

## A CRITIQUE OF KAUFMANN'S *HEGEL*

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Walter Kaufmann, *Hegel: Reinterpretation, Texts, and Commentary*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1965. Pp. 499. \$5.95.

Probably no other major philosopher has suffered so much caricature as Hegel, particularly in English-speaking countries: Hegel the thinking-machine who had no biography; Hegel grinding out endless cycles of thesis-antithesis-synthesis; Hegel forcing a preconceived theory on the realities of history and declaring that all history ended with him; Hegel the apologist of the status quo in religion and society, and the evil genius of Prussian statism; Hegel a living Gilbert and Sullivan parody of the German Herr Professor. And so on. Walter Kaufmann's *Hegel* offers us a carefully drawn portrait of the philosopher, neither more nor less than life-size, that should lay the caricature to rest. Drawing judiciously on German sources, Professor Kaufmann lets us see the man and his thought developing against the background of an exciting age and deeply involved in its social and cultural life. I think that the portrait is sometimes distorted, but it constitutes the most complete intellectual biography of Hegel in English.

A substantial portion of the book is composed of translations, of the high quality which we have come to expect of Professor Kaufmann as a translator. Even the six large chapters which comprise his interpretation contain many passages of generous length translated from Hegel's writings and lectures. In the sixty-five pages which follow Kaufmann has translated a fine selection of documents, reminiscences, and letters to and from Hegel. Most of this material has never before been available in English. Then he offers a new translation, with commentary on facing pages, of Hegel's Preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Hegel wrote it, in fact, as an introduction to his whole philosophy, and it can be very fruitfully read as such. While acknowledging and complaining about the technical density of Hegel's prose, Kaufmann likes to call attention to the vitality and wit that flash through it, in this preface and elsewhere. He also has a sharp eye for aphorism and for Hegel's "often pert observations" (p. 120). He closes the volume with a (first) translation of a short article by Hegel, "Who Thinks Abstractly?" in which this more lively side of Hegel's style is given freer rein than usual. It actually is a little pert! Also included in the volume are an extensive bibliography, an index, and a chronology of Hegel's life.

Kaufmann's *Hegel* will probably be the standard introduction to Hegel in this country for some time to come. In many respects it deserves to be. But important modern studies of Hegel have had such diverse orientations that there can be no question of one book displacing others. Some have

treated his early development, some have been detailed studies of the mature works, some have treated his thought in relation to that of his successors, to left-wing Hegelianism, to Marxism, to existentialism. Kaufmann's study traces Hegel's whole career, with emphasis on the earlier period, but is useful primarily as an introduction that will prepare the reader to approach the primary texts on his own. It is not a substitute for reading Hegel, or for more detailed studies. Kaufman generally shies away from the technical aspects of Hegel's thought, except for some valuable notes on terminology. This is the case even in his commentary on the Preface to the *Phenomenology*. The primary issues which emerge from Hegel's mature work, and to which his successors devoted themselves, receive scant attention; so his discussions of Hegel's influence are sketchy and of little philosophical importance. Hegel is compared with Nietzsche in style and biography, with Heidegger only as an occasion for aiming some question-begging jibes at the latter. On the other hand Hegel's work in the context of his own time comes into much sharper focus. There is, for example, very illuminating treatment of the influences of his predecessors and contemporaries, particularly the literary figures who have received scant attention in previous Hegel studies in our language: Kant, Fichte, and Schelling, but also Lessing, Goethe, Schiller, and the intimate friend of Hegel's youth, Hölderlin.

Kaufmann shrewdly observes, three times in fact, with Hegel but especially Heidegger in mind, that a reader can easily be so elated just to have penetrated an obscure and difficult text that he "is tempted to suspend criticism and concentrate on exegesis" (pp. 11, 137f., 181n.). Kaufmann himself strikes a fair balance. His over-all approach is certainly sympathetic, but he pauses frequently to break a lance with Hegel. The criticism as well as the exegesis is often suggestive and provocative but rarely trenchant. Sometimes it is scarcely to the point. Hegel's complex view of the history of philosophy as the *dialectical* development of philosophical truth through the successive conflicts of one-sided views, for example, is interpreted in terms of Leibniz's remark that "the sects" are generally right in what they affirm, wrong in what they deny; according to Kaufmann, Hegel therefore "came to think that *positive* knowledge was cumulative, and that construction could be expanded progressively" (p. 89). To this over-simplified formulation Kaufmann opposes his own view, which he quotes from his book, *The Faith of a Heretic*, that the history of philosophy can be more fruitfully approached as "the gradual analysis of, and liberation from one illusion after another, a stripping away of fantasies, a slow destruction of once hallowed truths that are found to be errors . . ." (pp. 88-89). Hegel's actual treatment of the history of philosophy surely absorbs this view.

Again, there are many criticisms of Hegel's style and his conception of properly philosophical thinking. Speaking of the *Phenomenology* Kaufmann complains that

Hegel is overly specific and has to drag in, for example, allusions to Antigone's brothers who destroyed each other in the fight for Thebes, lest we miss his string of allusions to Sophocles' *Antigone*. Or he pontificates:

“Actuality therefore contains, concealed, the other side, foreign to knowledge, and does not show itself to consciousness—does not show the son the father in the man who insults him and whom he slays, nor the mother in the queen whom he wifes.” One wishes Hegel had come out in the open, saying something like: in some ways, Sophocles’ tragedy—whether *Antigone* or *Oedipus Tyrannus*—gives classical formulation to a conflict or predicament that is representative of the human condition, or of a certain stage in the development of culture (p. 145).

The reader may judge for himself which statement of the matter is the more illuminating, or the less pontifical. Yet Kaufmann can be very suggestive. He argues that Hegel is sometimes carried away by “the poetic impulse,” which among other things leads him to overgeneralize, as when the case of *Antigone* prompts him to the conclusion that woman’s “highest intimation of what is ethical” is in the brother-sister relationship (pp. 143–144). At the same time, the poetic impulse leads Hegel “to perform a marvel of empathy, not just reading *Antigone* and being effusive about its beauty or profundity but trying to see the world through *Antigone*’s eyes” (p. 147). For throughout the *Phenomenology of Spirit* “Hegel has been conjuring spirits, letting them pass before us in a gigantic procession” (p. 161).

This view of Hegel borne by the poetic impulse is a far cry from the popular caricature. As I suggested at the outset, a chief value of the book is that Kaufmann demolishes so many unfair and silly notions about Hegel. Unfortunately he also has a way of dismissing serious issues in the process, as though they were simply aspects of the caricature. Since this device is employed so consistently as to become a regular procedure in the book it may be worthwhile to examine some examples.

“It is widely supposed,” says Kaufman, “that it is at least arguable that Hegel may have thought that history, and particularly the history of philosophy, ended with him. The evidence to the contrary is conclusive” (p. 70). Kaufmann then offers textual evidence, leaving no doubt that Hegel thought there would be a future, and even future philosophies. But this is virtually all Kaufmann has to say about the problem of historical fulfillment, a problem of enormous complexity lying at the heart of Hegel’s philosophy of history, of special importance in the Marxist appropriation of Hegel, and a problem which has received extended discussion among such serious modern writers as Karl Löwith and Herbert Marcuse, who have understood perfectly well that Hegel anticipated a future. Again, as Kaufmann points out, Hegel was not an optimistic believer in inevitable progress, nor did he ignore history’s great burden of tragedy, but he did believe that its sacrifices had not been in vain. But Kaufmann does not go on to discuss what actually made history a “theodicy” in Hegel’s eyes: the development through twenty-five centuries of the cultural embodiment of the Graeco-Christian logos, the Idea, until it had become fully actual in modern European culture. Hegel saw his own philosophy of Absolute Spirit premised upon this cultural achievement, and precisely this view raises the serious problem about the end of history, or perhaps the end of the Western epoch, in Hegel’s philosophy.

Mention of the Graeco-Christian logos calls to mind the tangled issue of Hegel's relation to Christianity, which I think Kaufmann has also oversimplified. Kaufmann returns to this theme persistently (e.g. pp. 43, 58-69, 162, 265f, 273-278, 292, 294); it is evidently a matter of importance to him. Three general contentions seem to me to emerge from Kaufmann's discussions of this theme: 1) Hegel was not basically in sympathy with the Christian tradition. 2) While he did sometimes appear to be so, this apparent sympathy was peripheral, largely rhetorical, and at odds with his fundamental point of view. 3) In any case such sympathy on Hegel's part, real or apparent, is deplorable. This last point will of course depend largely on one's own attitude toward Christianity. With respect to the first, Kaufmann lays great stress on the sharp criticisms of traditional Christianity appearing in Hegel's so-called early theological writings. Not only is the Christian religion regarded as authoritarian, but, Kaufmann argues, young Hegel went further than most critics in presenting Jesus himself in an unattractive light (p. 59).<sup>1</sup> In Hegel's mature work, his published writing as well as his lectures, the attitude toward Christianity is admittedly more affirmative. But Kaufmann argues that there was no essential alteration in Hegel's estimate of Christianity, but merely a shift in emphasis from its obvious enormities to its less obvious virtues (pp. 66-67). Kaufmann admits that Hegel treated many distinctively Christian themes, and "sometimes could not resist equating" his conception of spirit (*Geist*) "with God, instead of saying clearly: in God I do not believe; spirit suffices me" (pp. 276-277). Kaufmann quite properly points out that Hegel's references to God or to the divine—and also to spirit—drew on classical Greek as well as Christian connotations of the terms. Kaufmann goes on:

In addition to his beloved Greeks, Hegel saw before him the example of Spinoza and, in his own time, the poetry of Goethe, Schiller, and Hölderlin, who also liked to speak of gods and the divine. So he, too, sometimes spoke of God and, more often, of the divine; and because he occasionally took pleasure in insisting that he was really closer to this or that Christian tradition than some of the theologians of his time, he has sometimes been understood to have been a Christian (p. 277).

Kaufmann's own understanding is evidently to the contrary:

The religious views of the later Hegel were remote from all forms of traditional Christianity, but he no longer heeded his own emphatic dictum that philosophy should beware of being edifying, and tried to show that he could be more inspiring, and sound more Christian, than Schleiermacher and other liberal theologians. He came to emphasize what his philosophy had in common with Christianity—what is heard gladly.

He had not always been a tired old man . . . (p. 292).

Kaufmann's treatment is a proper antidote to any tendency to regard Hegel as primarily a Christian apologist. Actually most recent Christian

<sup>1</sup> Even this contention does not hold for more than the earlier of these early writings, is not, for example, true of "the Spirit of Christianity and its Fate" or of the later fragmentary revision of "The Positivity of the Christian Religion."

thinkers, under the influence of Kierkegaard, have not been tempted in this direction. But the fact is that Hegel in his maturity had come to see the classical tradition and the Christian religion as a unity, joined in the cultural destiny of the West. He took the Christian component very seriously, and not only as a "tired old man." The very fact that his early writings were so largely devoted to wrestling with the phenomenon of Christianity and that he continued, from a different point of view, to be preoccupied intensively with it throughout his maturity testifies that his interest in Christianity was not peripheral or of the nature of mere edifying ornament. Whether his philosophy, or any other philosophy for that matter, was "really" Christian is necessarily a very shifty question. (Does the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas "really" represent Christianity?) But Hegel spoke of himself as a Lutheran and a Christian, and was certainly in a significant sense a philosopher of Christendom and of Protestant culture. Kierkegaard, who was more familiar with Hegel's own work than Kaufmann implies,<sup>2</sup> saw quite clearly that his own Christian attack upon Christendom and upon the Protestant cultural synthesis was of a piece with his critique of Hegelianism. From this point of view it can indeed be debated whether Hegel's views were "really" Christian. But there can be little doubt about his own intentions in the matter. He sees the birth of Christianity as the turning point in history, and he devotes extended and sympathetic discussions to such classical Christian doctrines as the Trinity, the Fall, the Incarnation and Atonement—and of course the work of the Spirit! Kaufmann dismisses

<sup>2</sup> According to Kaufman: "Kierkegaard's attacks were not based on his own reading of Hegel and were usually as wide of the mark as his remarks about Goethe. His image of Hegel was derived from the lectures of the old Schelling who had developed a profound resentment when Hegel's fame eclipsed his own." In fact there is ample evidence from Kierkegaard's *Papirer* that he had formulated his basic critique of Hegel before he heard Schelling's lectures in 1841; in any case, leaving aside the question whether Kaufmann's comments on the later Schelling are just, he exaggerates Schelling's influence on Kierkegaard. And if Kaufmann means to imply that Kierkegaard's knowledge of Hegel was second-hand he is mistaken. It is true that his first acquaintance with Hegelian thought was via such Danish Hegelians as Heiburg and Martensen and the works of some of Hegel's German followers. But Emanuel Hirsch has shown conclusively that Kierkegaard had read in Hegel's *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* by 1838, and that by the time he wrote his master's dissertation in 1841 had encountered the *Philosophy of History*, the *Philosophy of Right*, the article on Solger, and had thoroughly absorbed Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*. See Hirsch, *Kierkegaard-Studien* (Gütersloh, 1931) III, 501, 591. There are also passages in the published writings and in the journals that suggest an acquaintance with the *Encyclopedia*, the *Logic*, and *Phenomenology*, though probably at a somewhat later date. How he understood what he had read, and whether his attacks were generally fair, are of course questions which could not be settled without detailed analysis of texts. But Kierkegaard was surely right in seeing that there were important conflicts between his own views and Hegel's, particularly regarding the meaning of Christianity and the significance of the single individual, even though it is also true, as Kaufmann says, that "he was not clearly aware of how much he had taken from the man he fought" (288).

all such talk as mere rhetoric or "edification" and points out that Hegel was not a supernaturalist, as Kaufmann apparently thinks any real Christian would have to be. It is a little odd to see such a well-known critic of Christianity as Kaufmann setting himself up as the arbiter of Christian orthodoxy. Of course Hegel's treatment of Christianity does not stop with the catechism, and of course, as Kaufmann points out as though it settled everything, Hegel places philosophy above religion on the scale of adequacy to the Idea. But "philosophy" is not confined to the concluding sections of the *Encyclopedia* and *Phenomenology*, nor to the lectures on the history of philosophy. Hegel is doing "philosophy" throughout the whole system, in his aesthetics as well as in his logic, and nowhere more certainly than in his lectures on the philosophy of religion, which contain his most elaborate treatment of Christianity as the absolute religion. Hegel certainly draws upon the classical philosophical tradition as well as the Biblical in these discussions, and offers his own constructive interpretation of the whole. It therefore seems "reprehensible" to Kaufmann, and apparently even hypocritical, that Hegel should have claimed kinship to the Christian tradition. Worse, he "became a precedent for theologians like Tillich and Bultmann," who evidently also fall outside Kaufmann's canon of Christian orthodoxy, and who are therefore even more reprehensible because they have actually set themselves up as Christian theologians (p. 277). So the upshot seems to be that Hegel was no more a Christian than, well—than two of the four or five outstanding Protestant theologians of the twentieth century. In fact, Hegel's treatment of Christianity provided the background for modern European culture's most serious crisis regarding the meaning and truth of faith, a crisis in which men like Tillich and Bultmann have still been quite honestly and self-consciously involved.

Finally, some more extended comment must be made on Kaufmann's treatment of philosophical method. Again we find his procedure at work, but the case is more complicated. He punctures the myth of Hegel as the philosopher who by use of a "mechanical three-step" dialectic began with the category of Being at the beginning of the *Logic* and proceeded to "deduce" all the categories of thought, then all nature, all history, and finally the absolute Spirit. In the first place, Kaufmann points out, following G. E. Mueller, that the Hegel of thesis-antithesis-synthesis is a legend. The only passage in which he mentions the three terms together is one in which he is reproaching Kant for using such a schema:

Fichte introduced into German philosophy the three-step of thesis, anti-thesis, and synthesis, using these three terms. Schelling took up this terminology; Hegel did not. He never once used these three terms together to designate three stages in an argument or account in any of his books. And they do not help us understand his *Phenomenology*, his *Logic*, or his philosophy of history; they impede any open-minded comprehension of what he does by forcing it into a schema which was available to him and which he deliberately spurned. The mechanical formalism, in particular, with which critics since Kierkegaard have charged him, he derides expressly and at some length in the preface to the *Phenomenology* (p. 168).

As for the system, Kaufmann's approach to the philosopher through intellectual biography enables him to shed a good deal of light on the way in which it actually evolved. Hegel's life spanned a golden age in European culture (1770–1831), and he was in the closest possible touch with its richest strains. Without such a milieu his own achievement would have been impossible. Further, a man who combined encyclopedic knowledge in practically every field—still possible at that time, but a rare achievement—with enormous intellectual originality, Hegel gradually came to devote sustained philosophical reflection to diverse subjects on an unbelievably wide range. Hegel was, as Kaufmann says in another happy phrase, “the philosopher of abundance” (p. 215). Moreover, in accord with his developing view of the relation of mind to reality and with some models by contemporaries to point the way, he evolved the ideal of philosophical system, a comprehensive but integrated vision in which reason could grasp all actuality as a progression of necessary moments in its own inner life. The actual shape of the system evolved slowly. Hegel spent his youth sifting his material, did not publish his first major work until he was thirty-seven, by which time his precocious younger friend Schelling had already produced several. Even this first great work, the *Phenomenology*, written under enormous personal tension, is anything but an edifice hewed out according to a preconceived blueprint. But by this time the conception of philosophical system was mature, and some of its outlines had begun to form.

Now what was Hegel's conception of philosophical system, and what was its method? Kaufmann's answer seems to be that the system is a tidy arrangement of the topics Hegel wanted to write about, and the dialectic is simply the method of their exposition. In the *Logic* “as in the *Phenomenology*, Hegel first wrote each volume and then asked himself what precisely he had got and how it might be arranged neatly” (p. 198; see pp. 241f, 249). So far as the necessity in its succession of moments is concerned, “What is wanted is a sensible arrangement of the topics that Hegel . . . considered it ‘necessary’ to cover” (p. 245). As for the essential moments of the philosophy of history, Hegel is distinguishing “between what really matters and what is merely incidental. (Hegel creates confusion by not keeping this contrast distinct from that between the accidental and the necessary.)” (p. 263). Again, from the unquestionable fact “that Hegel himself never used the dialectic to predict anything, and actually spurned the very idea that it could be used in that way . . . and that his deductions were admittedly *ex post facto*” Kaufmann reaches the highly questionable conclusion that “Hegel's dialectic is at most a method of exposition; it is not a method of discovery” (p. 175). Actually it is neither. It is a method of distinctively philosophical comprehension. Philosophical reason, after the fact to be sure, must discover the necessity in the material given to it.

Sometimes Kaufmann seems actually to be attributing to Hegel himself the attitude toward his work expressed in the above quotations. Generally it is clear that the author is proposing what he thinks Hegel's attitude ought to have been and what he thinks Hegel actually accomplished, whatever his intentions. He seems in any case to have in mind the arrangements of Hegel's tables of contents rather than the substance of the system itself.

So far as the outlines and tables of contents to Hegel's writings are concerned, Kaufmann's point is well worth making. Some previous studies have come complete with staggering outlines, drawn from the table of contents to Hegel's *Encyclopedia*, purporting to represent an epitome of the system of Hegel. As a graduate student I had one of these outlines pasted to my library carrell where I could check off each point as I proceeded through the system from Being to Absolute Spirit. Such a schema has its uses, but Kaufmann is surely correct in arguing that it was an afterthought which hardly reflects the essential movements of Hegel's thought. Kaufmann also presents tables of contents from the *Logic* and *Encyclopedia*, but largely for the sake of comparing the differences in the outlines through successive editions. Far from supposing that he had encapsulated some sort of final truth within these structures, Hegel in fact revised constantly, freely experimenting with different arrangements. Of course, this testifies to the very opposite of a casual attitude toward his texts, but still Hegel never supposed that the Absolute Spirit had absolutely revealed its own process of thought between the covers of a book.

A great deal of the earlier Hegel-scholarship in the English language, including most of the translations still in use, developed under the influence of so-called British Neo-Hegelianism or Absolute Idealism. The scholars in this tradition, in accord with their own primary interests, saw in Hegel primarily an idealistic metaphysician and the author of a quasi-deductive system embodying this metaphysic. Despite their valuable services they have been responsible for the one-sided and sometimes distorted view of Hegel prevailing in Britain and America, a view enshrined in countless philosophy textbooks. Generations of students approaching Hegel under their guidance have attempted to contrive ingenious deductions of every section-topic and sub-topic from that immediately preceding it in the text. If the deduction was unconvincing Hegel had erred. A running polemic against this whole tradition of Hegel scholarship is implicit throughout Kaufmann's study. He also attacks the Marxist use of Hegel's dialectic as a quasi-scientific instrument of analysis so rigid that predictions can even be made on the basis of it—contrary to Hegel's expressed intent. Kaufmann's more relaxed view of the system and its method may at least spare the student many unfruitful preconceptions. But it will also fail to prepare him for Hegel's philosophical seriousness, his tremendous intellectual eros and his rigor.

The construction of the system was for Hegel the attempt to think self-reflexively. For Hegel saw that it is not merely the ideas *about* which one thinks, but the categories *through* which one thinks, the basic categories of interpretation, which are problematic. It is not enough for consciousness to grasp an object, a proposition, a "truth"; the philosophical task is the comprehension and criticism of consciousness itself, not in abstraction from its object, but in its grasp of the object (*Begriff*). Since consciousness is an historical emergent, this task involves in the first place the herculean labor of comprehending the historical development of thought and symbolic representation through its evolving forms. Hegel believed that history had reached the point in this development at which it might be possible for

reason to be self-conscious about this very process which gave it birth, and finally to grasp all forms of consciousness, and therefore reality itself as it is mediated by the successive forms of consciousness, as a succession of internally related and hence necessary forms within reason's own process of thought. So reason's knowledge of itself is in one sense its final task, since this knowledge completes its investigation of all truth. In another sense it is its first task, since nothing can be known essentially, in its transparency to reason, which is not known as a mode of reason itself. Hence the need of reason to grasp every truth in its necessity, as a dialectical moment in reason's own inner life. Reason's disciplined effort to know all things in itself is the philosophical system. This conception of the system and its method belongs to the heart of Hegel's philosophy.

In attempting to understand a philosopher of such ambitions intellectual biography can be of only limited assistance. A distinction must be made between the genetic and the essential, between the process of discovery and the articulation of vision, between the origins of his ideas, the false starts, lucky inspirations, experiments through which he struggles personally to bring them to fruition, and on the other hand the essential order of things which begins to emerge in his thought. Intellectual biography can be very revealing with respect to the former, and, of course, the latter is only logically independent of the former. But to comprehend and criticize the latter is a philosophical task, which requires of the critic that he approach the system with something like the methodological rigor which its author brought to its construction. Hegel never supposed that he had given the system its fully adequate form, but he believed that every properly philosophical work must be an unreserved quest for reason's self-comprehension in the object under investigation.

Of course, it is not a question of deducing topics in a table of contents. The topic-categories are simply punctuations in a continuous movement of thought. Nor are they deduced in any logico-mathematical sense. But neither is the dialectical movement which defines them a philosophically arbitrary procedure adopted for purposes of exposition. The categories through which thought proceeds are a series of progressively more adequate or "concrete" definitions of the Absolute, i.e. of reason in its complete self-comprehension. The system in fact runs in a circle, as Kaufmann recognizes, and he even provides a circular diagram (p. 243). Hence one may speak of a "beginning" of philosophy—and Hegel would say the same of its origins in the philosopher's intellectual biography—"only in relation to the person who decides that he wishes to philosophize, but not to the discipline [*Wissenschaft*] as such." Hegel continues:

. . . the Concept [*Begriff*] of the discipline, and hence its starting point . . . must be comprehended by the discipline itself. This is in fact its sole purpose, act, and goal, to attain the Concept of its Concept and hence its return and satisfaction (*Encyclopedia*, § 17).

Every moment in the system is posited in its necessity only by this "end," by absolute Knowledge, because the Absolute is the "inner truth" of every moment. So the "forward" movement of the system, from Being through the

Concept in the *Logic*, then through the Philosophy of Nature and Philosophy of Spirit, is at the same time "a backward movement into the *Ground*, to the original and true" (*Wissenschaft der Logik*, Lasson ed., I, pp. 55-56). If there were to be any talk of deducing the categories, one might better think of the deductions as moving "backward," the more abstract and preliminary categories being derived from the "later," more concrete.

"Being," for example, is utterly abstract and immediate, without content or differentiation; *i.e.* as we discover at the beginning of the *Logic*, it is the same as Nothing. But if this Being which is so empty of content as to be identical with Nothing had only this utterly immediate meaning it would already be all over for the system. There could be no question of deducing anything from it. But this Being and Nothing are to be regarded in the light of the fact that they are the first categorical conditions of the concrete, of Becomingness in the first instance, and finally of the Idea. We begin with nothing at all. However, this Nothing "is to become something. The beginning is not pure Nothing, but a Nothing from which something is to proceed" (*Ibid.*, I, p. 58). "Something" is already built into this empty "beginning"—indeed everything is built into it, but only implicitly. We could begin, and in a way do begin, with "the Absolute or Eternal or God," and Hegel remarks parenthetically that God would have "the most incontestable right" to be considered the true beginning of the system. But before the articulation achieved by the progressive movement of the Idea, "God" or "the Absolute" would be without any determinate meaning. So we begin with Being, which is precisely the Absolute—but as yet only implicitly, indeterminately (*Ibid.*, I, p. 63). The movement of the system proceeds through the successively more concrete and explicit definitions.

Now Kaufmann denies that there actually is a dialectical method, as does Findlay (*Hegel: A Reinterpretation*, [London & N.Y., 1958], 353). Kaufmann invites the reader to look for it, but predicts that "you will not find any plain method that you could adopt if you wanted to" (p. 173). In a way he is right. Hegel observes the fairly elementary point that an adequate method of comprehension must always be developed in a specific relation to the particular subject of investigation. The method changes with every moment in the system. There is no rigid, all purpose, ready-made method that one could simply "adopt." The facile talk among Marxists and others about rejecting the system and adopting the method surely reflects a misunderstanding. There is a Hegelian method, but only in the sense implied by Hegel himself in the Preface to the first edition of the *Encyclopedia*, where he expressed the hope that the reader would recognize in this work a new treatment of philosophy in which the method is identical with the content. The idea of philosophical system may be madness, but there is method in it—and there is no dialectical method finally separable from it.

Kaufmann rejects, or "disbelieves," both system and dialectic (p. 173). Fair enough. But then it is pointless, for example, to use Hegel's "discussion of being and nothing" to belabor Heidegger for thinking quite differently about being and nothing (pp. 213-214). Heidegger explicitly rejects Hegel's treatment of these categories. So does Kaufmann, really, since "being" and "nothing" have no meaning on Hegel's terms other than that conferred on

them by the peculiar dialectical tensions of the system, as I have tried to indicate. It is possible to regard Hegel's system as a stupendous error. It is not possible to pick and choose from it in piecemeal fashion. Let us grant that there is a good deal of unsystematic wisdom in Hegel, which one may sample as it suits one's taste. But terms which have been meticulously assigned a systematic meaning should not be used loosely as mere projectiles for one's own popular-philosophical polemics. If one wishes to argue against Heidegger in a general way, without touching the profound differences in the conception of philosophy that separate him from Hegel, that being and nothing are empty abstractions, one has to find other grounds than Hegel's for so arguing. One could cite other examples in which Kaufmann ignores such scruples. It may be true that "Hegel published his critique of Kierkegaard six years before the latter was born" in his criticism of romantic philosophy in the Preface to the *Phenomenology* (p. 379; also p. 180). But Hegel's critique has deep roots in his own alternative conception of philosophy. A price has to be paid if one is to enlist his aid in one's own polemic against Kierkegaard; otherwise the decisive questions are begged. Hegel undoubtedly had a gift for the epigram; one can only be grateful for having one's attention called to his "pert observations." But he was not a philosopher of the epigram, and it is doubtful whether his fundamental conceptions should be used as points of departure for one's own pert observations.

The point is not that Hegel's philosophy must be accepted whole or not at all. Every thinker strongly influenced by Hegel has doubtless had his convictions, to use Croce's phrase, about what is living and what is dead in the philosophy of Hegel. But those who have not adopted the piecemeal approach have been able to discriminate the living from the dead only by following Hegel into the most fundamental questions about the nature of thought. For Hegel has not only abundance but depth, depth in a specific and not honorific sense: his most successfully articulated systematic concepts throughout the whole range of subjects to which he applied himself are explicitly grounded in a conception of the nature of thought itself, a conception which was itself the product of sustained reflection on the development of thought as an historical activity conditioned by and progressively conditioning its proper objects. In order to discriminate the living from the dead in the philosophy of Hegel one must be prepared to follow Hegel into this depth. One must earn the right to reject a great philosophy. The system and the method inseparable from it was Hegel's essential and original contribution to philosophical thinking, and the right to reject it is not easily earned.

Kaufmann comes the closest to meeting Hegel's challenge in a passage revealing enough to be quoted at length:

What is wrong with Hegel's notion of what ought to be done can be stated here quite briefly. He assumes that philosophy requires a distinctive method of its own and sometimes writes as if he had such a method; but in fact, as we follow his procedure closely, we find that he did not. Instead of admitting this, he occasionally (though not nearly as often as is generally assumed) affected what are usually called dialectical deductions. These differ

greatly from case to case and are certainly not reducible to any mechanical three-step; but what many of these cases have in common is the attempt to be rigorous in some way or other that does not really lend itself to rigor.

Right as Hegel is that it would be a mistake for philosophy to model itself on mathematical method, he is wrong in also departing from Descartes' quest for the greatest possible clarity and distinctness. Above all, he fails to recognize what is really the heart of scientific and rational procedure: *confronted with propositions or views, we should ask what precisely they mean; what considerations, evidence, and arguments support them; what speaks against them; what alternatives are available; and which of these is most probable.*

No quest for a system and no finished system can ever compensate us for the neglect of this canon . . . (pp. 172-173; the italics are Kaufmann's).

The canon is certainly unexceptionable. It is in fact doubtful that Hegel himself could object to it as a rule of thumb. Its appeal is to common sense, and Hegel was not lacking in common sense. It seems doubtful that this piecemeal canon "is really the heart of scientific and rational procedure." But that it might do as a solution to Hegel's problem of philosophical method is beyond belief. It is not simply that Kaufmann's canon does not meet the problem as Hegel posed it; Hegel may after all have misconceived the problem. But this solution is not on the level of precision or sophistication about the nature of thought itself that was for Hegel the standard of philosophical seriousness. If it is true that Hegel attempted to be rigorous where rigor is impossible it is because he was driven by the divine madness of philosophical eros itself. As Kaufmann suggests (pp. 195-196), Hegel's *Logic* substitutes a painstaking analysis of the categories for metaphysics in its traditional sense, and as such is akin to the concerns of the most technically rigorous modern philosophies. But since this analysis of the categories is precisely the key to philosophical method Hegel was also most thoroughly modern in his intensive methodological preoccupation. No collection of his pert observations or his estimates of probabilities among alternative views could compensate us for neglecting that.

A philosophically modest Hegel, modest but pert, whose dialectic is a method of exposition, who eschews necessity in the movements of thought, who finds no absolute implicit in history or embodied in his own thought, who does not try to be rigorous in ways that do not lend themselves to rigor, would not challenge us as the real Hegel does. Such a Hegel would hardly merit the valuable biographical and philological scholarship which this book provides.

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