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The thesis of Michael W. Clem entitled

Hegel's Ethics, Berger's Sacred Canopy

and an Ethics for a Secular Society

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies in the School for Summer and Continuing Education of Georgetown University has been read and approved.

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Hegel's Ethics, Berger's Sacred Canopy and an Ethics for a Secular Society

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies

By

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Abstract

The following paper is a study of the plausibility of an ethical structure designed on a secular foundation. The work begins with a concentrated examination of Hegelian ethics, primarily focusing on Hegel's sociological emphasis. Hegel’s ethical philosophy was chosen as a model for the construction of my own ethical theory because of his somewhat ambiguous ideas about divinity, and because of his sociologically focused conclusions. His basic moral philosophy is concerned with the creation and development of a moral code through one’s interaction and participation in civil society. His work also reaches some conclusions about the role of the individual within the state and the ultimate function of the state as the paramount moral structure. All of this initially stems from Hegel’s organicism, in which he states that each man is like a part of a body; the body(society) is dependent upon its parts, and the parts become dependent on the whole.

Peter Berger’s ideas on man’s development of society and culture are the focus of the second portion of the paper. I used his work because of his ideas about man’s world construction and creation of God. Berger begins his work, The Sacred Canopy, with a basic summary of how he believes man externalizes his ideas and beliefs into the world around him and creates a culture and society in which he can survive and
prosper. Man then must respond to the things he has created as they have taken on a life of their own. They have become something out there that he must react to. They have become objectivated. Man then internalizes these products that have taken on this objective reality, such as language and symbols, as if they were transcendent truths. It is at this point that man has the means and desire to create a set of ideas and beliefs that will appear transcendent and serve to give him meaning and purpose. The transcendent quality of these convictions will provide them with a sense of validity and weight.

By combining the ideas of Berger and Hegel, as summarized above, I concluded with a moral structure designed for a secular society, and founded on purely humanistic terms. The ethics would be an externalization of the beliefs of the people and would take form within the institutions of the society. The state would ultimately reflect the ideas of the people and would provide the moral model and guide for the society.
This study is intended to be an examination of the plausibility of a moral and ethical structure based not on divine or supernatural foundations, but on humanistic terms. This is not an examination of personal and individual morals per se, but rather one aimed at societal ethical structures and the consequential role of the individual within those structures. The first portion of this investigation will center on the sociological focus of Hegelian ethics as well as any relevant values and concerns expressed in his work. Hegel presents us with a rare philosophical look into societal value structures rather than the more common individual moral focus of most philosophical works on this issue. Peter Berger’s ideas on religion and world construction, found in his work, *The Sacred Canopy*, will be analyzed and interpreted in the second section of this investigation, with a special concern for his notion of the origins of God and religion. From the study of these works I hope to find the necessary ideas with which, in the third part of this work, I can develop a strong case supporting moral and ethical guidelines relevant to and based upon current secular values and traditions.

Hegelian ethics are immediately useful here because of his social concentration as opposed to the individually focused ethics of many philosophical inquiries. His philosophical work is still very relevant in twentieth century society as is
evidenced in his influence on Marxian and Existential thought. His work in ethics is also useful here because his treatment of the divine, or supernatural, is relatively inexplicit and allows great room for interpretation. Hegel appears to support and argue for a divine influence in the universe but this concept of the divine is referred to in terms of Absolute Idealism, which will require more detailed treatment as it unfolds later in this study. This is the point at which Berger’s work on the concept of the spiritual world will be most useful. He presents us with a fresh and, I believe, convincing approach to the subject of the divine as it is expressed in Hegel.

Hegel’s moral and political philosophies run hand in hand. His ethical theories conclude that there is no higher moral authority than the state. There is no obligation other than to the society in which you live and the institutions found within it. The educational and religious institutions as well as the economic and political situations of a particular time and place are of great (conscious and subconscious) influence on the individual within that system and yield no other practical course of action or reaction than to submit. We are, in the end, products of our social setting.

This idea of a social or nation-state morality seems to be derived from Hegel’s organicism. This is his idea that everything is a part of some larger reality; that we are like
the parts of a body. The body is a whole with a purpose and a form that is made up of many vital parts that are dependent on one another to complete the whole, and the whole in turn is dependent upon these parts for survival. This is how Hegel views the human situation. We are, as individuals, basically a part of the whole of society and only within that wholeness can we realize ourselves and be human. Only within that structure and in cooperation with the other parts of that unity are we able to reach our full potential as man, and of course only through human cooperation can there exist the whole itself. There is obviously a cyclical process at work in this theory that cannot be broken if we are to prosper as humans.

Within this organicism we find Hegel’s concept of the Spirit of the People.¹ This Spirit I believe is the collective experience and personality of the culture and society in which one finds him or herself. It is embodied in the culture of the particular society; in its arts, language, philosophy, and religion. It is developed from Hegel’s ideas of Spirit as a set of related systematic steps toward an absolute harmonious consciousness. The Spirit of the People is one phase in the development of a consciousness that displays the collective experience and nature of that group of people. This composite

¹ Philosophy of Right. 341-360.
character becomes the basis for each society's unique notions of right and wrong, as developed in the conscience of each individual. It is through the individual's own conscience that the ideas of good and evil must first be examined in order for there to be any dialogue and resolution within the society's institutions. These moral beginnings develop as a collection and consensus of individually accepted ideas evolving within the cultural institutions that are part of the society. Obviously the religious institutions of the society, if there are such traditions, will be of great influence in this area. This idea of the influence of religious tradition is a point that will be taken up with Berger later as a matter of social construction and not one of ethical theory. But it is important here to understand that the Spirit of the People, as described above, is the point of origin, in Hegel, for the collective societal standards that will govern the people. Through this general accord among the people, the nation state is created and given the power to set the standards of society and to enforce those principles as agreed upon and devised by the citizens. It is through the recognition of the need for a set of societal guidelines that the state is initially developed as a means of common survival and security. Through this relationship between the people and the state, we can see that the desires of the public and the precepts of the state are originally one and the same. Of course there seems to
inevitably come a time when the state and the people begin to diverge and become at odds. Often as the cultural institutions develop they take on an objective character that the people become reactionary to and eventually hostile towards.

The most obvious objection to Hegel's ethics is that the state itself may not be of a high moral caliber and that the Spirit of the People may be misguided. An immediate example would be that of Nazi Germany. The point Hegel would make is that he never claims any government or society to be ideal, but that a society is made up of those people who are in turn created by that society and consequently the actions taken within that structure reflect their moral conceptions. These moral concepts are conscience. An individual’s personality is a direct reflection of experience and growth. The person will reflect the values and interests that are a part of his development. If he does not duplicate the values of those who influenced him, that too is a direct result of his experience. His conscience then is formed through the episodes that influence his value decisions and become his notion of right and wrong, or good and evil. The individual conscience and the societal ethics are part of a dialectic process in which one reacts to the other and the other in turn must react and change according to the first. This personal development may later be of influence to the society as a whole if the individual becomes actively involved in the institutions of
his culture. The fact that the average German would either deny the occurrence of the holocaust or would denounce it, is a direct reflection of his horror in response to such actions. This is what his society has supplied him with in terms of a moral code and it is what he has internalized. The men who carried out those deeds were possibly responding to a very different set of social and subsequently moral guidelines, and were conceivably acting in accord with what their culture had taught them. This is obviously not an attempt to justify anyone's actions but rather an attempt to understand how "good" or "bad" things occur. We internalize the moral, political, and cultural products of our society so that they become who and what we are, and guide our actions accordingly. To judge those actions as an alien to that particular culture is to do so with a, very possibly, different set of principles, and thus will be prejudiced in some fashion.

As a society and culture changes it must evolve and expand in order to accommodate the vast ideas and values of the individuals. Each person will develop values and ideas relevant to and influenced by his individual experience within his culture. There will be those with similar views and those who oppose. There will be a great number who have strong views and others that hold less demanding opinions. In the end the culture will reflect some of, if not all of this in some way. There will be institutions and societies formed by like minded
people, there will be those who are forced to submit to others. But in the end the values and positions held by each individual will be of some significance to the society and that society will play a part in the development and growth of the individual.

Another objection that could arise from this societal moral structure would be one of personal conscience. An individual could have the idea that his own conscience could be his moral guide through life. This I think in some respects does not necessarily run counter to what Hegel has to say. It seems that the conscience and values this member of society holds would be to some significant extent a direct result of his participation in that society and would generally reflect the Spirit of the People. Not only would he be a reflection of society but, of course, the values of his society would be a reflection of him through his input and participation. If the values of that person are indeed in conflict with his particular culture he will be dealt with by that society. This is the danger of nonconformity to the Spirit of the People and a risk one would take in assuming his separate morals will not conflict with the norm. The opposition to societal norms often results, however, in the eventual evolution of a society’s values and beliefs. The gay rights movement is a good example of just such a situation in which the societal standard has been crossed and there is a great deal of consequent
negativity from the majority who view the gay lifestyle as immoral. But because of their continued action and cultural involvement the Spirit of the People is slowly evolving to accommodate and accept this previously rejected lifestyle.

Another opposing view to Hegel’s ethical theories is that God should be one’s moral guide. To this Hegel would respond that a person cannot be certain that it is not the state’s or one’s own moral agenda that he/she is adhering to. How can we be sure that we have not devised our own ethics based upon the assumption that it is what God would approve of, or that the state, through the people, has done the same thing? This could easily be the case if we are model citizens who have accepted and internalized the standards put forth by our society, provided that our culture maintains a religious tradition.

Hegel also reveals his thoughts on divinity in response to the notion of God as a moral guide as opposed to the state serving in that capacity. For Hegel the divine is the Absolute\(^2\), the revelation over time of total truth to certain nation-states and the people who make up those special societies. Through time there is an evolution of the Nation-State into a closer awareness of the Absolute Truth of reality. This Truth is revealed in small increments to powerful societies which are modeled after the Absolute in the

\(^2\) Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences III. 553-577.
way in which they incorporate all of their social, political, and economic institutions to make a whole, an Absolute of the period in time. This theory, I think, can be interpreted in different ways. First is the idea that there is a divine being who is revealing some real eternal Truths to mankind at various important historical junctures. A second interpretation could conclude that there is an historical and evolutionary tendency, or trend, in which mankind is evolving towards a better self understanding and appreciation of one another on a personal as well as a societal level. It is man's continuous evolution towards "liberty and justice for all", as well as freedom that Hegel may be referring to here as Absolute. Man becomes free by confronting and understanding all he comes in contact with. He becomes more self-conscious and aware as he evolves and becomes independent through his thought and acceptance of his surroundings, both physical and theoretical. Man becomes free from internalized social standards once he becomes aware that it was his activity that initially created them. Could it be that the notion of an Absolute is simply man's perfecting of his social skills which are really nothing but his ability to harmoniously coexist as free and independent individuals, and through the Nation-State these ideas are brought to fruition and are enforced and reinforced as a means of aiding in peaceful human interaction?

From this point Hegel describes the three stages in which
a person takes part in internalizing the morality of his society and culture\(^3\). He begins with the family in which the child is part of a group, and within that setting, comes to understand cooperation and unity. He learns the basic ideas of ethics as a single part of a whole. If this training does not begin with such a family unit and the child is not taught this lesson of harmony then he has missed a valuable portion of his moral guidance that will aid him later in dealing with society as a whole.

Next the person becomes a part of civil society in which he/she becomes a contributor and participant in the economy, utilizing the skills learned within the family. This person, as a part of society, is striving to gain for himself while simultaneously, both consciously and unconsciously, aiding the common interests of the community as a whole. The individual has set out to make his own unique mark on society and is also working within that same society as a team player, as he had learned to do within the family.

From this point Hegel develops the Nation-State as the synthesis of his family thesis and the civil society antithesis. The state is where the ethical lessons of the family and participation in civil society as an individual blend together to provide the citizens with a set of moral

\(^3\) Philosophy of Right. 158-300.
guidelines as developed by themselves. This is the ultimate point in human morality for Hegel. Man has learned to be conscious of his own needs and desires while at the same time considering those of others around him. It is this ability to understand his place within that extended family model that allows him to act accordingly and as expected by his culture.
II

Peter Berger begins his work, *The Sacred Canopy*, by characterizing man as a creature in need of order and control. Through this need, or rather because of it, he is responsible for the construction of society. For Berger, this social construction is part of a dialectic system involving three stages. The first of these stages or steps is man’s externalization.

Externalization is man’s outpouring of self into the world around him, according to Berger. This outpouring is man’s way of shaping a hostile and imperfect world into a world in which he can live and flourish. Unlike all of the other creatures on earth, man finds himself placed in a world that is not immediately suitable for his survival. There is, in every other creature an instinctual ability to survive within the natural habitat in which they were born. Humans, however, are dependent on something other than the instinct to survive. They must rely on their ability to reshape their environment to suit their immediate requirements. Man begins by shaping nature to suit his needs and desires while simultaneously creating non-material products as well. As he produces clothing and shelter for protection he also produces language and symbols which allow him to communicate with others and to begin the process of socialization. All of this ordering eventually results in what we refer to as culture, which
of nature. Man has externalized his visions and desires onto
the world and constructed a culture and society in which he
can become better assured of survival and prosperity.

From this point Berger examines the idea of objectivation.
For Berger objectivation occurs when "the humanly produced
world becomes something 'out there.' It consists of objects,
both material and non-material, that are capable of resisting
the desires of their producer."¹ Man has created a wide
variety of objects and institutions to which he now has to
relate. He now has implements which he relies upon to produce
food and shelter, or anything else he needs or desires. He
also has a language which others must possess in order for it
to be of any value. This language allows him to better
understand others and can be used either in cooperation or
disagreement with his fellow man. The language has become an
entity in itself. It exists as an objective reality. He has
created an order of things which have become a reality and a
necessity to his well being. The institutions which he created
can now tower over him as some external force he has little
personal control over. His culture has become a reality to him
and society as a part of that cultural creation has also
become an external reality that he must now accept as such.
The political and religious institutions he has created now

have the power to control his actions. He encounters the structures he has establish, such as language and religion, and he must conform or suffer the consequences of not being able to communicate or to live within the cultural standards.

The next phase of man's world building activity Berger calls internalization. Internalization is the phenomenon of man confronting this society as a reality (objectivation), and not only accepting its reality as something other than himself but it becomes a part of his consciousness. Berger explains it as "the reabsorption into consciousness of the objectivated world in such a way that the structures of this world come to determine the subjective structures of consciousness itself. That is, society now functions as the formative agency for individual consciousness." Man has become a product of society; the very same society that was and is a product of his activity. The process is a never ending cycle in which man reacts to the world and makes adjustments to this world as necessary and then must consciously react to the changes in society that result from his activity. Man is now responding to the cultural standards and expectations he created, as some force beyond himself, and he is absorbing this information as a reality which he must conform to and become a participant in, in order to live. Man becomes the things and roles he has

\(^5\text{Ibid. p.15}\)
created, such as father, aunt, christian, or criminal. These roles to him are a necessary part of reality. Berger stresses that the process must be thought of as a dialectic comprised of the three parts, externalization, objectivation, and internalization, otherwise man is seen only as reactionary to the reality of society, when in fact he is part of the ongoing dialogue within himself and with others that make up this reality. He must be a part of the externalization in order to fully internalize that which he has helped to create. It can now be understood that as a producer of culture and society, man also produces himself. He assigns himself roles as developed within that structure which give him a means by which he can define himself in a variety of ways other than just simply man.

Through this dialectic process we can witness the ordering nature of man and his desire for social "nomos", as Berger would describe it. Because of the need for order man has, through externalization, objectivation, and internalization, created culture and society to provide structure and thus meaning for himself. The disruption of this ordering process or separation from order is therefore man's greatest fear. Whether that threat to order is a result of some unexplainable

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6Ibid..p.4

7Ibid..p.19-20.
tragedy, or injustice, or from mental estrangement, man is continuously guarding against such occurrences. The ultimate separation, however, is something over which man has no control and no hope of avoidance, and that is of course death.

While death is something which man cannot regulate, he is compelled to find some rationalization for it and some understanding of its relation to the order he has created, just as he sees the need to explain psychological irregularities that would cause a person to become anti-social and disorderly. All of man's actions and experiences are considered in context with everything else in his life. The relevance of one situation is measured against another in order for each to have a place in reality. The need for order and reason is always present. According to Berger, "To live in the social world is to live an ordered and meaningful life. Society is the guardian of order and meaning not only objectively, in its institutional structures, but subjectively as well, in its structuring of individual consciousness." Without society and its inevitable structure man loses his sense of identity and reality, and in death man loses all control over his being, and his place in reality.

It is through this fear of the unknown and fear of the lack of order that man is further compelled to explain that

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which he cannot change. Society, through man, creates a system of safety nets to protect him from possible anomy. These nets need to be fully internalized in order for them to be of any use. Doubts are like holes in the net through which one may slip if faced with the possibility of anomy. The ideas and the existence of society must be taken for granted as an transcendent reality in order for it all to be useful and meaningful, just as a trapeze artist must have complete faith in the net below in order to function in his roll. One must internalize the social system and subconsciously accept it as Truth in order to overcome the fear of chaos. Because of this taken for granted quality man reacts to society and sometimes its institutions as pre-existing realities that are present to govern his life.

This idea of a pre-existing set of guidelines, or anything pre-human, introduces the notion of some greater purpose and causative agent beyond mortal reality. This is the point where all of the necessary ingredients are in place for religion to exist. Man has a motive, and that is his fear of anomy. He needs order and purpose, especially in those areas in which his existence is most threatened. He also has the means to explain his reality and that is through his having internalized societies values and institutions to the fullest possible degree, so that they are no longer a creation of his own but rather have taken on the appearance of timelessness.
This pre-existing and ever present meaning now takes on the quality of being a sacred and wondrous power beyond human control or comprehension. This is man’s creation of "God". No matter what its form or forms, no matter what its powers or desires or canon, man creates a God or Deity that corresponds with his society. These may be entities with some perfect form and materiality or they may simply be principles or forces that have dominion over the universe with no physically definable properties.

Regardless of the form, man now has a sacred defender of his order in existence. Man now has a means of explaining how and why threatening situations occur as well as a way to place himself on an infinite time line of reality in relation to this omnipresence. The idea of meaninglessness is still a possibility but to have a solid relationship with this sacred being can provide a sense of order in the most troubling of times and in the face of chaos. Through this sacred protector man can devise an infinite number of allegories in order to explain away any fears and doubts he may have. He can also, through the use of religious symbols and traditions, find a means of understanding tragedies as well as joyous occasions. Through weddings and through funeral services man can better respond to the occurrences in life that threaten either extreme. Man now has a frame of reference for such occasions. Berger concludes his world building ideas by stressing the
importance of social interaction in relation to religion and all of societies institutions. He refers to this as plausibility structures. According to this idea, man must interact and share his thoughts and convictions about religion in order for it to remain valid. Only through the sharing of beliefs and experiences, either in ritual form or in community activity of some fashion, can there be a religion. That is, religion is only plausible if there are people who practice it and share common views. Without support or fellowship there is no one to offer validity to the faith one possesses, it will simply reflect personal fantasy and desire.
III

Hegel and Berger share many ideas of man's relationship with his society, and from these similar views we are able to draw several conclusions about mankind's ethical structure and moral responsibility. As we have seen, both approach their work from a sociological perspective. Each is concerned with the institutions with which man is a part, regardless of whether those institutions are man made or have some sacred origins. For each author, man is a product of his culture and his society. Berger suggests that man produces his society and the institutions within it and in doing so will ultimately become a product of it. For Hegel the state is man's greatest accomplishment and the moral voice to which he must respond.

Berger presents us with a means of understanding man's relationship with the Divine in his ideas of world construction. It is through human insecurity about mankind's continuing existence that God becomes a reality. Berger begins by stating that man is in a constant struggle to organize his world. Man needs order in his life so that he can, not only survive, but have meaning in relationship to his world. Through this need he develops the institutions and culture that will make his existence more comfortable and significant. By internalizing these objectivated ideas of his own design, man becomes that which he had considered important and necessary for prosperity as a human. Man, through his
insecurity, convinces himself that he will be protected from non-existence and disorder by internalizing the very ideas he once created, to the point of complete and absolute faith.

Once related to Hegel’s ethical theory, we realize the similarity. Hegel concludes that by internalizing the ideas and morals expressed by the State man becomes the ultimate ethical being. He has accepted the Spirit of the People, which is manifested in the State, as his guide and, as in Berger’s theory, has reached the final step in world building.

In both instances it is the consensus of the society that has created the moral structure at the outset. Mankind, by externalizing his notions of righteous living, has created a set of guidelines for society which are manifested in his cultural institutions. The general consensus, or Spirit, is developed from the like desires and needs of the culture. Each person, through powers of reasoning expresses his ideas of right and wrong and through that continuing dialogue supplies his culture with a moral code upon which each successive generation will build. To put it simply, in Berger man creates the God that in turn creates the ethics. Man therefore has devised the ethical structure that he feels necessary for his well being and accredits it to the God he has created. Hegel does not go so far as to claim man’s creation of God as a canopy of protection, but he does attribute society’s ethical makeup to the consensus, or spirit, of the people. Mankind is
responsible for the institutions that guide him in social interaction, by a general agreement and pact with his fellow man. In either case it is man who develops his own ideas of right and wrong through the creation and internalization of institutions and traditions.

In Berger we also find plausibility structures upon which man’s creations rest. Without these structures the ideas would lose validity and become obsolete. Once the people lose faith in a cause or a theory it has no further use within that culture. For example, because of the religious institutions and the traditions that are associated with them, man has a means of justifying their existence simply because of the popularity and desire for them. Without these traditions and without religious dialogue our culture’s moral structure would not be attributed to religious traditions and institutions, and some other theory pertaining to the origins and justification of our ethical behavior would take its place. Another example would be, once a society loses faith in the political structures within that culture, it will not be long before it is rejected and becomes a part of history only to be succeeded by some other system of government.

We find a similar idea in Hegel’s organicism. He says that humans are like the parts of a whole and without those individual parts the whole cannot survive. We can see that the state as the whole is dependent upon the people for its
existence, as would be any cultural institution of society. The people create the institutions as useful tools which provide meaning and prosperity, once they are no longer necessary or believable they are replaced or rejected. By visualizing history as a time line we can better grasp the idea of plausibility structures. We can see changes as they occur and place them on this line and consider them another passing phase of human experience from which, hopefully, a lesson was learned. We can look at recorded history and understand the major changes and revolutions of the past as a breakdown of plausibility structures. The French revolution, for example, was in part just such an instance of the breakdown of the structures and reasoning behind the status quo. The royalty no longer was viewed as out of reach of the common man. All were equal; a revolutionary idea that destroyed centuries of previously accepted beliefs and institutions. It seems possible to conclude from this that there could potentially be any number of theories and beliefs upon which we can base our moral code, depending upon the needs and ideas of a particular society. As the plausibility structures collapse so does that which they support. The expanding acceptance of the relatively new theories of evolution as well as the fields of genetic engineering and biology have already begun to chip away at many plausibility structures that have been in place for centuries. Mankind is
beginning to question the validity of that which was once sacred and taken as absolute truth.

Hegel too has a good sense of history in his ideas about ethics. He views the state as an ongoing manifestation of the Absolute in relation to morality. Throughout man's history this Absolute is revealed in increments to certain societies, and those societies exhibit the ethical model of their time and place. They represent the idea of true moral living for the world to witness. Over time a new society evolves and with it is revealed another step on the path to full realization of the Absolute. The previous society is now considered to be of an inferior moral stature. But what of the people who lived in that time and place? Were they not living an ethical life based upon the relevant needs and desires of their place in history? Wasn't the Spirit of the People at work within those cultures? Hegel I believe would conclude from this that there is an ongoing process of revelation of the Absolute, but that the people of history had lived ethically in relation to the knowledge they possessed. My response would be that if they believed their actions to be ethical then we are not in a position to judge them. Our place in history has distorted our view and it is difficult, if not impossible, to objectively consider their actions. The fact remains that they were acting according to the Spirit of the People, and had the interests of their society in mind as they lived their lives, they were
living by the rules prescribed by their culture, they were therefore living ethically by Hegelian standards. They had lived as well as they could given the degree of absolute that was revealed to them at that period of history.

It would seem more logical to say that the Absolute is revealed in the evolutionary process of man's self perfection. Through his desire for order and meaning in reality, as described by Berger, man is continually attempting to perfect his social skills and institutions to reflect his idea of how a society should be constructed. He is trying to evolve into his ever changing notion of perfection and righteousness in relation to his fellow man. From this desire and drive to improve his society man develops new guidelines and mores by which to live. These ideas of a perfect society are man's perception of Absolute, or the best that man can be.

Hegel takes two positions in response to the claim that God should act as a moral guide versus the state. The first is dealt with above in the Absolute. His second response is that one cannot be sure that the moral voice one is responding to is not God's but that of the state or one's own conscience. If this is true then there must be doubt about the certainty of claims of a divine moral guidance. How can we know that that voice is not a result of our internalization of cultural traditions? If we take Berger into account in relation to this point of doubt about the origin of conscience we understand
that one can never be certain of the answer. In Berger we internalize those objectivated ideas and practices that we originally externalized in our desire for order and meaning. So we find ourselves subconsciously reacting to these traditions as if they were pre-existent to human reality and transform them into a set of transcendent morals.

To combine the ideas of Berger and Hegel one can devise an ethical structure with a timeless quality in which the place and period become irrelevant. The notion of a society with a set of morals founded in its institutions and traditions is not only a probability but is, in my opinion, the only possible means of living an ethical existence. One needs only to look at history in order to understand that this has always been the case. Each society and culture in man’s past has had an ethical structure that mirrored the particular institutions and traditions of that era. The classical Greek and Roman societies were, by our standards, morally inferior. Their society accepted and promoted acts that would today be deemed unprincipled and evil. They were as a culture, however, acting in accordance with the standards and values as expressed by their religious and political institutions, just as we do today. One thousand years from this period in time there will likely be those who view our actions as barbaric and unethical. The same can be said of any culture and society around the world. To exist within a social structure of any
variety or any size, one must predominately adhere to the customs of that group. Whether one is a part of a small village or tribe in Mali, or a citizen of a world power, one must internalize the values of that society for survival and meaning. To aggressively act against those values, beyond the scope of accepted individuality, can jeopardize one’s existence and place within reality.

Hegel’s ethics is a good model to begin with in devising a moral philosophy for a secular society. The basic ideas exist for a logical adaptation into any social and cultural setting. I have also prepared the groundwork above for a coherent transition away from a divine influence.

It would be prudent to begin this ethical construction as Hegel did, in organicism. It is a logical and practical place to start considering the final product is to be aimed at societal standards as formed by the individual principles.; the whole as formed by the parts.

In organicism man is seen as an individual part of a whole. He is one person in a society and contributes to the entirety as an essential component within that structure. The whole in turn relies on these individual units for survival. Without the people a society cannot exist. This is supported by Berger in his idea that a society is dependant upon human interaction and socialization for its continued prosperity. Without cooperation and a culture that is flexible enough to
change with the needs of the people, a society cannot thrive.

From this organicism develops the Spirit of the People, which I described above as the consensus of the citizens of a society. This is evident in their culture and in their economy, politics, and social life. All of the aspects of their lives reflect the ideas and personality of the people as a whole. Their art, food, music, and their type of government all reveal this Spirit of which Hegel speaks. We can witness this Spirit in each culture and society today at several levels. There is an evident Spirit in small communities and villages. Even concentrations of a specific ethnic group in a large city, will reflect a spirit or set of values and ideas that are different from that of the others surrounding them. There is also obviously the spirit of a country that we can witness in all of their cultural products and byproducts. The religion or lack of religion is a mirror of the personality of the people as a whole. It gives others an idea of the values and needs of a specific group. It is, like all of the other cultural products, a means for that society and culture to express itself through communion with one another and is by no means a necessary element in this Spirit. If the community has a religious tradition then that is obviously a component in their consensus as a people with common interests and needs, it is part of their Spirit as Hegel would put it. If a society is not inclined to practice religion in any form then they too
will have collectively agreed to such an arrangement and that is a part of their Spirit. They do not forfeit their Spirit when they evolve away from religious customs, they simply evolve with their Spirit.

The Nation State is the manifestation of this Spirit of the People. It is this collection of political, cultural, economic, and educational institutions, as designed and constructed by the Spirit. The wishes and dreams of the people have been externalized into the reality that is a nation. Their collective ideas and models of society have been projected into the world around them and become objectivated, as Berger would put it, and are now the State that exists for the people as a means of realizing their desires and needs. The people have, at this point, externalized their desires and shared them with one another until a compromise or accord was reached, that is if there was any initial disagreement, and then these ideas were implemented as a means of seeing them through. They then have become reality in the form of government or religion depending upon the nature of the original externalized idea. This is the point of Berger’s objectivation. The people have constructed a reality that they now have to react to and live with. This is the Nation State, the one collection of all of their externalized desires as an objectivated reality. This is the provider of all that they need including a morality, according to Hegelian thought and
the theory under construction here as well. The people have made their desires and interests into reality and from what better place could a sense of the collective moral interests of the people come?

Only by acting in accordance with the moral principles expressed by one’s society can a person live ethically. This society is a reflection of one’s own morality and in turn the person should be a reflection of the society. The two are one and the same. Without one the other would not be. The only moral obligation one has is to the society in which they live. This, as we have seen, is the manifestation of their externalized desires and therefore is their own moral voice as an objective reality. The individual is now obligated and naturally inclined to internalize the cultural and social principles under which they live. The Nation State is their moral voice echoed over and over again. To act against that voice is to act against one’s own ethics and is a self-conflicting and self-defeating activity. By not internalizing the precepts of the Nation State a person becomes self destructive in their negative actions toward the society. From this we can conclude that to live ethically, as prescribed by the society and the Nation State, a person is acting in his own interest and is only carrying out the ideas by which the state was originally designed and constructed. To live any other way is to contradict one’s own desires. To live by one’s
social and cultural guidelines is the only means of living a moral existence.

The Nation State can take many forms and can consist of a variety of social institutions, but it always functions as the moral guide regardless of the components. Whether the government is founded upon a democratic, monarchical, or communist system is irrelevant. Whether the society has a religious tradition or not is also irrelevant, and if there is such a tradition the form it takes is inconsequential as well. It makes no difference whether the people have created for themselves a democratic/Islamic state or a monarchy with Catholic customs, the fact remains that to live ethically one must act according to the guidelines of the State. The state, as the reflection of their idea of morality, provides the individual with the necessary means by which to eliminate the threat from other’s unethical behavior, as well as provides the tangible reality of their moral beliefs.

Hegel’s theory consists of three stages in the development and internalization of society’s ethics. First is within the family, second is as a part of the economic and civil society, and as a synthesis of these two, the third is as a citizen of the State. This too is an important part of the idea of a morality for modern society. Man’s early training is within the home and can vary greatly from family to family, especially in today’s society with multicultural societies
becoming prominent. There is a need for a secular morality designed from the consensus of these citizens of differing cultures and there is a need for a degree of assimilation. The values of alien cultures can vary greatly and even conflict, making the role of the state a difficult one of combining beliefs and values to provide a moral structure. But that must be the Role of the Nation State. Without the state as a mediator and guide there will be endless conflict, especially if one relies upon one’s religious ideas as the only source of ethical guidance. The entirety of society must be weighed and considered in order for an individual within that society to have a working and comprehensive set of moral precepts.

What we have in the end is a moral structure based solely on the consensus of the active citizens of a given society. The various pockets of cultural originality and uniqueness must be considered as a part of that whole through their constant participation and political action. Each must become a part of that society’s completeness as a unit within that whole. Each is dependent upon the activity of the other. Each reflects the other. The whole must be a complete collection of all of its elements by the interaction and involvement of the people. It cannot reflect only the views and values of a portion of the populace. The Christian values must not hold a higher place than those of any other segment. Islamic ideas cannot shadow those of Judaism. The state must be impartial to
the various ideas presented by the people but must at the same
time address each one and recognize its worth. There must be
an eventual assimilation and incorporation of all of society’s
beliefs and values in order for the State to provide a moral
structure to protect and guide the citizens. What must prevail
in the end is a secular moral structure that recognizes and
absorbs each individual’s values as expressed through
participation and involvement in cultural institutions. There
will evolve a state that is empathetic toward the citizens’
beliefs. This state will evolve as the values and needs change,
as new physical developments and situations occur, and as the
people react and grow in response to those changes. What will
exist and what has always existed is a moral structure that
emerges out of the desires of the individuals that make up a
society.

What must, of course, exist prior to one’s political and
social involvement is a comprehensive self-awareness. In order
to be active one must first come to realize and understand
one’s needs for a prosperous existence. An individual needs to
consider the factors that govern and affect their life and
reach some conclusions about how best to live that life. Only
then can a person make their case before the public and
express their ideas and beliefs about what is best for them,
or what is right and what is wrong. Only through an
understanding of self can a person compliment the society and
culture of which they are a part, and only through self-
understanding can a person live ethically.


