**Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831)**

**Reality and the Rational Process**

According to Hegel, reality is Absolute Mind, Reason, or Spirit, which manifests itself in both natural and human history. This Mind is universal and therefore cannot be identified with the mind of any particular person. Rather, each particular mind is an aspect of this World Mind (*Weltgeist*), and the consciousness and rational activity of each person is a phase of the [absolute](https://mail.chicousd.org/owa/redir.aspx?C=eca75ae7906844fca81376a34bcb4cfd&URL=http%3a%2f%2fgme.grolier.com%2farticle%3fassetid%3d0000920-0) itself. This activity of Mind is dialectical in nature. Hegel was preoccupied with triadic development, one phase demanding the next by an inner necessity. In this development, known as the Hegelian [dialectic](https://mail.chicousd.org/owa/redir.aspx?C=eca75ae7906844fca81376a34bcb4cfd&URL=http%3a%2f%2fgme.grolier.com%2farticle%3fassetid%3d0084530-0), one concept, the thesis, is followed by its opposite, the antithesis; the ensuing conflict between the two is brought together at a higher level as a new concept, or synthesis, which becomes the thesis of yet another triad.

Hegel's famous dictum that "the real is rational and the rational real" can thus be understood as an expression of the identity of reality and the rational process. Because reality is rational, it acts in accordance with the laws of reasoning. At the same time, the laws of reasoning (dialectics) are real and not mere human conventions. To understand the nature of thought, then, is to understand the nature of reality as a whole. The science of [logic](https://mail.chicousd.org/owa/redir.aspx?C=eca75ae7906844fca81376a34bcb4cfd&URL=http%3a%2f%2fgme.grolier.com%2farticle%3fassetid%3d0175320-0) is the most nearly basic form in which the process of reason is to be apprehended. Even nature manifests the dialectical activity of Mind and is to be studied from a rational perspective rather than from a more limited empirical one.

**Art, Religion, and Philosophy**

The dynamic activity of Mind is also apparent in human affairs. Art is the immediate, sensuous expression of creative Reason as it represents itself to itself. Although the artist may not be aware of the ultimate rational process alive in the work of creation, the philosopher is, and thus the philosopher can study art for the representation of reality that it really is. Hegel also found that the philosopher could understand [religion](https://mail.chicousd.org/owa/redir.aspx?C=eca75ae7906844fca81376a34bcb4cfd&URL=http%3a%2f%2fgme.grolier.com%2farticle%3fassetid%3d0245030-0) as more than traditional, symbolic ritual. He held that in general religion is the highest nonrational manifestation of the Absolute. In Christianity, the highest evolution of religious expression, the concept of the [incarnation](https://mail.chicousd.org/owa/redir.aspx?C=eca75ae7906844fca81376a34bcb4cfd&URL=http%3a%2f%2fgme.grolier.com%2farticle%3fassetid%3d0146740-0) symbolically reflects the truth that the infinite is manifest in the finite and not distinct from it.

For Hegel, the nature of Mind could most immediately and clearly be known in philosophy. Here Reason is truly revealed as reason and rational process. Through the concepts of philosophy, the philosopher may know Reason as it has been and as it is in itself. The history of philosophy thus reveals the development of Mind itself in its quest for its own unification and actualization. The greater the historical perspective accorded the philosopher, the greater and richer the vision of the system and of Reason's own self-comprehension in the system. According to this view, Hegel's own system would seem to represent the ultimate achievement of Reason; yet philosophy can only contemplate the past and the immediate present, which is the swiftly changing result of the past. Philosophy "paints gray on gray," and Hegel generally refrained from predicting future manifestations of Mind in any area.

**The Progress of History**

Absolute Mind further manifests itself in the subjective consciousness of the individual, who undergoes a process of development from a purely materialistic and subjectivistic state to a state of universal and rational consciousness. At the same time, the individual passes through several objective phases—family, society, state—each of which represents a move from subjectivity to objectivity, from partiality to unity. Human [history](https://mail.chicousd.org/owa/redir.aspx?C=eca75ae7906844fca81376a34bcb4cfd&URL=http%3a%2f%2fgme.grolier.com%2farticle%3fassetid%3d0139020-0) in general is the progressive move from bondage to freedom. Such freedom is achieved only as the partial and incomplete desires of the one are overcome and integrated into the unified system of the [state](https://mail.chicousd.org/owa/redir.aspx?C=eca75ae7906844fca81376a34bcb4cfd&URL=http%3a%2f%2fgme.grolier.com%2farticle%3fassetid%3d0275735-0) in which the will of one is replaced by the will of all. In this doctrine of the priority of the state, Hegel rejected the individualism expressed in both the [American Revolution](https://mail.chicousd.org/owa/redir.aspx?C=eca75ae7906844fca81376a34bcb4cfd&URL=http%3a%2f%2fgme.grolier.com%2farticle%3fassetid%3d0009770-0) and the French. Such individualism runs directly contrary to the nature of humanity and reality, for the individual has value and reality only as a part of a greater and unified whole.

This view of history and of the state ultimately contributed to sharp divisions among Hegelians. What began as disagreements about religion soon developed into left-wing and right-wing political theories. Among the most prominent left-wing, or radical, Hegelians was Karl [Marx](https://mail.chicousd.org/owa/redir.aspx?C=eca75ae7906844fca81376a34bcb4cfd&URL=http%3a%2f%2fgme.grolier.com%2farticle%3fassetid%3d0186400-0), who turned the dialectic of Spirit into a dialectic of economic conditions that would culminate in the revolutionary triumph of the working class. Right-wing Hegelians, on the other hand, tended to stress the necessity of the unified state and thus contributed directly both to the growth of [nationalism](https://mail.chicousd.org/owa/redir.aspx?C=eca75ae7906844fca81376a34bcb4cfd&URL=http%3a%2f%2fgme.grolier.com%2farticle%3fassetid%3d0204760-0) and to the unification of Germany.

Moore, J. T. "Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich." *Grolier Multimedia Encyclopedia.* Grolier Online, 2013. Web.

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