that the passions of human beings are the driving force of history and that, taken in themselves, such passions describe the bare contingency of human life. However, like Kant, he is both amazed and horrified by what human beings have accomplished through history. If one focuses on their rational accomplishments, then one cannot rest content with describing human life strictly in terms of its bare contingency. The question that speculative philosophy of history poses is how we are to reconcile the rational accomplishments of human beings with the bare contingency of their existence. Hegel recognizes, just as Hume and Hampshire do, that our passions can and will overwhelm our "reason-ability," our ability to have reason mediate our differences and difficulties, in any given contingent situation if one takes the point of view from that given contingent situation. That is, any given human situation is driven by the human passions that are the dynamic forces that bind it as a particular, given situation. Such situations will be conflictual to the extent that the passions involved stem from differently developed familiarities. (Such situations can be both creatively or destructively conflictual, but more of that in a moment.) However, when we look, not at a given conflictual contingent situation, but at the process by which these conflictual situations resolve themselves through time, we notice that they display not only the spectacle of spent passions, dismally enough, but also the development and deployment of what Hegel calls "reason," and which we can call the "reason-ability" of human passions-in-situation. I make use of this notion of "reason-ability" in order to emphasize the fact that, for Hegel, reason arises out of the passionate situation of human interaction and is not something added from without. The passions are the means of its realization.

This has never been by any means a smooth process, and the evidence of destructively conflictual situations around the world suggests that it will not become so for some time. However, before inferring from this that this will always be the case, we might turn our attention to the developmental features of the process itself. In order to capture the way in which reason, when we take the long view, survives the destructiveness of human passions as they have unleashed themselves throughout history, Hegel makes use of the expression "the cunning of reason." The most famous passage in which this expression is used, in describing the historical process considered as a whole, is the following (Introduction, p. 89):

Particular interests contend with one another, and some are destroyed in the process.
But it is from this very conflict and destruction of particular things that the universal
emerges, and it remains unscathed itself. For it is not the universal Idea which enters into opposition, conflict, and danger; it keeps itself in the background, untouched, and unharmed, and sends forth the particular interests of passion to fight and wear themselves out in its stead. It is what we may call the cunning of reason that it sets the passions to work in its service, so that the agents by which it gives itself existence must pay the penalty and suffer the loss. For the latter belong to the phenomenal world, of which part is worthless and part is of positive value. The particular is as a rule inadequate in relation to the universal, and individuals are sacrificed and abandoned as a result. The Idea pays the tribute which existence and the transient world exact, but it pays it through the passions of individuals rather than out of its own resources.

I want to comment on many things in this passage, but I shall start with the last sentence. For our purposes, we should read Idea as "reason-ability," specifically, as those socially mediated spaces that allow for human beings to realize themselves through their own efforts. "Reason-ability" arises only out of a contingent situation, the transient world, but in effect it is what perdures when that contingent situation gives way to another, other passions confronting each other in terms of their relative familiarities. While our passions drive us, as animating forces, as long as we are alive, what is accomplished by our passionate engagement in the world is the sustenance of continued "reason-ability," the ability to have reason mediate the conflicting passions that animate our lives, taken individually and taken socially. This is how we need to understand what history itself means: it is the development of human "reason-ability" over time as it encounters and responds to situations that challenge it, situations to which we give the general name of "conflict." These responses are varied and diverse. They are often institutionally expressed, though they can also be embodied in informal social and cultural practices with no explicit codes and regulations. When Hegel writes that "the universal Idea . . . keeps itself in the background, untouched, and unharmed, and sends forth the particular interests of passion to fight and wear themselves out in its stead," he is referring to the way in which contemporary forms and social spaces of "reason-ability" continue to develop through the passionate expenditure that is the living out of our lives.

Here, as always in philosophy, we are dealing with a very general description, though not an abstract one, of what takes place concretely in each of our lives (or, at least, that is what philosophy attempts to do). In order to make sense of such general philosophical statements one needs to keep one eye on what goes on concretely in one's life.

For example, if you have children, you may think about what you are doing to "raise" them, that is, think about what you are doing to enable your children to deal with the emotions they feel within the particular situations
they find themselves in. If they come home crying, you do not merely begin
to cry along with them. Perhaps you gather them into your arms and ask them
what is wrong. Depending on how taken over they are by their passions—they
may be crying so hard that they cannot speak—maybe you will hold off from
asking them questions and merely soothe them, that is, allow them to regain
their composure, to have the intensity of their passionate expression diminish
somewhat so that questions can be asked and responses can begin to sputter
forth. This can take time. The explanations may be incoherent and prone to
breakdown, issuing into renewed bouts of sobbing, and your questions may need
once again to turn into soothing sounds (providing an interesting speculative
glimpse into the origins of language) in order again to create a space and a
context for the difficult effort of forming words and uttering sentences that
can be understood, an ability that your children have learned from you. This is
what "reason-ability" is: a space and a context we create for ourselves in which
our utterances can be formulated and understood. If we stay with my everyday
example, the soothing sounds and delicate questions that you make as a parent,
thus providing this space and context, stem from the development of your own
"reason-ability," which, of course, is prone to being overwhelmed by your own
passions. Insofar as it is not, it is because the "reason" of your "reason-ability" is
successfully "keeping itself in the background, untouched and unharmed." Or,
in Hegel’s terms, your success is a function of your being a vehicle for "reason"
in this particular situation that humanity calls for it.

We can stay with this example in order to understand Hegel’s further point.
Imagine an older child, an adolescent, who either storms or slinks into the house,
refusing to acknowledge your presence or even her own, disappearing into her
room, saying nothing at meals, refusing to join in “family activities,” sometimes
shouting out her evident discontent, sometimes being ominously silent about
it. Soothing words and delicate questions are of no use here, insofar as these are
the responses that they provoke. What is “reason-able” in this situation? It will
de pend on the particulars, but, whatever the strategy, it will involve cunning,
skill, and dexterity in the face of complicated passions, not only those of the
adolescent in question, but those of the parent who wishes to help but does
d not know how, and, because of this inability, this powerlessness, may be prone
to frustration, anger, sadness, helplessness, angst, mockery, defiance, rage or
other responses. The space of “reason-ability” that the parent-as-parent has been
intent on creating and sustaining proves insufficiently stable, not only to allow
the adolescent to make sense of her own despondency and confusion, but for
the parent-as-child-himself-become-parent to readily respond to the situation
in a way that will allow it to develop from itself the resources to resolve itself. The
cunning of reason manifests itself in a widened context where the other parent,
or friends and other persons, recognize the situation and, through appropriately
soothing or chiding, or sympathetic, or “realistic” words, help foster “reason-ability” in the situation by widening the context, allowing more space for things to get worked out between the adolescent’s confusion and concern, and the reality that makes its demands on her life.

I do not need to develop the different kinds of ways these dynamics can spin out of control. When they do, it is in the absence of “reason-ability,” a “reason-ability” that has withdrawn in order to preserve itself, perhaps only to reappear, sadly, tragically, in the form of a justice system or a medical system whose purpose is to re-establish order. It is interesting to note, though I won’t develop it here, that such “systematic” interventions themselves will not be fully “reason-able,” even on Hegel’s terms, if the solutions they provide are externally imposed on the persons in question, even when they follow from what is deemed an “understanding” of the situation. Hegel’s point about the cunning of “reason-ability” is that it must emerge from the dynamics themselves. That is precisely why “cunning” is required.

My purpose in describing these everyday examples of the cunning of “reason-ability” in the name of concrete considerations has been to palliate the charge of excessively abstract and general theorizing that is often levelled against speculative philosophizing. It is cunning, and has to be, because the passions that need to be dealt with can easily and rapidly overwhelm its efforts, as these simple everyday examples demonstrate. Hegel seeks to extend this understanding of the cunning required of reason much further, to show how it allows us to see the development of human efforts in terms of its overall direction, a development that is not itself evident in the everyday struggles that we are involved in and that we work through to the best of our abilities.

At its most general level Hegel’s notion of the “cunning of reason” bears resemblance to other general ideas that attempt to make sense of the overall development of human life as it unfolds in time, such as Providence or Fate, for example. Again, such ideas are speculative ideas, and therefore distinct from what are generally called “scientific” ideas, because they attempt to think about a whole that cannot be experienced as a whole. We are in the midst of the process we are attempting to think—to make sense of—and cannot remove ourselves from it in order to see it as a whole. Such ideas are called for because what we do experience in the world is a sense of developing within it, a sense that each of our lives is something that is unfolding, that can be made sense of. They are called for because we do not live our lives as a mere random sequence of events, void of meaning and significance. Even if many of us are prepared to accept, at some general, cosmic level, the “ultimate” insignificance of our lives, it remains the case that this is not the way we live our lives. Such
cosmic insignificance is itself a speculative proposition that one may believe or entertain, but it is not as "reason-able" as it appears, inasmuch as it does not structure most people's "reason-able" life commitments.

For example, even in our secular and technologically inspired climate, many of my students actually believe in, or claim to commit themselves, to some notion of "providence" or "fate" as providing an overall structure to their lives, in the very general sense that they think that what happens to them "happens for a reason," or that there exists, to some extent, some kind of pattern to their lives that they are meant to enact or follow and that certain specific kinds of events await them. To be sure, some of them are appealing to an explicitly religious background, while others are no doubt indebted to Hollywood plotlines. The point is that they are, more or less, attuned to the very general sense that such notions provide to their otherwise more concrete commitments and engagements in the world. I imagine that, when their encounters with certain features of the world stir up an emotional tumult that threatens to overwhelm their normal "reason-ability," such notions play a kind of soothing function similar to the one that a parent's arms and voice once played—another example of the cunning of reason.

Note, however, how an appeal to the cunning of reason differs from an appeal to "providence" or "fate". The latter notions hand over the sense-making or sense-giving power to something beyond our own puny power to make sense of our lives. That is, if one appeals to such notions as "providence" or "fate," one effectively hands one's life over to a process that has the full or real control. To appeal to the cunning of reason is, of course, to do no such thing. Hegel refuses to hand over our lives to an overpowering source. In fact, it is the passionate forces of our lives, as these reveal themselves in our emotional dealing with the world, that is overpowering, and reason must use its cunning to counter that power.

In that sense, more than Providence and Fate, Hegel's notion of the cunning of reason most resembles Kant's notion of a "secret plan of Nature," in the sense that it is through our passionate engagements, which Kant sums up somewhat dryly as the "self-interest" that animates the "unsocial sociability" of human beings, that reason manifests itself. For both Kant and Hegel, human beings, insofar as they are passionately engaged in living out their own lives, are actually accomplishing the ends of a far wider project, ends that they do not immediately recognize as their own. However, there is also an important difference between Kant and Hegel here. For Kant, the ends themselves describe an ideal that is detached and serves only a regulative function in relation to the real dynamics that are to bring about that ideal. Hegel, in contrast, appeals, not to a "secret plan," but to the cunning of reason, in order to show how the ideal arises out of or emerges from the dynamics of social life, the social space of "reason-ability."
Nevertheless, like Kant, Hegel wants to show how the ideal directs the course of history, that is, that history needs to be understood as a directed process and not merely a succession of events that, taken together, have no ultimate significance. He does this by showing that what we discover in the space of “reason-ability,” which we create for ourselves in our interactions with others, is that our own self-development is something that takes place over time and is shaped by our own progressive self-realization. This is how we need to understand his claim, which I quoted earlier, that: “Whoever looks at the world rationally will find that it in turn assumes a rational aspect; the two exist in a reciprocal relationship.” The various conflicts that we encounter in our experience, our contact with the world, need to be looked at rationally, which means to see within those conflicts the space of “reason-ability” that they allow. When we do this, when we attempt to look at the world rationally, we actually create this space and, conversely, the space thus created allows us to grow and develop within it. As we grow and develop within it, the space itself expands, allowing for the continued growth of “reason-abilities,” of things that we show ourselves capable of doing by showing others how we do them.

We can see here why Russon, for example, reads Hegel’s understanding of history and social life as a process of mutual recognition and mutual education. Our development as human beings, because it takes place within a social space, does not take place automatically, as it were, or even “organically.” Because it takes place within a social space, it takes place within a space of “reason-ability,” a space where reason is used to direct development, through parenting or schooling, for example. Reasons are given for that direction and reasons are expected from those participating in that development. The process of recognition that we owe to each other within the social space we create for ourselves is a process of mutual education. That is, the social space that we share is the space within which we account for ourselves to each other in the development of our “reason-abilities.” Thus, we learn from each other increasingly what it means to be human beings within a developing social space of “reason-ability.”

Now, if I seek to relate all this back to the initial question of this book—where are we headed, given that the world is increasingly becoming multicultural?—we can imagine a Hegelian answer along the following lines. Through the process of mutual recognition and mutual education that best describes the attempt to resolve the conflicts of familiarities that animate the dynamics of social life, as long as we commit ourselves to looking at the world rationally, we are headed towards an expanding space of “reason-ability” within which we will be called upon and must be prepared to account for ourselves as others are prepared to account for themselves. This space is, of course, a conflictual space because of the different familiarities that feed into it, the multicultural here being defined...
as the "multiply familiar," as it were. Yet, because those different familiarities are increasingly in contact in a quotidian way, they increasingly show themselves as "unfamiliar familiarities." They are thus increasingly drawn into and increasingly draw that expanding space that calls for "reasons" to regulate and govern and mediate social relations, thus increasing the "reason-ability" of the world. The cunning of reason manifests itself in the way in which the attempt to inhabit a familiar world contributes to the expansion of a world where diverse familiarities and ways of inhabiting the world are called upon to live together within a space of mutual "like-mindedness." Thus, a Hegelian account of history shows that the telos of a social life of mutual recognition arises or emerges from the very dynamics of social life, insofar as social life creates a space of "reason-ability," thus ensuring continued human development.

Some might want to ask some basic questions at this point. Is that what history actually shows? Or is this Hegelian account merely the old story of historical progress that, to be sure, was inspirational for a long time, but is belied by the present state of affairs? In other words, does anyone still believe in that old story? Others might want to recognize that Hegel's account, as here presented, is not merely a recounting of this old story, but one that insists that we look to the actual dynamics of social life. They might accept that the world is becoming increasingly multicultural, and agree that it is within those dynamics that the telos of mutual recognition is found, and not at the end of a story of human progress. Yet they too might still want to ask some basic questions. Can such dynamics and the telos that they generate really be said to be governing the course of the world? Even if reason is cunning enough to create spaces within which we effectively recognize each other and learn from each other, are these spaces not, in fact, few and far between? Is the course of the world itself subject to forces that even the cunning of reason will simply not be able to outmanoeuvre in the long run, especially if we are asked to focus on the dynamics of such limited spaces? In other words, is the general view of Hegel's philosophy as too "idealistic"—in the common use of that word, where "idealistic" means "unrealistic"—in some sense right? Even on the most charitable reading of this speculative attempt, must we not conclude with a sigh and a "would that it were so"?

I cite such questions not because I think that they are warranted but because of the fatigue they express, a fatigue in and with the speculative effort required to try to think history as a whole as the appropriate context for making sense of our unfolding lives. As Descartes says, at the end of the first of his Meditations on First Philosophy (p. 17):

this undertaking is arduous, and a certain laziness brings me back to my customary way of living. I am not unlike a prisoner who enjoyed an imaginary freedom during
his sleep, but, when he later begins to suspect that he is dreaming, fears being awakened and nonchalantly conspires with these pleasant illusions. In just the same way, I fall back of my own accord into my old opinions, and dread being awakened, lest the toilsome wakefulness which follows upon a peaceful rest must be spent thenceforward not in the light but among the inextricable shadows of the difficulties now brought forward.

Note, however, the speculative dimension of these questions: it is supposed that there is a course of the world that is to be deemed real, hence the assumed "realism" underlying the questions. That supposition can and should be fleshed out, and that is precisely what speculative philosophy of history proposes to do.

Note further that we are using speculative philosophy of history in order to respond to a specific question, which, if the reader has followed us this far, needs to be taken into account, something that the objection does not do adequately. We are trying to respond to the sense we have that we are headed somewhere and that the world is increasingly becoming multicultural. This latter affirmation of the multicultural dimension of our world suggests that the course of the world has distinct features that should be thought about in their specificity.

Having said that, there is a point underlying the questions that merits attention. It is true that there is a tension between the sense we have that we are headed somewhere and the recognition that the world is becoming increasingly multicultural, and that this tension suggests a general discomfort and unease. That is, the sense that the world as a whole is progressing toward better days is not as predominant as it once was, and even the idea that history manifests itself developmentally, that is, in stages, each building itself out the earlier one, is often questioned, even by historians. There is a general sense that the complexity of the world simply does not allow for the kinds of speculative moves that philosophy of history makes. The unease expressed here with speculative philosophy of history betrays a distrust of history itself, of the view that human beings are best understood in terms of various engagements over and in time. In the end, the objection seems to imply that history is not the best overall context within which to understand human beings. The past-present-future complex is simply too complex to be encapsulated within any overarching conception. Historians study the past, social and political theorists study the present, and the future cannot be studied because it is not yet and we cannot know what impact we are having on the future, nor predict how the future will deal with what we are bequeathing it.

Indeed, the twentieth century has taught us that we should temper our attempts to master the dynamics of history because such projects of mastery can lead to disastrous consequences. The spaces of "reason-ability" can feed
into projects that seem far from reasonable—colonial conquest and imperial expansion, on the one hand, or ethnic reaction and other forms of retrenchment, on the other. It would be better to be wary of such grandiose schemes that seek to order the historical process in terms of either its dynamics or its telos. If we want to continue to be critical of present developments, then we should focus our attention on having them be true to the professed values and commitments that are said to animate them, and control, as best we can, the unintended and unexpected effects of what actually materializes.

In the next Part I will attempt to show that there is something to the "realistic" objection to the "idealist" pretensions of speculative philosophy of history, its attempt to understand human history as a developmental whole that focuses on the development of reason and the spaces in which it flourishes. That is, although Hegel's speculative philosophy of history is an improvement on Kant's, insofar as it provides a better account of how the telos of history can be seen to arise out of the dynamics of history, its consideration of those dynamics as structured by mutual recognition may in the end result in satisfying itself too quickly with unduly restricted spaces of developing freedom.

However, we should not let such considerations lead us to abandon our concern with the movement of history itself and the sense that it might have.
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