

## Why Hegel? Why Now?

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We live in the self-proclaimed time of difference, when particular identities and localities worry about or actively resist the global forces of modernization. This is the time of the other, the exception, the multi-cultural. Why then look again at Hegel, who is reputed to be the philosopher of unity, sameness, and absorption into the whole? Things may not be what they seem. Hegel may be surprisingly relevant: in a world where particularity is alternately triumphant and resentful, Hegel offers more sophisticated ways to think about individual and social unity. Agree with him or not, you can learn from him.

Although the essays in this issue deal with a variety of topics, again and again they return to the question how thought deals with resistant particulars. This shows up in Jay Bernstein's exposition of action in community, and in the friendly questions he raises about Henry Harris' interpretation of Hegel on mutual forgiveness. Several of our authors offer different readings of Hegel's views on thought's relation to particular reality. Kristjan Arngrimsson discusses his relation to the Enlightenment notions of individuality and modern alienation and irony. Hegel has always been read as a partisan of modernization, though not always of individuality. Our individual freedom is the concern of Will Dudley's treatment of Hegel's attempt to provide room for both modern self-legislation and a social content that enables rather than damages individual autonomy. Alison Stone shows parallels between the categories Hegel uses to describe nature and those for individual consciousness. Ardis Collins discusses the relation of Hegelian philosophy's most abstract moment, the Logic, to the particulars of nature and historical reality, offering a Hegel who both develops an a priori set of philosophical concepts and surrenders to the particularities of a reality that will always resist those concepts.

The most wide-ranging discussion of Hegel's views is offered in the three pieces discussing Henry Harris' monumental new commentary on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Jay Bernstein and Terry Pinkard applaud Harris' work, and in the process they, and Harris' reply, show how Hegel's key notion of Spirit is being read today as the human community's self-awareness of its own structure and motion. They disagree, though, on how this non-theological conception of Spirit fits with Hegel's use of the particular religious language of Christianity -- compare Bernstein's desire for a "wholly secular" reading, with Harris' desire to show "the logical necessity of Hegel's transition

to 'Religion'." At stake is what it means for us to live as a rationally structured community that is aware of both its unity and its historical particularities.

Today's Hegel is post-Kantian, in several senses. He strives to extend Kant's advances while overcoming Kant's dualities. Hegel, like Kant, works towards a self-conception of our conceptualizing activity. For Hegel, though, that knowledge is unconditioned by any other factors. Hegel does think that we can come to know the form of our developing process of language and culture, and that we can come to live self-consciously within that process, building our institutions from that understanding. This is what it means to be completely modern.

The difficulty is to find ways to affirm the unconditioned quality of philosophical knowledge where "all of the positions in the story are logically necessary, and hence permanently present in our experience" (Harris) yet also to be open to the particular and the other. Our essays include a debate about just how pure philosophical knowledge can be. Richard Winfield argues that Hegel's discussion of formal logic can lead to insights based purely on the immanent development of necessary concepts, whereas Rebecca de Boer argues in a Heideggerian and deconstructive fashion that Hegel's thought is necessarily impure and relies on presuppositions not accounted for in the self-comprehending system. Ardis Collins tries for a middle position showing how the very purity of the Logic might demand an openness beyond itself.

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### Finding Hegel On the Map

Discussions of nineteenth century philosophy have tended toward two complementary omissions. Either Hegel and reactions to him are made the central drama, to the exclusion of empirical and positivist thought, or the growth of empirical and positivist science-oriented philosophy is stressed, to the exclusion of Hegel and other "metaphysical" thinkers. The first narrative traces an ancestry for contemporary Continental philosophy, the second for contemporary analytic philosophy.

With the analytic reaction against the Hegel-inspired British Idealists, and with the Hegelian influence on American pragmatism either hidden or denied, in the twenties and thirties of the last century Hegel was removed from the map of philosophical options in England and America. He crept back on from his hideouts in Europe, partly as a corrective for Marx, partly through reactions to Heidegger's negative references,

and largely through the pioneering expositions of John Findlay, Walter Kaufmann, Charles Taylor, and others in the late fifties and sixties. The next decades saw a Hegel boom. But that is old news. Why Hegel now?

In so-called Continental philosophy Hegel has always loomed large, often as the parental figure to be rejected. Heideggerians and deconstructionists find themselves facing a Hegel who already announced many of their themes, though, they insist, with an emphasis on closure that must be rejected. His method seems so thoroughly rationalistic, and his goal of a complete understanding so outrageous, that he is taken as the supreme example of philosophical hybris. This leads some to attempt to rehabilitate Hegel and deny that his thought is as closed as it is made out to be. Several of the essays in this issue enter that debate.

Hegel confronts us with a process that makes us who we are, but that cannot be captured by the usual modern devices of formal analysis. Stable frameworks of meaning exist within a process that they can neither describe nor dominate. In Hegel's jargon, this means, as Bernstein says, that "the claim of immediacy is always a reflective one, hence always mediated or posited." While this Hegelian theme obviously reappears in deconstructive thinkers, it also lies behind the continuing vitality of hermeneutic thought. Gadamer and Ricoeur continue to both bring together and to deny one-sided simplifications in their studies of philosophy, literature, and ethics, influenced by Heidegger but using more Hegelian strategies than Heidegger would approve of.

Hegel has also become relevant to some debates within analytic philosophy, especially in ethics and politics, where he is often seen as developing Kant's moral ideas in more socially useful directions. He is conceived not as the crypto-fascist that Popper pictured, but as a proto-communitarian. In ontology and epistemology he has been brought into contact with current analytic debates through the work of scholars such as Willem DeVries, Kenneth Westphal, William Maker, and others. Analogies to Hegel have even been asserted for the systematic ambitions of Wilfrid Sellars and Donald Davidson. In the philosophy of art, whose historical mode he invented, Hegel remains influential through the work of Arthur Danto, Karsten Harries, and others, often in debates about "the end of art." Even his much disdained philosophy of nature has been receiving a second look, urged on by the careful studies of Michael Petry, John Burbidge, and others.

Large-scale debates about modernization, whatever their provenance, find themselves

referring to Hegel. He has been attacked by Marxists and varieties of postmodernists for his approval of bourgeois life and for his vision of a completed modernity. But his views about the relation of civil society and state seem more relevant in the time of the triumphant global market.

There has been another stimulus for new looks at Hegel, as new texts have become available. The Hegel Archive has been embarked on a new critical edition of his works. Hegel published only four books and a handful of articles during his lifetime. His books included *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, his tortuous account of how consciousness arrives at the stance of true philosophical knowledge, the *Science of Logic*, which develops the fundamental content of true philosophical knowledge, the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, his handbook for students attending his lectures, and the *Philosophy of Right*, an expansion of the Encyclopedia section dealing with ethics, morals, and the philosophy of law and politics. These works have been carefully re-edited in the new critical edition.

The bulk of Hegel's published works, however, are his more accessible lectures on concrete and historical subjects: the philosophy of art, of religion, of history, and the history of philosophy. These lectures include extended narratives of the relevant history, threaded on a framework provided by his logic. The lecture volumes were assembled after Hegel's death from student transcripts and Hegel's fragmentary notes. Those who assembled them put together material from different courses. The new critical edition is attempting to publish the student transcripts themselves, where they still exist, enabling us to follow the development in Hegel's thought. Also, where Hegel revised his published books for subsequent editions, the editors are re-issuing the earlier as well as the later versions. Besides their value to scholars, these new editions of the books and lectures quietly undermine the image of Hegel as unresponsive to the empirical and historical material he deals with.







