

*Hegel's Philosophy of Freedom, God, and the State as  
World-Historical Discourse on  
Power and Domination:*  
**The West Versus the Rest of the World in Edward Said's  
Critical Hermeneutic**

**Samuel Zalanga**

*Bethel University*

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szalanga@bethel.edu

**HEGEL'S THEORY OF "FREEDOM, GOD, AND THE STATE"**

An excellent way to begin exploring Hegel's theory of freedom, God, and the state is to examine two quotations from Hegel, which provides a succinct summary of his philosophy of history. The two quotations are as follows:

The world is not abandoned to accident and chance, it is controlled by Providence, a divine providence presides over the events of the entire world, a wisdom endowed with infinite power which realizes its own aim, that is the final Absolute purpose of the world which is freedom. (Hegel 1956, p.13)

If God's wisdom is manifest in animals, in plants and individuals' lives, then why not in world history? God is all-powerful, and so exercises his wisdom on a grand scale; he governs the world and the actual working of his government, the carrying out of his plan is the history of the world. For only that which has been carried out according to God's plan is true. (cited in Kaufmann 1965, p.261)

Hegel is asserting that world history is a grand drama with God as the sole author. Humans cannot write the script of history by themselves even though they would like to believe, so asserts Hegel. The freedom they can enjoy is to be conscious of God's plan and cooperate with it. The failure of humans to be conscious of God's plan results in their living under the illusion that they are authoring the scripts of history. From the idea of living under illusion and refusing to cooperate with God's plan for history, Hegel proceeds to discuss the concept of alienation. At the beginning of his career, Hegel's concept of alienation was focused on the individual, but later in his career, especially while in Berlin, his work became very political and therefore he wrote about alienation at the political level, within and among nation-states.

At the individual level, Hegel asserts that human selves have two parts: the first part is their essence or spirit, and the second part is matter or their existence. Human essence or spirit is the divine part of the human self, while matter

is the part of the human self that is involved in material existence. The major task for all humans according to him is to unravel their essence or their divine self and act according to its dictates. Failure to do so means humans are alienated. They are alienated because they focus on their material existence. But material existence to Hegel is perishable, and therefore an illusion. The best human beings can do to avoid alienation is to subsume their material existence within the dictates of their essence or divine spirit.

After analyzing the concept of alienation at the individual level, Hegel proceeds to explain what freedom was in his conceptual system (Hegel 1956:1-102). According to him, freedom is a state of consciousness within human beings that enables them to escape illusion or self-alienation, which was described above. Humans are free when they are conscious of the divine spirit in them and overcome alienation by behaving according to the dictates of the spirit. The real purpose of humanity according to him is to comprehend what God's plan is and glorify his wisdom by acting according to the revealed wisdom. In essence, freedom for Hegel is a subjective experience because it occurs at the spiritual level. When people are subjectively conscious of God, then they are spiritually liberated and they are therefore free. However, this subjective consciousness that results in being free comes as a gradual process through increased enlightenment and obedience to law and the observance of morality. If humans know God's will in their divine spirit, they will obey him. Thus humans do not create history; they are only executors because God is the sole author of history (Hegel 1956; Kaufmann 1965).

Hegel then examines the historical trajectory of the progressive development of human consciousness to know God's will on a world historical scale (Hegel 1956:1-102). Human consciousness of God's will, which to him is the quintessence of freedom, is necessary for the realization of civilization. Human civilization from time immemorial has been progressively evolving. This human consciousness of God's will which results in the creation of civilization started in Asia, precisely in India and China. Then God's revelation increased when it was revealed at a higher level in Ancient Greek societies. As the Ancient Greek civilizations ended, the Roman Empire took the lead in having a deeper understanding of God's will, and therefore freedom. As the Roman Empire collapsed, modern Europe experienced the highest and deepest understanding of God's will and therefore the highest degree of human freedom was experienced in Europe. So for Hegel, history is progressive as the fall of one historical kingdom and the emergence of another is accompanied by the greater ability of humans to execute God's will and become freer.

Hegel's Eurocentrism can be deduced by examining what he had to say about Asia and Africa. He contrasts the courage and wisdom of Western people with the lack of courage and curiosity of the people of the Asiatic state. According to him, Western people do not allow themselves to be dependent on valley plains. They engaged in long distance trade which is a very risky venture since it involves going on the seas. For Hegel, it is the cunning of the seas that attract Western people to leave solid ground and be on the sea in a wooden instrument. Hegel asserts:

The sea gives us the idea of the indefinite, the unlimited, and infinitive; and in feeling his own infinitive in that Infinitive, man is stimulated and emboldened to stretch beyond the limited: the sea invites man to conquest, and to piratical plunder, but also to honest gain and to commerce. Those who navigate the sea, have indeed gain for their object, but the means are in this respect paradoxical, in as much as they hazard both property and life to attain it. The means therefore are the very opposite to that which they aim at. This is what exalts their gain and occupation above itself, and makes it something brave and noble. (Hegel 1956:90)

Hegel is clearly attributing some essential sense of courage to the Western person, a kind of courage that leads to noble achievements. Interestingly, he does not attribute this spectacular spirit of courage and achievement to the environment, but to the consciousness of the Western person. This argument is substantiated by statement he made with regards to the people of Asia:

This stretching out of the sea beyond the limitations of the land, is wanting to the splendid political edifices of Asiatic States, although they themselves border on the seas as for example, China. For them, the sea is only the limit, the ceasing of the land; they have no positive relation to it. The activity to which the seas invite, is a quite peculiar one: thence arises the fact that the coast-lands almost always separate themselves from the states of the interior although they are connected with these by a river. (1956:91)

Hegel is providing a comparative theory of development by asserting that even though the Chinese were close to the sea, they did not exploit that as a means to conquer the world; they did not have the courage to achieve noble things through the sea.

When Hegel turns to the continent of Africa, excluding Egypt, he had much negative things to say about them. In brief, Hegel is of the view that Africans are at the lowest ebb of human civilization; they have not experienced history because of their lack of development of historical consciousness. They have no idea of a higher being like the Christian God, and do not know of the immortality of the soul. Africans are violent, used to tyranny and have no value for human life or humanity. They also do not have any concept of law and order. As far as Hegel was concerned, Africans were in a state of historical slumber. He surely doubts that African people can achieve historical consciousness on their own. Given that in Hegel's vision of human civilization and development, historical consciousness is a precondition for that realization, the logical conclusion is that someone from outside needs to jump-start Africa if it is going to join the Western world's march on the path of historical consciousness. Two quotes below support my portrayal of Hegel's position on Africa. Hegel begins his assessment of Africa as follows:

Africa proper, as far as History goes back, has remained—for all purposes of connection with the rest of the world—shut up; it is Gold-land compressed within itself—the land of childhood, which lying beyond the day of self consciousness history is enveloped in the dark mantle of Night. Its isolated character originates, not merely in its typical nature but essentially in its geographical condition (Hegel 1956:91).

It seems Hegel is partially attributing Africa's backwardness to its isolation which is in turn a product of geographical location. This is in a significant way an environmental explanation of backwardness. The geographical isolation presumably made it impossible for Africa to be jump-started by Western civilization. If Hegel's explanation for Africa's backwardness was only environmental, this may not be as damaging to Africans, but on the contrary, he had much to say about the resistant nature of Africans which constrains Africa's development. Hegel asserts on this note that:

The peculiarly African character is difficult to comprehend, for the very reason that in reference to it, we must quite give up the principle which naturally accompanies all our ideas—the category of Universality. In Negro life the characteristic point is the fact that consciousness has not yet attained the realization of any substantial objective existence—as for example, Gods, or Law in which the interest of man's volition is involved and in which he realizes his own being. This distinction between himself as an individual and the universality of his being, the African in the uniform, underdeveloped ones of his existence has not yet attained; so that the Knowledge of an absolute Being, an Other and a Higher than his individual self, is entirely wanting. The Negro as already observed, exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state. We must lay aside all thought of reverence and morality—all that we call feeling, if we would rightly comprehend him; there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character (Hegel 1956:93).

In the two quotes above, we can deduce the fact that Hegel, while sitting in his office in Berlin, categorized and classified different people of the world into geographical groupings and then he attributes certain essential characteristics to the people living in the regions, and he suggested a unique methodology for studying and comprehending African people. Although some part of him wants to recognize Africans as human and a part of the universal human family, he is ambivalent about comprehending them using the same epistemological assumptions he would use in understanding Western people. Once he laid this fundamental reasoning as a foundation of his philosophy of history, what follows is deriving public policies based on the logic of his reasoning. This line of reasoning is at the core of Orientalism as conceptualized by Edward Said. Without fundamentally revising the initial premise of the philosophical assumptions, the more the West operates within the parameters of the original fundamental premise, the more the non-Western world is perceived and treated in a condescending manner, which opens room for domination.

At the time Georg Hegel was writing, Europe, and in particular Germany was according to him experiencing the highest level of freedom experienced by any group of humans in history. In effect, Europeans were the least alienated because they had experienced the highest level of consciousness of God's will and executing it. They were effectively cooperating with God's grand design for human history. Christianity for Hegel was the context in which people would realize the highest level of freedom by overcoming alienation. Under Christianity, humans reached the least level of estrangement from God's will. The Christian religion according to him has provided human beings with the highest level of spiritual awareness or consciousness, which has prepared them to become increasingly freer (Hegel 1956). By implication, all other peoples of the world remain alienated because they have not received the kind of revelation that Europe and particularly Germany had received. To conclude this first part of Hegel's theory of freedom, God, and the state, which focused on the individual, we need to note that to acquire freedom as individuals, he is asserting that humans have to struggle constantly to fight alienation and estrangement from God by trying to identify God's will for

history and execute it. History for the individual in the Hegelian tradition is the constant struggle between the individual essence or divine spirit on the one hand, and material existence of the individual on the other hand. Progress in history from the perspective of an individual comes through the continuous internal struggle between the person's two parts, with the divine spirit emerging as victorious.

As mentioned above, in the latter part of his life, Hegel became political in his thinking and writing. I now proceed to examine Hegel's philosophy of history at the political level, and at the world historical scale.

## **HEGEL'S PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY: THE NATION-STATE AS GOD'S AGENT IN WORLD HISTORY**

According to Hegel, the political state is the highest "embodiment of reason or reflective self-consciousness in the modern world" (Hegel 1956:1-102). He saw civil society as the realm where human selfish interest is pursued to the maximum, while the state is the "domain of universal altruism" (Ashley and Orestein 2001:164). The political state according to him has been chosen by God to play a leading role in the implementation of the grand drama he has orchestrated for the world, i.e., world history. He transposes the concept of alienation from the individual level to the world scale i.e., instead of conflict within the individual, now states are fighting each other. God, according to Hegel, in ensuring the implementation of his will, chooses one political state out of numerous ones in the world and he imparts his divine spirit to it. The other states are left without God's divine spirit. The justification for this, according to Hegel, is that God only chooses nation-states that will fulfill his will. Interestingly, God only chooses states with military and political power because they are the only ones that can create grand empires. God, according to Hegel is not concerned with nation-states that are losers, e.g., those in Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America or Southeast Asia. As nation states embark on military and political campaigns to expand their empires or spheres of influence, they clash. This conflict among nation-states, however, instead of being considered repugnant, is desirable, and thus not an aberration for Hegel (Hegel 1956).

With the emergence of nation-states, individuals now can reduce their degree of alienation by working obediently to fulfill God's will through their nation state. Since not all nation states are chosen by God to receive his divine spirit, only individuals in a nation-state chosen by God can eliminate the experience of alienation in themselves and the world at large. They can do so by obeying their nation-state, which has received God's divine spirit and therefore commissioned to execute his plan on world historical scale. Such a nation-state, when chosen by God, becomes the agent of God in world history. It constitutes the highest expression of morality because it serves God's purpose on earth. World history unfolds through the actions of such a nation-state. Hegel conceives the individual as subordinated to the state. The individual is part of a large hierarchical social organism i.e., the nation-state. As individuals obediently perform their role in the nation-state chosen by God, they overcome their alienation and also further God's will on a world scale. Individuals can only realize their virtues through the nation-state.

Hegel concedes that when nation-states engage in conflict this will necessarily result in violence, but this pain and suffering is not all in vain. Rather, it is part of the grand course of history. The conflict to him, while regrettable, is inevitable because it is necessary and the only means for progress. This position taken by Hegel contrasts with many traditions in Africa and Asia where progress is considered to come about through human beings living in harmony with nature and themselves. God, according to Hegel, does not choose the majority of nation-states to execute his will since he confers his divine spirit on only one nation-state. All other nation-states are consigned to the dustbin of history. Nation-states consigned to the dustbin of history are victims of large and powerful nation-states because they cannot carry out the struggle that is necessary to execute God's grand plan for world history. The chosen nation-state according to Hegel can only be identified retrospectively because it is the nation-state that wins the war or conflict at the end that is chosen by God. But we cannot always know who will win the war in advance. We have to wait to see the end of the war. In the concluding part of his theory of "*Freedom, God, and the State*," Hegel addresses the role of the hero in world history or the world historical individual.

## **HEGEL'S PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY: THE HERO IN WORLD HISTORY**

The heroes in world history according to Hegel are world historical individuals that are an embodiment of their nation-states (Hegel 1956:1-102). Such individuals turned their nation-states into powerful empires and they get this

done through military conflict. These persons are practical and political men. They are persons of great vision and therefore ahead of their time in terms of their vision and agendas. They are great figures of history that execute whatever challenges the historical moment presents to them. Because God's divine spirit is bestowed on such persons, they have the capacity to raise the latent divine spirit in their citizens to a level of high consciousness. When they communicate with their followers or the citizens of their country, the citizens find it unable to ignore the irresistible power in the divine spirit possessed by such leaders. Hegel asserts that these leaders pursue their passion but do so in a manner that ensures the realization of universal goals within their nations and in the world. Indeed, these leaders are actually "supermen." They are so powerful and determined that they cannot adjust their ambition to existing moral, social, and institutional constraints. Hegel concedes that they may commit morally reprehensible acts but that should be discounted because we cannot hold them accountable. They are in any case mere agents carrying out the necessary steps that need to be executed for the realization of world historical progress and human freedom as envisioned by God. In effect, these world historical figures are God's agents in pursuit of God's destiny. They are agents of world history. They help us to realize more freedom and less alienation (Hegel 1956:1-102).

Hegel's theory of "Freedom, God, and the State," is in my assessment a good illustration of the strength and weaknesses of Nietzsche's monumental history (see Nietzsche 1874). I will examine the social implications of Hegel's theory with the particular aim of highlighting some of the dangers associated with exaggerated historical consciousness in the form of monumental history. We must note that Hegel was a very influential philosopher of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and his ideas continued to be translated into public policy visions by many leaders of the world even today.

## **SOCIOPOLITICAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS OF HEGEL'S PHILOSOPHY OF FREEDOM, GOD, AND THE STATE**

First, Hegel's theory provides divine sanction and legitimation to the use of military and political power in resolving conflict for the simple fact that conflict leads to progress. It is unfortunate that he ruled out the possibility that progress can come through other means than conflict. In this framework of global order, the countries of the world that will suffer most are those of the Third World. They will never be any of God's chosen nations because they lack military and political power. There is evidence that this kind of legitimation in Hegel's work may have been exploited by the Soviet Union under Stalin as the quotation below indicates:

The nation to which is ascribed a moment of the Idea is entrusted with giving complete effect to it in the advance of the self-developing self-consciousness of the world mind. This nation is dominant in world history during this one epoch.... In contrast with this its absolute right of being the vehicle of this present stage in the world mind's development, the minds of the other nations are without rights, and they, along with those whose hour has struck already, count no longer in world history (*Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, paragraph 347).

In the post-cold war era, it is fair to say that the United States has increasingly assumed the role that is described in the above quotation. In contemporary times, this concern is particularly important with regards to the use of Christian theological language by the President of the United States to articulate the justification for the second Gulf War (Wallis 2005). Surely there is much similarity in Hegel's reasoning and the arguments made by public officials in the White House and supporters of the *Project for the New American Century (PNAC)*.

Second, Hegel's political theory stresses the primary role of politics in the struggle for truth or to be precise, spiritual truth. Whether it is at the United Nations or the United States Congress, truth seems to be established based on procedures. If the legal rational procedure is followed, then any conclusion arrived at is considered valid and therefore true. Of course this situation is applicable to all other countries of the world as well. But the reason why its applicability to the United States is very relevant is because the U.S. is the only superpower in the post cold war era and therefore, whatever decision the country makes, the consequences can have ramifications beyond U.S. borders. If truth is based on politics, and politics is grounded in the legal rational understanding of power and authority, then the whole process is not immune to manipulation because politics whether in the United Nations, the U.S. Congress or any other country does involve manipulation. Consequently, powerful people can use their power and influence to manipulate procedures and come up with procedural concept of truth that supports their interests (see Domhoff 1997; Perrucci and Wysong, 2003) or passion, as Hegel would call it. Nations that are poor and people that are poor will have little room for influence, even though the agency of the disenfranchised cannot be totally ruled out.

Third, an important social implication of Hegel's theory is a profound legitimation of nationalism in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe but also in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries' world community. In all these centuries, nation-states have used nationalism to further particularistic and sectional interests instead of the universal goals that Hegel's theory envisioned. It is fair to say that Hegel's theory must have had significant impact in Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As part of the process of resolving nationalistic conflict in Europe, Africa was colonized between 1884 and the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Some of the arguments presented to justify colonialism in Africa, Asia, and other parts of the world, dovetail very well with Hegel's vision of history, i.e., whiteman's burden to civilize heathen nation-states. From this Hegelian vision of history, the suffering of all colonized people can be recognized, but yet dismissed as necessary for the further expansion of God's grand design for world history i.e., civilizing the world.

## **EDWARD SAID'S *ORIENTALISM*: A TOOL FOR DECONSTRUCTING HEGEL AND HIS CONTEMPORARY INTELLECTUAL DESCENDANTS**

Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1979) is a very rich book that can be used by scholars in the humanities and the social sciences to illuminate numerous issues of contemporary scholarly relevance. Because of space limitation, I have selected a few conceptual themes from his book in reference that I intend to briefly analyze from the social science perspective—particularly in terms of the “*sociology of development*.” In each case, I intend to demonstrate how his ideas constitute in one respect a devastating critique of Eurocentrism, which is one of the fundamental thrust of Hegel's theory of freedom, God, and the state. I begin the analysis by focusing on the “*selective use of history*” by scholars operating knowingly or unknowingly under the rubric of Orientalism.<sup>1</sup>

*Selective Use of History*: Said asserts that Orientalism as a discourse socially constructs the Orient in a way that is fitting to the expectations and imaginations of the Occident. Once geographical regions are socially constructed, they are ossified into real, coherent ontological categories and on that basis certain epistemological conclusions are drawn in the form of universally applicable covering law. When this covering law is applied backwards, it explains why non-Western people are inferior or underdeveloped. When applied to the future, the covering law predicts why non-Western people will continue to remain underdeveloped unless they acquire Western rationality, institutions, ideas, values and culture in general. This becomes *authentic knowledge* on which basis public policies are developed and implemented by multilateral institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. Thus the classification or models of nations that emerged based on Western historical experience even though socially constructed, becomes the foundation on which different genre of scholarship is built (poetry, literature, social science, philosophy, political theory, economics, or empire domination). In effect, the distinction between Western culture and non-Western culture is used not only as a foundation of scholarly epistemological assumptions, but a certain kind of mindset and historical destiny is imposed on the socially constructed regions. The geographical regions (e.g., the East, the Orient, or non-Western society) are reified, and accordingly dominated and restructured. This scholarly atmosphere shaped the post-enlightenment intellectual discourse in Europe not only about the East, but indeed about non-Western people in general. Furthermore, the ability of Europe to conceptualize the *Other* (Orient, the East, and non-Western people) as inferior has made it possible for European culture to gain in “strength and identity” because the West defines them; they are not

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1. Edward Said provided three major definitions of Orientalism. I find two of those definitions to be particularly relevant to the analysis in this paper where I use his ideas to critique Georg Hegel's philosophy of freedom, God, and the state. The first definition I find relevant is the following: “Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and (most of the time) ‘the Occident.’ Thus a very large mass of writers, among whom are poets, novelist, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, ‘mind,’ destiny, and so on” (Said 1979:2-3). The second definition of Orientalism that I find relevant for this paper is the following: “Taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient (Said 1979:3). In Said's analysis as can be concluded from the definitions of Orientalism provided, it is a concept that at its core contrasts the East and the West. But in this paper I expand the contrast beyond merely the East and the West to include the non-Western world in general versus the West. There are two justifications for me doing so. First, the West was particularly interested in contrasting itself to the East because it considered the East to be the only part of the non-Western world with “historical achievements” that can favorably compete with the West's conception of its exceptionalism. Second, most of the arguments and statements that have been used by Western scholars to portray Eastern achievements as comparatively worth nothing have equally been used with even greater ease to ‘dehumanize’ the other parts of the non-Western world. For these reasons, throughout this paper, Orientalism is conceptualized in terms of how the Western world contrasts itself to the non-Western world in general, and not just the East.

allowed to speak for themselves.

In one sense, the selective use of history is equivalent to saying Eurocentric ethnocentrism became built into Western scholarship as epistemology in an insidious and recondite manner. The knowledge produced through this epistemology is venerated as science and science is not only elitist but technocratic in the sense that ordinary people can hardly question the legitimacy of the knowledge. Only scholars with appropriate knowledge that is respected within the parameters of the epistemology are taken seriously. To worsen the situation, anyone who decides to effectively challenge the knowledge claims will probably have to convince the same Eurocentric knowledge producers that they are wrong, using their own parameters of knowledge. While this is possible, it is an extravagantly difficult task. Furthermore, any attempt to fundamentally challenge the presuppositions of Eurocentrism elicits the “*Western intellectual empire*” to fight back vigorously (see Landes 1999). This leads to another issue of concern that Said’s Orientalism raises i.e., *the raison d’être for producing knowledge*.

**Knowledge and Human Interest: The Raison d’être for Non-Western Scholarship:** One issue that Said underscores in Orientalism which is significantly inspired by the works of Giambattista Vico (1993; Luft 2003) and Wilthem Dilthey (1989; Rickman 1988:43-78) is the need to understand the particular or individual case for what it is and on its own terms. Within Orientalism as a worldview, Said asserts that the non-Western world is not studied or interacted with for the purpose of genuine and authentic cultural understanding, appreciation, and mutual exchange. It is a hierarchical relationship informed by the desire to produce knowledge that will justify and enhance domination, and control. Although some scholars in humanities assert that we can never truly project ourselves outside our cultural boundaries and therefore our perspective of interpreting a text is always culturally determined,<sup>1</sup> Said and Dilthey would insist on the need for us to be sincerely committed to doing a fine balancing act in our interpretation and analysis. Said insists that a humanistic scholarly critique must be grounded in an analysis of long sequence of events (trajectory) rather than “short bursts.” Furthermore, such a critique should aim at a genuine rational historical analysis for the purpose of “understanding and genuine discourse.” Related to this, Vico warns against any human being or group of humans making themselves the yardstick for evaluating “all other people” and all things. He maintains that whenever human beings find it impossible to develop sufficient knowledge about a distant people, they evaluate the people with the little or no substantive knowledge they have (Vico 1993). Edward Said is indeed providing a thorough critique of much Western scholarship such as Hegel’s.

In many respects, Western scholarship uses its own limited knowledge and awareness of non-Western societies to evaluate those societies using Western standards as the yardstick. The fundamental aim is to affirm Western exceptionalism, an assumption that informs many scholarly projects. But as Dilthey maintains, the hermeneutic circle leaves no room for an absolute starting point. Knowledge should be always treated as subject to correction and therefore tentative and provisional. This assertion of his demands flexibility and tentativeness on the part of all social science practitioners. Hegel’s theory of Freedom, God, and the State which was reviewed above was an attempt to put Europe, specifically the Germanic people, at the epic center of the unfolding of the Idea of Freedom. He used information on India, China, and Africa just to contrast with Europe and make his case of European exceptionalism legitimate. Similarly, along the same lines, a significant part of Max Weber’s scholarship (1958; 1995) started with the assumption that Europe was unique. Consequently, a major thrust of his scholarship became using the history of non-Western societies to prove his fundamental assumption. For Robert Brenner (1977) as for David Landes (1999), Europe is the center of human civilization and it owes no part of the world any appreciation for contributing to its achievement in any way. Thus the study of non-Western societies is either totally irrelevant for explaining European historical development as in the case of Brenner, or only relevant to solidify the case of European exceptionalism, which is the position of Landes.

Edward Said’s vision, in line with Vico’s position (1993), is that there are commonalities and particularities in the history of all cultures of the world. But scholars should devote their attention to investigating human agency and try to understand, apprehend, criticize and influence it. Our goal should be to “*forge a common global concert*” and work on issues that are of common interest to people e.g., the environment, famine, gap between advanced and developing countries, health-care, and human rights issues. Doing this is better for him than trying to focus on the distinction among people and use the knowledge acquired on that basis to facilitate cultural domination. We have to study non-

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1. Pauline Marie Rosenau (1992:25-41) asserts that this same argument is made by postmodern scholars. The important issue from the perspective of this paper is that Orientalism, even though it is Eurocentric, maintains that it is pure scientific and objective knowledge free from any cultural bias. The contribution that some scholars in the humanities and postmodernists are making here is the need for humility on the part of every scholar or theoretical perspective on grounds that one can never be clinically free from bias. Unfortunately humility is not one of the virtues that academia teaches.

Western people from the perspective of their cultures as coherent systems instead of observing them externally and classifying them in pursuit of an illusory ideal that was socially constructed to privilege Western civilization. But Hegel's theory of Freedom, God, and the State exactly does what Said and others are criticizing. This leads to another important theme that Said addresses: the discourse legitimating cultural domination of the non-Western world.

**Discourse Legitimizing Cultural Domination of the Non-Western World:** Said asserts that when empires or powerful nations want to embark on a campaign that is aimed at dominating weaker nations as happened between the West and non-Western societies, they come up with a discourse such as "civilizing mission" or "the Whiteman's Burden" to enlighten, normalize, and democratize non-Western societies. The proponents of empire maintain that the normalizing project will be carried out peacefully and to the benefit of the vanquished. Force will only be used as a last resort. They promise to keep destruction at the barest minimum. Interestingly, there is never a shortage of scholars willing to put forward a robust "scientific" or "sophisticated" discourse to justify state expansion or empire building as a "benign" and "altruistic" venture (Cooper 2002). Hegel's theory of freedom, God, and the state is a scholarly justification of empire but systematically packaged as an integral part of the grand process of the universal evolution of human freedom and civilization. Hegel was so convinced about his universal process of human evolution that he cites Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar and Napoleon Bonaparte as Great Men of history or world historical heroes and leaders that are above the law and morality because of their status of being agents of God in world history (Hegel 1956:1-102).

Related to the discourse of domination, Said also argues that Oriental discourse even if it recognizes human misery as a by-product of the activities of empire, either ignores it or dismisses it on grounds that this is necessary in order to realize the march of history towards human freedom. Even a scholar and activist committed to the creation of a just and egalitarian society like Karl Marx (Tucker 1978:653-664) falls into this trap of Oriental discourse, as enunciated in his assessment of the historical meaning of British colonial rule in India.

On why non-Western societies have to be necessarily colonized and be civilized, modern Oriental discourse blames the very victims of empire. They insist that Oriental and non-Western elites must admit their exclusive responsibility for having failed their people (Landes 1999). The historical fact that imperial intrusion in the past had disorganized, disoriented and socially disequibrated the people is totally ignored (Wolf 1997). Furthermore, many conflicts in the postcolonial era are tied or related to an agenda of Western colonial empire in the past or present (Horowitz 2000). In effect, Oriental discourse argues that history and all ideas, values, and knowledge that have contributed to the social evolution of societies are territorially bounded. In terms of development theory, this implies explaining the development of a society purely based on endogenous factors. Using this logic of reasoning, Europe developed exclusively on its own right and non-Western societies need to exclusively blame themselves for their failure to develop. But as the "Galton Problem" debate highlighted (see Barrett 1998:53), it is difficult and mistaken to establish causality based on the assumption that the flow of history, ideas, values etc. are bounded in a water tight manner by national geographical boundaries.

While Said maintains that the contact between the West and non-Western world is unequal and detrimental to the non-Western world, scholarship informed by modern Orientalism unreflectively assumes that contact between the two results in progressive ideas and development diffusing from the West to the non-Western world (Landes 1993; Rostow 1991). Said maintains that Oriental scholarship and worldview informs how nations and people in the West interact with non-Western people. In such interaction, the Western world always positions itself as superior whether the contact is in the form of missionary work, education, science, foreign aid, rural development, agriculture, literature, art and music. In effect, we cannot fully understand the contact between the West and non-Western world, while ignoring the social context of the contact and the relationship. The social context is one of inequality and the perception of inherent failure and weakness of the non-Western world to transform itself.

In contemporary times this line of reasoning has led to published works such as Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992); Thomas Friedman's *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (2000); and Michael Mandelbaum's *The Ideas that Conquered the World: Democracy and Free Markets in the Twenty First Century* (2003). All these prominent authors argue vehemently in their books that the only workable idea in terms of development strategy is neoliberal capitalism and democracy. The way forward for all nations is to adopt more neoliberal economic policies and have governments become downsized and buster, while the scope of market expands. While one cannot in general disagree with some of the specific ideas mentioned by these authors, the important issue from Said's perspective is the context within which the ideas of neoliberalism and liberal democracy were incubated, developed, and propagated.

Neoliberalism as an ideology shaping public policy came out of what is referred to as the Washington Consensus which is a product of agreement among policy makers at the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and the U.S. Treasury Department in the 1990s. This was, however, a continuation of the Reagan Revolution or what in the devel-



opment literature is referred to as the neoclassical counter revolution in economics (Todaro and Smith 2003:128-129). No Third World country participated in developing the Washington Consensus. Third World people were not allowed to speak for themselves: the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the U.S. Treasury Department spoke on their behalf. The consensus represents a vision of the World from the perspective of Western advanced industrial nations and their economic interests. Third World countries were required to fall in line or face the consequences. Here we see clearly a contemporary application of what Edward Said calls modern Orientalism. Orientalism thus changes its form over time but its core essence remains the same.

But the most alarming example and effect of what might be termed postmodern Orientalism is represented in the recommendation of senior British diplomat named Robert Cooper. His recommendation was that because many non-Western societies have historically demonstrated a lack of inherent capacity to transform themselves to become modern nation-states such as in the Western world (i.e., failed states), coupled with the presumably established superiority of Western neoliberal capitalism and democracy, there is a need for a new dispensation of *Liberal Imperialism*. The idea of liberal imperialism means that the United States and the European Union should involve themselves in the domestic policies of the socially constructed pre-modern states in order to promote liberal ideas. Doing so will ultimately produce the golden triangle of *peace, prosperity and democracy*. Cooper's view is summarized below:

The challenge posed by the pre-modern world is a new one. The pre-modern world is a world of failed states. Here the state no longer fulfills Weber's criterion of having the monopoly on the legitimate use of force. Either it has lost the legitimacy or it has lost the monopoly of the use of force; often the two go together. Examples of total collapse are relatively rare, but the number of countries at risk grows all the time. Some areas of the former Soviet Union are candidates, including Chechnya. All of the world's major drug-producing areas are part of the pre-modern world. Until recently there was no real sovereign authority in Afghanistan; nor is there in upcountry Burma or in some parts of South America, where drug barons threaten the state's monopoly on force. All over Africa countries are at risk. No area of the world is without its dangerous cases. In such areas chaos is the norm and war is a way of life. In so far as there is a government it operates in a way similar to an organized crime syndicate. (Cooper 2002)

Cooper's views properly understood are *benign* and *altruistic* imperialism since the intention for liberal imperialism is to establish liberal values and institutions in the pre-modern world. If this is done, he believes liberal imperialism would help in creating a world full of peace, prosperity and democracy for everyone. Failure to do so means the lack of institutionalization of these cherished values and goals among the pre-modern people, and the pre-modern states could also continue to be a threat for the modern ones. Along this line of reasoning, the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq will legitimately be considered imperialism. To conclude, it is clear that like Hegel, Weber, Brenner, and Landes, Cooper observed differences in the world and selectively used history to develop a discourse legitimizing Western domination of non-Western societies. Much that has been said about the intellectual discourse on the triangle of peace, free markets/prosperity, and democracy, and of course liberal imperialism falls under a portion of Edward Said's work that I conceptualize as the sociology of knowledge.

***Orientalism: The Sociology of Knowledge:*** An important contribution that Edward Said makes to our understanding of Western scholarship under the rubric of orientalism is his reflection on the social context within which knowledge is produced, the credibility confers on it and how that knowledge is deployed. Karl Mannheim is one scholar that has made significant contribution to our understanding of the sociology of knowledge. Examining his ideas will help us to appreciate Said's position on this issue. Mannheim contends that no scholar:

Confronts the world and, in striving for the truth, constructs a world view out of the data of his experience... It is much more correct that knowledge is from the very beginning a cooperative process of group life in which everyone unfolds his knowledge within a framework of a common fate, a common activity, and the overcoming of common difficulties (Mannheim 1936:26)

Mannheim's position is that the production of knowledge is existentially determined though not in a mechanistic way. He maintains that all ideas including "truths" are connected to and influenced by the social and historical contexts in which they emerged. Ideas and scholarly concerns are connected to social structure for Edward Said as for Mannheim though not in a mechanical way. Every thinker according to Mannheim is relationally embedded to certain social groups in society, and occupies certain social position in society which necessitates him or her to perform some social

roles. This situation predisposes him or her to view society in some respects and not others. Mannheim again asserts that human beings:

do not confront the objects of the world from the abstract levels of a contemplating mind as such, nor do they do so exclusively as solitary beings. On the contrary, they act with and against one another in diversely organized groups, and while doing so they think with and against each other (Mannheim 1936:3).

Contrary to what some may think, Mannheim's analysis does not address the issue of the existential determination of knowledge in a pejorative sense. Indeed, for him, even respected scholars who are diligent in trying to be objective and neutral can be limited in the sense that Mannheim conceptualizes the issue. He asserts that given that there is probably more than one way to approach an issue, existential determination of knowledge can help us understand which method is chosen and by implication the kind of conclusions that are most likely to be drawn, and the public policy implications warranted.

Given Mannheim's argument, we can conclude that even though Hegel's work is considered Western scholarship at its best, and even though Weber, Brenner, and Landes are reputable scholars, we can understand the presuppositions of their work by noting what they thought were the major issues to be explained, how they posed the issues, and what sort of data they collected and how the data was organized and presented, and what conclusions came out of it. As this paper has highlighted, Hegel's work justifies the superiority of European civilization, sees Europe at the time he wrote and in the near past as the torch bearer of world civilization. He sees nothing wrong with imperial domination because it is considered part of God's grand unfolding plan for human freedom.

Along Mannheim's line of reasoning, Edward Said is concerned about the context within which knowledge is produced. Some scholars that are committed to the naïve idea of objectivity maintain that true knowledge is non-political. While Said is committed to genuine and open disclosure in scholarship, he challenges the idea that true knowledge is non-political. At the same, he does not agree that politically oriented knowledge is automatically not a true knowledge. He provides several arguments to clarify his position. He notes that in an imperialistic society, the political importance of a given piece of knowledge is directly related to how that knowledge could be translated into economic value. In other words, if a piece of knowledge about a people can enhance the ability of a dominant group to control a subjugated people for effective economic exploitation, such a piece of knowledge will receive premium more than others that, even though are excellent, have no direct economic value. Said is also of the view that when the producer of a particular body of knowledge has close attachment or an easy access to the corridors of power, that knowledge will have more political significance than another body of knowledge that is equally excellent, but the producer is distant from the corridors of power.

In a manner similar to Mannheim's existential determination of knowledge, Said forcefully argues that an imperial society through its regular operations and the functioning of its institutions imparts its strategic concerns and priorities to its civil society. Thus while in theory the civil society is supposed to be the arena where the state institutions are scrutinized and tamed against the potential for abuse of power, yet civil society in an imperial society tends to absorb the agendas of empire. Consequently, any scholar that is part of the civil society of an imperial society is consciously or unconsciously being influenced by the imperial society's worldview. Although Said makes this forceful argument about how social and historical context affect knowledge production, he concedes that this does not happen in a mechanistic way. He is therefore in agreement with Coser, when the latter asserts while evaluating Mannheim that: "existential determination of knowledge did not imply a mechanical cause-effect sequence" and therefore "only empirical investigation would disclose the precise nature of the relation in concrete cases (Coser 1977:432-433).

## CONCLUSION

Much has been said about Said's contribution to the critical deconstruction of Western hegemony in the form of Orientalism as a form of approach to scholarship and interaction with the non-Western world. In conclusion, it must be asserted that Said would want us as scholars to be always concerned and aware of how the idea of empire and its imbrications are imparted to each of us as ordinary citizens through the reproduction of culture in civil society. If as ordinary citizens we internalize some of the subtle presuppositions of empire in the cultural lifeworld, then we cannot even hold our political elites accountable for creating a generally free and fair global community. In such a situation, we embrace the domination of the non-Western world as a birth right of the West. We need, however, to problematize this assumption and be deliberately skept-

tical of scholarly works that may on the surface appear excellent but are built on the assumptions of Orientalism i.e., the inherent superiority of the Western world vis-à-vis the non-Western world.

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