

## THE HEGEL MYTH AND ITS METHOD

*I only avail myself of the person as of a strong magnifying glass with which one can render visible a general but creeping calamity which it is otherwise hard to get hold of.*

NIETZSCHE, *Ecce Homo*

HEGEL is known today, at least in the United States, less through his own works than through secondary sources and a few incriminating slogans and generalizations. The resulting myth has, however, long lacked any comprehensive statement. This situation was altered by the publication in 1945 of Karl Popper's *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Now this work, which has already gone through three impressions in England, has been published in a revised edition in the United States.<sup>1</sup> The book has many virtues: it represents a passionate attack against totalitarianism, is written with superb clarity, contains many interesting quotations and — more important — a great number of extremely suggestive ideas. Yet the book also has grave faults. Even those, for example, who will welcome a forceful critique of the view that Plato was really a democrat are not likely to accept Popper's picture of him. For the *Republic* is still widely read, and even the *Laws* is easily within reach. It is therefore altogether less important to take issue with Popper's interpretation of Plato than with his method. And by the same token, it seems preferable to use his chapter on Hegel as an example rather than the ten on Plato; for far fewer readers are likely to recall crucial passages in the *Philosophy of Right* or to reach for a worn copy of this work to check Popper's accusations. Moreover, one can deal more thoroughly with one chapter than with ten.

Popper's Hegel chapter (fifty pages, plus nineteen pages of notes) demands detailed criticism for at least two reasons. First, it con-

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<sup>1</sup> Princeton University Press, 1950, in one volume (the English edition has two). There are twenty-five chapters: ten each attacking Plato and Marx, two on Aristotle and Hegel, and three presenting some of the author's conclusions. The notes are gathered together at the end of the volume (pp. 467-726) and printed very readably (much better than in the English edition); and the publisher has made it exceedingly easy to match them up with the text.