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What is Hegel's legacy and what should we do with it?

To deal with Hegel and his intellectual legacy in the present philosophical environment seems to be a rather nostalgic and unobtrusive endeavor which presupposes a contemplative state of mind and a calm curiosity about things long past. It seems to be a perfectly legitimate though maybe in these days a little bit boring topic for people who, after having been successful in establishing new and exciting ways of worldmaking in theory or practice, allow themselves to get interested in the history of their culture or in the genesis of a certain type of worldview or even in the remote roots of their own philosophical convictions. To care about Hegel's intellectual legacy seems to be somewhat out of touch with anything that needs to be done in order to contribute to so called contemporary discussions or to solve what is supposed to be a gripping new problem. It is rather something which happens to occupy someone in pretty much the same way in which he in the course of a long and lonely winter night might get involved in, say, the question of whether the woman he was married to for some twenty years and who divorced him ten years ago has had any impact on his more fundamental perspectives on life in general. People might get drawn into those nostalgic questions - whether they concern their former wives or Hegel's legacy - whenever for them there is nothing really important to deal with and because the answers they come up with will make no difference for their private or intellectual lives anymore.

Though I don't believe that there are many among you who will consent to that caricature-like picture of the situation in which the question of Hegel's intellectual legacy might occur, I believe it has a point. It reflects an attitude towards Hegel's philosophy

which is widely held and not entirely unjustified. This attitude is characterized by the assumption that especially Hegel's philosophical work has proven to be a detour in our attempts to get a sound view of whatever it is we might be interested in philosophically. For people sharing this attitude Hegel's philosophy is not only out of fashion, it is outdated. And to care about Hegel is just another example of one of these nostalgic activities some intellectual circles are currently so fond of indulging in.

But not only those who are in favor of such an attitude might have a certain feeling of uneasiness about what it means in the present philosophical situation to examine Hegel's heritage anew. This feeling might also occur if one is to appreciate this undertaking against the background of several observations which will lead to a number of rather sceptical questions. The first observation is that there is no reason to expect anything which has to do with Hegel to have been of noticeable relevance for what has been going on in the philosophical scene especially in the English speaking world during the last fifty years or so. If things are going to change now, as we have a lot of reasons to believe, what are the motives of this newly awakened interest and what do they have to do with Hegel? The second observation is that Hegel is acknowledged to be a rather obscure thinker especially by modern standards. If there is a secret of Hegel it is still kept very well. Given that situation and given the assumption that the interest in Hegel is not a purely historical or doxographical one, one wonders what could be attractive nowadays in the attempt to embark on the project to revitalize elements of a philosophy nobody really feels quite comfortable with. In a talk concerning Hegel congeniality demands that one comes up with some sort of threeness (if that is an English word at all). So let me add a third observation. Hegel's philosophical work represents in a paradigmatic sense a type of philosophy which is strongly committed to holistic tendencies. These tendencies are responsible for his being in favor of what might be called 'System-Philosophie'. Now, 'System-Philosophie' in Hegel's sense has been out of

fashion from his days on, and I take it that nobody nowadays really wants to give the 'System'-version of a holistic approach in philosophy a second chance. If, however, there are good reasons to suppose that for Hegel the idea of a system was constitutive of a philosophical theory then one wonders how it is possible to think of Hegel as a philosopher whose legacy is of some value for us.

Observations like these might give rise to the suspicion that the only reason for wanting to have a new look at Hegel's heritage would be the ambition to integrate some elements of his thought into the discussion of contemporary issues. Accordingly, it would not really be Hegel's philosophy people want to get mixed up with, since all they want is to use certain things from it. Though I have to confess that I believe this is sometimes what we do with Hegel, I don't want to follow this line of thought here. Instead I will address two questions, which respond to this piece-meal approach. The first is: what is it one is confronted with when one has to face Hegel's philosophical heritage? The second is whether and to what extent it is possible to utilize just parts of Hegel's legacy in isolation from the rest. In the first part of my paper I will try to give a rather sketchy account of what I think to be the crucial points in Hegel's intellectual legacy. The second part is designed to answer the second question. At the end I will make some remarks concerning the options one has when dealing with Hegel's legacy.

I

To find out what can be done with Hegel's intellectual legacy, we must first settle the question of what the legacy is. I take it to be an uncontroversial claim that this legacy is quite voluminous (*reichhaltig*) if you think of it as the sum total of all of Hegel's philosophical ideas and convictions. His oeuvre not only contains the books and writings he himself

published under his own name but also an even larger number of works published after his death by others using his name. It is hard to think of any topic in almost any area of knowledge which Hegel did not address. Whether it is logic or mathematics, anthropology or aesthetics, history or psychology, not to mention the huge realm of natural studies from geology via botany to life sciences - as we all know Hegel had something to say about all of these disciplines.

Though the enormous mass of subject matter which Hegel tries to integrate in what he calls a philosophical system is really impressive I doubt that there are many people around nowadays who would think of Hegel's legacy as consisting in his actual teachings with respect to these subject matters. Especially those of his teachings which deal with natural phenomena like, say, the behaviour of physical bodies or the mutual relation between acids and bases or the organization of geological and other developmental processes in nature are not really in contact anymore with what a normally educated person, let alone a contemporary scientist would accept as a reliable and well informed contribution to the understanding of these phenomena. This does not mean necessarily that there is no sense to Hegel's thoughts about those topics, it just means that a very different way of conceptualizing nature and its phenomena has become successful. It is, however, not only this part of Hegel's philosophy which has become obsolete. The same can be said with respect to his findings concerning what he called Logic. Neither today, nor even in Hegel's own time, would anyone think of these findings as promising or fruitful. But not only this. Even some of his more influential theories arising from his philosophy of spirit appear to be rather outdated too. Whether you think e.g. of his defense of hereditary constitutional monarchy within the framework of his political philosophy or whether you take his claims about the end of art and the end of history, none of these points connect very easily with anything we find necessary or at least attractive to deal with philosophically or otherwise.

Observations like these might lead to the suspicion that though there is a rich legacy

indeed this legacy as a whole has no intrinsic value for us anymore. This result comes as no surprise taking into account one of the many characterizations Hegel gives of what philosophy is all about. If, as he tells us, philosophy is "ihre Zeit in Gedanken gefasst" (its time framed in thoughts) then we should not be astonished about that result. Times have changed after all, Hegel's time is not ours, and the things he needed to express philosophically no longer grip us. This line of thought urges us to look at Hegel's philosophy in much the same way we are used to look at gothic cathedrals. These cathedrals as well as this philosophy have to be perceived as impressive and powerful documents of the achievements of former cultures. Their value for us consists not in their being authentic witnesses of how we think and feel nowadays but in their being paradigmatic objects of aesthetic admiration, and the only task we have in dealing with them is to preserve them in as good a shape as possible.

Though this perspective on the question of Hegel's legacy is by and large the prevailing one it is not the only one possible. Another way of tackling that question is to ask what Hegel himself would have taken to be his legacy. It might turn out that what he left for us and what he wanted us to appreciate is not primarily what could be called the material side of his system but rather a set of principles and fundamental convictions which organize that system as a whole. In order to look in this way at Hegel's legacy one has to go back to Hegel's philosophical intentions, as far as these can be gleaned from his work.

Now, the leading intention in Hegel's philosophical thought is to demonstrate that the whole of reality in all its different manifestations and in all its forms of appearance must be understood as the result of a process which consists in the self-explicating activity of a single entity. This intention may, by itself, seem unremarkable when viewed in the philosophical context of Hegel's own time. It seems only to put him in the long line of those who, following in the wake of what they took Kant's philosophical heritage to be started to construct various philosophical systems centering around one or another first principle, like, among others,

Reinhold, Fichte and the early Schelling. What makes Hegel's leading intention interesting is that he thinks of it as connected with a couple of peculiar claims which set his project apart from that of his philosophical contemporaries. Three of these claims should be mentioned because they constitute what are rightly supposed to be Hegel's most fundamental convictions.

The first claim is an ontological one. It is the claim that the entity whose self-explicative activity is the whole of reality is to be conceived of as reason (Vernunft). It is understood that this concept of reason has little to do with our normal psychological conception of reason. The second claim is a methodological one. Hegel believes that the realization of his leading intention in the shape of a philosophical theory presupposes ways of thinking totally different from those of the entire preceding occidental philosophical tradition. It is because of this belief that Hegel wants to convince us that we have to abandon traditional approaches to understanding of reality if we want to find out what really is the case. The third claim is an epistemological one. It consists in the assertion that knowledge (Erkenntnis) in the proper sense can only be thought of as self-knowledge (Selbsterkenntnis).

Now, I take it to be uncontroversial that these three claims are Hegelian claims indeed. So there should be no need to worry about their authenticity. However, what these claims amount to is highly controversial not only because of their opaqueness but primarily because of the vast number of consequences connected with them if you take them seriously. Fortunately it is not my task on this occasion to give an elaborate account of what Hegel exactly means with these claims and of what he is committed to in holding them. Here I am only interested in them in as much as they shed some light on the question what we have to be prepared to agree to if we are to accept what Hegel thinks his legacy to be. So my remarks concerning these claims are restricted to some short comments on their role in Hegel's philosophical worldview.

It is the first of these claims, i.e. the ontological claim that reason is reality which

makes it quite clear what Hegel's philosophy is all about because this claim reveals directly his most central philosophical ambition. This ambition consists in establishing what has been rightly termed a monistic account of reality. Such an account aims at an understanding of anything there is in terms of a single principle which is taken to be the essence of everything. According to a monistic philosopher then, to have a correct understanding of something or to give a convincing explanation of something means to be in the position to demonstrate that whatever is claimed to be understood or to be explained is an expression (Leibniz: a parabola is an expression of a circle) or a manifestation (Spinoza: a body is a manifestation of the Substance) or even an embodiment (Hegel: nature is an embodiment of spirit) of that entity which is introduced as the monistic principle or substratum.

There are as many candidates to a monistic principle as there are monistic theories. Hegel's candidate is reason. All there is is reason or there is nothing but reason - this is Hegel's monistic credo he wants us to convince of. By reason he means a rather complicated structure which is the joint product of a (Hegelian) Concept and a process. Basically, it consists in the self-realizing activity of an entity which is defined in terms of a large number of characteristics named by Hegel determinations of thought (Denkbestimmungen). The sum total of these determinations of thought make up what Hegel calls the Concept of reason. Now, one of the elements constitutive of the Concept of reason is the characteristic of objectivity understood in the sense of 'having to become real'. This characteristic implies according to Hegel that reason has to realize itself in order to agree with its own Concept. That realization of itself takes place in the form of a process in which each of the characteristics of the Concept of reason contribute successively to the constitution of a specific configuration of reality. This process comes to an end when reason has completely objectivized its Concept. Because the very notion of objectivity is an integral element of the Concept of reason and has no meaning apart from it there can be nothing real or objective except what is grounded in that Concept. This process of realization is supposed to have a

double result: on the one hand it shows to us who witness this process that reality indeed is nothing but reason; on the other hand it demonstrates to reason itself that it is the whole of reality.

This crude sketch of what Hegel's most fundamental ontological claim consists in is not meant to be a very telling description of his monism. It is not even meant to be very reliable with respect to the main features of this monism mentioned in this description. The only point which is of importance here is to realize that Hegel's very ambitious and complicated version of an ontological monism is an essential part of his philosophical legacy. But this by no means is the only thing one has to worry about though it might be the most obvious. It is equally important to realize that Hegel demands of us to think differently. This leads to the second claim mentioned above, the methodological claim. For Hegel in order to get a clear and correct insight into the true, i.e. the monistic structure of reality it is required to think in terms of a new logic whose possibility is founded in the very idea of reason itself. This logic could be called - borrowing the terminology from another controversial thinker of the 19. century (Nietzsche) - a logic of generation or of becoming in contradistinction to a logic of static stability or of determinate being. (Usually Hegel calls the first one just logic and the other one logic of the understanding.) According to Hegel this new logic uncovers the laws which govern the constitution and the development of reason (understood as an ontological concept). Because reason is taken to be a self-realizing entity whose process of realization can be thought of very much in analogy to the way in which a living organism unfolds its characteristic features in the course of its life time these laws reflect in a predominant way processual aspects of elements in transition, of things in their coming to be and their passing away. Being the logic of reason and reason being the one and only real entity this new logic is not attentive primarily to our subjective modes of thinking (though these play a role too) but rather mirrors universal rules of objective self-organization.

There are two things which should be noted here. The first is that Hegel thinks of his new logic as being in part incompatible with traditional logic (meaning 18. century logic). This is so because he believes that traditional logic has a totally misleading conception of its most elementary objects, i.e. concepts, judgements and syllogisms. Hegel was fond of expressing this belief right from the beginning of his public career as a university teacher in a number of rather spectacular claims. The most famous of these just says: *contradictio est regula veri, non contradictio falsi* (Habilitationsthese I). This claim is meant to point out among other things that traditional logic has no resources to get even the most fundamental things right. The second point to be noted is that Hegel is deeply convinced of the truth of his account of reality. He would not be ready to admit that there might be many different ways to have an accurate understanding of the world as it happens to be, and that his account is just one of them. Hegel is a resolute opponent to any form of relativism in metaphysics. This means that his belief in the validity of his new logic together with his conviction that this new logic is partly incompatible with the traditional one implies the request for a new, Hegelian conception of rationality which is not just a refinement or an improvement of our normal, traditional concept of rationality but which is fundamentally at odds with it. For Hegel this change of our conception of rationality not only is a necessary condition for our being able to gain true insight into the process of reality, it is also necessary for bringing about a new, unalienated image of ourselves.

All this leads directly to the third Hegelian claim central to his philosophical program, i.e. the epistemological claim that knowledge in the proper sense has to be understood as self-knowledge. This claim is intimately connected with his monistic worldview on the one hand and with his conception of rationality on the other. It might seem to be uninteresting taken by itself because it can be looked upon as a purely definitional move on Hegel's part. The principal idea expressed by this claim seems to be the following: Knowledge according to Hegel consists in a relation holding between a knowing subject and an object known. It is

knowledge in the proper sense if the knowing subject realizes what its object really is. Because all there is is reason the ultimate and only subject of knowledge is reason itself. Because there is nothing but reason the unique object of knowledge reason can deal with is also it itself. Now, for reason to get an adequate picture and that means to have knowledge in the proper sense of reality is to come to know that it is reality. So in the end to have knowledge in the proper sense of what reality really is amounts to having knowledge of itself or self-knowledge. It is through this line of thought that Hegel gets to his well known definition of philosophy as being self-knowledge of reason (Selbsterkenntnis der Vernunft).

Though this epistemological claim even considered within the framework of purely Hegelian assumptions seems to me the least convincing (I have tried to show why in an unpublished paper on Hegel's conception of philosophy), it has the most spectacular consequences. The strangest and philosophically most disquieting of these is that we as human beings cannot think of ourselves as subjects of knowledge proper anymore. According to Hegel's conception of philosophical knowledge we can no longer entertain the belief that it is part of our epistemic situation to be in principle in the position to reach an insight into what things really are by relying on our own epistemic possibilities. Our role in epistemic contexts properly so called is restricted to that of more or less initiated onlookers who just have to accept what Hegelian reason says to itself. Against the background of Hegel's picture of knowledge we are not just victims of the veil of our ignorance we are victims of the process of reason too. Hegel, by the way, is well aware of this eccentric result associated with his concept of knowledge. This can be seen particularly well if one pays attention to his theory of epistemic modalities presented in the chapter on absolute spirit in the *Encyclopedia*.

These few remarks have to be sufficient in order to point out what I take to be in Hegel's eyes some of the most essential elements of his philosophical legacy. He intends to endow us with a spiritual monism in metaphysics which goes together with a new conception of rationality and a rather uncommon theory of knowledge. Though I grant that there may be more sophisticated ways to present that legacy I am strongly convinced that my description is not biased or unfair. It just tries to get things sufficiently clear.

Now, it is one thing to find out what a legacy consists in, it is quite another to decide what to do with it. In the first case you are concerned with matters of fact, in the second questions of sympathy come into play. Here it is no secret that Hegel did not find the most sympathetic heirs neither in academic circles nor elsewhere. The history of the reception of Hegel's philosophy is witness to that. His philosophical legacy was denounced in almost every possible way. The most common accusations range from misguided Kantianism (Liebmann) via irrationalism (from Schleiermacher to Popper) to Herrschaftsdenken (Haym and the liberal tradition) and protestant-theological Weltanschauung (Marx, Dilthey, Neo-Kantianism). But even if one is not prepared to agree to such assessments, one need not be a prophet in order to see that few contemporary philosophers are likely to find a philosophical program based on Hegel's heritage to be very attractive. And not only this. It even seems unlikely that anyone would consider it worthwhile to examine the details of such a programm. This is not so because this program has been proven to be manifestly absurd, the reason rather seems to be that our understanding of what one should do in philosophy has changed.

Given this situation it is somewhat surprising to find, every so often, that interest in Hegel's philosophy awakens anew - an interest that is not merely doxographical, but which is motivated by the expectation that there is something to learn from Hegel. Even in quarters known to be populated by people who are not suspected of having much sympathy for highly extravagant worldviews that are at odds both with a scientific and a common sense image of

the world, this tendency is to be noticed now and again. Obviously, we are witnessing such a time now, as can be inferred from the fact that this conference is taking place.

This renewed interest raises the question of what it is that excites the expectation that there is something valuable in Hegel's thought. From what I have outlined up to now it should be clear enough that I don't believe this expectation is grounded in a change of attitude towards the central tenets of his philosophical project. It rather seems to be fueled by aspects of his program which Hegel himself would take to be either somewhat exoteric to his main message or at least not directly relevant to his major points. This impression results from the fact that the topics in Hegel's philosophy that have been dealt with sympathetically and in a systematic spirit during, say, the last decade, mainly pertain either to what he says is the introductory part of his theory, or to his social and political philosophy. This observation, taken by itself, has little significance. For why shouldn't it be possible to derive something of value either from the periphery of Hegel's main doctrine or from one of its material domains, without having to embrace the main doctrine itself? Why, after all, to put the same point a little bit more metaphorically, shouldn't we be able to salvage what we think to be the jewels in Hegel's legacy, without having to accept what we take to be worthless scrap? The question lying ahead then is: are we entitled to exploit elements of Hegel's philosophy in isolation in order to learn something from him? My attempt to answer this question will be restricted to some remarks addressing topics connected with the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Philosophy of Right*.

Let me start with the *Philosophy of Right*. If one had to give a very informal description of the principal characteristics of what could be called Hegel's theory of the social world, it might go something like this: Hegel envisions the social world as an organic unity in which all the elements are mutually dependent on one another in that each element contributes to the existence of all the others, and vice versa. These elements consist in the multitude of different institutionalized forms of social interaction which together form the

ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*). What makes this multitude of different elements one organic whole is the fact that all the elements can be interpreted as being individuated by one and the same conceptual principle (the will, in Hegel's use of that term), which is said to be realized in the elements. The individuation of the elements together with the realization of this principle is governed by very specific laws that are founded, according to Hegel, in the very nature of (Hegelian) reason itself.

Now, such a description of what is going on in the *Philosophy of Right* might be considered appropriate or not. The important point is that one has to explain why such a theory of the social world should be considered to have any special philosophical value. In this particular case the value cannot consist in Hegel's favoring an organicist model in the interpretation of things social and political. That would be nothing peculiar to his socio-political philosophy, but would make it just another version of a certain type of political thinking within a long tradition going back at least to Aristotle. Nor can the value consist in the list of elements he recognizes as forms of social interaction, because a lot of these elements are no longer in existence in our modern social environment (examples: *Stände* and *Korporationen*, *Majorat*). That value can only be seen in the philosophical peculiarities of Hegel's theory, which lie in the means he provides for explaining social and political phenomena. These means undoubtedly consist in the conceptual and logical apparatus Hegel sets down as the rational basis for such explanations. But this directs us back directly to the unwelcome parts of his legacy, i.e. his metaphysical, methodological, and epistemological views, because it is in them that the justification for these peculiarities is found.

So there seems to be no easy way to get rid of Hegel's general outlook on reality and at the same time to stick to the details, in this case of his social and political philosophy. The general outlook and the details are much too closely interconnected. It should be noted that it would not help to take a presumably modest stance and argue that we should restrict our interest to what could be called the phenomenological side of Hegel's analyses, i.e. to his

descriptions of the different phenomena which make up the social and political world. This would not help because these phenomena are in part constituted by those descriptions, which in turn rely heavily on Hegel's theory of what can count as a descriptive term. Take, for example, the phenomenon of civil society in Hegel's description: In order to identify it as something structurally different from a community that is organized in the form of a state, or from a huge compound of families, you have to be in the possession of very specific, that is of Hegelian notions of, let's say, particularity (*Besonderheit*) and universality (*Allgemeinheit*). Without them you can't even know what you are talking about on the phenomenological level.

These observations concerning topics from the *Philosophy of Right* also apply to topics taken from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Here too one finds an intimate connection between Hegel's general views and his special phenomenological teachings. This claim might be surprising for those who are used to thinking of the *Phenomenology* as a comprehensive introduction to the system, designed merely to set the stage for Hegel's theory of reason, because they might assume that as an introduction the *Phenomenology would have to be* logically and methodologically independent of the system. That this is not the case can be seen as soon as we pay attention to the more basic operations guiding the phenomenological process. That process itself can be described as taking place between (subjective) claims of knowledge and (objective) facts. Knowledge is understood to be knowledge of what a fact really is, and a fact is taken to be something which is defined in terms of one or more knowledge claims. The leading idea governing this process is to show that all those knowledge claims are inconsistent and therefore have no relation, or only an incomplete one, to what their respective facts really are which allow for any difference between what is said to be known (what an object really is) and what is known (what an object is according to one or more subjective knowledge claims). Surely, this idea by itself - especially when presented in a more lucid formulation than the one I have been able to accomplish - hints at an

ambitious philosophical project whose realization deserves our attention. Nevertheless, it should not be overlooked that the very concept of a process of knowledge understood in Hegel's sense presupposes the acceptance of claims which according to Hegel can only be justified in the context of his metaphysics. The most prominent examples which are of relevance here are the claims that we have to agree to the operation of determinate (bestimmte) negation and that we have to think of knowledge in terms of self-knowledge.

A similar conclusion will be reached when concentrating on some of the more limited claims connected with the *Phenomenology*. Take as an example the assertion that each form of consciousness (Bewusstseinsgestalt, Wissensform) or each new configuration of spirit follows from a previous one in which it is said to be 'founded', and is followed by another one which it then 'founds'. 'Founding' here means something like 'is made possible by'. This idea leads on the one hand to the result (highly acclaimed currently) that spirit has something to do with communities (Gemeinden) or, to use Pinkard's term, that reason is something social because it allows Hegel to introduce a common subject to all forms of knowledge. On the other hand this idea also permits Hegel to develop his notion of the context-dependence of truth, which has become influential in the pragmatistic tradition (James, Dewey). Now, this idea of a chain of configurations of spirit (or reason) characterized by specific knowledge claims and standing in a founding-relation can only make sense if you already presuppose something like a universal subject of knowledge which exhibits its cognitive contents in an orderly fashion, for otherwise it would make no sense to talk about founding. This presupposition brings us right back to Hegel's more substantial metaphysical convictions, which prove to play a constitutive role even in the domain of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

Here too like in the case of the *Philosophy of Right* it won't help to retreat to the position that Hegel's phenomenological findings have an intuitive plausibility even without taking into account his rather extravagant general opinions. For here too Hegel would insist on the point that what makes his *Phenomenology* philosophically important is not its

plausibility but its being a rational reconstruction of how things really are. And in order to accept it as such a reconstruction one has to follow his rules of rationality which are layed down in his metaphysics.

I am afraid that the point I have been driving at is now more than sufficiently articulate: Hegel's philosophical legacy consists in a very intricate combination of an impressive multitude of elements which in their entirety form one huge complex. To choose only some of these elements and to claim that just these constitute the philosophically important parts of his legacy means to have a very special notion of what could be done to a philosophical theory without changing its content so much that the theory has in fact been abandoned. I am not going to suggest that such a selective treatment of Hegel's philosophy is not possible in the sense that it might not lead to interesting results, all I am prepared to say is that such a treatment has its problems if it is supposed to be compatible with genuinely Hegelian philosophical aims. It is, after all, one thing to use Hegel's philosophy as a quarry (and that means to obliterate it) and quite another to be occupied with it in order to profit philosophically from its peculiar character.

But not only this. To deal with Hegel's philosophy in a rather selective way means to be not very faithful to his will, to say the least. For whatever the ultimate opinion on the content of Hegel's philosophical legacy may turn out to be, one thing is quite clear even now: part of that legacy is the request for a totally new way of thinking about the world, its constitution and our place in it. This request operates on the assumption that you can't get a sound philosophical view of the world and all its various phenomena if you don't give up almost all your old habits of thinking. For Hegel then it is of crucial importance to persuade us of the necessity to become different people because we have to accept a different conception of rationality. Hegel's philosophical oeuvre seen under this perspective is plainly one great plea for our getting changed fundamentally, and that is his philosophical testament.

Now, in Hegel's eyes, this plea is only justified if we take into account his philosophy

in its entirety. If however we start to separate elements of this philosophy from their systematic context in order to profit from them philosophically in isolation we don't execute Hegel's will any longer but we subscribe to a different project. Instead of changing our own modes of thinking (and ultimately of living) we would instead be trying to integrate parts of his philosophy into our traditional and according to Hegel obsolete ways of thinking. We try to make him one of us rather than becoming like him. This project may be in the end the more realistic one though it departs considerably from what Hegel wants us to do with his philosophy.

III

So our situation at present seems to be the following: on the one hand most of us are not prepared to follow Hegel's objective with respect to what should be done with his philosophical heritage, and for quite good reasons; on the other hand many obviously still believe in the fruitfulness of some of his philosophical ideas or in the value of parts of his legacy. Hegel is convinced on philosophical grounds that the philosophical value of each of these ideas is conditional to the value of the whole legacy. The majority of those presently dealing with Hegel want to have it otherwise. How then are we to treat this legacy? As is to be expected I don't know a really satisfying answer to this question. The only thing I can do is to come to conclude my paper by hinting at some points I take to be not utterly implausible if one agrees in principle (not necessarily in detail) with my description of the situation.

The first point is that the only ones who should expect to find something philosophically valuable (in contrast to something of historical or maybe psychological value) in what Hegel left to posterity are those who share with him the sentiment that there is something either fundamentally wrong or at least unsublatably onesided with our traditional

ways of attaining a correct conception of reality or of finding out what things really are. This is not because one has to believe in what Hegel takes this defect or this onesidedness to consist in, but rather because without this shared sentiment there is no reason to take Hegel's philosophical project seriously. Without sharing this dissatisfaction all you get from Hegel's legacy is a bunch of more or less illuminating insights into a wide range of phenomena which have their value only on the descriptive (and not on the philosophical) level because they lack the needed connection to Hegel's metaphysical framework. This does not mean that those insights may not be used in philosophically fruitful ways in other contexts, but then their philosophical value is no longer part of Hegel's particular heritage.

Now, and this is the second point, even for those who are in sympathy with Hegel's general attitude towards traditional rationality his philosophical legacy is not easy to claim. The difficulty arises because there are too many things within Hegel's philosophy that are unclear and extremely hard to assess. Though we might agree that in the end his philosophy was designed to introduce a new paradigm of rationality, this claim remains rather empty as long as nobody really knows what this new paradigm consists in exactly, how it works in detail, what can be brought forward in its favor and what it demands of us. Many of those dealing with Hegel's philosophy have found through experience that Hegel himself is not particularly helpful in answering questions like these. The long and still growing list of publications on Hegel with completely incompatible results is a rather discouraging witness to that.

The third and last point I want to make pertains to the options we ultimately have in our dealings with Hegel's heritage. I believe that they can be reduced to two: the one is just to give up on the task to look for an adequate evaluation of that legacy and to go on with the practice (well established since the time of Marx) to take away from it whatever seems to be appropriate to whatever philosophical purposes one is pursuing. I have explained the price one must pay for choosing this option. The other consists in the somewhat laborious attempt

to go back again to Hegel's own writings in order to get a better picture of what exactly it is he is trying to achieve philosophically and to what extent his project as he conceived of it is still convincing. H.G.Gadamer recommended this option to us some thirty years ago when he said that we must learn first simply to spell out Hegel (wir muessen Hegel erst buchstabieren lernen) - though he himself, as far as I know, was not enthusiastic about getting involved in this business very deeply. Nevertheless, his point is well taken. For to spell out Hegel seems to be a necessary condition for almost everything else you want to do with him, especially for claiming his legacy.

I am pretty sure that these three points raise more questions than they answer. It is after all by no means clear what they amount to in the end. Do they imply, e.g., that all the different positions in the history of philosophy we know of are ultimately worthless for us because of the validity of the hermeneutic principle that one can never really know what their authors were up to? One surely doesn't want to get committed to such a claim. Or do they presuppose that, e.g., in order to rely on specific though partial results of a philosophical theory one has to accept that theory in all its aspects? Nobody would be happy with such a prospect either, and rightly so. Obviously then these three points are in need of a lot of qualifications and limitations if they are to make sense at all. Nevertheless, in the case of Hegel things seem to be a little bit different - maybe just or only because of his disquieting insistence on a non-traditional conception of rationality.

But before getting too serious about these matters we might be well advised to remind ourselves that we have been talking about problems we have with theories, we have not been talking about things. And this allows me to end with a consoling aphorism which goes back to Epictetus (Encheiridion) and which was used already by Laurence Sterne as a motto in his Tristram Shandy.

It says:

Tarassei tous Anthropous ou ta Pragmata,

Alla ta peri ton Pragmaton Dogmata.

(People are not disturbed by things,

but by theories about things).¹

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