

RICHARD BOURKE

## **Ritter and the Hegelian Tradition**

As is well known, Joachim Ritter was a leading figure in postwar German political philosophy. He organised his thought around the pillars of Aristotle and Hegel. At the centre of his thought was an endorsement of the Hegelian category of *Sittlichkeit*, and with that a celebration of the Hegelian conception of freedom. In advancing this position, Ritter was deliberately embracing the values of modernity which he associated with the advent of the French Revolution. Here, moreover, he believed he was following Hegel. For him, Hegel was the philosopher of the French Revolution, its leading champion and interpreter. However, this reading of Hegel is mistaken. Notwithstanding the view expressed by generations of scholarship, Hegel was a critic of the Revolution, beginning with developments in the summer of 1789. Ritter believed that Hegel offered an alternative to modern radicalism. His arguments would have been better served by excavating Hegel's indictment of Revolutionary fanaticism.