

Hegel on Death and War

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Abstract

Hegel sees war as contributing positively to the experience of social and political life. Of course, his support for war is qualified in that the overall aim is to maintain peace and to mitigate the violence and destruction of warfare. Nonetheless Hegel takes individual citizens to appreciate the achievement of social and political life in the light of war, and how the patriotism evidenced in war reinforces their recognition of the freedom and unity of public life. Hegel's support for war arises in part out of a realism that he shares with Hobbes. But he also considers the significance of war on more general philosophical grounds. War, like the life and death struggle between individuals that is set out in the *Phenomenology*, plays a role in the development of recognition. If the life and death struggle brings out the sociality of recognition. War is a graphic reminder of the social and public operation of freedom. While Hegel's philosophical justification of war and death make sense in the context of his wider philosophy, his dramatic depiction of death and war tend to supersede the systematic limits of his philosophy. They are excessive in a way that is similar to the figurative language of Hobbes's *Leviathan* that supersedes Hobbes's own sense of the limits of language.

Hegel, war, death, recognition, freedom, realism, Hobbes, system, excess

1. Introduction

In his 1970 song "War" Edwin Starr declared that war was good, for absolutely nothing. Bob Dylan in *The Philosophy of Modern Song*, perhaps surprisingly, critiques the song's sentiments and urges that war can be good for lots things, including reopening trade routes,

freeing people from slavery and oppression and raising spirits.¹ While Dylan's comments are plausible, they appear odd. For one thing, does Dylan really think a song, which seemed to have been designed only to give Tamla Motown an appearance of radical credibility, is worth discussing? Its oddness is reinforced by its jarring with standard radical and liberal attitudes to war. It is unusual for a liberal or radical to justify war in general, even if they might support a particular war. This reluctance to support the general cause of war breeds uneasiness in reading Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel on war. Instead of stepping back and regretting war, Hegel launches a defence of war, in which he lauds what it has to offer. There are few, outside of the far right, who defend the experience of war, given its association with death, violence, rape and disruption. Notwithstanding a willingness on the part of many on the left, as well as the right, to support particular causes—for instance, Ukraine's defence of its territory against Russian aggression, or the UK continuing the war against Nazi Germany after Dunkirk—for many there is a reluctance to commit to the cause of war. It is at best a practical necessity. Its wild-eyed supporters, and the martial spirit it conjures, are looked upon with suspicion. Likewise Hegel arouses suspicion. A philosopher who supports the cause of war, and who sees ethical fulfilment in fighting for a non-democratic regime, is not to be trusted.

Hegel's support for war arouses suspicion and downright hostility. It is what most arouses distrust in Hegel. Liberal theorists, such as Karl Popper, R.G. Collingwood, and Bertrand Russell, who are suspicious of Hegel's elaborate metaphysics, see his vindication of war as confirmation of his unacceptability.² This essay deals with Hegel and war, and argues that Hegel's justification of war is sophisticated and multi-dimensional. It is true that Hegel's

¹ Bob Dylan, *The Philosophy of Modern Song* (London, Simon and Shuster, 2022), 212

² See R.G. Collingwood, *The New Leviathan* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1992), Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies vol. 2* (London, Routledge, 1945) and Bertrand Russell, *The History of Western Philosophy* (London, Routledge, 2004).

defence of war is involved in his metaphysics, but this is not a reason to condemn Hegel or war. Hegel's justification of war does not derive either from an appreciation of violence or from a blinkered nationalism in which only one nation matters. Hegel's metaphysics is centrally concerned with making sense out of human circumstances and beliefs. He is not a metaphysical dogmatist, but he does maintain that we cannot ignore aspects of experience that bear upon our identity as human beings. For Hegel, the possibility of death and the prospect of war are aspects of the human condition, and so his philosophy does not deny them. Hence the *Phenomenology of Spirit* which establishes the conditions of self-consciousness, includes a section on the life and death struggle as part of the processes of mutual recognition.³ Likewise the *Philosophy of Right* acknowledges war to be part of the social and political condition.⁴ Hegel's realism can be taken to resemble that of Thomas Hobbes. Hobbes sees the logical foundation of political association in the ever-present possibility of warfare in the state of nature, and imagines states as ever liable to go to war against one another. Hobbes and Hegel share a realism about war and death that takes the idea of universal peace to be an illusory pipedream that shies away from the realities of life and death. Hobbes is certainly closer to Hegel than is standardly maintained, for Hobbes recognises that the motivation of individuals to conflict with one another arises from social reasons, notably their fear of a dishonourable death, rather than from a mere desire for mere self-preservation.⁵

Yet we should not see Hegel as simply following Hobbes. For Hobbes, political association does not shape or alter the fundamental drives of individual human beings. They remain fundamentally self-interested. For Hegel, however, individuals are not fixed, and his

³ G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. J.B. Bailee (London: George, Allen & Unwin, 1971).

⁴ G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967).

⁵ See Gary Browning, "The Politics of Recognition: Life and Death Struggles in Hobbes and Hegel," *Hobbes Studies* 28 (2015), 3-17.

metaphysics incorporates multiple forms of recognition that lead to their mutual appreciation of their freedom. Individuals are self-constituted in developmental ways, and that development can also be seen as taking place over time. For Hegel, war and death play roles in the economy of existence that allow for human growth and self-realization. Paradoxically, when seen in the context of multiple forms of recognition, war plays a vital role in enabling individuals to recognise and hence realise their identities. This role of war in Hegel's wider scheme of philosophy tends to be ignored or played down by modern and careful commentators on Hegel.⁶ We might be chary of following Hegel along his metaphysical and martial pathway to freedom, but it is neither an unconsidered piece of flag-waving nor one which ignores considerations of welfare and the mitigation of bloodshed. Hegel's metaphysics locates war and death on a continuum of recognitive experience, and allows us to appreciate how they fit into an integral sense of human freedom and self-awareness. Yet, Hegel's sharp and memorable epithets about death and war, like Hobbes's figurative language on death and war are so striking that they transcend the bounds of his philosophical system. In so doing they resemble Hobbes's evocative use of figurative language, which go beyond his own limits on how language is to be used.

2. *Hegel and Realism*

Routinely, Hegel is condemned for his attitude to war, and often this condemnation runs along with a general revulsion against his alleged conservatism and absorption of moral

⁶ See Robert Devigne, "Hegel's Modern State and the Interrelation of Internal and External Sovereignty," *History of Modern Political Thought*, 42.4 (2022), and Robert Fine, "Contra Leviathan: Hegel's Contribution to Cosmopolitan Critique," in Andrew Buchwalter, *Hegel and Global Justice* (New York and London: Springer, 2012).

issues into a dense web of metaphysical relations that subvert clear-headed thinking. Russell supposes that Hegel can only imagine a hero as a military conqueror, while Popper, in *The Open Society and its Enemies*, takes Hegel to be an uncritical supporter of a repressive Prussian regime and a proto-Nazi for his ardent support for war and military values. According to Popper, “Hegel’s Theory implies that war is good in itself.”⁷ Popper interprets Hegel as endowing the state with divine attributes that would be sacrilegious to question. Hence war requires no justification, as war service is a sacred duty that the state demands. Popper misses the point. Hegel recognises how war is a significant feature of political life, which is to be accounted for, rather than summarily dismissed. Hegel’s realism over the role that war plays in the political world does not render him an unthinking partisan on behalf of war. Hegel is a philosopher, whose signature style is to examine the world, and to consider realistically how it makes sense. His post-Kantian non-dogmatic form of metaphysics is oriented to making sense of experience and its conditions. Demanding or unwelcome aspects of experience are not to be denied. Hegel looks hard at the nature of experience and his dialectal style sees the point of its inter-related conditions as consisting in how they bear upon one another. It is nearly 200 years since the *Philosophy of Right* was published, and the jury on Hegel is still out. Some, like Popper and, from an earlier generation, Karl Marx and Max Stirner, take him to be a dogmatic metaphysician who unthinkingly embraces repressive forces such as war, whereas others see him as more liberal but in doing so tend to underplay Hegel’s willingness to endorse conflictual aspects of experience.⁸

War and death, for Hegel, are part of the human condition. A philosophy which aims to be realistic must accommodate what is real rather than pursue imaginary ideals. A philosophy

⁷ Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* (2004): Popper, *Open Society* (1945), 262.

⁸ See Max Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, ed D. Leopold (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995) and Karl Marx, ‘Critique of *Hegel’s Doctrine of the State* (1843), in K. Marx, *Early Writings* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1975).

which dealt merely with abstract ideas and ignored embodiment, would end up in a rationalism with nothing much to say to embodied individuals, excited by moods and the environment and worried by age and illness. Hegel's commitment to realism involves taking on embodiment, and the physical and emotional aspects of experience. Hence he is prepared to engage with the darker aspects of lived experience. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*—the precursor to a system embracing the totality of experience, nature and social life as well as logic—Hegel imagines conditions which constitute the pathway to knowledge.⁹ Insofar as individuals along the pathway to knowledge engage with one another in exploring and working through their common identity, Hegel imagines the possibility of deep conflict. Individuals on encountering one another might be driven to assert their identity over the claims of others, and in doing so a fight to the death is a possibility. Again, conflict might lead to a relative subjugation of one individual to another. We are all aware of how deep conflicts with others are part of the human condition, and that the intensity of conflict and relationships of dependence, inform us about the limits of experience. Hegel recognises this, and sees such difficult experiences as contributing to a comprehensive form of self-understanding. He is realistic about what experience involves and sees how disturbing forms of experience can be seen to be instructive as well as disconcerting.

Just as in the *Phenomenology*, so in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* and in the *Philosophy of Right* Hegel is prepared to reflect upon disturbing aspects of experience. In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* Hegel acknowledges how history is a slaughter bench, “on which the happiness of nations, the wisdom of states and the virtue of individuals are sacrificed.”¹⁰ Yet he contrives to see a supervening point to historical development insofar as it leads to the growth of freedom. In the *Philosophy of Right* Hegel considers war as a

⁹ G. W. F. Hegel *Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. J. B. Bailee, (London, George, Allen & Unwin, 1971a)

¹⁰ G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, trans. H. B. Nisbet, with an Introduction by Duncan Forbes (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1975), 69.

condition of social and political experience, which plays a role in orienting citizens to the public world of the state and social ethics.¹¹ In critiquing Immanuel Kant's projection of the ideal of perpetual peace, Hegel observes that political authority resides within states and accepts the reality that there is no viable mechanism for ensuring a sustained peace if and when states disagree.¹² If states are determined to prosecute their interests, then war is always a possibility. He notes, "if states disagree, and their particular wills cannot be harmonised the matter can only be settled by war."¹³ Hegel does not give war a blank cheque, overriding all other considerations. Rather, he sees war as a possibility, given the reality of the political landscape, but it is not to be pursued at the expense of peace. War's rationale is that it makes peace possible, rather than providing its own *raison d'être*. Hegel observes, "Hence in war, war itself is characterised as something which ought to pass away."¹⁴ Moreover, Hegel recognises how states are not absolutely independent of one another. A state presumes the existence of other states, and the actuality of a state depends upon its recognition by other states. Hegel is also alive to the possibilities of negotiation between states. Treaties are to be undertaken, and conditions of war are to be agreed, between states which mitigate its effects; civilians are to be protected and humane conditions provided for prisoners of war.

War, then, is not the end goal for states, but it is a phenomenon that contributes to experience. War plays a role in alerting citizens to the possibilities of social and political breakdown. The elaborate structures of social and political life are purposeful and useful, but they are constructed. Hegel is aware that achievements in social and political life are not merely given or natural. He acknowledges that slavery, for instance, is deeply wrong. No person should be treated as an object. Yet Hegel also observes how individuals have in fact been subjected to

¹¹ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 209-212

¹² Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 213.

¹³ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 214.

¹⁴ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 215.

slavery.¹⁵ It is an historic achievement to supersede the institution of slavery. We live in a constructed social and political environment. What is constructed can fall apart. Things can be deconstructed as well as constructed. War is an emphatic way of reminding citizens of the possibility of destruction of all that has been fabricated in social life. War brings home that possibility. Hence citizens are reminded by war of the value and fragility of their political institutions. In highlighting the value of the state, a set of institutions that enables the maintenance of valuable forms of social life, the phenomenon of war exhibits an ethical dimension. Hegel maintains that “The ethical moment in war is not to be regarded as an absolute evil. It is necessary that the finite- property and life- should be definitely established as accidental, because accidentality is the concept of the finite.”¹⁶ War elicits a striking expression of patriotism, which normally is maintained in a less dramatic manner. Patriotism is a crucial ethical phenomenon in that the state for Hegel is a unity composed of its individual citizens, and organised by means of related associational groups and institutions. Individuals within the state can appear as discrete and self-interested, and Hegel takes the modern world to be distinguished by its scope for individual freedom. Yet Hegel also maintains that the unity of citizens is manifested in the state, which enables the freedom of individuals, and also presents the concrete expression of their social and inter- connected freedom. This expression of freedom is realised in the patriotic standpoint of citizens, who can appreciate the unifying activities of the state in its ordinary round of activities in dispensing justice and overseeing civil society. But this realisation of the unifying role of the state is most emphatically present for citizens in their support for the state in times of trouble, and war where the very basis of social and political life is threatened.¹⁷

¹⁵ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 48.

¹⁶ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 209.

¹⁷ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 163–4.

3. *Hegel and Hobbes on War and Conflict*

Hegel's arguments in the *Phenomenology* and in the *Philosophy of Right* on death and war bear an affinity with those of Hobbes in the *Leviathan*.¹⁸ This likeness is underlined by Hegel's commentary on Hobbes in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. Hegel admires the realism of Hobbes, who recognises how individuals can act in terms of their self-interest and he also appreciates Hobbes' assimilation of scientific advances in the 17th Century.¹⁹ Like Hegel, and as is observed by Michael Oakeshott, Hobbes sees political association as involving construction.²⁰ The state is an artificial construction, rather than a natural phenomenon. While Hobbes invokes laws of nature to explain political commitment, these laws function as counsels of prudence guiding constructive activity, rather than as absolute moral determinants of conduct. Hobbes imagines a form of life and death struggle, which is invoked as a thought experiment to explain the logic of political association. To consider the motivation to form a political association, Hobbes does not look to high-minded ideals or moral duties that are ascribed by God. Rather, he imagines the impetus to the formation of a political association to consist in reflection upon the possibility of chronic and mortal conflict in a state of nature. In such a dire situation, it makes sense to seek the peace and to establish a commonwealth. The logic of sovereignty is located in the propensity for chronic conflict in a state of nature, where political states do not exist to keep the peace. Like Hegel again, the on-going practice of state sovereignty is identified in the state being the arbiter of war and peace. The state makes war, and although natural laws might counsel peace, there is no worldly

¹⁸ Hegel, *Phenomenology and Philosophy of Right*, and Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. R. Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

¹⁹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. 3 trans. E.S. Haldane and F. H. Simpson (London: Kegan Paul, Trench and Trubner, 1892), 317.

²⁰ Browning, "The Politics of Recognition: Life and Death Struggles in Hobbes and Hegel," 7-9, and Michael Oakeshott, "The Moral Life in the Writings of Thomas Hobbes," in *Hobbes on Civil Association* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975).

body that can prevent war when states determine to wage one. War and conflict are crucial determinants of political and social action, for Hobbes, as they are for Hegel.

It might be thought that Hobbes's radical individualism separates him from Hegel. Yet the differences between Hobbes and Hegel on this score should not be overplayed. On the one hand, Hegel aims to incorporate individualism into his complex rational modern political community. Individuals in Hegel's state pursue their individual careers and the market allocates goods in response to individual preferences. On the other hand, Hobbes's world is one in which individuals are influenced by social considerations. In Hobbes's state of nature individuals pursue felicity, and prioritise the acquisition of power to achieve felicity. Felicity, in turn is attached to pride, and pride is achieved by enjoying precedence over others in satisfying desires so as to realise felicity. In the state of nature power cannot be guaranteed, where a rough equality exists between individuals, and a prospective life and death struggle with others runs the risk of defeat and an inglorious death. Death is inglorious when it occurs suddenly at the hands of a competitor. Death is evidently something to be avoided as it ends the prospect of felicity, but an inglorious death is so much worse as it offends against a man's pride. Its prospect motivates individuals to seek a civil remedy for the problems of the state of nature. The atmosphere of the state of nature and the impetus to form a commonwealth are socially inflected by considerations of pride and the shame attaching to inglorious death. In constructing a political commonwealth, Hobbes is also highlighting the need for social and political construction. Collingwood, shrewdly, sees the social contract in *Leviathan* as a metaphor for the social creative and dynamic aspects of human beings.²¹

If Hobbes and Hegel are close in their readings of death and war, they remain distinct in their philosophical understanding of politics. Hobbes begins and ends his political theory with

²¹ Collingwood, *The New Leviathan*, 261–5.

individuals, whose motivations and self-understanding are unchanged by their engagement with the political.²² They are self-interested at the start, and remain so at the end of the process. The construction of a political commonwealth, for Hobbes, remedies the problems emanating from the fixed conceptions of self and self-achievement which from the outset motivate individuals. These conceptions of the self are inflected by social considerations but individuals never assume a social perspective, whereby they see themselves as identifying with one another in a community. For Hegel, on the other hand, individuals do not always see themselves clearly. The odyssey of the *Phenomenology* is set in train by a failure of an individual to account for their own claims to knowledge. Truth is outside them. To develop a fulfilling sense of their own identity and understanding of the world they have to engage with another self-consciousness. This unleashes a struggle for recognition, which continues throughout Hegel's system, until individuals can recognise themselves in a political community, which provides the social basis for the achievement for absolute knowledge and an appreciation of the truth that emerges in religious practice, artistic insight, and absolute philosophical knowledge. The development of individuals by their participation in forms of recognition, which are ever more satisfying and equilibrated, entails that the self for Hegel changes perspective radically. It develops, unlike the Hobbesian self. The contrast between the Hegelian self and the Hobbesian one is evident in an individual's willingness to participate in war. The individual's readiness to go to war in Hegel's rational community contrasts with the Hobbesian individual who retains a desire to preserve their own self at all costs.

4. *Hegel- life, death and war*

²² For a discussion of Hobbes and Hegel in the history of philosophy, see Gary Browning, *Hegel and the History of Political Philosophy* (Basingstoke and New York: Macmillan, 1999).

Life and death is important for Hegel in all kinds of ways. He highlights how the struggle for life and death is central to the drama of human recognition and self-understanding. The drama of human recognition runs throughout Hegel's philosophy, not just in the notable passages of the struggle for recognition in the *Phenomenology*, and this wider story of recognition and its development separates Hegel from Hobbes. Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* is a massively impressive work, and perhaps what impresses most is the struggle for recognition; the life and death encounter and the master-slave dialectic. The image is striking. It conveys a deep truth about Hegel's thought. Hegel's project in the *Phenomenology* and throughout his subsequent system is to show an immanent form of argumentation, whereby self-consciousness develops because of internal tensions within its conditions, which engender a movement to cohesion and awareness. The struggle for recognition emerges out of prior experiences. The *Phenomenology* begins with the assumption that truth lies outside consciousness, and that direct sense awareness can reveal the object of knowledge.²³ Merely to have brute sense experience of an object without elaborate reasoning holds the promise of apparent certainty. Nothing is presumed, and there is nothing to counter. Sense certainty is minimal in its assumptions, and, because of its minimal assumptions, surely it can be irrefragable? Yet the truth of this perspective is elusive. Wherever one turns, our sense encounters a different truth. There is no certainty in what is observed. The upshot is that truth is not to be imagined as external to the observer. Our consciousness cannot assume that the world is immediately revealed to it. The tensions within the experience of presumed sense certainty indicate that the nature of consciousness requires exploration. Hegel concludes, "Consciousness first finds itself in self-consciousness—the notion of mind—its turning point, where it leaves the parti-coloured show of the sensuous immediate, passes from the dark void

²³ Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 149–160.

of the transcendent and remote super-sensuous, and steps into the spiritual daylight of the present.”²⁴

If the truth of consciousness highlights the role of the self in exploring its own consciousness, then the pathway of the *Phenomenology* now invites self-consciousness to explore further and to demand assurance. Mere assertion does not do the trick. Engagement with other selves can move things forward. If one wants to know what it is to be self-conscious, having another self to test things out is important. There is a demand by the self for recognition by another self. This demand leads to an insistent drive, in which another self is challenged. The challenge is not half hearted, for much is at stake, the very nature of the self. Hegel imagines a life and death struggle with another self. What is at stake in the life and death struggle is, of course, life and death. It is only by risking death that the self can realise that its truth is not merely existence, but the freedom to go beyond life and existence. Hegel declares, “And it is solely by risking life that freedom is obtained; only by this is it tried and proved that the essential nature of self-consciousness is not bare existence, is not the merely immediate form in which at first makes its appearance is not its mere absorption in the expanse of life.”²⁵

The life and death struggle ends when one of the combatants blinks, and yields to the other. The victor assumes the role of master, and orders the slave to do his bidding. What each of the combatants was looking for in the struggle was acknowledgement, or recognition from the other. The master appears to have won, as he gets the servant to work for him. Yet there is a hollowness to his victory. He receives recognition, but only from a slave, who is not valued. Just as Groucho Marx balks at joining a club that will have him as a member, so the master cannot be satisfied by recognition from a slave, who is of no account, having given up his independent identity. To be recognised by a slave is meaningless in terms of achieving

²⁴ Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 227.

²⁵ Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 233.

positive recognition of one's freedom. The reverse condition is better, because the slave is put to work, and, in working, moulds the world to reflect thought and consciousness, and so gathers a sense of the meaning of purposeful activity. Yet, of course, the slave has given up on his own identity and claims to freedom, in deferring to the master. The terminus of the drive for recognition is not the master slave struggle. Hegel observes, "But for recognition proper there is needed the moment that what the master does to the other he should also do to himself, and what the bondsman does to himself, he should do to the other also. On that account a form of recognition has arisen that is one-sided and unequal."²⁶

In the *Phenomenology* recognition moves in multiple directions, and the directional momentum is to develop forms of recognition which are equilibrated, so that individuals can see themselves in the other, and hence advance self-awareness and freedom. The inner logic of the development—which ranges across scientific inquiry, practical and ethical standpoints, and spiritual shapes—culminates in forgiveness, the anguished religious acceptance of sin, the self, and others. Christ's message of forgiveness on the cross stands on the threshold of destiny.²⁷ Forgiveness is at the cusp of absolute knowing and, at the close of the *Phenomenology*, consciousness is equipped to engage with systematic knowledge. Systematic knowledge operates with the confidence of absolute understanding, yet its dialectical pathway works in and through the component conditions of experience which, taken by themselves, cannot provide holistic and comprehensive understanding. In the *Philosophy of Spirit* of his *Encyclopaedia* Hegel rehearses the life and death struggles and the master-slave conflict.²⁸ It forms a stage within the Philosophy of Subjective Spirit, whereby selves explore selfhood and recognise the need for interaction with and confirmation from others. *Geist* or Spirit, for Hegel, in expressly recognising social interaction, assumes the character of objective spirit, in

²⁶ Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 236.

²⁷ Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 676–9.

²⁸ G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).

that human beings require objective engagement with others to realise their mutual freedom and their social universal ties that can overcome the isolation of mere subjectivity. Key to this development is the political world, whereby individuals join together to pursue a social and free collective life. The political world is elaborated in the *Philosophy of Right*. Of course the state does not swallow up individuals. The point of modern life and society is that it allows for individual freedom and agency.²⁹ But if modernity sees individualism as necessary to fulfilment, it cannot efface the need for universal ties of recognition, which underpin the common character of Spirit. Hegel imagines selves joining together in a variety of ways, by the ascription of public rights, by a common recognition of welfare needs, contracts and by the largely hidden ties of the market, but these forms of recognition cannot be realised without the development of laws and public participation in a political community.

Participation in the ongoing life of a political community through representation by corporations and estates in a constitutional monarchy underpins the multiple ties between individuals that are realised in a state. Mutual recognition is expressly secured in patriotism within a community. Rights, contracts, welfare, and a market are all underpinned and facilitated by the state. Patriotism is most dramatically expressed in war and the willingness of individual citizens to sacrifice their lives for the good of the community. Hegel observes, “Patriotism is often understood to mean only a readiness for exceptional sacrifices and actions. Essentially, however, it is the sentiment which, in the relationships of our daily life and under ordinary conditions habitually recognises that the community is one’s substantive groundwork and end. It is out of this consciousness, which during life’s daily round stands the test in all circumstances, that there subsequently also arises the readiness for

²⁹ For analysis of a Hegelian reading of modernity, see Gary Browning, *Plato and Hegel: Two Modes of Philosophising About Politics* (New York: Garland Press, 1991).

extraordinary exertions.”³⁰ War, for Hegel, is the intense recognition that all of our welfare, our rights, property and economic transactions depend upon freely constructed mutual social ties that need to be preserved. Hegel remarks, “War is the state of affairs which deals in earnest with the vanity of temporal goods and concerns—a vanity at other times a common theme of edifying sermons.”³¹ Social recognition in a sense culminates in the state, yet Hegel notes that states, in turn, depend upon being recognised by other states. States are necessarily related to other states. While there is not a supervening set of interests that can, in the last resort, prevent war when states are sufficiently opposed, states should work to minimise conflict and establish treaties to mitigate the worst effects of war. Hegel sees a role for international law, even if state sovereignty remains significant. He notes, “International law springs from relations between autonomous states—its actuality depends upon different wills, each of which is sovereign.”³²

5. Conclusion

War matters in Hegel’s philosophy. Unlike many philosophers and social commentators, he sees a positive aspect to war. He uses striking language to highlight its role, which encompasses life, death and our material and affective world. He remarks, “This relation (of war) and the recognition of it is therefore the individual’s substantive duty, the duty to maintain this substantive individuality i.e. the independence and sovereignty of the state, at the risk and sacrifice of property and life.”³³ His defence of war resonates with the striking passages of the *Phenomenology* that depict the life and death struggle. Hegel’s philosophy is one of embodiment, where the risk of death in individual psychological development, and the prospect of massive loss of life in war, appear to go beyond the measured and careful

³⁰ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 164.

³¹ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 210.

³² Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 209. For a discussion of Hegel on international law, see Gary Browning, “Hegel on War, Recognition and Justice” in Buchwalter, *Hegel and Global Justice*.

³³ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 209.

articulation of a system of philosophy. It shows that the elements of Hegel's system are not absorbed in the overall frame. The components serve as more than components in a wider system. It is true that Hegel's account of death and war are integral elements within his system, and demand appreciation of how they fit in a wider conceptual scheme, but they also stand out from the rest of his work. They exhibit an 'excess' that is not to be explained by their role within the system.

Hegel's depiction of the life and death struggle and his attention to the void that the prospect of war evokes, recalls Hobbes in multiple ways. Both philosophers imagine the prospect of death and war to be vital framing devices in their philosophies. Likewise, their depictions of the risk of death, and the prospect of war, supersede their own specified constraints on philosophical language. Hobbes warns against rhetoric and metaphor, but trades on both to telling effect in imagining the prospect of death, and thereby in articulating a case for a political association. Hegel develops a carefully constructed philosophical system, but his vivid imagining of facing up to death and war are not encapsulated in his system. They are excessive moments. However, Hegel differs from Hobbes. He sees the prospect of death and war as enabling individuals to exhibit developmental qualities. A self, for Hegel, is not given and is not to be specified in isolation from the complex social forms in which it is situated. The self is shaped by the multiple forms of recognition. Mutual recognition via membership of a rational political community enables individuals to acknowledge their common, social identities in a way that Hobbes does not allow. Individuals fear death in *Leviathan* and their self-interested fear of death predominates even after they are envisaged as joining a political association. Hobbes and Hegel are united by their sense that—without the insecurity of possible death and the security that is provided by the state—we are exposed and at risk. Yet Hegel differs from Hobbes in imagining that individuals can develop and embrace a social orientation and public form of freedom, which supersedes mere self-interest.

The problem within Hegel's treatment of war and death is that it might deflect attention from appreciation of multiple inter-linking moments of recognition within his philosophy so as to highlight excessive dangerous moments that might distort his overall argument, just as Hobbes's language can distract from the systematic nature of his reasoning.

While Bob Dylan disclaims pacifism, he is aware of the negative possibilities in war and its prosecution. It causes death and destruction, but it can also be a vehicle for political and economic manipulation of patriotic emotion. In an interview in *USA Today* in 2001, he explained how his early hard-hitting song "Masters of War," which he continues to sing, is not anti-war, rather it is against the manipulation of the community by political, military and business operators. He observes, "'Masters of War' ... is supposed to be a pacifist song against war. It's not an anti-war song. It's speaking against what Eisenhower was calling a military-industrial complex as he was making his exit from the presidency."³⁴

³⁴ Edna Gundersen, "Dylan is positively at the top of his game," *USA Today*, 2001-09-10.