
Hegel, Political Economy and Government: One Christian Perspective*

1. INTRODUCTION

Modern economics is positive economics. It is not concerned with value judgements or with morality but simply with matters of fact. The first chapter of most elementary economics textbooks will state that economics is concerned with what is, rather than with what ought to be. Some economists have developed this position to the point where economic models cannot be judged by anything except their ability to predict the future, no matter how unrealistic any part of these models may seem.¹ This belief in value free, scientific economics reflects a philosophical position which is value-laden. If this philosophical position is ever discussed in the textbooks or in the discipline generally, it is usually put forward as being itself scientific and is never questioned.² Yet economic theory must be evaluated at every level including the basic level of philosophy.

The purpose of this paper is to consider the philosophical background of a relatively unpopular branch of economic theory. An evaluation of this background from a Christian perspective will also be attempted and the implications of both the philosophical background, and its criticism, for the role of government in modern economies will be discussed.

The exact title that should be attached to the branch of theory to be discussed in this paper is not a straightforward matter. It is a branch of political econo-

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1. See Milton Friedman 'The Methodology of Positive Economics' in *Essays in Positive Economics* (Chicago, 1935, University of Chicago Press) pp3-43.
 2. This philosophical position is utilitarianism. James Quirk *Intermediate Microeconomics* (Chicago, 1976, Science Research Associates) p.227 describes this utilitarian position as revolving around the notion 'that actions are to be judged solely on the basis of their consequences'. The criteria for judging these consequences are the subjective preferences of individuals. Quirk notes that modern economists may thus be called individualistic utilitarians'. It is this philosophical position that leads to the individualistic methodology of modern conventional economics. Joseph Schumpeter *History of Economic Analysis* (London, 1954, Allen and Unwin) p.407, has raised doubts as to the philosophical legitimacy of utilitarianism.

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my,³ what is coming to be called Post-Keynesian economics. This branch of Post-Keynesian theory represents a restatement and a refinement of the theory of the great classical economists Adam Smith and David Ricardo, as well as the theory of Karl Marx. It has come to be called Post-Keynesian economics because of its compatibility with John Maynard Keynes' principle of effective demand. Piero Sraffa's *Production of Commodities by Means of Commodities* published in 1960, will be taken as an encapsulation of this position.

Philosophy enters this tradition primarily through the work of Marx. It is well known that Marx was strongly influenced by the writings of G.W.F. Hegel, though he did not accept all of Hegel's philosophical ideas. The philosophy of Hegel and its connection with the tradition of economic analysis outlined above therefore, present themselves as subjects for the present enquiry.

2. HEGEL'S PHILOSOPHY

The Context of Hegel's Ideas

Hegel's work may be partly understood in the context of an epistemological dispute which occurred during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Two groups were involved in this dispute, the German Idealists associated mainly with Gottfried Leibniz and the English Empiricists among whose ranks John Locke, David Hume and Jeremy Bentham may be numbered.

The Idealists held a metaphysical view of the world which involved tight logic and deductions from simple, observable premises. Reason, they believed, could be a source of knowledge, independent of what could be observed by the physical senses. The Empiricists strongly denied the reliability of such knowledge, arguing that the senses were of crucial importance in understanding the world.

A strong theme in the work of Hegel is that the world is influenced and directed by forces which are not directly observable but whose existence must be deduced by reason. The process of reasoning was not simply a means of observing these forces but enabled interaction with them and was further an expression and development of them. Hegel's work may thus be seen as a reaction to the criticisms by the Empiricists of earlier Idealist positions.

Raymond Plant has argued that there is another important factor to be taken into account in trying to understand the development of Hegel's ideas. This was Hegel's attempt to answer what he regarded as the fundamental problem of human experience, that of personal fragmentation and the alienation of individuals from society and the environment, and social disharmony.

A number of German thinkers of Hegel's day including Herder, Schiller, Holderlin, Kant and Goethe, had come to regard Greek society as the standard against which modern society could be compared. The Germans viewed the culture of Ancient Greece as harmonious, unified and able to engage both the creative and intellectual powers of the individual, so that the whole person could be involved in society. All individuals could thus participate in the broadest range of experience, which meant that no significant aspect of society was alien to any individual.

3. The term 'political economy' is used here in its classical sense. It is the name used to describe the economics discipline for the greater part of the nineteenth century, including the earliest proponents of the marginal method, what is today neoclassical economics.

Against this ancient ideal, German citizens of Hegel's time were confined to specialised, commercially oriented tasks and were thus unable to participate in the broadest range of social experience. In addition Germany suffered from a lack of political integration, consisting of some thirty-eight states until Bismarck undertook a programme of unification in 1866.⁴

The lack of integration in German society and the impact of this lack upon eighteenth and nineteenth century citizens of Germany, was the fundamental problem of human experience for which Hegel sought a solution.

Two Causes of the Problem

Hegel believed the cause of this fundamental problem to be twofold. One of its aspects was economic in nature while the other was religious in nature. Hegel recognised with others of the idealist tradition, that economic progress had resulted in the specialisation of workers into particular social tasks.⁵ This specialisation precluded the kind of society that the Idealists esteemed so highly because it was impossible in such a situation for individuals to enjoy the broadest range of social experience and thus feel at peace in society.⁶

The result was that each individual became concerned with an increasingly particular aspect of society which was shared by an increasingly smaller proportion of the population. The basis for social relations and understanding was thus diminished, creating not only social division but personal fragmentation. As well, the ability of the whole community to participate in art and culture was diminished, as any part of art or culture was intelligible to only a small part of society. This followed from the premise that the intelligibility of art and culture was dependent upon experience. Individuals were therefore not only personally fragmented by economic specialisation but were culturally isolated from the greater part of their society by it.

The economic aspect of Hegel's fundamental problem was thus centred around labour and the manner in which it was organised and employed in society. The religious aspect of the problem of disharmony and alienation centred on Christianity.

Christianity represented what Hegel referred to as an 'objective' religion. It was a religion based upon a given set of truths, appealing to the intellect and leaving other aspects of personality disengaged.⁷ This partial involvement of the individual in religion, simply exacerbated the fragmentation of the person caused by the process of specialisation in the economic arena.

4. David Thompson *Europe Since Napoleon* (London, 1966, Penguin Books), p.310.

5. This was a prominent idea of the Scottish Enlightenment. Adam Ferguson, James Steuart and Adam Smith had all alluded to this notion of specialisation in their works. In particular Adam Smith developed the idea that economic development and growth was greatly enhanced by specialisation because of its effects on the productive powers of labour. The first words of his *Wealth of Nations* are as follows: 'The greatest improvement in the productive powers of labour, and the greater part of the skill, dexterity and judgement with which it is anywhere directed, or applied, seem to have been the effects of the division of labour' (Hammondsworth, 1982, Penguin Books) (first published 1776), p.109. See R. Plant *Hegel: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1983, Basil Blackwell), pp.21, 57 and 113.

6. R. Plant, *Hegel: An Introduction*, pp.24-25.

7. *Ibid*, p.33. These are the conative and affective aspects of human nature. The first pertains to the feelings and the emotions, and the second relates to desire or the power to strive.

Social disharmony was also fostered by Christianity, according to Hegel, because of its emphasis on personal salvation: reconciliation between the individual and God. Rather than creating social bonds and providing a behavioural code to strengthen the unity of the community, Christianity encouraged the individual to look beyond society for his or her hope and ideals. Hegel's objection to Christianity was therefore its individualistic nature, which stood in contrast to his ancient social idea. These two aspects of Christianity, its intellectual nature and its individualistic nature, were not unrelated but mutually reinforcing. In Plant's words:

The task of any religion in Hegel's view is that of fostering social morality, but an objective religion cannot fulfil this role because, in Hegel's view, the impulse to morality is not, *pace* Kant, primarily intellectual. Reason by itself cannot move a man to action. To act morally a man must act as a total being, with all his powers engaged.⁸

The Solutions

If in Hegel's thinking there were two causes of the problem of personal fragmentation and social disharmony, there were also two possible solutions to the problem. The first involved a reinterpretation of Christianity to remove its objectionable aspects, and the second involved Hegel's mature philosophical system which provided new perspectives on the problem. Let us take each of these separately.

Since one of the causes of fragmentation and disharmony was the objective and transcendent nature of Christianity, Hegel attempted to transform Christianity by altering this nature and changing Christianity into a civil based religion. Ancient Greece had had such a religion, involving a set of common beliefs linked to aspects of civil life, and so Hegel in one sense was attempting to recreate this ideal in his own Germany. He believed that this would produce a stronger sense of community and a stronger basis for participation in community life.

Removing what he regarded as the objectionable aspects of Christianity was in Hegel's thinking, also restoring it to its true form. Jesus, he suggested, had been misunderstood by his disciples and subsequently by Christians who followed them. According to Hegel, Jesus had brought a message primarily of social peace and reconciliation but had dressed this message up in the form of an authoritarian, transcendent religion because these were the characteristics of the religion followed by the Jews. The similarity between their religion and his dressed up religion ensured that the Jews would be sympathetic to what he had to say. The authoritarian and transcendent aspects of Jesus' message, as well as the miracles he performed, were therefore nothing more than pedagogic devices used to transmit an essentially social message. The problem with Christianity from Hegel's point of view was that these devices had come to be regarded as the central aspects of Jesus' teaching.⁹

Hegel's first solution had then been centred around his belief that the moral and social core of Jesus' teaching could be retained while dispensing with any reference to a transcendent God. Hegel gradually became disillusioned with this solution however, because he perceived religion as having a strong

8. *Idem.*

9. *Ibid*, p.46

political component that made it difficult to transform into a civil religion. In particular, the Roman church had strong links with the rising aristocratic governments in Europe which were concerned not so much with making society more cohesive as with looking after the interests of the aristocracy.

It was in this way that politics came to play a more prominent role in Hegel's thinking than it had played previously, and Hegel began to move more seriously to considerations of the earlier idealist tradition. Consequently metaphysics became an important part of Hegel's framework. Of particular importance was the idea that society was developing toward a state of perfection in which fragmentation and social division would not exist. This idea of development was to Hegel, the key to understanding human experience.

Two major works set out this position: *Phenomenology of Spirit* published in 1807 and *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* published in 1817. These works describe the development of society towards perfection, the result of a metaphysical force which was itself developing. This force was closely connected to the knowledge that humanity possessed of itself, both individually and corporately. Hegel called it 'Spirit' and its development or emergence was thus linked to the development of humanity's self-knowledge or self-consciousness. Eventually humanity would attain a perfect understanding of itself and would therefore be perfectly integrated within itself and with its environment. A resolution of the problem of personal fragmentation and social division would thus be obtained.

Two factors were especially important in the development of self-consciousness: the labouring process and property rights. The former Hegel believed to be important because it allowed a limited influence over the environment, an influence which alleviated the sense of alienation from the environment that characterised human experience. The labouring process also gave rise to specialisation which Hegel now saw as providing limited patterns of integration within the community, since it implied economic interdependence. Society was thus more cohesive than Hegel had earlier thought, mitigating the dissonance from the application of only some of the human powers in the workplace.

Despite its positive impact upon the development of self-consciousness, the influence which the labouring process accorded over the environment was only one-directional. The need Hegel believed to exist in people for reciprocity, was therefore exacerbated by this exercise of unreciprocated effort. An important way of meeting this intensified need for reciprocity was in marriage and the family. The creation of the family had a positive influence on the development of self-consciousness since it involved emotional interdependence and cohesion between family members. Negative effects were however also generated by the emergence of the family. In order to maintain the family, the material results of the labouring process became more important. But this gave rise to conflict between families over the available product of the labouring process, especially where economic activity was organised in such a way that it was difficult to see who had produced what. The destructive effect of this conflict on social cohesion was evident:

the recognition of property rights is crucial for the development of self-consciousness because property is the result of labour and labour is the

realisation of consciousness in its external form . . . The struggle must be destructive because each side involved has to take it seriously in that its own self-consciousness is at stake!¹⁰

The interaction and development of the labouring process, the family, property and the struggle over property in which some factors contribute to the emergence of self-consciousness and some mitigate against it, Hegel called the dialectical process. ¹¹

This dialectical process, the last stage of which involved a negative effect upon self-consciousness, Hegel believed could be influenced by the government. The government was able to develop self-consciousness, and to do so in three ways. Firstly it could resolve the struggle over property rights by recognising certain types of rights and not others. Secondly it could educate society as to the integration which exists in the network of specialised tasks, performed by members of society. Thirdly it could allow members of the community to be directly involved in governing the community via the ballot box or by standing for public office. These three functions provide another cohesive influence upon the community which limits the extent of previous destructive influences, highlights existing cohesion and provides important channels for further cohesion.

Hegel's philosophy therefore suggests a strong role for the government in society as part of the development of Spirit and self-consciousness. The importance of economic factors in reaching this conclusion centre on the role and organisation of labour. The following section shows that the connections between Hegel's philosophy and political economy swing largely around this notion of labour.

3. HEGEL, MARX AND SRAFFA

Marxian economics is characterised by its concentration on the process of production and how this process is organised. It views labour as central to this process, infact claiming that labour is the sole source of economic value even in modern economies with highly mechanised methods of production.

There were several influences that guided the development of Marx's economic and philosophical thinking from his early empirical view of the world, to the rationalist position of *Capital* and *Theories of Surplus Value*. It is well known that Hegel was one of the strongest of these influences, but Marx was also influenced by his reading of *Theses on Hegelian Philosophy* by Ludwig Feuerbach. In this book Feuerbach criticises the metaphysical nature of Hegel's work. Marx was therefore aware of the possible shortcomings of Hegel's philosophy. ¹²

Feuerbach regarded Hegel's notion of Spirit as nothing more than a tautology. He believed that the spirit of any age was simply the totality of the human

10. *Ibid*, p.109

11. Dialectical reasoning or processes involve what might be called interactive causation. This is where causative factors operate in different, including opposite, directions, to produce a final outcome. It may be contrasted with the idea of linear causality in which an outcome may be traced along a chain of causation which runs in only one direction.

12. See Isaiah Berlin *Karl Marx: His Life and Environment*, 3rd ed. (London, 1963, Oxford University Press), p.76.

phenomena that composed that age. To explain such phenomena in terms of the spirit of the age as Hegel had done, was to explain them in terms of themselves, which was no explanation at all.¹³ In general Feuerbach was opposed to the use of anything metaphysical in explaining social phenomena, adopting what seems to be a reductionist view of these phenomena. He did however accept Hegel's teleological view of history and social phenomena. But instead of seeing the driving force of history in terms of Hegel's tautologous notion of Spirit, he saw it in terms of the material aspects of society, the results of labour's efforts in production.

Marx largely accepted these criticisms of Hegel and incorporated them into his own thinking and views of society. It was in this way that Hegel's discussion of the struggle between families over property rights became the Marxian notion of class struggle. As Berlin notes: 'The central Hegelian conception remains the basis of Marx's thought, although it is transformed into semi-empirical terms.'¹⁴ It is these semi-empirical terms that have come to be the hall mark of historical materialism, a rationalist methodology that focuses on the struggle over the products of the labouring process as the chief determinant of social outcomes.

Marx also accepted Hegel's dialectical method of argument and his dialectical view of society's development. This is somewhat surprising however, given that he had accepted Feuerbach's criticism of metaphysical notions in Hegel's descriptions of social phenomena. The basis of Feuerbach's criticism had been a primarily reductionist view of the determination of social phenomena, but the dialectical method on the other hand, has come to be regarded as a largely anti-reductionist view of social determination.¹⁵

While Marx's work represents an immense contribution to the development of philosophical and economic thinking, and perhaps more importantly to the integration of the two, his economic system contained some technical problems which he was unable to resolve before his death. Perhaps the most famous of these problem was the so-called 'transformation problem'¹⁶ A solution to this problem was proposed by Ladislaus Bortkiewicz in 1907;¹⁷ but Piero Sraffa's economic system also represents a solution to the problem.

13. *Ibid*, p.77

14. *Ibid*, pp.127-8.

15. This has been contested by some Marxists who argue that the dialectic method employed by Marx is consistent with a reductionist methodology such as methodological individualism. Jon Elster is from this school of 'Analytical Marxism'. See his *Making Sense of Marx* (Cambridge; 1985 Cambridge University Press), and also A. Levine, E. Sober and E.O. Wright 'Marxism and Methodological Individualism' *New Left Review*, 162, 1987 pp.67-84, for an interesting criticism of Elster's position.

16. This involves the difficulty of transforming labour values into the money prices of commodities. A characteristic of the economics of Ricardo and Marx was their adherence to the labour theory of value. This theory states that commodities will exchange in direct proportion to the amounts of labour which have gone into their production. Marx discovered that in a complicated system with capital goods, this theory did not hold, but he was unable to ascertain the reason for this. The failure of the labour theory of value in this way has been used to dismiss Marxian economics as irrelevant. The modern solution to the transformation problem however, directly answers this criticism.

17. See Paul M. Sweezy, *The Theory of Capitalist Development* (New York, 1942, Modern Reader), pp.115-125, for a lucid description of this solution.

Sraffa's work has therefore been regarded by some as a significant development of Marxian economic theory.¹⁸

It must of course be recognised that Sraffa's work is a much narrower contribution than Marx's. Sraffa was concerned simply with one aspect of Marx's economic system, that of the determination of the prices of commodities and the distribution of the national product. However, as narrow as this contribution may be, it penetrates to the heart of economic theory as it was envisaged by the classical economists and Marx.

A consequence of the specific character of Sraffa's work, is that the role of government is not discussed. This role must therefore be deduced from Sraffa's system. It may first be noted that Marx did not have much confidence in the government's ability to influence society. He disagreed with Hegel that it would be able to play a significant role in solving the problems of personal fragmentation and social disharmony, a conclusion which was based largely upon Marx's belief that capitalism would ultimately collapse because the rate of profit on capital was falling through time:

Capitalists faced by a persistent tendency to overproduction and a falling rate of profit, would find it more and more difficult to extract a surplus (the basis for earning a profit), to fund either consumption or further investment; and intensifying economic crises would lead inexorably to social revolution!¹⁹

For Marx . . . the *telos* of capitalism was an inevitable and violent collapse. But whereas classical writers held that appropriate economic policies could postpone the onset of the stationary state, Marx maintained that no human contrivance could alter the destiny of the capitalist system.²⁰

Of course the twentieth century has failed to support this prediction of disaster for western economies, and so government influence in economic matters remains a possibility. It has in fact come to be a normal, if not the primary, function of government in the latter half of this century.

Three broad possibilities for the role of government immediately suggest themselves from a Sraffian framework. The government may influence the distribution of the national product, it may influence the *direction* of productive activity or it may influence the *level* of productive activity.

Affecting the distribution of what has been produced, may be achieved by influencing either wages or profits. It has been the practice of governments in Australia for more than ten years to influence wages through incomes policies implemented largely through the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission, or more recently via the various forms of the Prices and Incomes Accord.

18. See Alessandro Roncaglia, *Sraffa and the Theory of Prices* (Chichester, 1978, John Wiley and Sons), p. xix.

19. Phyllis Deane, *The Evolution of Economic Ideas* (Cambridge, 1978, Cambridge University Press), p.139.

20. William J. Barber, *A History of Economic Thought* (Hammondsworth, 1967, Penguin Books), p.147.

It is now being suggested by Sraffian economists that the rate of profits may be influenced through the operation of monetary policy.²¹

Government influence over the direction of productive activity may be achieved through a variety of measures from direct state ownership of industry to financial assistance and advice for particular industries the government wishes to develop. Affecting the level of productive activity has been the practice of governments world wide since the second World War. A rationale for this kind of influence is provided by the Sraffian framework because of its compatibility with the central principle of Keynesian economics.

Marxian and Sraffian economics therefore share the same central structure in their explanations of economic phenomena. Most importantly labour is central to both views of the process of production. In this sense Sraffian economics has developed out of the Hegelian philosophical tradition through the work of Marx. Although this tradition is not explicit in Sraffa's work, it should be kept in mind when interpreting it.

4. A CHRISTIAN HEURISM ON GOVERNMENT

The extent to which Sraffian and Marxian economics may be said to possess Hegelian underpinnings, or foundations, has been discussed. An evaluation of this tradition is now required. Some of Hegel's ideas are clearly unacceptable from a Christian point of view, but this does not of course mean that Hegel must be dismissed entirely. As Cole²² has argued, within the limits of biblical revelation there is room for adopting secular wisdom in trying to understand social reality. He calls this a heuristic approach. What must be done in this case is to identify what is helpful and consistent with biblical principles in Hegel's thinking, and what is not. Ideas which are consonant with biblical principles but not linked irretrievably to ideas that are unbiblical, may be used to guide the application of biblical principles in understanding economic reality.

Hegel's problem of the alienation of people from society and from the environment, will be familiar to readers of the Bible. They bear a striking resemblance to the effects that followed the actions of Adam and Eve as they are described in chapter three of Genesis. There were three of these effects. Adam and Eve found themselves alienated from God, alienated from each other and alienated from their environment (Gen. 3:1-10). But rather than being the result of some mysterious metaphysical force, these were the effects of what the Bible refers to as 'sin', the non co-operation of humanity with God (Rom 5:14).

Since it seems that Hegel was attempting to find a solution to the second two parts of the effects of sin, it should not be surprising that Hegel began his search for a solution with religion in general, and with Christianity in

21. See C. Panico 'Market Forces and the Relation Between the Rates of Interest and Profit' *Contributions to Political Economy* 4, 1985, p.56.

22. 'Given the limitations of biblical revelation, the Christian has room for heurism in approach. Heurism takes the wisdom that is available and applies it to social reality — assuming that the wisdom on view is consonant with the biblical materials' G.A. Cole, 'A Christian Approach to Economic Justice', *Interchange* 42 1987, p.61.

particular.²³ His objections to Christianity as a solution to this problem are worth re-examining at this point given the similarity between Hegel's formulation of the problem and the Christian formulation of the problem.

Christianity was inadequate to solve the fundamental problem of human experience, according to Hegel, because of its objective nature and because of its social divisiveness. It was an objective religion in that it appealed only to the intellect of an individual and not to his or her other faculties, such as the emotions, consequently fragmenting the individual. It was socially divisive because it directed the attention of the individual away from society and toward the transcendent God for his or her hopes and values.

These objections demonstrate a surprising lack of understanding as to the real content of Christian belief. Whether this lack was due to a less than adequate presentation of Christian ideas to Hegel at the Tubingen Theological Seminary, as has been suggested by Findlay²⁴, or to the state of the Church in eighteenth and nineteenth century Germany, is not certain. Whatever the reason, these objections may be dealt with in a fairly straightforward manner.

It is of course of great importance that Christianity has at its foundation a number of truths which appeal to the intellect and that a change in thinking must characterise the adoption of Christianity by an individual (Rom. 12:2). But the adoption of Christianity by an individual does not end with the mind. There are many injunctions and descriptions in the Bible indicating the importance of the will and the emotions in the transformation of a person who is alienated from God, into one who is reconciled with Him. These references include: Deut. 6:5 which requires a follower of God to love Him with all the human faculties; Luke 24:32 which describes the deep emotional reaction of the disciples to Jesus' explanation of the Scriptures; and 1 Cor. 13:13 which speaks of love as being the highest of all human responses to God, above even faith. Christianity must then engage all of the powers of the human personality or it is inadequate Christianity. Christianity is therefore as subjective as it is objective, in the sense in which these terms are employed by Hegel. It is not something that occurs outside the Christian and to which he or she must give intellectual assent. It must involve the whole person. Hegel is therefore mistaken to regard Christianity as a purely objective religion.

As to the second charge that Christianity is socially divisive, St. Paul takes great care to instruct the Christians of his day in attitudes and behaviour that are constructive of society and of unity. These attitudes and this behaviour are not an addendum to Christianity but are an integral part of it:

For (Christ) is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down

23. Hegel had a strong Christian background and studied theology at the Tubingen Theological Seminary, see R. Plant *Hegel: An Introduction* p.15. J.W. Findlay says of Hegel: 'If Hegel was nothing better, he was at least a great Christian theologian', Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by A.V. Miller (New York, 1977, Oxford University Press), p.xxvii. But Arthur Holmes points out that 'Hegel had Christian roots, but the religious consequences of his philosophy contributed more to the rise of liberal theology than either to orthodox theology or to philosophy from (a) Christian perspective', *Philosophy: A Christian Perspective* (Downers Grove, Ill., 1975, Inter-Varsity Press), p.48.

24. J.N. Findlay *Hegel: a Re-examination* (London, 1959, George Allen and Unwin), p.30.

the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end — Eph. 2:14-16.

The idea of unity and peace or harmony between people is linked in these words of St. Paul to the cross of Christ, which is the very basis of the Christian faith. Through the cross comes reconciliation between an individual and God, removing the fundamental cause of the individual's alienation from society and from the environment. In Christian terms, the basis for social harmony could not be more solid. And the apostle is not silent on methods of building social harmony on this basis:

I . . . therefore beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace — Eph. 4:1-3.

Belief in the transcendent God therefore is not to cause a person to ignore the society in which they live, but to have all the greater regard for that society *because* of their belief in God. Hegel's second charge against Christianity may thus be dismissed.

Hegel's own solution to alienation in the modern world centred around the actions of government. From a Christian perspective such actions would not solve the problem of alienation, because they would not deal with the problem of sin. As it stands, Hegel's prescription for the ills of society cannot work, but is there any place at all for this prescription?

Thielicke provides the basis for a helpful distinction that may be made between the primary solution to the problem of alienation and a secondary solution to the problem. He points out that the role of government in society is a provisional one pending the return of Christ at the end of the age (1 Cor. 15:24).²⁵ The principles directing this provisional role, according to Thielicke, are set out in Rom. 13:1-6. The government's provisional role is to restrain and limit evil. Thus if any aspect of economic relations may be shown to be evil or unjust, there is a biblical role for the government to play in limiting such economic evil.

The fulfilment of at least two of the following conditions is sufficient to regard economic relations in western economies as wrong or evil to some extent:

1. Labour is central to production
2. Production may be regarded as central to the exercising of the creation mandate of Gen. 2:28 to subdue the earth
3. The products of the labouring process are necessary for the welfare of the people involved in that process.

The conventional wisdom of the Hegel-Marx-Sraffa theories of society indicate that the first of these conditions holds. Even where a significant amount of material capital is involved in production, the Sraffian theory indicates that this capital is logically reducible to labour.²⁶

25. Helmut Thielicke *Theological Ethics* Volume 11 (Grand Rapids, 1979, Eerdmans), p.248.

26. Piero Sraffa *Production of Commodities by Means of Commodities* (Cambridge, 1960, Cambridge University Press), pp.34-5.

In the Bible, agriculture is the activity which is seen as central to discharging the creation mandate. The last two hundred years of history however have witnessed a move away from agriculture to manufacturing as the major use of the resources of the world. Since the creation mandate involves a responsibility in the use of these resources, it seems satisfactory to conclude that the second of the conditions above is fulfilled. If this is the case, to subvert production by directing its benefits into the hands of a powerful minority may be regarded as wrong. The responsibility of exercising the mandate applies to the whole of humanity and so must the privileges associated with the mandate.

It is not likely that the third condition is fulfilled on a wide scale in most western countries, but if the view is broadened world-wide it is not hard to see that it applies.

The fulfilment then of the first of the above conditions *and* the fulfilment of *either* the second *or* the third condition, is sufficient to deem economic relations in the western world perverse. A secondary or provisional role then seems to exist for the government in economic matters and Hegel's solution may be adopted at this level. The economic theories of Marx and Sraffa may also help to formulate the details of this role. These ideas pivot around the creation mandate, the role of labour in society and the views of economic relations from the perspective of these Hegelian-based economic theories.

5. CONCLUSION

Although the philosophy of Hegel, which provides a basis for Marxian and Sraffian economics, fails to correctly perceive the real cause of the fundamental problem of alienation, its formulation of the problem is reasonably accurate. It is even instructive for Christianity in that it highlights aspects of the problem at the secondary level that are quite important. The most notable of these aspects being the role played by economic factors in the alienation of people from society.

The fact that Hegel failed to get to the very heart of the problem in which he was interested, means that his solution to that problem, in the form of government, cannot be efficacious. The only real solution to that problem lies in the cross of Christ. It has been shown however that Hegel's solution may be relevant at the secondary level and that this is perfectly consistent with scriptural principles. A strong case therefore exists for the involvement of government in modern economies from the standpoint of Christian thinking, informed by a heuristic drawn not just from Hegelian philosophy, but from Marxian and Sraffian economic theories which embody Hegelian ideas.