

# Coming to terms with Hegel

By Walter Kaufmann

We are witnessing an unprecedented explosion of scholarly interest in Hegel. Well over a thousand books and articles on Hegel have been published in the 1970s. So far, none seems to be more expensive than Charles Taylor's *Hegel*, and few are equally ambitious. There is no subtitle nor any indication at the outset—or anywhere, for that matter—of what Professor Taylor hoped to do. We are invited to read the book to find out.

Taylor, who is professor of philosophy and political science at McGill University in Canada, does not see his own book in the context of the current wave of Hegel studies. Although the final chapter is entitled "Hegel Today" he does not even seem to be aware of the recent explosion, and his brief account of the reception of Hegel is rather odd. He speaks of Hegel's "comeback" in Germany at the end of the nineteenth century and suggests that "at the same time" when Dilthey and Lasson renewed interest in Hegel in Germany (which they actually did after 1905) Hegelianism also "became important in England and America". And he adds: "This renewed interest continues unabated to this day. Interrupted on the Anglo-Saxon scene by the reaction against the British Hegelians, it is nevertheless returning."

The way things actually happened was a little different and more interesting. When Hegel was a dominant figure in Anglo-American philosophy in the later nineteenth century, he was in eclipse in his native Germany; and when he was rediscovered in Germany after about sixty years, he went into eclipse in the English-speaking world. After G. E. Moore published his "Refutation of Idealism" and his *Principia Ethica*, both in 1903, Hegelianism ceased to be a vital force in Anglo-American thought, and Hegel scholarship was scarcely dreamt of. McTaggart still published two volumes in which he expounded his version of Hegelianism (1910 and 1918), and in 1924 Stace's *The Philosophy of Hegel* appeared; but Stace was in Ceylon and never played any role in the British academic world. Mure, who taught at Oxford, published two books on Hegel in 1940 and 1950, and a third in 1965, but his lot was very lonely.

In North America nobody seems to have written a full-length study of Hegel before 1965. The two most noteworthy contributions during the first half of the twentieth century were probably the chapters on Hegel in Josiah Royce's posthumously published *Lectures on Modern Idealism* (1919) and in Herbert Marcuse's *Reason and Revolution* (1941).

Hegel's "comeback" in Germany after 1905 and in the English-speaking world after 1950 needs to be distinguished sharply from the initial interest in his thought. In the twentieth century "Hegelianism" has never been a dominant force in Germany, Great Britain, or North America, not even if we make allowance for the striking differences between "Hegelianism" and Hegel's own philosophy. Dilthey, writing about the young Hegel and seeing to it that *Hegels theologische Jugendschriften* were published in 1907, and Lasson, who prepared careful editions of Hegel's other writings at popular prices, contributing excellent introductions, made important scholarly contributions; but their Hegel never had any major influences on twentieth-century philosophy.

In the English-speaking world Hegel's reputation reached its low point with the publication of Karl Popper's *The Open Society and Its Enemies* in 1945; and in 1950 a revised edition appeared. This prompted my attack on "The Hegel Myth and Its Method"; for "Popper's Hegel chapter . . . contains more misconceptions about Hegel than have previously been gathered in so small a space". The point was to show how different Hegel was from the myths about him; and that was also true of my article on the young Hegel three years later (1954).

J. N. Findlay's *Hegel* (1958) remains a milestone in the reception of Hegel in the English-speaking world. He aimed to influence the course of contemporary philosophy by calling attention to

what he called "Some Merits of Hegelianism", but in that ambition he did not succeed. What he did produce was the most comprehensive study of Hegel in English up to that time and the first that dealt at great length with the *Phenomenology* as well as all the major parts of Hegel's system. My own *Hegel* (1965) was very different, and yet the two books had a good deal in common. Both aimed to show how Hegel was incomparably more interesting than he had generally been thought to be; both tried to buck a heavy current and were the works of loners; and both agreed on many details, presenting similar views of Hegel's dialectic and his attitude towards God.

Up to that point, books on Hegel had appeared in the English-speaking world at great intervals, and for a generation T. M. Knox was the only one to publish scholarly translations of at least a few of Hegel's writings into English. In the late 1960s all this changed. The great majority of those hundreds upon hundreds of recent studies are, of course, German; and more are written in French than in English; but it really will not do to claim that the interest renewed at the end of the past century "continues unabated to this day". In the spring of 1975, Anthony Quinton published a review in two instalments of eighteen recent books, all in English, and made no effort at completeness. His editors spoke of "The Hegel Craze". How is it to be explained?

First, Hegel is immensely interesting. Once that was shown, many academics with widely different interests found it worth their while to study him and write on him. Secondly, he provides a striking alternative to all kinds of positivism and to the mainstream of Anglo-American philosophy. Thirdly, the immense growth of interest in Hegel reflects student interests. All three factors also help to account for the extraordinary growth of interest in Nietzsche. But in Hegel's case we must add a fourth point: the explosion of interest in Marx.

When Jacques Maritain joined the department of philosophy at Princeton University in 1948, one professor was apprehensive that the great Neo-Thomist might try to convert his students to Roman Catholicism, and he considered it reassuring that Maritain would not teach undergraduates. Yet the only suggestion Maritain ever made about the undergraduate curriculum was that Marx should be taught, as he was in Paris. In the late 1960s students almost everywhere wanted to have courses on Marx; and many were persuaded by Marx's early writings or by Engels or some passages in Lenin, or by Kojève or Lukács, that one cannot fully understand Marx without knowing something about Hegel. Their interest in Hegel was sometimes like the attitude of some Christians towards the Old Testament background. In any case, Hegel is now taught very widely, while in the 1940s it used to be said that there was only one professor in North America who taught Hegel's *Phenomenology*.

Hardly anyone can hope any longer to keep up with the flood of studies of Hegel. Confronted with yet another book on him, one wants to know what is distinctive about it.

Professor Taylor's book is unquestionably serious. The reader is always in the presence of a highly intelligent author and will never feel like exclaiming: How stupid! But one cannot help feeling that the book is tediously prolix. If everything said a great many times were said twice only, the book would be less than half as long as it is. One has to force oneself to go on and on. The book is incomparably less exciting than Hegel himself.

Two other general observations help to explain this. First, Hegel was remarkably original, and his ideas are often wild, surprising, and at times, at least at first glance, quite grotesque. These qualities are lost in Professor Taylor's study, which is rather uniformly stolid. His writing is, of course, much clearer than Hegel's, but his frequent solecisms are pointless. One sentence begins "And nor" (page 186) and another

CHARLES TAYLOR:

*Hegel*  
580pp. Cambridge University Press.  
£12.50.

"But nor" (page 554); he speaks of "The practice of knowledge" (page 132); he uses such words as "intrication" (page 499) and "re-vindicating" (page 525); his syntax is often faulty; and he says: "Freedom was the appanage of citizens; slaves and barbarians were outside its ban" (page 395). Style is the mirror of the mind; and this is as true of Professor Taylor as it is of Hegel.

Secondly, Hegel's mind was exceptionally polemical. Those who know his *Phenomenology* will agree that the long preface, the section on the unhappy consciousness, and the attacks on Kant in V.C and V.I.C are striking cases in point. Quite generally, Hegel attacked many facets of his age, often with sardonic humour. Professor Taylor is deliberately unpoetical, to the point where many readers will keep wondering what, if anything, is new in his book.

The book has the structure of a sandwich in reverse. There is some meat in the first and the last chapters, and a lot of bread in the eighteen chapters in between. The bulk of the book is given over to what looks like a play-by-play account of Hegel's thought, including roughly a hundred pages on the *Phenomenology*, a little more than that on Hegel's *Logic*, and three chapters each on "History and Politics" and "Absolute Spirit". It would serve no purpose here to argue about details, but a few faults are pervasive.

First, large parts of Hegel's thought are omitted, without any indication that they are omitted. The reader is likely to suppose that he is getting a play-by-play account when in fact it is highly selective. At other times, we are told that this or that is left out for reasons of space, but are left to wonder why it had to be ignored when so much time is spent on making other points again and again and again. The principles of selection are never made clear any more than the purpose of the book. And many of the best things in Hegel are missing.

Secondly, Taylor makes it hard for those who want to use his book as a help in studying the texts. Probably, the text cited most often is *PhG*, which is misidentified at the outset as Lasson's edition of the *Phänomenologie* although all the page references are actually to Hoffmeister's edition, which replaced Lasson's in 1952. Moreover, there should be a great many more page references throughout if the point were to help serious students of Hegel. As it is, one cannot help wondering whether the point is rather to provide a substitute for reading Hegel. In any case, the utterly inadequate subject index takes up scarcely a page, the index of names does not include recent authors, and the bibliography is very faulty. This is not the place to itemize mistakes or show how Professor Taylor's arrangement of some of the books about Hegel in various categories suggests that he has not read them. But it may be worth mentioning that he shows no awareness of the new critical editions published in West Germany during the past decade, or of the annual *Hegel-Studien*, or of the rival *Hegel-Jahrbuch*. Students will not find him a well-informed guide to "Hegel Today".

Finally, Professor Taylor's lack of rigour is appalling. Hegel claimed in the long preface to his first book, the *Phenomenology*, that rigour was all-important and that his book was scientific by virtue of its "necessity" and "completeness". He claimed that he demonstrated the necessary progression of spirit from sense certainty to absolute knowledge, and that his account was complete. Faced with such claims, one can try to vindicate them, but this cannot be done successfully; or one can argue that Hegel operated with an untenable model of scientific procedure, that he deceived himself about what he had done and was doing, and that his rigour is spurious. Anyone who takes the second view and finds Hegel's vision more poetic than scientific is likely to be

met with the charge that Hegel was after all a philosopher and that this "poetic" view is not rigorous enough. In response to this, several things need to be said. Most obviously, the shoe is on the other foot. Anyone who knows what rigour is will find it lacking in most of Hegel's transitions in the *Phenomenology*. The claim of necessity is as outlandish as that of completeness. Those who attribute rigour to the *Phenomenology* obviously have a very soft notion of rigour.

This is one of the central problems confronting any student of Hegel's thought, and an interpreter should be clear where he stands. Professor Taylor, however, fudges the problem. He does not face up to Hegel's "necessary" and "complete"; he does not come to grips with the apparent enormity of some of Hegel's other claims and wild generalizations; and he often uses "therefore" with the license of a parson or a theologian. To give at least one grotesque example: Chapter 14 ends, "Let us turn now to see how it develops in history". Chapter 15 begins, "The fulfilment of Spirit therefore requires the growth of a community . . .".

At almost every turn one is led to wonder what the point of these reports might be. In Germany this sort of approach was led to the absurd by Kuno Fischer in his two-volume work on Hegel at the beginning of the century and has not found much favour since. Professor Taylor lacks Fischer's Teutonic thoroughness and is often downright sloppy, but in the end both authors are not much help in the really rough places and they seem to address themselves mainly to those who prefer a relatively clear report on Hegel to his own works.

Now it may be objected that if Hegel is really as unrigorous as I claim, he is not worth reading. It is widely held that a philosopher's business is with arguments that he should either offer or examine. Professor Taylor certainly does not concentrate on arguments, and half the time it is not clear whether he is speaking in his own voice or in Hegel's. But the question I am raising now is not about Professor Taylor but about Hegel. If he did not offer rigorous arguments, should he be taken seriously at all as a philosopher? Actually, this question concerns not merely Hegel but philosophy in general.

"Analytical" philosophers who might be inclined to answer the question in the negative would do well to reflect on the patron saints of "analytical" philosophy. In *Essays on J. L. Austin* (1973) George Pitcher pays tribute to his former teacher but admits: "I cannot recall anything I ever heard, or read, of Austin's that contained a straightforward, old-fashioned philosophical argument." It was Austin's extraordinary "authority that seemed uncannily to still all critical doubts while he spoke". Wittgenstein's enormous impact was even much more obviously inseparable from his charisma. When Norman Malcolm said in his beautiful memoir of Wittgenstein that one had to attend his lectures for at least three terms "before one could begin to get any grasp of what he was doing" and George Henrik von Wright said in the same volume that Wittgenstein "once said that he felt as though he were writing for people who would think in a quite different way, breathe a different air of life, from that of present-day men", I take it that they are acknowledging implicitly that he was not in the

habit of offering rigorous arguments in which conclusions are derived from clearly stated premises.

That leaves the question whether they as well as Hegel are horrible examples and whether truly great philosophers are distinguished by the rigour of their arguments. Hegel clearly did consider rigour indispensable, and he derived his notion of the way important philosophical works must be written in German from Kant. He shared Kant's disdain for "popular philosophy" and felt that, in spite of his sarcastic criticisms of Kant, serious philosophy had to be written more or less in the manner of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. And his own *Phenomenology* actually was written like the *Critique of Pure Reason*—that is, "within four to five months, in flight as it were", as Kant put it in two letters to two leading German philosophers in August 1783.

The *Phenomenology*, like the *Critique*, was written about as fast as it would take anyone to copy the text; that is, without time enough for the author to reread the text, to mull over what he had written, and to be self-critical. At the same time, both authors looked down on clear prose as inherently inferior and less scientific. Both wanted nothing less than absolute certainty and were able to persuade themselves that they had attained nothing less than this; but this self-deception depended on their excessive obscurity and the lack of time for careful self-examination. In other words, what Hegel learnt from Kant was a misguided conception of science as precluding hypotheses and involving necessity and certainty, and he shared Kant's unscientific and profoundly uncritical way of writing.

There are sacred cows in philosophy; Kant is one of them; and one is supposed to revere him and to reconstruct his arguments in such a way that they come out well, even if they are untenable as they stand. It is easy to revere Kant as in many ways a very great man and thinker, but his influence was in many ways disastrous, and much that is wrong with his successors, including Hegel, comes from Kant.

Hegel, however, was influenced no less by a man who was in many ways, as Nietzsche once put it, Kant's "antipode": Goethe. Indeed, much of German philosophy after 1790 is best understood as a series of attempts to reconcile Kant and Goethe. Schiller pointed the way in a series of immensely influential essays published in the 1790s, and Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and others down to Dilthey also tried to reconcile them. (In the twentieth century we encounter equally quixotic attempts to reconcile Kant and Nietzsche; for example, in Jaspers and Heidegger.) In Hegel's *Phenomenology*, the poetic vision that hinges on the notion that the way to know mind or spirit is through its development comes from Goethe, the final quotation from Schiller, and the abortive attempt at "scientific" rigour from Kant.

For Kant science meant Newton, who had said "hypotheses non fingo". There was no room for hypotheses in serious philosophy, and "hypothetical" was practically a dirty word. Philosophy was not a matter of inventing anything and worlds removed from literature and poetry. Goethe, on the other hand, tried hard to show how Newtonianism had been a disaster for science

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and, being himself a scientist of some note, tried to develop a non-Newtonian model of science. In this connexion he made many interesting points that Hegel accepted, but Hegel never was able to cut loose completely from Kant.

I have tried to work out this theory in a book, but that is not finished yet, and it may seem unfair to blame Professor Taylor for not seeing things this way. After all, nobody else has seen things in this manner, either. But Professor Taylor's Chapter 1, "Aims of a New Epoch", is actually devoted to a rival theory, to which he occasionally refers back in the course of his book, and it would be niggardly to point out simply why his theory won't work without first indicating what it is that he seems to have seen darkly and got wrong.

Taylor has been much impressed by Isaiah Berlin's article "Herder and the Enlightenment" (1965), which is an overpowering virtuoso performance. Here Johann Gottfried Herder was credited with having "virtually alone, launched upon the world" three "sui generis doctrines" one of which Sir Isaiah called "expressionism", describing it succinctly in half a page. Professor Taylor prefers the term "expressivism"—a term also suggested by Berlin (private communication). Professor Taylor's account of what he means by this term is not terribly clear, and he vacillates about Herder, who is nevertheless the hero of Chapter 1 and also mentioned again and again later on. Sir Isaiah did not claim that Herder had exerted a profound influence on Hegel; Professor Taylor does. As long as he does, he should have bothered to look up what Hegel had to say about Herder both in his works and in his letters; and it might have been interesting as well to check what others thought of Herder. But Professor Taylor's history of ideas is not empirical.

As it happens, Hegel, like Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Freud, was monumentally uninterested in Herder and hardly ever referred to him. But when he did speak of him, it was to disparage him; and this is also true of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. This in itself does not disprove Professor Taylor's construction, but in a book of almost 600 pages, in which a whole section of almost twenty pages in the first chapter is devoted to Herder, one might at least have expected him to face up to this problem. But in his *Hegel* Professor Taylor usually dodges problems instead of coming to grips with them, and here, as often, he does not seem to realize that there is a problem.

To Goethe, Hegel referred constantly, and on April 24, 1825, he wrote to him: "When I survey the course of my spiritual development, I see you everywhere woven into it and would like to call myself one of your sons; my inward nature has . . . set its course by your creations as by signal fires." It might still be argued that Goethe got the ideas that were so influential from Herder; but Professor Taylor does not argue this and I think that it could be shown to be false.

In Professor Taylor's scheme "expressivism" is opposed to the Enlightenment and to Kant, and Kant's most influential idea was what Professor Taylor calls again and again "radical freedom" or autonomy, which he considers an "exhilarating notion" that "turned the head of a whole generation". (Professor Taylor constantly reifies a whole generation as if it had one head only and a single mind, which makes, I think, for very bad history of ideas.) It is none too difficult to understand what he might mean by "radical", but the fact remains that Kant's conception of autonomy was anything but radical; it was more nearly calcified, as it involved a strict adherence to routine and was entirely compatible with a life of conformity. And when Professor Taylor says of Goethe in a footnote that "he remained unmoved by . . . the ideal of radical moral autonomy" and that "the exhilaration of radical freedom was not for him", this is about as wrong as one could be.

In fact, Kant's conception of autonomy never had much influence on the major German philosophers and poets because they had learnt from Goethe what it meant to be autonomous. Goethe had exhibited the absurdity of Kant's conception without ever trying to refute it. Autonomy involved for most of them spontaneity, development, alienation, change, and individuality. And to suppose that Goethe had learnt that from Herder

makes no sense, though it is evident that in 1770, at their first encounter, Herder at twenty-five helped the twenty-year-old Goethe to understand himself. He also got Goethe to collect folksongs and opened his eyes to the Gothic. But four years later Goethe was world-famous, and Herder was not; Goethe created one masterpiece after another while Herder did not; and there is abundant evidence that no great philosopher, and certainly not Hegel, set his course by Herder's works as by signal fires. When Herder published his *Metakritik* in 1799, attacking Kant, the book was not received as the spearhead of a new movement but considered a discredit to him and a bad book by Goethe, Schiller, and Hegel among others. This was not merely because Kant was a sacred cow even then; it was also because Herder was long considered a man who had outlived himself, while Lessing, who had died the year the *Critique of Pure Reason* appeared, was widely felt to have died much too early. Professor Taylor mentions but never discusses Lessing, Goethe, or Schiller.

Professor Taylor's historical framework is by far the most interesting and suggestive part of his book, but unfortunately out of touch with fact. The second chapter, oddly called "Hegel's Itinerary", deals none too well with the early "theological" writings of the 1790s, and the third and last chapter of Part One dodges a central philosophical problem. It is called "Self-positing Spirit" and proceeds for fifty pages without ever so much as noting Schopenhauer's devastating critique of the notion of "positing". Towards the end of section 28 of Volume 2 of *Parerga and Paralipomena*, Schopenhauer said, in the vitriolic style that he considered appropriate for Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, and women:

Something still more impudently surreptitious in this same *Fichte* is his impudent abuse of the word *posit* that, instead of having been reproached and exploded, is still in frequent use to this day among all philosophers [*Philosophätern*], following his example and relying on his authority as a constant aid to sophisms and deceptive doctrines. *Posit, ponere*, from which *propositio* is derived, has been a purely logical expression ever since ancient times and means that in the logical context of a disputation or some other discussion one supposes, presupposes, affirms something to begin with, granting its logical validity and formal truth for the present, while its reality, material truth, and actuality remain altogether untouched and undecided. *Fichte*, however, gradually gained surreptitiously a real but of course obscure and foggy meaning for this positing, and the ninny accepted that as valid, and the sophists use it all the time; for since the ego first posited itself and afterwards the non-ego, positing has come to mean creating, producing, or in brief putting into the world, one does not know how; and everything one wants to assume as existing without any reasons and wants to put over and impose on others, is simply *posited*, and there it stands and is there, altogether real. That is the still prevalent method of so-called post-Kantian philosophy and is *Fichte's* work.

Schopenhauer's crisp critique is not answered either in these fifty pages on "Self-positing Spirit" or in the sixteen chapters in which Hegel is *referiert* or reported on. The last chapter is as suggestive as the first. It returns to Herder and "expressivism" and suggests that Marx tried to reconcile "expressivism" and Enlightenment. Allowing for the transposition I have suggested earlier, this seems right to me. While Professor Taylor is by no means the first to have noted his concern with self-realization, this central theme in Marx still needs stressing. Hegel is also used as a stick for belabouring the New Left, because he recognized what was wrong with "absolute freedom".

There are some ideas in this chapter that would be worth developing incisively, but the lack of rigour and precision continues unabated. On the last page of the last chapter, for example, we are told—and this seems to be one of Professor Taylor's most cherished conclusions:

The fact that we are still trying to reconcile freedom and nature makes us still at home in the Romantic period. They [*sic*] speak to us, however bizarre their doctrines may appear to contemporary eyes. And in so far as this search for a situated subjectivity takes philosophical form, Hegel's

thought will be one of its indispensable points of reference.

But a footnote about Hölderlin goes on to inform us that although his "position is not easy to interpret" and "may be inaccessible to philosophical statement", Professor Taylor feels nevertheless that this "too-soon-silenced friend may point a surer way".

This is scarcely decent, coming on page 571, without further elaboration. Once again, we are left up in the air and are led to wonder about the point of this book. Surely, we do not really have to plod through Professor Taylor's paraphrases of Hegel's *Phenomenology* and *Logic* and other parts of the system in order to feel at home in the Romantic period philosophically, too—or to score against ill-advised ideas about "absolute freedom". And if Hölderlin's position "may point a surer way" for us today—the non-committal vagueness is characteristic of the book—it would have been nice to see this question discussed at some length.

I certainly do not think that Hegel's system points a way for us. But history can be immensely exciting when it is done well. When one deals with a subject that has already elicited a vast literature, doing it well must involve a polemical thrust—an attempt to show how some of the major views that have come to be accepted widely need to be revised. Among English-speaking philosophers, however, history is still a stepchild, and it is symptomatic that Professor Taylor relegates Hegel's biography to a two-page note at the end and that he tries in effect to make his history respectable by making it unempirical. The lack of any pervasive polemical thrust and the bad conscience about doing history show how little the author has learnt from Hegel.

To end on a constructive note, let me spell out five major contributions Hegel made, though this is clearly not the place to discuss them as they still need to be discussed today.

First, Hegel's systems approach, though often ridiculed, was a stroke of genius. Hegel maintained that views and positions have to be seen as a whole, that the theoretical and moral belong together as aspects of a single standpoint, and that, in effect, atomism and microscopism miss the spirit that holds everything together.

Secondly, Hegel tried to show in his *Phenomenology* how every view must be seen in relation to the person holding it. What he had in mind was not a reductionist psychology but a way of transcending the split between subject and object, thinker and thought.

Thirdly, he meant to see every position as a stage in a development—not only as a whole but also as part of a still larger whole, in relation to what came before it and what followed after it.

Fourthly, a position needs to be seen in relation to opposing views that help us to see not only its motivation but also the partiality and inadequacy of both sides. While a little of this insight has rubbed off on some later proponents of "dialectic", neither they nor other members of various schools of philosophy have absorbed the whole lesson. School philosophers spend most of their time matching their wits against other members of their own school, relying on an unquestioned consensus and concentrating on their minute differences. Hegel held that it was most important to see fundamentally different positions in relation to each other.

Fifthly, he applied these insights not only in his *Phenomenology*, where he was thwarted at every point by the disastrous legacy of Kant—an impossible style and a fateful misunderstanding of science as entailing necessity and certainty as well as completeness—but also in his vastly influential lectures on the philosophy of history, art, and religion, and the history of philosophy. As a lecturer he was less impeded by his notion that a major philosophical work must resemble Kant's *Critiques*.

What is needed in over-all evaluations of Hegel today is not a paraphrase of his works that looks complete but is actually selective. What is needed is an incisive critique of Hegel that leads up to a discussion of his major contributions. One need not accept those either, and different interpreters will single out different contributions. But unless there are some major contributions that still need to be discussed today, there is not much sense in writing or reading bulky books about him. I even think that Hegel himself might have agreed with this conclusion.

# Beauty, truth

By John Casey

G. W. F. HEGEL:

*Aesthetics*  
Lectures On Fine Art

Translated by T. M. Knox

611pp. Clarendon Press: Oxford  
University Press. £30 for two volumes.

Hegel's lectures on fine art form in many ways the most attractive introduction to his thought. Although their chief concern is with aesthetic theory they contain, in diffuse form, many of his central philosophical ideas. For those readers whose chief interest is in aesthetics and art-history the richness of illustration and the numerous passages of brilliantly suggestive critical interpretation will make fascinating reading. Hegel's aesthetic theory was founded upon an experience and knowledge of the arts of a quite prodigious range. The exalted importance he gives to art in his philosophical system, although explicable in purely philosophical terms, also answers to the experience of his own life. In this he is to be contrasted with Kant whose writings on aesthetics, greatly though they influenced Hegel, are strangely detached from any obvious love of the arts.

The publication of T. M. Knox's excellent new translation is an important event. Professor Knox has already given us fine translations of other works (notably the *Philosophy of Right*), and the *Aesthetics* lives up to his own high standards. Until now there was only one complete version in English, that of Osmaston (1920), long since out of print. Although an honourable attempt, Osmaston's version is stilted, eccentric and sometimes seriously inaccurate. (He renders "medieval portraits" as "portraits of middle-aged men", and Professor Knox quotes other examples.) Bosanquet's excellent version (1905) is of the *Introduction* only. Professor Knox keeps very close to Hegel, and aims to be as faithful and literal as possible. He resists the temptation to explanatory paraphrase, and gives a very good sense of the movement of Hegel's mind as his thought develops in the relatively informal medium of the lecture.

It cannot be said that Professor Knox's version is clearly superior to Bosanquet's rendering of the *Introduction*; and it must be conceded that the *Introduction* does contain the essence of Hegel's theory of art. For many readers Bosanquet will still be an extremely useful means of entry to the aesthetics. But it is the detail, the full richness of illustration that gives life to Hegel, and by means of which he gives an apparent coherence to his theory of art-history. Anyone who wants fully to understand the aesthetics will have recourse to Professor Knox's version.

Those who have been brought up in the tradition of British empiricism must find the importance given to the philosophy of art in German thought puzzling. Empiricist philosophers have produced aesthetic theories, but they have never done so as part of their central task of evolving a satisfactory philosophy of mind. For Hume and Hutcheson "taste" or the aesthetic "sentiments" are more or less optional extras to the normal range of human capacities. They are a capacity to experience a special sort of pleasure in the presence of works of art. All that we can ultimately say of the beautiful is that it is a cause of pleasure. A man without a sense of the beautiful would lack certain sensations, but his vision of the world would be no different from that of a Winckelmann, or indeed, of a Leonardo. The empiricists reject a tradition of thought which can be traced back to Aristotle, and which holds that works of art can in some sense be a means of knowledge, so that a man without a proper understanding of art would also have an impoverished conception of reality.

The contrast with the German tradition is very great. The successors of Kant felt the need to overcome the bifurcation which (as they saw it) Kantianism entailed between man as an entirely free agent, subject only to the commands of rational moral law, and man as

part of nature, with sensibility, emotions and desires. Fichte, Schiller and Schelling all tried to produce a synthesis, a reunion of both aspects of human nature. And there was a general tendency among the post-Kantian Idealists to find the point of contact between man as an abstract, universal being, and man as part of nature, in aesthetic experience. So in evolving a philosophy of art they were solving a problem central to the critical philosophy as it developed after Kant. Aesthetic experience, far from being a mere optional extra to man's normal capacities, expresses a central fact of human nature. Thus the philosophy of art is at the centre of philosophical speculation.

It is against this background that Hegel evolves his aesthetic theory. Like earlier Idealists he accords art a crucial role in his system. It is the first moment of that highest phase of the human mind that Hegel calls "Absolute Spirit", which is the sphere of the most fully developed operations of the mind, the realm of art, religion and philosophy. The aesthetic consciousness is a necessary step in man's struggle for self-awareness.

Hegel's thought about art is best grasped as an elaboration and modification of Kant's. Like the empiricists Kant had rejected a genuinely cognitive view of art—art as providing knowledge of the world. Like them he takes pleasurable feeling to be a fundamental fact about our experience of art, a necessary part of the concept. Our notion of aesthetic experience is necessarily the notion of a particular sort of pleasure; but the feeling of pleasure is to be explained as our awareness of certain fundamental powers of the mind—the powers of representation, by which we normally gain knowledge of the world—being in a state of "free play". This state of free play arises when we contemplate an object for its own sake, and not as something that we desire. Our pleasure in the beautiful derives from our sense of a harmony between imagination and understanding which works of art occasion. But this awareness of a harmony is all there is. We do not through it gain knowledge of the world, or even of ourselves. What we apprehend when we experience a work of art is the fundamental powers of the mind somehow echoed in concrete, sensuous form. A work of art exhibits what Kant calls "purposiveness without purpose"—a kind of inner unity which is somehow a reflection of mind in sensuous form. In art the physical and mental come together, and beauty is just our sense of the unity of the two. So for Kant our aesthetic experience is subjective, in that it is essentially a matter of feeling; yet at the same time it is universally valid in that it reveals in concrete form the fundamental powers of mind. The aesthetic judgment "This is beautiful" claims universal validity, in the way that "This is delicious" and "I like this" do not.

Kant is Hegel's starting point, but Hegel is unwilling to accept Kant's subjectivism. For Hegel art is the expression of a particular mode of consciousness of the world, a consciousness that is tied to images. The same truths can be approached through works of art, religious mythology and (at the highest level) philosophical concepts. Hegel agrees with Kant in seeing aesthetic experience as essentially contemplative. He also thinks, with Kant, that in aesthetic experience we are somehow confronted with the fundamental operations of the mind expressed in sensuous form. But it is a cardinal belief of Hegel that mind manifests itself through a succession of forms, each approximating ever more closely to what mind is in itself—i.e. to pure thought. Mind or spirit shows itself dimly in the organic forms of life, more strikingly in animals, but perfectly only with the human body. The representation of the human form, particularly in classical Greek sculpture, is for Hegel a moment of perfection in the history of art. Thereafter the history of art is a history of the ever more "inward" manifestation of spirit through (successively) painting, music and poetry, until art itself is transcended and spirit goes on to manifest itself in religion, and finally in philosophy.

It is impossible to accept Hegel's theory of art in all or even in most