

## Hegel and Modern Society

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## Preface to this edition

FREDERICK NEUHOUSER



In 1975 Cambridge University Press published a book that was to transform English-language reception of nineteenth-century German philosophy forever. The book, Charles Taylor's *Hegel*, offered a comprehensive interpretation of Hegel's thought dedicated to revealing the *philosophical* significance of that thought to readers for whom terms such as 'dialectic' and 'self-positing spirit' signalled the essential incomprehensibility of analytic philosophy's constitutive 'other': the 'Continental' tradition of philosophy. It is difficult to overstate the impact *Hegel* had on young Anglophone readers. For those of us who were interested in post-Kantian German thought but had no philosophical access to it, Taylor's book provided a new orientation that made it possible to begin reading Hegel's texts productively. The current resurgence of Hegelian thought outside Europe – unimaginable forty years ago – would not have been possible without Taylor's pioneering work.

Four years after the publication of *Hegel* there appeared a much shorter work by Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society*. This volume claimed to 'condense' the earlier one so as to focus on what Taylor regarded as the part of Hegel's thought most relevant to contemporary concerns: his philosophy of society and politics. The book's thesis was that Hegel's social philosophy attempted to satisfy two aspirations bequeathed to us by the Enlightenment and its Romantic successors: aspirations to radical autonomy and to expressive unity with nature and society. Achieving this aim required Hegel to re-think Enlightenment conceptions of reason and freedom such that individuals' identity-constituting social attachments could be seen to be compatible with – indeed, constitutive of – their freedom and well-being. One of the important contributions of *Hegel and Modern Society* is that it combatted prevailing Anglophone post-World War II stereotypes of Hegel as a proto-Fascist apologist for totalitarianism for whom freedom required sacrificing individuals' interests to the ends of an amorphous, all-determining State. Taylor's Hegel, in contrast, aimed not to deny the rights of individuality but to synthesize them with the intrinsic good of communal membership, which explains why *Hegel and Modern Society* emphasized the need to preserve differentiation

(and to find a place for the individual rights heralded by liberalism) while fostering forms of social life that enable individuals to value their social participation non-instrumentally, as a fundamental dimension of their own good.

Re-reading Taylor's book makes clear that the reasons he found Hegel relevant then are even more compelling today: 'industrial civilization' – especially in its current neo-liberal, globalizing form – has progressed farther than Taylor could have imagined in 1979 in subordinating all social processes to its overriding aim of ever more efficient (and ever more profitable) material production, resulting in the destruction of traditional forms of community and the atomization and alienation of the very humans who sustain that production. Hegel's vision of a society in which free individuals find their social activity not merely useful but also 'expressive' of who they take themselves to be seems an even more distant goal now than it did four decades ago, and for this reason Taylor's ground-breaking work deserves a fresh reading by social philosophers today.

## Editors' introduction



The purpose of this series\* is to help to make contemporary European philosophy intelligible to a wider audience in the English-speaking world, and to suggest its interest and importance in particular to those trained in analytical philosophy.

It is appropriate that the series should be inaugurated with a book on Hegel. For it is by reference to Hegel that one may indicate most starkly the difference between the two traditions to whose intercommunication the series seeks to contribute. The analytical philosophy of the contemporary Anglo-Saxon world was developed by Moore, Russell and others in revolt against idealism and the influence of Hegel at the turn of this century. It is true that the British and American idealists had already diverged considerably from Hegel, but their holistic philosophy was certainly Hegelian both in terminology and in aspiration. Moore and Russell themselves obviously owed most to a different tradition stemming from Hume. Nevertheless, they too were influenced by European contemporaries to whose writings they explicitly appealed in their revolt against the British Hegelians. In particular they admired two European philosophers who had very little sympathy for Hegelianism: Brentano in the case of Moore, and in the case of Russell, Frege.

Again, if we look at the modern origins of radicalism or anti-traditionalism in philosophical thought in the English-speaking world – and most of the philosophers of the Vienna Circle were political radicals as well as philosophically iconoclastic – we find another contrast which can be drawn by reference to Hegel. In England, philosophical opposition to 'Establishment' ways of thinking and patterns of influence was developed in opposition to Hegel rather than under his influence; the opposite has been true of the more Marxist-orientated philosophers in many European countries, for instance Sartre and Merleau-Ponty in France. In the

\* *Hegel and Modern Society* was first published by Cambridge University Press as part of the series *Modern European Philosophy*. This Introduction was written by the series editor at the time, and allusions to 'this series' in this section refer to the series in which *Hegel and Modern Society* was first published.



mid- 1930s, just when Hegel's philosophy was being introduced seriously to the academic world in Paris, A. J. Ayer returned from Vienna to Oxford as a champion of the logical positivism of the Vienna Circle, whose chief target of attack was precisely Hegel. It is true that logical positivism was short-lived in England; and even in the United States, to which several members of the Vienna Circle eventually escaped, it represented an important phase rather than a lasting school. But many of the philosophical virtues with which it was most concerned continued to be fostered. What is now called analytical philosophy, with its demand for thoroughness of conceptual analysis and its suspicion of rhetoric and grandiose structures, came to be more and more dominant in the English-speaking world. The philosophical attitude that it represents and that distinguishes it from the dominant European schools of thought is succinctly expressed in the foreword of the *Philosophical Remarks* (1930) of Wittgenstein, whose influence on analytical philosophy was incalculable.

This spirit is different from the one that informs the vast stream of European and American civilization in which all of us stand. That spirit expresses itself in an onwards movement, in building ever larger and more complicated structures, the other in striving after clarity and perspicuity in no matter what structure . . . And so the first adds one construction to another, moving on and up, as it were, from one stage to the next, while the other remains where it is, and what it tries to grasp is always the same.

Everyone knows that the labels 'analytical' and 'European' (or 'continental') are very unsatisfactory. Many of the philosophers who have influenced the recent tradition of analytical philosophy in important ways were born and bred on the European mainland (for example, Frege, Poincaré, Schlick), and even if some (such as Wittgenstein, Hempel, Carnap, Popper) moved later in their lives to the United States or England, they first developed their thought in Europe. Von Wright, Hintikka and Føllesdal are very much products of the European philosophical tradition as well as being analytical philosophers in their own right. There are many other philosophers engaged in work of conceptual analysis in the Scandinavian countries, Poland and, more recently, Germany.

Moreover, the universities of Europe that have not been influenced by the analytical tradition – and these include nearly all of those in France and Italy, and the great majority of those in German-speaking countries and in Eastern Europe – have by no means represented any unitary tradition. The disagreements, or even lack of communication, between, for instance, Hegelians, Marxists, phenomenologists and Thomists have often been deep.

But these disagreements are 'small' in comparison with the barriers of mutual ignorance and distrust between the main representatives of the analytical tradition on the one hand and the main philosophical schools of the European continent on the other (which are also dominant in Latin America, Japan and even some universities in the United States and Canada). And these barriers are inevitably reinforced by the fact that, until very recently at any rate, even the best students from the universities situated on either side tend to emerge from their studies with such divergent areas of knowledge and ignorance, competence and incompetence, that they are hardly equipped even to enter into informed discussion with each other about the nature of what separates them.

The divergences that lie behind the development of these barriers can properly be understood only by reference back beyond Hegel to Kant, to the very different ways in which different schools of philosophy have reacted to his work and to the further counterreactions of *their* successors. But the transformation of these divergences into veritable barriers is a relatively recent phenomenon. Brentano, writing on the philosophy of mind at the end of the last century, frequently referred to J. S. Mill and to other contemporary British philosophers. In turn, as we have noticed, Moore refers to Brentano. Bergson discusses William James frequently in his works. For Husserl, one of the most important philosophers was Hume. The thinkers discussed seriously by Russell include not only Frege and Poincaré, but also Meinong. How unfortunate, then, that those who have followed in their footsteps have refused to read or respect one another, the one convinced that the other survives on undisciplined rhetoric and an irresponsible lack of rigour, the other suspecting the former of aridity, superficiality and over-subtle trivialization.

The books of this series represent contributions by philosophers who have worked in the analytical tradition, but who now tackle problems specifically raised by philosophers of the main traditions to be found within contemporary Europe. They are works of philosophical argumentation and of substance rather than merely introductory résumés. We believe that they may contribute towards the formation of a richer and less parochial framework of thinking, a wider frame within which mutual criticism and stimulation will be attempted and where mutual disagreements will at least not be based on ignorance, contempt or distortion.

## Preface



This work is largely a condensation of my *Hegel* (Cambridge University Press, 1975). But the purpose of the condensation was more than just to make a shorter and more accessible book. The book *is* shorter and, I hope, more accessible. I have left out the account of Hegel's logic, perhaps the most difficult part of his system to explain, as well as the interpretation of the *Phenomenology*, and the chapters on art, religion and philosophy.

The shorter book thus has a quite different centre of gravity, and this is its second purpose. The aim was to produce not just an exposition of Hegel, but a view of the ways in which he is relevant and important to contemporary philosophers. I try, in other words, not just to expound Hegel, but also to show how he still provides the terms in which we reflect on some contemporary problems. Perhaps I should state this aim more modestly, and say I wanted to show how Hegel has helped shape the terms in which I think. But such modesty, although seemingly, would be insincere. In fact I believe that Hegel has contributed to the formation of concepts and modes of thought that are indispensable if we are to see our way clear through certain modern problems and dilemmas. And that is what I want to argue in the following pages.

The book falls into three chapters. The first is entirely expository. It opens with a new statement of what I see as the problems and aspirations shared by many of Hegel's generation, and continues with what is largely an adaptation of Chapter 3 of *Hegel*. The second chapter considers Hegel's political philosophy, and leads up to a discussion of its relevance today; this is an amended version of *Hegel*, Part IV. The final chapter tries to show how the problems and aspirations of Hegel's time continue through certain modifications into our time. These can be seen as centring on the issue of freedom; and I try to show how much our best articulations of this issue owe to Hegel. This chapter largely reproduces the final chapter of the longer work.

I recognize how tentative and fragmentary many of the points are that I try to make in the third chapter, and particularly what I say about the twentieth-century focus on questions of language and meaning. Sketchy as it is, what I say is highly contestable. But I don't feel capable of putting

forward a more solidly defensible thesis at this stage. We are just now coming to a more dispassionate and penetrating assessment of what is original to the various strands of twentieth-century philosophy. I hope to be able to say something more coherent on this on another occasion.

But, for the moment, I share the widely held intuition that some major problems in our philosophy of language are bound up with those which bedevil our conceptions of the human subject, and particularly of freedom. And this is why, I believe, we would benefit greatly from a renewed acquaintance with the work of Herder, Hegel and Humboldt. I hope this book may be of some help in this, at least as regards Hegel.

## Abbreviations



- BRel Begriff der Religion, ed. G. Lasson, Leipzig, 1925.
- Differenz Differenz des Fichte'schen und Schelling'schen Systems der Philosophie, ed. G. Lasson, Leipzig, 1928.
- EG System der Philosophie, Part III: The Philosophy of Spirit, in *SW*, x. References are to paragraphs.
- EN System der Philosophie, Part II: The Philosophy of Nature, in *SW*, ix. References are to paragraphs.
- GW Die germanische Welt, ed. G. Lasson, Leipzig, 1920.
- PhG Phänomenologie des Geistes, G. Lasson edition, Hamburg, 1952.
- PR Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts, ed. J. Hoffmeister, Hamburg, 1955, or Hegel's Philosophy of Right, trans. T. M. Knox, Oxford, 1942. Quotations are usually from the Knox edition. References are to paragraphs for the text and to Knox edition pages for the preface.
- SW Sämtliche Werke, ed. Hermann Glockner, 20 vols., Stuttgart, 1927–30.
- VG Die Vernunft in der Geschichte, ed. J. Hoffmeister, Hamburg, 1955.
- WL Wissenschaft der Logik, G. Lasson edition, Hamburg, 1963.