

Foreword

Today the institutions of freedom stand in grave jeopardy, threatened by the rise of authoritarian movements who rule or contest political power in much of the world. The challenge they represent cannot be refuted with the theoretical arsenal provided by the Enlightenment. Although Enlightenment thinkers advance freedom of thought, of conduct, and of artistic creation as the answer to dogmatic tradition, they do so by treating self-determination as a foundational principle of justification. Self-determination is thereby misconceived to be a privileged determiner of theory, practice, and artistry, whereby truth, right, and beauty possess validity by having it conferred upon them by an antecedent principle of autonomy. Whereas self-determination is what it determines itself to be, the principle of freedom to which the Enlightenment appeals has a given character that determines something other than itself. In this way, Enlightenment figures take the conditions of knowing to determine knowable objectivity, subjecting every possible object of experience to the external necessity that cognitive structure imposes upon them. Thereby the self-activity of life, of subjectivity, and of freedom are excluded from the domain of truth, enfeebling any rational defense of autonomy. Similarly, Enlightenment thinkers treat freedom as a liberty given by nature that serves as the principle of ethical construction, reducing right to a derivative instrument for upholding personal property with the consent of the governed. Not only does this leave the validity of liberty a questionable assumption, but it reduces the domain of freedom to a formal framework in which household, social, and political self-determination have no justifiable place. As for aesthetic worth, the Enlightenment leaves it determined by the process of aesthetic judgment, depriving beauty of its constitutive exemplary individuality, robbing artistry of its unique creativity, and blocking aesthetic criticism from evaluating the unity of configuration and fundamental meaning in the individual work of fine art.

For the critics of the Enlightenment project, it is all too easy to follow Nietzsche and deconstruct rationality as a will to power; where all attempts at justification assert norms rooted in a foundation whose privilege is ultimately arbitrary. This renders all assertions of truth, right, and beauty attempts to dominate others with standards that have no other basis than the particular character of whoever asserts them. For Nietzsche, this leaves just one will to power preeminent over all others—the brazen assertion of value as nothing but an attempt to dominate proceeding from a specific will that dispenses with all the sanctimonious hypocrisy of claiming universal validity for its particular agenda. This recipe for fascist domination receives its most potent political theorization in the work of Carl Schmitt. Every one of the signal features of Schmitt's characterization of politics rests on the supposed impossibility of providing non-arbitrary political principles. Instead, all attempts at political justifica-

tion are exercises in political theology, resting on faith, leaving political unity depending upon opposition to some foe, and leaving the political order resting on a decision, whereby a sovereign power chooses whether to declare or end a state of emergency and a dictatorship that is always permissible.

Hegel may have preceded both Nietzsche and Schmitt but on three accounts his *Philosophy of Right* provides the conceptual tools to rebut their challenge while overcoming the limits of the Enlightenment. First, Hegel shows how normative justification can never rest upon privileged foundations. On their own terms, such foundations can only be legitimated by resting upon themselves, but once this is acknowledged, the difference between what confers and what possesses validity is eliminated, leaving self-determination the one and only substance of normativity. Second, Hegel shows how self-determination consists in the reality of a self-sustaining system of rights, including not just property, but moral, household, social, and political rights as well. Third, Hegel shows how the institutions of political freedom have their distinct political identity by integrating all the pre-political freedoms under the sway of self-government, without need of appealing to any external opposition to political foes.

Few readers of Hegel have fully recognized these key features of his *Philosophy of Right* and fewer still have seen how they provide the resources for escaping the pitfalls of the Enlightenment and refuting the political fascism of Nietzsche and Schmitt.

Markos Haile Feseha is an exception and his book, *The Modern Problem of Political Sovereignty: Hegel's Post-Schmittian Solution*, makes a major contribution towards theoretically justifying the modern institutions of freedom and undermining the theory of those who threaten all our rights today.

Feseha's work does this by interpreting and applying to Schmitt's political fascism the key insights of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* that transcend the opposition of the Enlightenment and its authoritarian critics. Feseha addresses how the *Philosophy of Right* provides an ethics without foundations and then proceeds to examine how political freedom retains its defining character in subordinating civil society and its economic activity under the universal pursuits of self-government. Feseha further explores how Hegel's account of the head of state sustains the hegemony of politics over society. With these achievements in hand, Feseha is able to show how Hegel's conception can demolish each of the principal arguments of Schmitt's political theory.

At this pivotal time in world history, we cannot afford to ignore the questions and answers that Feseha here puts before us.

Richard Dien Winfield