

James Doull And The Philosophic Task Of Our Time

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1. Hegel And The Philosophic Task Of Our Time

In an essay published in 1973 James Doull defined the organization of contemporary society in terms of two principles, “an unlimited technical and economic expansion” and “the utopian confidence that men can live together in unity of purpose.”¹ His purpose was to demonstrate the continuing validity of the tripartite Hegelian analysis of the modern state against subsequent criticism. He located the first tendency in the conflict of self-interested particular wills characteristic of civil society and the second in the construction of concrete universality in the state. Thus, “the philosophical interest of the present time does not lie any longer in the philosophies of subjective will. Their common problem was solved long since in the Hegelian phenomenology.”² The continuing validity of the Hegelian analysis of the modern state was understood to be the institutional separation and relation between family, civil society and the state in which the conceptual relationship between immediate undifferentiated universality, the reflective self-interested particularity of subjective will, and reflective mediated concrete universality was rooted in historical actuality. His argument against critics of Hegel was that any attempt to undermine this tripartite structure would be a regression. Specifically, liberalism and “anarchic individualism” simply propagate subjective will and do not see its necessary supercession in which “society is common work of promoting what is useful to its members singly and collectively.”³ In this respect Marxism contains a valid legacy of Hegel insofar as it understands civil society as “the total conflict of particular personality and economic life” and “socialism is in truth this conflict overcome inwardly as well as in the structure of society.”⁴ The philosophic task of our time is thus to promote the universal will inherent in the state as against the partial realization of modernity in the particular will and to diagnose the failure of cultural currents that do not attain this understanding.

¹ James Doull, “Hegel and Contemporary Liberalism, Anarchism, Socialism: A Defence of the Rechtsphilosophie Against Marx and his Contemporary Followers” in J.J. O’Malley, et. al., *The Legacy of Hegel* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973) p. 226.

² *Ibid*, p. 228.

³ *Ibid*, pp. 234, 240.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 247.

Defence of the tripartite Hegelian understanding of modern society and thus of the Hegelian understanding of the philosophic task of our time was a persistent feature of Doull's work from this 1973 essay until his very last work. However, despite his acceptance of the Hegelian diagnosis of the philosophical task of our time, Doull does make two important critiques of what we might call "actually-existing Hegel" in favour of a more thoroughgoing and contemporary Hegelianism. He notes that the Hegelian synthesis in the 19th century occurred within nation-states on the European model of a people with a historico-cultural unity (nation) achieving its own state. In contrast, American states are more advanced because they are not nation-states but Federal states whose unity lies in a constitutional order embracing all individuals rather than a previously existing people.⁵ Secondly, the Hegelian 19th century synthesis occurred only within particular nation-states whereas our situation is to find ways of addressing this task in a post-national condition.⁶

2. The Universal Will Of The State

The problem with the Marxist continuation of the Hegelian analysis is, in Doull's view, that it results in "an unmediated fusion of natural will with the universal."⁷ Doull's source for this interpretation of Marxism is a passage from the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* in which communism is presented as the synthesis of naturalism and humanism, existence and essence, objectivation and free activity, freedom and necessity, and individual and genus. Return into self-consciousness of the universal is thus understood to cancel the stage of particular will such that "the inner development of this principle has not taken place, namely of opposition of particular wills to the universal and the resolution of this opposition."⁸ Marxism's naturalism seeks to reach universality by leaping over the necessary separation of particular will from immediate universality. Its universality aims directly to synthesize natural immediacy with self-conscious mediation by rejecting the particular subjective will outright rather than surpassing it dialectically.

Doull's interpretation may be taken to contain considerable historical insight into the totalitarian consequences of Fascism and Communism in suppressing the necessary moment of particular will. Such unmediated universality actually entails a regression comparable to ancient political forms in which the rights of particular will had not yet emerged. Indeed, insofar as it is a regression, it takes a more extreme form than the ancient polities themselves. However, it may well be doubted whether this historical

⁵ James Doull, "The Philosophical Basis of Constitutional Discussion in Canada" in David G. Peddle and Neil G. Robertson (eds.) *Philosophy and Freedom: The Legacy of James Doull* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003) p. 402-3. Originally published in *Animus*, Vol. 5, 2000. See also David G. Peddle and Neil G. Robertson, "North American Freedom: James Doull's Recent Political Thought" also in *Philosophy and Freedom*, pp. 476-80.

⁶ James Doull, "Hegel's Phenomenology and Post-Modern Thought," in *Philosophy and Freedom*, p. 294; Doull, "Hegel and Contemporary Liberalism, Anarchism, Socialism," p. 248.

⁷ James Doull, "Hegel and Contemporary Liberalism, Anarchism, Socialism," p. 247.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 244.

insight applies to Marxism itself or the whole of Marxism. Shlomo Avineri had, in his commentary to Doull's paper in the same volume, already raised the issue of whether there is an "uncritical equation of Marxism, or socialism, with the Soviet Union or the other countries that claim to be Marxist today" in this account.⁹ It is not possible in this note to get into the much-debated issue within Marxism of the role of Marx's *1844 Manuscripts* in Marx's development and in the formulation of Marxism itself. Suffice it to say that Doull's historical insight must carry the qualification that the relation of Marxism to Communism remains assumed rather than shown. The historical insight was developed further in Doull's late essay "Hegel's *Phenomenology* and Post-Modern Thought" where it provided the basis for a diagnosis of the two dominant cultural tendencies of our current time. An outright acceptance of global technological culture brooking no critique co-exists with a primitivist finite naturalism due, precisely, to the failure to actualize the Hegelian surpassing of particular will by concrete universality. The philosophical task of our time, now called post-modern (due to limiting the term modern to the early modern emancipation of particular will), remains identical. "Considered from the side of the Hegelian philosophy, 'post-modernity' is the concrete unity of nature and thought as it appears in the *Sittlichkeit* of the family, society, and state set forth in the *Philosophy of Right*."¹⁰

In commenting on Doull's defence of the necessity, though inadequacy, of particular will and its institutional expression in civil society, Avineri pointed out that Doull's Hegelian claim that "the practical interest of the present age is transparently that science and technology be brought under universal will, and that individuals have their particular freedom explicitly and primarily therein" might itself be considered "what Marxism and socialism are all about."¹¹ Indeed, were the naturalism of the *1844 Manuscripts* to be considered, as it is by many Marxists, as a passing phase in Marx's development, it might be suggested that the Marxist and Hegelian versions of the philosophic task of our time are identical in demanding a supercession of civil society by the universal will of the state that preserves the necessity and validity of particular will—especially in light of Doull's two revisions of Hegel's idea of reconciliation within the 19th century nation-state which might well converge with the internationalism and non-national individual of Marxism.

3. Propertylessness as Lack of Effective Will

Where the Marxist and Hegelian tasks differ, however, is in whether civil society as the institutional actuality of particular will must remain alongside its preservation and cancellation in the state or whether it should be annulled institutionally by its dialectical surpassing. As Hegel noted, subjective particular will has no place in the world unless it is externalized. "As the private particularity of knowing and willing, the principle of this system of needs contains absolute universality, the universality of freedom, only abstractly

⁹ Shlomo Avineri, "Comment on Doull's 'Hegel and Contemporary Liberalism, Anarchism, Socialism'" in *The Legacy of Hegel*, p. 249.

¹⁰ James Doull, "Hegel's *Phenomenology* and Post-Modern Thought," p. 291.

¹¹ Shlomo Avineri, "Comment on Doull's ...," p. 252, citing Doull on p. 229.

and therefore as the principle of property.”¹² Relevant to this difference is the argument made by Marx throughout the period 1843-5 concerning the definition of civil society as the sphere of conflicting particular wills. He asserted that there is “a class in civil society which is not a class of civil society” such that “when the proletariat demands the negation of private property it only lays down as a principle for society what society has already made a principle for the proletariat, and what the latter already involuntarily embodies as the negative result of society.”¹³ Also, “the proletariat and wealth are opposites. As such they form a whole. ... [T]he proletariat itself can and must liberate itself. ... It cannot do so without destroying *all* the inhuman living conditions of contemporary society which are concentrated in its own situation.”¹⁴ The necessary externalization of particular will in property contains a contradiction between property-holders and the propertyless. The fundamental character of civil society is thus not the conflict of a plurality of particular wills but the systemic contradiction between two opposed classes who only together form the whole. The persistence of civil society does not guarantee that the particular will is not suppressed but rather guarantees that particular wills remain subservient to their formation into classes and the interests of those classes as a whole.

Thus, while there is a certain formulation of the philosophical task of our time that unites Hegel and Marx in the socialist task of bringing science and technology under the universal will, there is another sense in which the Marxist task of the emancipation of the proletariat diverges from this socialist task. They are rooted in the difference between understanding capitalism as a market-dominated society and as a form of production of goods. This is the difference that Marx marked in the transition between Parts 1 and 2 of the first volume of *Capital* in which “the consumption of labour-power is completed, as in the case of every other commodity, outside the limits of the market or of the sphere of circulation.”¹⁵ The mature Marx understood the historically-produced existence of propertyless proletarians as the condition for the appearance of labour-power as a commodity in the sphere of circulation. These two different understandings have co-existed within Marxism considered as an historical force. When Lenin defined capitalism as “the anarchy of the market” he accepted the common Hegelian-Marxist task of a universal steering of science and technology through the state alongside the specifically Marxist argument for the abolition of civil society. This development indeed succumbs to Doull’s critique of a regressive suppression of particular will. Indeed, Doull’s critical analysis states that both existentialist nationalism and (supposedly) universalist Marxism “had to appropriate the spiritual resources of the state” to attain dominance.¹⁶ It does so, however, by ignoring entirely the problem of the externalization of the particular will in property from which Marxism developed. It is this issue which gives rise to the

¹² G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969) p. 134.

¹³ Karl Marx, “Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right: Introduction*” (1843) in Robert C. Tucker (ed.) *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: Norton, 1978) pp. 64, 65. Emphases removed.

¹⁴ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, “Alienation and Social Classes” an excerpt from *The Holy Family* (1845) in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, p. 134.

¹⁵ Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1970) p. 175-6.

¹⁶ James Doull, “Hegel’s Phenomenology and Post-Modern Thought,” p. 295; see also, James Doull, “Hegel and Contemporary Liberalism, Anarchism, Socialism,” p. 230.

specifically Marxist version of the philosophic task of our time, the emancipation of the propertyless.

4. Workers' Democracy As Effective Universality

The suppression of civil society might not take the form described by Doull if it were not to be suppressed by the state acting as the agent of the concrete universal, if it were not suppressed from outside, but by the entry of the concerns of the universal into the standpoint of the actor within civil society. How might this happen? There was an important Marxist tendency in the early 20th century called council communism, disparaged by Lenin as an “infantile disorder,” that was concerned to orient the production of goods on the basis of workers’ democracy. It is well known that, while the Bolsheviks used the slogan “All power to the Soviets” during their fight for power, workers’ councils were quickly and effectively shut down after the revolution—which is logical if the state is understood to be the bearer of universality. The council communist Anton Pannekoek criticized Leninism as “state capitalistic planning of industry which for the workers means just another form of slavery and exploitation.”¹⁷ Paul Mattick has summarized Pannekoek’s communism in these terms: “the workers organise themselves and society in such a way as to assure a planned social production and distribution determined by the producers themselves.”¹⁸

If the process of production were to be democratically organized it would mean that the concrete universal would dialectically surpass particular will at the point of production itself, not by going beyond market circulation of goods but by entering into their production. It might well be argued that workers’ democracy of this sort is exactly the politics implied by the specifically Marxist critique of class and property. However, this critique is not the exclusive property of the council communists. It is also an important trend in anarchism. Kropotkin put it clearly when he argued for “a society where each individual is a producer of both manual and intellectual work; where each able-bodied human being is a worker, and where each worker works in both the field and the industrial workshop; where every aggregation of individuals, large enough to dispose of a certain variety of natural resources—it may be a nation, or rather a region—produces and itself consumes most of its own agricultural and manufactured produce.”¹⁹ In this case, the suppression of civil society as a separate sphere would not imply the suppression of particular will as such. The politically active worker at work would experience there the separation and dialectical surpassing of particular will by universality. In short, the institutional separation of civil society which Hegelians demand for the protection of the rights of the individual might not be necessary if another, possibly superior, institution were designed in which the dialectic between particular will and universality were the main issue.

¹⁷ Anton Pannekoek, *Lenin as Philosopher* (London: Merlin Press, 1975) p. 119.

¹⁸ Paul Mattick, “Anton Pannekoek (1873-1960)” in *ibid.*, p. 132.

¹⁹ Peter Kropotkin, *Fields, Factories and Workshops of Tomorrow* (New York: Harper, 1974) p. 26

Indeed, one might characterize this solution as an attempt to make property available to all and thus extend the benefits of civil society to all. Within Marxist theory, it has been understood more as the negation of property—where property is understood as exclusive property right—but, as both Hegelians and Marxists know, a negation may also be an affirmation in another sense. C. B. Macpherson understood the rights of workers in the welfare state in these terms. “The rise of the welfare state has created new forms of property and distributed them widely—all of them being rights to a revenue.”²⁰ Neo-liberalism has demanded a retreat from such new property rights but perhaps the task of our time is rather their extension such that they become not only rights to a revenue that mitigate the proletariat’s exclusion from the means of production (in the sense of gaining one’s livelihood) but also from exclusion in the actualization of concrete universality. The origin of this task is in the form in which exclusive particular will involves a rupture with nature. It was expressed with great clarity by Rousseau. “The first person who, having fenced off a plot of ground, took it into his head to say *his is mine* and found people simple enough to believe him, was the true founder of civil society.”²¹ The suppression of civil society in this sense requires an institutional protection of particular will which can be found in the notion of access to property in the sense of a right to participate in the economic foundation of society. This is an alternative formulation of the philosophical task of our time—call it anarcho-communist—which originates, however, in the same critique of the universalization of particular will that animates the Hegelian and Marxist task.

5. Conclusion: Self-Rule As The Philosophic Task Of Our Time

My argument for workers’ democracy as an effective universality that includes the moment of particular will implies that the philosophic task of our time is the realization of self-rule. This would be the unfinished task of modernity. It could not be the purpose of this short note to address all of the philosophical and practical problems confronting the realization of self-rule in our time. My comment has been limited to showing that this task is reasonable in the context of the Hegelian analysis of modern society. This task requires concretization with regard to exactly the two points on which Doull found it necessary to revise actually-existing Hegelianism: internationalism and federalism. Perhaps it is even the case that the historic transformation of Marxism from a theory of workers’ self-rule into an apology for state socialism (or state capitalism) is due precisely to its confinement within the 19th century nation-state—a historical situation that it escaped only in theory.

The realization of self-rule implies that the Hegelian analysis of the relationship between particular will and concrete universality must be re-thought. The reflective, mediated, concrete universality that Hegel attributed to the nation-state has been found to

²⁰ C. B. Macpherson, “A Political Theory of Property” in *Democratic Theory: Essays in Retrieval* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973) p. 131.

²¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality*, trans. Roger D. Masters (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1964) p. 141.

have shifted its location. Doull argued that this set a transformed internationalist and federalist task for a contemporary Hegelianism. The “state” in Hegelian terms is thus not simply the state (or nation-state or nations-state) of sociological observation. Pertinent to this rethinking is the observation by the great political sociologist Rodberto Michels of the “iron law of oligarchy” that attended the social democratic parties when they achieved state power and which applies with even less reservation to Communist parties. “[T]he appearance of oligarchical phenomena in the very bosom of the revolutionary parties is a conclusive proof of the existence of immanent oligarchical tendencies in every kind of human organization which strives for the attainment of definite ends.”²² The state in a sociological sense seems not only not to fulfil the task of the state in the Hegelian sense but to be a positive barrier to it. As Graeme Nicholson has said, we now experience “the degeneration of the state into *Technik*.”²³

If the apparently universal institution of the state has degenerated due to the failure to realize self-rule, it is also the case that particular will takes a different form than that assigned by Hegel. After all, the Hegelian task of subordinating science and technology to universality has not, as Doull’s cultural analysis demonstrates, been very successful. Yet Doull consistently interpreted technology and the bureaucratic apparatus attendant upon contemporary technology as “particular will” in the Hegelian sense, which he had to do in order to argue that the Hegelian philosophic task of the realization of concrete universality was still our own.²⁴ In his critique of George Grant, he rendered Grant’s Heideggerian conception of technology in such Hegelian terms.²⁵ To interpret science-based technology, which is actualized by huge social organizations and concentration of resources, and which disrupts even the balance of nature, as an instance of the conflict of particular wills in civil society, and thus as implying that its problems could be addressed by a sufficiently interventionist state, is to minimize the difficulties facing self-rule in our time.

Re-thinking the relation between particular will and concrete universality in the light of the project of self-rule might thus imply breaking the bounds of a Hegelian dialectic altogether, but this suggestion goes beyond the argument of this note, which was solely to justify the realization of self-rule as an authentically modern project and as a candidate for the philosophic task of our time.

²² Robert Michels, *Political Parties*, trans. Eden and Cedar Paul (New York: Dover, 1959) p. 11.

²³ Graeme Nicholson, “Heidegger and the Dialectic of Modernity” in *Philosophy and Freedom*, p. 390.

²⁴ James Doull, “Hegel and Contemporary Liberalism, Anarchism, Socialism,” pp. 226, 228, 229; James Doull, “Heidegger and the State” in David G. Peddle and Neil G. Robertson (eds.) *Philosophy and Freedom: The Legacy of James Doull* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003) p. 357-8, 365, 368-9; James Doull, “The Doull-Fackenheim Debate: Would Hegel Today be a Hegelian?” in *ibid*, pp. 340-1; Graeme Nicholson, “Heidegger and the Dialectic of Modernity,” pp. 387-8, 390; David G. Peddle and Neil G. Robertson, “North American Freedom: James Doull’s Recent Political Thought,” pp. 477-8.

²⁵ James Doull, “Heidegger and the State,” p. 375; David G. Peddle and Neil G. Robertson, “Lamentation and Speculation: George Grant, James Doull and the Possibility of Canada” in *Animus*, Vol. 7, 2002, pp. 14-5.