Art and Politics in the *Systemprogramme*

Philip A Quadrio

Introduction

I have divided this paper into three sections: the first and shortest section is a preamble; in the second section, which primarily concerns political philosophy and Rousseau's influence on Idealist thought, and in which I explore a little of the intellectual history that I think provides an important backdrop for the issues explored in the third and longest section, in which we will take up issues relating to the intersection of political and aesthetical thought through an engagement with a rather enigmatic Idealist text that has come to be known as the *Systemprogramme*.

Preamble

It is appropriate to say a few words about the text that forms the focus of the latter part of the presentation, which is a text that is not well known outside of Idealist scholarship. The text, which, according to custom, I shall refer to as the *Systemprogramme*, is a fragmentary piece of disputed authorship that dates from around 1796. I shall treat the text as if Hegel were the author but, I am willing to confess, this contention is open to question. In regard to the issue of authorship this paper is a significant departure from my previous engagements with the text.[1] Where I was once inclined to interpret the text through the lens of Schellingian thought, here the text is refracted through a Hegelian lens as I am now of the opinion that it was indeed Hegel and not Schelling or Holderlin who authored the text. Whilst I have a fairly good argument for why I believe this to be

[1] P Quadrio, 'The Oldest Systemprogramme of German Idealism,' in *Cogito: Journal of Philosophy*, 2001, Vol 2 (1).

the case, which I have made in a separate paper, I will not be making it here.[2]

Secondly, in regard to the relationship between the *Systemprogramme* and Idealist thought in general, I have a further confession to make, and that is that the *Systemprogramme* does not play a huge role in the history of Idealism. The course of Idealist thought would probably have remained the same without it. It passed into obscurity almost immediately after it was written, and only re-emerged in the late nineteenth century. It has however generated a lot of interest amongst scholars of classical German philosophy and it now seems almost customary for Idealist scholars to offer some comment on it. There are many reasons why this is the case but for the purposes of this presentation let me indicate three of these: it presents an interesting interpretive problem, as understanding the text is half the fun of engaging with it, it raises some fascinating ideas relating to the politically educative uses of art or more particularly poetry, and finally, if Hegel is the author, it gives some insight into the course of his intellectual development.

In this paper the primary aim is to consider what the text says about the relationship of art and politics, although along the way we will also have to engage in some difficult hermeneutic work, and hopefully the paper will be able to shed some light on early Hegelian thought. In this regard it is important to make it clear from the outset that Hegel's thought during this period has a different focus and feel than the work of his latter period. To get some perspective here, in 1796 Hegel is about twenty-six years old and his first major publication, the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, will not be published for another eleven years, and even this work is not often considered to be the mature Hegelian view. So the Hegel we are dealing with is quite different from the Hegel that some of us know; his interest here is not so much in creating

[2] Ibid.

a systematic theoretical philosophy, even though the text does seem to offer a program for such a system, but rather Hegel in this period seems to be more concerned with rational social reform. In any case, whilst the work of the early Hegel seems to pursue a different agenda from the latter Hegel, the work of the early Hegel has long been recognised as a very fruitful field, especially for those interested in the development of Hegel's socio-political thought.

Lastly, I explicitly make a point about the *Systemprogramme* that is implicit throughout the paper and serves as a kind of hermeneutic framework for what follows. I take it that in regard to what the text has to say about the intersection of politics and aesthetics, its focus is on the political problem of the relation between freedom, obligation and authority. The text seeks to reconcile freedom with the political obligation and political authority that is fundamental to life in a modern state. The text is based in the notion that freedom is compatible with the kind of constraints that are placed upon us by our political associations so long as those constraints are constraints that we can rationally endorse. In the most general terms the text seems to be based in a republican concept of freedom, that we are free when we live by laws of our own making.

Background

The background I wish to paint here, although somewhat crudely, is one that attempts to draw out the importance of Rousseau for the political thought of the German Idealists. There are three main points that I seek to make. Firstly, I will claim that Rousseau's notion of the general will is received into Idealist thought as an organic theory of the state. Secondly, I will argue that Rousseau's philosophy was a fundamental motivation for Kant's critical turn (effectively Rousseau turns Kant away from metaphysics and towards practical ends) and particularly the actualisation of freedom through rational reform. Thirdly, that Rousseau almost pre-empts what has come to be known as the

theory versus practice debate and that this pre-emption seems to leave its mark on this text, the *Systemprogramme*. As I have said above, this section is highly compressed and so in making these points I am merely offering the outlines of longer arguments.

For Rousseau a system of civil obligations can be reconciled with human freedom and equality if each member identifies their will with one that is completely general.[3] By identifying one's will with a general will the authority of that will becomes one's own authority; therefore, in acting according to that authority one acts as one wills. This identification of the individual will with one that is completely general constitutes the state as 'a "moral person," an organic civil whole.'[4] This organic state is a notion that becomes fundamental to political Idealism, especially in the work of Fichte and Hegel, and so needs explanation.

The best way to come to terms with the organic conception of the state, as it was understood by the Idealist, is to juxtapose it with a contrasting conception of the state, the mechanical state or the machine state; this takes us to Hobbes. For Hobbes the civic body is a product of consent, and sovereign authority is derived from this consent.[5] But, once established, the relation of the sovereign to the whole can be viewed as analogous to that between the body and soul, whereby the body was something mechanical and the soul a separate substance governing its motion.[6] The soul animated the body just as the sovereign animated the civic body; here we have what I will call a socio-political duality of substance. What is important here is that sovereignty is something that is external to the civic body; once sovereignty has been established these two terms are isolatable

[3] J J Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, translated by M Cranston, Hammondsworth, 1968, 61-3.
[4] S Meld Shell, 'Organizing the State. Transformations of the Body Politic in Rousseau, Kant and Fichte,' in *International Yearbook of German Idealism*, K Ameriks and J Stolzenberg, editors, Berlin, 2004, 50.
[5] T Hobbes, *Leviathan*, R Tuck, editor, Cambridge, 1996, 117-121.
[6] Meld Shell, op cit, 54-5.

and distinct.[7] Whilst sovereignty emerged from the consent of the civic body once it is established it is free from its dependence upon that body, in fact any relation of dependence flows in the other direction, and it seems that the civic body is to a large degree dependent on the sovereign for its motive force and coherence. In such a conception, sovereignty is not immanent within the civic body, but rather it lies outside of it.[8]

For Rousseau, on the other hand, the civic body was understood by analogy with organic life, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that it was understood by analogy with the moral person.[9] The civic body, *qua* moral person, contains within it its own principle of life and movement. This principle is completely internal to that moral person without becoming a separate ruling part. The state is a living whole 'whose unifying general will is immanent and consistent with freedom and equality.'[10] This we could construe as a form of socio-political monism. This Rousseauian idea passes into the Idealist tradition but is radically transformed in transit, so that by the time Hegel takes up the notion of an organic state, the notion of organicism is not so much based on an analogy but rather it is based on Hegel's logic, it has become a logical category. This is a complex story the exact details of which we will have to leave aside, although we will take up the notion of organicism as a logical category later and thereby develop more nuanced understanding of the organic state.

Scholars like Richard Velkley[11] and Friedrich Beiser[12] admirably bring out a more direct Rousseauian influence on Idealist

[7] T Hobbes, op cit, 121-2.
[8] Ibid, 120-121.
[9] Meld Shell, op cit, 56.
[10] Ibid.
[11] R L Velkley, *Freedom and the End of Reason: On the Moral Foundation of Kant's Critical Philosophy*, Chicago, 1989.
[12] F C Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution, and Romanticism: the genesis of modern German political thought, 1790-1800,* Cambridge,1992.

thought. This second dimension lies in Rousseau's influence on Kant; Rousseau was able to convince Kant that metaphysics undermines practical morality, that its concern with transcendent entities was useless in the sphere of practical life.[13] Rather than base morality on metaphysics, it would be more appropriate to base metaphysics on morality.[14] The key end was freedom, and could only be achieved via the realisation of human rights, which, for Kant, could only flourish in a Republican society based on equality. Hence, a specific set of socio-political conditions become, for Kant, the transcendental ground of freedom.[15] So, with Beiser, I understand the primacy of practical reason in Kant to be a product of his encounter with the thought of Rousseau.

The primacy of the practical in Kant is basically an expression of the notion that the end or *telos* of reason was a practical one, the *telos* of reason was human freedom.[16] For Kant the practical goal was, through the application of reason, to transform the mere mechanical rule of the patriarchal sovereign (the state understood along Hobbesian lines) into a social organism that embodied the spirit of reciprocal freedom,[17] which we might interpret as something like Rousseau's General Will. Kant was operating with an agenda of rational political reform. Reason could guide our political life and lead us to a reconciliation of freedom, obligation and authority and to that degree reason itself had a practical authority. So whilst the powers of reason had limits and were indeed bounded, reason did extend as far as was practically necessary for life.

But Kant's optimism was not shared by all of his contemporaries. For conservative thinkers one event more than any other, the French Revolution, served as the most forceful indictment of

[13] Ibid, 29.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid, 30.
[16] Velkley, op cit, 39-40.
[17] Ibid, 61-62.

reason's practical authority.[18] It seemed for them that practical reason had all the blood of the guillotine on its hands and that the rational reform of politics actually undermined political authority;[19] political theory was undermining political reality. For the conservatives, the principles of morality were only derivable experientially, and wholesale reform led to anarchy.[20] Such criticisms of political rationalism fed into the now famous 'theory versus practice debate:'[21] for the conservatives, theory ought to follow practice, whereas for the radicals practice ought to conform to theory. The theory versus practice debate had a decisive impact upon European thinkers from Kant through Hegel to Marx and beyond. This debate was framed around two questions: firstly, does reason have the power to determine the first principles of the state?[22] Secondly, does it have the authority to make people act on those principles?[23] For the conservatives, even if one answers the first question affirmatively, and they held some doubt about this, the second question must be answered in the negative; pure reason does not have practical power, it cannot motivate a person towards their duty. The wellsprings of popular political action were the passions, imagination and tradition,[24] which are untouched by the philosophical abstraction typical of the rational reformers.

The challenge to those philosophers, like Kant, who were optimistic about the authority of practical reason was to show that reason could be practical, that theory could guide practice. Against this conservative position other thinkers believed that rational political reform was possible; their answer to the first question was affirmative. Reason could determine the principles

[18] F Beiser in *A companion to continental Philosophy*, S Critchley and W R Schroeder, editors, Oxford, 1999, 24.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.

of state, theory could guide practice, philosophy can tell us how we ought to live. Yet the arguments of the conservatives were not lost on them; they took seriously the claim that the passions, imagination and tradition were the wellsprings of popular political action and that reason was not suited to appeal to poorly educated unenlightened people. The problem was to transform abstract ideas, well-suited to a philosophical temperament, into a source of motivation, and inspiration, for popular political action. For many the problem became a problem about presentation and education. The challenge that had to be met was to find some vehicle whereby philosophical discourse could be presented to a non-philosophical audience and through this achieve a kind of general philosophical education which would facilitate practical reform. An uneducated public had to undergo some kind of educative process whereby they would be able to achieve a rational perspective on social and political problems.

For those philosophers who followed Kant, and here I am particularly thinking not only of Fichte, Schelling and Hegel, but also of the Early Romantics, there was a feeling that a new age was dawning. They dreamt of a completed philosophy, a completed science, and with that completed science a perfect theory of the state. Yet, the issues that animated the theory versus practice debate indicated that such a perfect theory, whilst theoretically possible, might not be practically achievable. This end appeared unachievable simply in virtue of the fact that the public seemed to lack the enlightenment required to be motivated by reason or what they perceived as rational.

Now, as I stated earlier, I want to claim that Rousseau had already grasped this problem so let me return to Rousseau briefly. One idea linked to Rousseau's concept of a body politic constituted by reciprocal connectedness was the need for a unity of sensibility, the need for an emotional bond, as a kind of transcendental condition or ground for such a body politic.[25] This

[25] Meld Shell, op cit, 59.

held the body politic together as a moral being and without it the body politic would fall apart, disintegrate. The general will is, in fact, an expression of this connectedness, the general will forges this connectedness into a tangible political agency. So in an important sense the general will arises out of some prior emotional bond or is a modification of it.[26] Whilst a general will could theoretically be achieved through the rational construction of institutions, for Rousseau the most adequate means to this end is through creating shared values, shared 'habits of the heart' which bring about a sentimental connection to the social whole.[27] So for Rousseau in order for practice to follow theory there is a need to have a way of appealing to sensibility.

One vehicle through which this appeal could be made was the civic religion. Here religion becomes a vehicle of reciprocal connectedness because of its affective power and not because of its content.[28] It is through affect that the spirit of reciprocal connectedness is forged and the general will can manifest to produce a reconciliation of freedom and obligation. It is not the doctrinal components of religion that interest Rousseau, rather its capacity to create bonds of affect within a community and to fill abstract legalism with passion by embedding it in an affective social practice. Religion does not dictate to reason what it ought to think, but rather reason leads religious practice towards rational social ends. Rousseau pre-empts the conservative critique encountered in the theory versus practice debate by tacitly acknowledging that unaided reason, pure abstract legalism, is insufficient to achieve civic health. It is not sufficient to know the good but rather the people must undergo an experience which creates an affective bond with the good. Reason is powerful but affect is even more so in the realm of popular political action. Indeed it is only through affect that a bond can be made between the people and the rational.

[26] Ibid, 58.
[27] Ibid, 59.
[28] J H Dent, editor, *A Rousseau Dictionary,* Oxford, 1992, 204.

This is the general background that we need to have in view in order to work through what I want to say about the *Systemprogramme*. Before we move onto section three, where we will directly engage with the text, it would be appropriate to take a short Hegelian interlude. In order to gain a sense of the text's flavour, its bold pronouncements and its almost sermon like quality, consider the following abstract (taken from the Bowie translation):

> Putting the Idea of Humanity first – I want to show that there is no Idea of the *State* because the state is something *mechanical*, just as little as there is an idea of a *machine*.
>
> Only that which is an object of *freedom* is called an *Idea*. We must, then, also go beyond the state! – For every state must treat free people as a piece of machinery; and it should not do this: thus it must come to an end…
>
> Finally the Idea which unites all, the idea of beauty…the highest act of reason…is an aesthetic act…The philosopher must possess just as much aesthetic power as the poet. People without aesthetic power are our pedantic philosophers [*BuchstabenPhilosophen*]. The philosophy of spirit is an aesthetic philosophy…
>
> Poetry thereby gains a higher dignity, at the end it becomes what it was in the beginning – *teacher of* (History) *Mankind*; for there is no philosophy, no history any more, poetry alone will survive all the remaining sciences and arts.
>
> …we hear so often that the masses should have a *sensuous religion*. Not only the masses but also the philosopher needs monotheism of reason of the heart, polytheism of imagination and of art, this is what we need!
>
> …I shall speak here of an Idea which, as far as I know, has never occurred to anyone – we must have a new mythology, but this mythology must be in the service of the Ideas [of reason], it must become a mythology of *reason*.

> Before we make the Ideas [of reason] aesthetic i.e. mythological, they are of no interest to the *people* and on the other hand before mythology is reasonable the philosopher must be ashamed of it. Thus enlightened and unenlightened must finally shake hands, mythology must become philosophical and the people reasonable, and philosophy must become mythological in order to make the philosophers sensuous. Then eternal unity will reign among us. Never the despising gaze, never the blind trembling of the people before its wise men and priests. Only then can we expect the *same* development of *all* powers, of the individual as well as all individuals [equality]. No power will be suppressed any more, then general freedom and equality of spirits will reign!… it will be the last greatest work of mankind.[29]

Comments on the Text

The *Systemprogramme* overcomes the gap between theory and practice in a way resonant with Rousseau's civic religion. The *Systemprogramme* is a naïve, but beautiful, revolutionary dream that a philosophically inspired reform of religion could be the great agency of popular enlightenment, overcoming the gap between theory and practice, reconciling freedom with political obligation,[30] forging an organic social form united in reciprocal connectedness. It is not doctrinal Christianity that provides the model of reform but rather it is the aesthetic religion of the Greeks.[31] Christianity is hostile to myth and imagination: hence it is practically useless for uniting the people.[32] The superiority of Greek religion lies not in any of its metaphysical doctrine but in its form, the Greek religion is aesthetic, its power is its

[29] Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche,* Manchester, 1993, 265-67.
[30] H S Harris, 'Religion as the Mythology of Reason,' in, *Thought*, 1981, Vol 56, (222), 302.
[31] Ibid.
[32] H S Harris, *Hegel's Development: Toward the Sunlight 1770-1801,* Oxford, 1972, 254-255.

mythological or poetic character.[33] The content of the new religion is not to be found in the sphere of the religious, but rather it is to be found solely in practical reason.[34] So, whilst the aesthetic mythology of the Greeks provides the form of this religious reform, Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* grounds its content.

Here we have swiftly emptied religion of all metaphysical content and turned it into a vehicle through which practical reason can become an active social force; Nietzsche's quip about Christianity being Platonism for the masses comes to mind. Let us now consider what the text itself tells us. In the part of the text which most interests me we are told that the Idea of humanity cannot provide us with an Idea of the state and this is so because the state is something mechanical whereas humanity is a living organic ideal.[35] Here the thought is that mechanism and organicism are mutually exclusive modes of understanding, which is a notion we have briefly sketched out earlier. The main clue to the interpretation of this passage lies, however, in the first line of the next paragraph, which states that only an object of freedom is called an Idea.[36] An Idea is an object of freedom in that it is an actualisation of its own concept. Idea and concept are both used in their special Hegelian sense. Here we must understand concept as a causative principle, a blueprint embedded in some self-developing unity. We might understand concept as the concept of an end, a *telos*.[37] The Idea is a unity that has developed teleologically towards an end that is embedded within it – it is self-determining. More concretely we might say that the Idea contains within itself its own developmental principle (the concept) and as such is the cause of itself, or at least is more the result of its own inner

[33] Ibid.
[34] Harris, 'Religion as the Mythology', op cit, 302.
[35] Harris, *Hegel's Development*, op cit, 250.
[36] G W F Hegel, *Systemprogramme*, translated by Harris in Ibid, 510.
[37] M Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary*, Oxford, 1999, 60.

determination than the result of anything external to it.[38] The Idea is the actualisation of its own concept; the idea is to the concept as the mature tree is to the seed. Again, I would emphasise the teleological nature of this development. The Idea is an object of freedom in that it is relatively independent of influences outside of its own nature for its existence, just as the seed contains the germ of the mature tree.

For Hegel, the organism, *qua* logical category, can only be understood through the concept of a system of parts that are in a relation of reciprocal connectedness, through a notion of a life whose principle of growth and development is internal to it. In other words, the organic is a unity that contains within it its own concept, or that contains within it its own internal principle of development and its possibility does not require any reference to an external will or a creator. Hence there can be an idea of an organism, because organism is a concept, a self-developing unity: organism contains the ground of its own determination. That is the logical definition of an organism. With mechanism, however, we have a relation of parts in juxtaposition to one another. The function of each part in relation to the whole is something that is determined externally: by a creator or controller who sets the parts in such a relation so as to achieve some end. Such an end is, of course, always external to it and is never part of its own inner purpose and so one must always go beyond the mechanism in order to explain it. A mechanism is an artifice, something constructed and so is ontologically reliant upon an artificer. It is not self-sufficient and thus it is dependent and unfree.

So, with the mechanism its concept always lies in a will external to it and in order to explain the existence of the mechanism one has to refer to some external will. The mechanism requires the mechanic or engineer. It is other determined. The organism, containing within itself its own principle of growth and

[38] Ibid.

development, its own ends or purpose, is therefore self-sufficient and so is an object of freedom, but the machine, which has its purpose or end determined by an external will cannot be understood as an object of freedom. The state, like the machine, is an instrument, it is set up; it is an arrangement of interacting 'objects' that is set up by a will external to it. Those who set up the state are like political mechanics or political engineers. Therefore, whilst both the state and the machine can operate with causal efficacy they also, in their reliance on an external will, demonstrate a passivity and dependence alien to the organism, which does not need refer to an external will. They require for their very existence, for their very possibility, another causal power, a power that serves to actualise a concept of the instrument. Hence the concept, or *telos*, of mechanism always lies outside of itself, whereas the concept of *telos* of the organism is always contained within it.

Remember, an Idea represents a fully actualised concept, and a concept is something that is self-actualising or contains its ends within itself. If the state is mechanical, it is not an object of freedom: it is a system tuned towards ends external to it. Thus there can be no Idea of the state in the same way that there can be no idea of a machine.[39] Both are conditioned, neither actualises its own concept. For Hegel there is an idea of humanity; humanity is a self-determining, self-sufficient concept and hence an object of freedom. In this, we encounter the notion that the state, as an instrument, and an instrument of a sovereign that is in effect separate from or external to it, has subordinated that which is unconditioned and free to itself. Something unfree, the machine state, subordinates something free, the people that comprise it. Freedom is subsumed by the apparatus that ought to serve it. An absurdity! This must come to an end! The machine state, *qua* mechanism, inevitably treats free people as if they were cogs, mere instruments in the service of its ends - thus

[39] Hegel, *Systemprogramme*, op cit, 510.

negating rather than actualising human freedom.[40] The state must go! We have been led to anarchism.

The spirit of revolution is a strong voice in the text, but this is mitigated. It is not the state *per se* that must go, but the patriarchal machine state. Once the machine state is dissolved, what is required is not the further full dissolution of the state but rather that thought go beyond the state.[41] The machine state cannot forge an ethical community nor can it inspire morality, it can only pursue abstract legality, it can only operate in the spirit of positivism, according to laws applied in abstraction. The ethical society, on the other hand, is one bound in the spirit of reciprocal connectedness, the organic whole. Ethical society is an object of freedom. It is not something constructed, but rather is self-actualising, because ethical society, *qua* society bound in the spirit of reciprocal freedom, is a moral person. Whilst the Idea of humanity cannot provide an idea of the state, because the state is constructed by humanity, the Idea of humanity can provide us with the idea of the ethical society, for the ethical society is an analogue of the moral person.

The machine state is a product of what Hegel refers to as *Verstand*, abstract understanding. This is a piece of Hegelian terminology that I ought to explain. *Verstand* is a mode of thinking that analyses and dissects what it relates to, breaking the world down into definite particulars, abstracting those particulars from their concrete relations to other particulars or from the wholes in which they are embedded.[42] These particulars are then defined and these definitions held fixed by the understanding. For Hegel this is an essential, but ultimately one-sided and inadequate mode of thinking. The Machine State is a product of *Verstand*, it is the product of a process of abstraction that brings isolated and isolatable but clearly defined particulars

[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Inwood, op cit, 243-244.

into some kind of contingent relation to achieve a contingent end. Like a machine, it is a product of human design, assembled out of isolated particulars with an end in mind. It can only treat people from the aspect of the abstract understanding – as a means to its ends. It is for this reason that the state treats people as cogs,[43] analysable quanta. It is for this reason that the state is something mechanical. Thus from the perspective of the abstract understanding the members of the body politic must be considered in abstraction from all their concrete particularity, as mere singular units or bare particulars, which can be brought into causal and mechanical relations so as to achieve the sovereign's ends. *Verstand* applied to the social results in instrumental and mechanical relations. It operates in the spirit of positivity.

This notion of *Verstand* can be considered as a cognitive mode that achieves clarity without depth to produce clear analysis. It fixes and isolates its objects and is associated with concepts as they are traditionally understood, as opposed to the Hegelian concept. *Verstand* creates rational and abstract theoretical structures, to quote Hegel, 'a palace of the intellect where ordinary folk cannot dwell.'[44] Whilst this may be fitting in some spheres, like science, in the social realm it only produces 'a sapless phlegm that cripples free movement.'[45] Such structures are the product of what Hegel refers to as the *Buchstabenmench*,[46] the philosophers of the letter whose analytic clarity and rational structures become a source of 'vainglorious superiority.'[47]

Legality is not, however, the enemy of ethical society, as it can become its instrument. Hence, the state must be subordinate to the moral person of the ethical society. The state, *qua* machine, must never be an ends and only ever a means. Abstract

[43] Hegel, *Systemprogramme*, op cit, 510.
[44] Harris, *Hegel's Development*, op cit, 140.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.

understanding must serve reason, or to use another idiom, *Verstand* serves *Vernuft*. *Vernuft* (reason) is for Hegel a mode of thought transcending the abstract quality of the understanding exposing its inner contradictions so that understanding's conceptual clarity collapses, but collapses with a positive result, something higher.[48] In politics that something higher is the moral person of ethical society. Anarchism is thus mitigated. When *Verstand* serves *Vernuft*, the state serves the ethical life of the people. The machine is a means of the people's ends; the humanly constructed mechanism of state is a subordinate function of a republic bound in reciprocal connectedness. The *Buchstabenmench*, the philosophers of the letter, become the under-labourers of republican freedom, constructing theoretical structures in the service of society.

In this critique of the *Buchstaben philosophen* the text arrives at a novel conception of the philosophical vocation. The philosopher becomes the *Volkserzieher,* teacher of the people; the philosopher's vocation is not mere theoretical speculation but the practical realisation of that speculation in service to the people. The *Volkserzieher* seeks to enlighten the people and bring them beyond the state, beyond the subordination of freedom to its own mechanistic product, through awakening the spirit of reciprocal connectedness.[49] Such enlightenment cannot be pursued purely through the Ideas of reason, which, whilst capable of motivating a philosophical temperament accustomed to abstraction, lacks the power to inspire the people. The people are capable of reaching the standpoint of enlightenment; this is simply the actualisation of human potential. Enlightenment is part of the actualisation of the concept of humanity, but the people need to be educated, enlightenment must be cultivated; this is the role of the *Volkserzieher*.[50]

[48] Inwood, op cit, 244.
[49] Harris, *Hegel's Development*, op cit, 140.
[50] Ibid.

The idea of the organic state, unified in the spirit of reciprocal connectedness, is an idea of reason. In order for that idea to pass over into the realm of popular political action, it must be rendered sensuous. It must be rendered in a form that appeals to the imagination.[51] The people must undergo a sensuous experience with this idea. Otherwise, the idea will remain in the realm of abstract theory. For conservative thinkers these ideas of reason could never serve as motivation for political action, since the people simply are not moved by reason – indeed for the conservative the people are irrational. Reason is an abstract power; it is one that undermines tradition and so one cannot marry reason to the sensuous world of tradition. This idea is denied in the *Systemprogramme*.

Something like Rousseau's notion of the civic religion now comes into play. The *Systemprogramme* invokes the notion of a rational religion, through the notion of a mythology of reason. For Hegel, as for Rousseau, it seems as if a rational civil religion must derive its source of unity from something other than doctrines or creeds, for in the world of civic life there must be a perfect tolerance, without which social stability would falter.[52] Hence Hegel appeals to the imagistic and poetic power of myth rather than the rational theology of religion traditionally conceived, which, like pure reason itself, is too abstract to appeal to a people who have not yet undergone enlightenment. There are two core aims that a civic mythology must achieve: Firstly, the requirements of practical reason must be met within it. It must embody practical reason, practical reason must be its full content.[53] Secondly, imagination, passion and sensibility must be fulfilled by it.[54] It must render pure reason sensible. It must take an aesthetic form. The mythology of reason strives towards these ends, to create a unity of reason, imagination and passion

[51] Ibid, 145.
[52] Harris 'Religion as the Mythology', op cit, 303
[53] Harris, *Hegel's Development*, op cit, 145
[54] Ibid.

that could unify public life.[55] It overcomes the gap between theory and practice by presenting a poetic expression of reason that appeals to popular imagination and passion. Through such a poetic expression of reason, the people can have a sensuous presentation of the ideas. They undergo a personal experience with practical reason and this, for the Hegel of the *Systemprogramme*, becomes the great vehicle of civic enlightenment.

The highest act of reason is not the formulation of the Ideas of reason but rather the aesthetic act of poetising them; only through their poetisation can the Ideas of reason become a force of popular political action. The philosopher must have the aesthetic power of a poet[56] for without this capacity reason must remain an abstraction. The *Volkserzeiher* is not the *Buchstaben philosophen*,[57] the philosopher of the letter, philosophising from the standpoint of abstract understanding, but rather assumes the standpoint of an aestheticised reason. In making this claim the young Hegel undergoes a revolution in his understanding of the human condition and the relationship between reason and imagination.[58] He saw his own vocation as that of a teacher of the people, and indeed he sees this as the most worthy vocation of all. Now, he is struck by the thought that without aesthetic sense one cannot achieve this vocation. Indeed one cannot even be a philosopher without aesthetic sense. A triangle forms: one can neither philosophise nor be a teacher of the people without aesthetic sense and one cannot be a teacher of the people without being a philosopher. Thus poetry acquires a higher dignity, becoming once again what it was in the beginning, in the world of Greek myth: the teacher of humanity.[59] In the final act of reason, philosophy disappears into poetry.

[55] Harris 'Religion as the Mythology', op cit, 303
[56] Hegel, *Systemprogramme*, op cit, 511.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Harris, *Hegel's Development*, op cit, 253.
[59] Hegel, *Systemprogramme*, op cit, 511.

The myth of reason, like the civil religion, serves the ideal of ethical society. Hegel is aware that such an idea may seem reactionary but claims

> Before we make the Ideas aesthetic, ie mythological, they are of no interest to the people and on the other hand before mythology is reasonable the philosopher must be ashamed of it. Thus enlightened and unenlightened must finally shake hands, mythology must become philosophical and the people reasonable, and philosophy must become mythological in order to make the philosophers sensuous. Then eternal unity will reign among us. Never the despising gaze, never the blind trembling of the people before its wise men and priests…then general freedom and equality of spirits will reign…it will be the last, greatest work of mankind.[60]

Rational religion, as with Rousseau, overcomes the gap between theory and practice, becoming the vehicle of reciprocal connectedness, reconciling freedom and obligation.

One must not overemphasise religion here. The Idea of beauty, not the Idea of the holy, is the pinnacle of reason. The highest rational act is an aesthetic act, not a holy one, beauty is the source of unity and reconciliation.[61] Here religion and philosophy are on par, subsumed under beauty. When reason is poetised, it takes the place of religion, and when reason is poetised, there will be no need to distinguish between religion, philosophy and poetry. Mythology becomes the proper name for the general integration of philosophy and aesthetic experience.[62] This, rather than the completion of philosophy, the completion of science, becomes the last great work of humanity, rendering what has been completed by the intellect into a sensuous force in practical life.

[60] Ibid, 511-12.
[61] Harris, *Religion as the Mythology*, op cit, 304-5.
[62] Ibid.

Here art's function is educative: it is humanity's teacher and remains so even when philosophy consumes itself. The intellectual endeavour of philosophy, science itself, may complete itself, but until it is rendered poetic it has not realised its end. Philosophy thus has mythology as its limit for it is not the abstract speculation of the *Buchstabenmench* that is the greatest work of humanity. Rather, the poetization of pure speculation receives that accolade. Poetry lives on after speculation has ended. To marry a completed philosophy to poetry is to allow philosophy to pass over into poetry. The myth of reason remains as a religion of sorts, and it keeps the people on the moral path by its sensuous expression, but serves the further useful function of keeping philosophers sensuous by transforming them into poets. Thus theory is anchored in the sensuous world of practice and the people are spared the humiliation of the despising gaze of vainglorious wise men, and spared from the degradation of trembling before them. In the rational mythology philosophy and religion have passed over into art, the result of which is the utopian but beautiful dream of perfect equality and freedom.