Introduction

> Gideon Rose, Editor of *Foreign Affairs*: You and your country have lived through a lot of history over the years, a lot of epic ideological and geopolitical conflict. Will Poland's future be as turbulent as its past, or have you reached an equilibrium that will allow you to have a normal national life?
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> Radosław Sikorski, Poland's Minister of Foreign Affairs: Indeed, both the Second World War and Solidarity started in Gdansk. The twentieth century was a roller coaster for Poland, regaining independence after World War I, then losing it and getting ethnically cleansed by Stalin and Hitler together, and then 45 years of struggle for democracy. Hopefully, we'll produce less history than in the past. Geopolitically, we are having the best time in 300 years. And we are now contributing to other countries' stability, being a source of European solutions.
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> Rose: So Poland is finally at the "end of history"?
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> Sikorski: *Inshallah*, as they say.
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> Radosław Sikorski, "The Polish Model: A Conversation with Radek Sikorski." *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2013

There is a well-known story which lives on wherever Hegel is studied. There are variations of this tale, depending on who tells it and what their reasons are for passing on the tale, but the account typically runs something like this: as Hegel completed his first great work, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, in 1806, an old world was coming to an end, and a new one was about to begin. Bonaparte's forces had crushed the Prussian armies of Friedrich Wilhelm III at the battle of Jena on 14 October, effectively bringing to an end the Prussian feudal system that had animated the Holy Roman Empire, in one form or another, since Otto I was crowned Emperor of Italy in 982. The liberal reforms which Prussia's critics had long called for were forced upon her as a result of her defeats – and just as Napoleon's victories over the Germans brought about the end of historical tyranny and despotism in continental Europe, so Hegel's *Phenomenology* ushered in the final chapter in Western philosophical history. Hegel's work announced the arrival of absolute freedom and, in effect, the end of history – not history in the sense of the succession of discrete events, which of course would continue, but *history* in the sense of the long pursuit of the ends towards

which humanity had always been striving. This type of history, which one might call *philosophical* history, ended the moment that the *political* revolution (which had begun with the Revolution of 1789) and the *philosophical* revolution (inaugurated by Hegelian thought) met as one, on the eve of the battle of Jena. Hegel claims to have glimpsed Napoleon at Jena, writing to his friend Niethammer, "I saw the Emperor – this world-soul – riding out from the city on reconnaissance. It is indeed a wonderful sensation to see such an individual who … astride a horse, reaches out over the world, and masters it" (Hegel *Letters* 306). Hegel hailed Bonaparte's "mastery" as the completion of the revolutionary epoch in the assertion of universal rights and autonomy in the face of the old world of privilege, inheritance, and bondage. And in the same vein, whereas Napoleon's victories announced political liberty, Hegel's *Phenomenology* announced spiritual or intellectual liberty, the freedom long sought by humanity. Moreover, Hegel's was the *absolute* philosophy, because it finally achieved what he termed *absolute* knowing: "This last form of spirit, a spirit which gives its complete and true content in the form of the self and through this likewise realizes its own concept, while remaining within its own concept; this is absolute knowing [*das absolute Wissen*]" (Hegel *Werke* 3:582). All that remained for the future was to universalize the political victories of Napoleon and the philosophical victories of Hegel. History, in the sense of the progress of spirit into freedom, was at an end.

In broad outline, this is the tale of Hegel's end of history thesis. Many of the political components in the tale are correct, particularly the reliance of the end of history thesis on its proximity to the French Revolution. The philosophical components, however, are deeply problematic. Though evocative, the image of a sequestered Hegel struggling to give birth to the philosophical equivalent of the very battle raging at his doorstep as he penned the final lines of the *Phenomenology* does not do justice to the actual content of Hegel's philosophy, not to mention the fact that it is simply untrue. It is true that, as a member of the "revolutionary generation" of 1765–75 (a generation which included Hegel, his friends Friedrich Hölderlin and Friedrich Schelling, as well as Beethoven, Wordsworth, and Bonaparte himself), Hegel understood his work as an integral part of the political and historical movements of the time. Indeed it is impossible to make sense of the end of history discussion if Hegel's philosophical claims are divorced from the political movements which paralleled them. Yet according to Ritter (1982: 61) Hegel's philosophy "proves itself to be the settlement of the problem posed by the Revolution that the continuity of world history no longer stands and is broken for it as well as for its restorative opponents. What emerges with the new age and the revolution is for both the end of former history; the future has no relation to tradition." Ritter is correct, the future is not the realm of the philosopher, according to Hegel, but not because the future is unimportant. Rather, because the philosopher is not a prophet (Hegel *VPW* 210), the future is not philosophy's to command; "the

face of the thinker is turned toward the historical, that is, toward the past and the passing present; nothing is more false than the popular belief that Hegelians believed they could foresee the future like a prophet" (Schmitt 1988: 61). Of course, even a cursory reading of Hegel's work shows that Hegel did in fact believe that his philosophy occupied a position of privilege, for he declares at the end of his *Philosophy of History*, "thus far has consciousness come" (Hegel *Werke* 12:539) – that is, Hegel's explication of the philosophy of world history stands for him as the culmination of the story of human consciousness. Hegel understood his philosophy to stand as a culmination of the entire philosophical endeavor begun by Heraclitus and the Greeks millennia ago. It would be disingenuous to deny this aspect of Hegel's totalizing thought, and this alone has often served as reason enough to dismiss the insights of his philosophy of history. If Hegel truly believed that his thought heralded the end of history, a charitable reading would be to simply shake one's head and try to make better sense of some other element of Hegel's philosophy.

Yet claims about Hegel's end of history thesis always leave out more than they include. To mention only three important examples: such claims never take into account Hegel's very clear strictures against philosophy turning into prophecy (Hegel *VPW* 210), they fail to address the brief but crucial statements Hegel makes about the possible course of world spirit in the New World or in Russia (Hegel *Werke* 12:107ff.), and they forget that history comes to be what it is within Hegel's larger schema of thought. "Poking fun at the lecture cycle on the philosophy of history is easier than understanding it, because it … only makes sense in its context," says Bungay (1994: 36). "History is 'placed' in the system, so systematics must come first, for it is only in the system that Hegel says what he thinks history is." Historical spirit "strides ever forwards," Hegel remarks, "because only spirit is progress. Often it seems to have forgotten and lost itself; but inwardly opposed to itself, it is inwardly working forward … until strong in itself it bursts asunder the crust of earth which divided it from the sun, its concept [*seine Begriffe*], so that the earth crumbles away" (Hegel *Werke* 20:456). Beneath Hegel's Platonic imagery here of the sun and the ἰδέα (cf. *Republic* 508a–b; 514a–515e) lies his basic Aristotelian openness to the world; and while like Aristotle Hegel is thoroughly teleological, the proposed end (τέλος) he envisions is always beyond philosophy's grasp, because it is the futural end, the *eschaton* (ἔσχατα), as in the Pythian oracle's idiomatic τὰ ἔσχατα γαίης or "ends of the earth" as an unachievable goal (Herodotus, *Hist.*7:140), or the Septuagint's τὰ ἔσχατα της θαλάσσης, the "uttermost parts of the sea" (Ps. 139:9) which only God can plumb. Within the Hegelian dialectic, we have no access to *das Ende* as such because it is always approaching and receding according to its own historical logic. At the same time, there *are* ends in Hegelian thought, even something *like* an end of history. While Part I of this book is dedicated to tracing and exposing the "myth of the end of history"

in Hegel, in Part II I undertake an interpretation of Hegelian philosophy of history that makes room for the proper sorts of ends Hegel's thought envisions. He conceives of the "end" as a culmination of history, because for Hegel, the end or τέλος is the larger, proleptically realized yet historically unattainable ἔσχατον. When Hegel speaks of the end, it is important to understand just what sort of end he envisions.

Along with questions about the end, Hegel also raises the question of historical progress. The question of progress is a vexed one in Hegel's philosophy. On the one hand, few if any philosophers so thematize progress in their thought. But just as we have to ask what sort of "end" Hegel envisions within his philosophy (and what role his philosophy plays in that end), so also must we ask what sort of "progress" Hegel champions. It will come as a surprise to some that Hegel in fact is not a blind devotee of inevitable human political and spiritual progress. Every age has these apostles of progress; Hegel is not one of them, though over the centuries many of them have cited him as their standard-bearer. For Hegel, everything that happens of any import is *immanent*, a process internal to whatever phenomenon he is studying. Immanent progress, i.e. the process of something becoming what it is, is not the same thing as transcendent progress (Latin *transcendere*, "to climb"), a progress that rises above. Hegel is not the philosopher of transcendence. His great concern is to understand the inner workings of phenomena, an Aristotelian fascination with the universals that exists *in re* and work themselves out in time and history. Interpreters who locate an end of history in Hegel believe that they are adhering to a fundamentally top-down Hegelian idea of a transcendent idea which manifests itself within the course of human history. But that is (arguably) Plato, not Hegel; one should (almost) never read Hegel as a Platonist. The end of history rests upon a Platonic interpretation, wherein a preordained universal plan is made concrete within human life. Hegel's language and images (the cunning of reason, the world-soul) feed into this reading, until he becomes a caricature of himself, blithely plotting the course of the world spirit across the bloody pages of history, paying little attention to the actual course of events, and no attention at all to the violence the spirit leaves in its wake. This reading leaves us thinking Hegel either a buffoon or a monster, or perhaps both.

History does not progress – "only spirit is progress," Hegel writes (Hegel *Werke* 20:456). This is a nuanced but vital point that must not be overlooked. Hegel does speak of progressions within history, but not of an overall progress of history beyond his own philosophy and its own time. The Hegelian end is the culmination of the *now*; not the foreclosure of the *next*. Hegel's statement that "only spirit is progress" and others like it are not isolated sayings which Hegel makes in the process of trying to cover every inch of the globe with his philosophy of absolute spirit. In fact, many of them are among the most commented upon in the Hegelian corpus, such as the famous comment in the Preface to the

Rechtsphilosophie about philosophy coming on the scene too late to give historical direction (*Werke* 7:28). Hegel's statements about the possible future openness of the movement of human and historical spirit betray something of a significant counter-trend in Hegelian philosophy, towards open-ended possibility and *away* from the completeness and comprehensiveness his philosophy otherwise claims, and therefore allow us to attempt a reading of Hegel *contra* Hegel. As I detail aspects of the context and development of Hegel's philosophy of history, these junctures of openness will begin to appear. I develop these open places in Hegel's philosophy in order to cast light on the meaning of Hegel's claim to stand at the end of history. It will become clear that when read carefully, no such end of history thesis can be found in Hegel's philosophy. This is not to dismiss the very real notion of *culmination* which is an important part of Hegelian thought. However, culmination is not end (properly speaking it is *an* end but not *the* end), and to mistake the two is to do grave injustice to the whole of Hegel's philosophy. Also, because Hegel explicitly ties his philosophy of history – which is supposed to represent his "end of history thesis" in its fullest mode – to the theological idea of theodicy and the justification of evil in history, one cannot understand Hegel's philosophy of history apart from an attempt to get at what he means by human finitude and the contingency of evil. History and evil are bound up in a complex relationship in Hegel's work, and to appreciate this relationship, one has to try and understand exactly what Hegel does and does not say, and why.

There is no way to grasp Hegelian philosophy from the outside. Hegel's influence upon every strain of European philosophy since his time is greater than any other philosopher, even Kant, and as such he is too close, even to his harshest critics, for a balanced appraisal. Phenomenology, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, Western Marxism, *Historismus*, existentialism, British idealism, hermeneutics, psychoanalytic theory, structuralism, post-structuralism and deconstruction, French feminism, critical theory: all of these are watered by Hegelian springs; and if some of them find the water stale or tepid, they drink nonetheless. Heidegger's advice remains sound: "If we wish to confront Hegel, then the demand lies upon us to be 'akin' to him" (Heidegger *GA* 32:44). The rift between analytic and continental philosophy arises first with Hegel, and debates over his influence, successors, and place in the canon. Hegel's influence over theology, particularly Protestant thought, is immense and seems to resurface in every new generation. Hegel has many kin. But not everyone, even among his own kin, agrees that Hegel can still open up new possibilities. I believe that he still can do so, and in profound ways. The present work is intended to stand in the tradition of Hegelian interpretation which denies that Hegel forecloses possibilities for the future in his thought. This means that, though Hegel will be criticized throughout the work, at its heart my study serves an apologetic function.

Although it is best to let this book stand on its own, it may be useful to situate my approach to Hegel within the larger world of scholarship. The reader will quickly note that I consider Hegel in tandem with Aristotle at nearly every juncture in the argument. I believe that many of the most vexing problems plaguing Hegel scholarship would be largely ameliorated by paying close attention to the parallels between Hegel's conceptual views and those of Aristotle. It would not be wrong to locate this book within the metaphysical camp of Hegel interpretation, but only because, like Aristotle, Hegel's work is best understood as a whole, and taking various works out of the system leaves out what, for Hegel, is most important. Yet Hegel's philosophy continually slips outside the boundaries he surveys for it, particularly where an end of some sort might preclude futural possibility. To that extent as well, this book is an exercise of reading Hegel *contra* Hegel; or at least, *contra* the traditional metaphysical Hegel with his spirit monism and transcendent inevitabilities. Since that commits me to an anti-metaphysical metaphysical Hegel, I shall then have to explain what I think is going on within Hegel's teleology, and why it isn't a bad thing, properly understood, and how all this makes sense of his philosophy of history without having my Heideggerian membership card revoked. Part II of the book records my attempt. With Malabou (2005), I affirm that Hegel does have a future – that is, he takes the future seriously, and that there is still a future for Hegelian philosophy.

Hegel nowhere says that his philosophy represents the end of history as commonly understood by philisophers and political scientistics; his few statements to that effect have been misunderstood or used in a way incongruent with the overall philosophical system. What we are left with, then, is the question as to whether or not this is what Hegel *meant*, even if it is not what he *said*. The idea that he does mean this arises from a few key later interpretations of Hegel. This study is dedicated to showing why those interpretation are, and must always remain, false. The overall plan of this study is quite simple. In Part I, I will take up the idea of the end of history in Hegel and demonstrate how certain key early interpretations of his work helped to give rise to the widespread belief that Hegel indeed taught that history had reached its end with his thought. The two most important nineteenth-century sources for the end of history thesis in Hegel are Friedrich Engels (1820–95) and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900). In his *Untimely Meditations* (1873–76), Nietzsche laments Hegel's apotheosis of historical consciousness, and remarks that for Hegel, "the apex and terminus of world history coincided with his own Berlin existence" (Nietzsche *SW* 1:308). Engels believes that while Hegel does not "sharply" delineate the end of the historical process, he "nevertheless finds himself compelled to supply this process with an end, just because he has to bring his system to a close at some point or other" (Engels *MEW* 21:268). In other words, both Nietzsche and Engels think that the systematic nature of Hegel's thought involves him in

an evitable claim that history must end with his system. This reading of Hegel's philosophy of history, and its relation to Marx's interpretation of Hegel, has been decisive for virtually all later interpreters, and played no small role in the philosophical development of the most important twentieth-century advocate of an end of history thesis in Hegel, Alexandre Kojève (1902–68). I locate Kojève's reading of Hegel within the long tradition of interpretation stretching back to Nietzsche and Engels, in order to show that the end of history, whatever it might mean for Hegel, is not at all what it means for Kojève *et al.* This discussion will clear the ground for a serious investigation in Part II of what Hegel actually means by history and the end of history, by way of comparisons with the historical philosophies of Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803) and Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814). Having established the important links Hegel's work has with the writings of Herder and Fichte, I am better positioned to show just what Hegel is doing in his philosophy of history, which makes up the remainder of the study.

Hegel's philosophy represents an eternal tension between the *dialektisch* (διαλεκτική, a natural process of conflict) and the *spekulative* (θεωρία, a spiritual or *geistig* vision of totality). Hegel's great attempt in his philosophy is to reconcile this dual tension, to eliminate the contingency of dialectical history with a comprehensive way of seeing the world via spirit, a speculative vision of totality. Let me say at the beginning of this book that Hegel's great attempt is a failure; in that sense, this book recapitulates Croce's attempt to find "what is living and what is dead" in Hegel's philosophy, in this case the philosophy of history. Croce locates the great, insurmountable dualism in "the profound distinction which Hegel makes between nature and spirit, and which he affirms as the distinction between an unconscious and conscious logicity" (Croce 1915: 198). Following Croce, Alison Stone has argued that the best way to understand the tensions within Hegel's concepts of nature and spirit is to see how "Hegel organizes the stages of nature on the same model as the forms of consciousness. This is no coincidence, since he identifies both domains as starting from initial states with corresponding structures and contradictions" (Stone 2004: 52). Stone understands Hegelian philosophy of nature from a strongly a priori point of view, and she makes a compelling argument. My concern here is a bit different. I do not try and reconcile Hegelian spirit with Hegelian history, because for Hegel, history is not to be understood in an a priori fashion. That is Fichte's approach, which I detail in Chapter 6. History is always the realm of the contingent for Hegel, and his philosophy of history is his attempt to overcome the contingency of history within his larger category of spirit. But because spirit proceeds and develops dialectically, it requires the contradictions of history in order to be what it is. Therefore, against Hegel's best insights, those contradictions cannot be dialectically overcome; they are crucial to the dialectic of history as Hegel (rightly) understands it. Since the

dialectic is ongoing, necessarily, history cannot be brought to an end, and Hegel's attempt to offer his philosophy of history as a theodic explanation of historical contingency founders upon the very dialectical necessity which gives rise to the problem in the first place. Hegel cannot end history, and therefore no theodic explanation is possible. Hegel's heroic effort to "eliminate contingency" (Hegel *VPW* 29) is doomed to failure. Yet that must not count against him, in the end. In fact, the lasting power of Hegelian thought results from its failure to ever come to a full stop, that is, in its inability to close itself off to the dialectical movement that is its driving force. Hegel's great failure, this irreconcilable struggle, is the starting point for every European philosophy since his time. His great failure is the crucible of worlds.

My treatment of Hegelian terminology and Hegelian German requires some small mention. In citing Hegel and in translating his German, I make it a point *not* to capitalize such prominent terms as *being* [*Sein*], the *absolute* [*das Absolute*], *spirit* [*der Geist*], and so forth, unless the context cries out for such a translation. In doing this I hope to allow his language to speak (insofar as an interpretation is able: *traduttore, traditore*), without the encrustations of philosophical interpretation which can all too often get in the way in a translation. There is no reason to make Hegel any harder than he has to be; in fact, Hegel's systematic way of thinking and writing makes him a remarkably clear (which is not to say *easy*) thinker, once one has a grasp of the overall idea he is treating and the way in which he uses language. In fact, Hegel has no time for such obfuscations: "these days we often see an expression which precisely denotes a concept disdained in favor of one which … shrouds the concept in a fog and therefore sounds more uplifting" (Hegel *Werke* 3:54). Translating German philosophy into English with Portentous Capitalization generates "overterms," frighteningly weighty hypostatizations which cloud the meaning Hegel wants to convey (which is not always easy to grasp in the original, or with a flawless translation). Is this unwarranted license? After all, these terms have a "fixed" and "authoritative" place in Hegel's system, do they not? We all know that the Absolute is Hegel's way of speaking about the Totality of his Intellectual Pantheism, which is identified with Spirit (or better, Mind, another preferred translation), the Movement of this Pantheistic Oversoul through History, which is identical with Being itself, don't we (or We)? Perhaps not. In actuality, these terms mean different things in the course of Hegel's thought, and while there is a uniformity of use, it is better to understand them as the common terms that they were (and are, in German), put to different usage in order to explain the complex web of relationships which emerge in the course of Hegelian thought. After all, it is Heidegger, not Hegel, that more often than not coins a new word in order to explain a new or forgotten concept – and Heideggerian overterms are far more daunting.

The concepts Hegel is trying to explain, however, are not forgotten or new, as far as he is concerned. They are everyday events and unfoldings which have to be explained absolutely, that is, "scientifically" or systematically so that their meaning becomes evident. For example, *der Geist* carries with it the commonplace meaning of "spirit" as in a spirited debate (the spirit that "inhabits" the debate, gives it meaning and a life of its own, so to speak), or a spirit of fellow-feeling like the French *esprit* which binds people together around a common goal or project, as well as the spirit or character of a people, even to the point of cliché (the "American can-do spirit"). These understandings of spirit are not ancillary to Hegel's philosophical meaning, but in fact deeply inform his meaning, and should inform our understanding of his terms. Especially for this study, which treats of Hegel's philosophy of history, the historical or temporal meanings of his terms should be given full weight, without imposing upon them overbearing ideas which have more to do with the fact that all nouns are capitalized in German, than how Hegel might have written had he written in English. Because I extensively retranslate from German, I will use English standards as far as possible to translate Hegel, and that means leaving his nouns lower case, unless specific reason to capitalize them presents itself. I often wonder how differently the course of German scholarship in English might have gone, had the convention of capitalizing every important term in the philosophical arsenal not taken hold early on. Without a doubt, reading Hegel with the overterms muted leaves a very different impression on the mind. However we feel about his system, we should not cloud it with translations which imply the presence of Presences lurking in the background, ready to sublate anything and everything into a higher preservation of Universal Spirit.

No more need be said about the proper manner in which to translate and understand Hegel's philosophical language. My reading of Hegel will have to convince on its own merits, and will do so or not regardless of how I have translated this or that word or concept. Paul Redding (1996: 246) points out that "the resurgence of interest in Hegelian thought characteristic of the last few decades has been largely concerned with working a way out of the labyrinth of those traditional interpretations which have dominated the reception of Hegel but which are now being increasingly recognized as inadequate to his thought." This book is a hopeful contribution to that ongoing work. Hegel's account of events is his own, and must be read that way and within his own context. The philosophical thought which undergirds his account, however, is a meaningful one apart from the uses to which Hegel puts it. Hegel's philosophy of history should be understood not as a once-for-all summation of history and time, but as an account of the process of historical change itself. Viewed in opposition to the totalizing lures of thought which constrain it from within, and read with an eye towards Hegel's openness to the future and its possibilities, Hegelian thought is still a powerful resource for revaluing historical claims about the

present and future. Hegel's great concern in his philosophy of history is not to achieve the end of history, but to explain and finally eliminate contingency and the perception of loss within history. In a phrase I will invoke frequently in this study, Hegel says that "philosophical reflection has no other purpose than the elimination of the contingent" (Hegel *VPW* 29). By contingency, Hegel means external necessity, and within the context of the philosophy of history, Hegel is talking about explaining an internal essential drive to history which cannot be affected by something accidental.

Though I defend Hegel against misinterpretations of his philosophy of history, I do not think that Hegel is successful in eliminating the contingent, nor do I think that he could ever be. However, I do not want to begin this study with a negative assessment of Hegel in this Introduction. "The beginning is not what one finds first; the point of departure must be reached, it must be won," according to Ricoeur (1967: 348), and so by indicating that I think Hegel's overall project in his philosophy of history is a failure, I mean to free up the study to find what is valuable in Hegel's philosophy of history. The apologetic function of this study is also its critical function. Hegel's failures are not what are usually considered failures, and the successes I find in Hegel, and present in this study, are not what are usually considered Hegelian successes. For example, Hegel's dependence upon mediation, finitude, and contingency is both the greatest strength of his philosophy as well as a guarantee that he will never be able to overcome contingency in any absolute position, such as he argues for in the philosophy of history. The airtight completeness for which Hegelian metaphysics is justly renowned and justly feared is constantly undermined by the power of the equally renowned Hegelian dialectic, which moves forever forward and is eternally enfolding and unfolding new strata of meaning and creating new kinds of value in the world. "Misconstrued, treated lightly, Hegelianism only extends its historical domination, finally unfolding its immense enveloping resources without obstacle," according to Derrida, a careful reader of Hegel. "Hegelian self-evidence seems lighter than ever at the moment when it finally bears down with its full weight" (Derrida 1978: 251). Cognizant of the danger of the weight of Hegel, in this study I suggest a way to get out from under some of the effects of the weight without treating it lightly. What is needed is a more *humble* reading of Hegel, if such a thing is possible. To do this without doing unconscionable damage to the integrity of the Hegelian system is a difficult undertaking, but by considering key points of Hegel's works in turn, a picture of Hegelian philosophy and Hegel's notion of the "end" emerges which is at odds with received Hegelian orthodoxy. By taking Hegel seriously and at his word, I undertake to read Hegel contra Hegel in order to see what his thought can still tell us about history and humanity. For Hegel still has much to say.