
HEGEL BETWEEN THE PHILOSOPHY OF REALITY AND PHILOSOPHY OF ACTUALITY

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Abstract

In the introductory part of the article, we briefly examine the crisis of the Hegelian system that took place in the middle and second half of the 19th century, and its subsequent 'revival' as a kind of reflection of the turbulent processes of modern European history. In the next part, we substantiate a seemingly paradoxical idea that Hegel's philosophy is the first and, perhaps, the deepest experience of self-understanding of the modernity. It was in Hegel's philosophy that the radical overcoming of Cartesian dualism was initiated on which the scientist worldview of the early Modern Age was based. In the sections of the article with the titles 'From nature to culture' and 'From reality to actuality', we offer a methodological substantiation of the radical change created by Hegel. The shift of philosophical attention from the world of natural givenness to the world of cultural values created by humans resulted in a turn from the interpretation of motionless objects and entities to the world of activity. In the ontological sense, this meant a turn from 'reality' to 'actuality' (that is, to the interpretation of the 'world' as a result of action). In the 'Conclusion' section we emphasize that it is this turn that gives Hegelian philosophy an inexhaustible topicality.

Keywords: subject, spirit, activity, freedom, history

1. Hegel's system after Hegel - decline and revival

The Hegelian philosophical system, which triumphantly made itself known at the beginning of the nineteenth century (at one time, it was recommended as the final and the only correct one for studying at German universities), manifested all signs of decline and, moreover, collapse by the second half of the same century. The reason for this was not so much the emergence of many philosophical projects, directly or indirectly polemicizing with Hegelianism (Schopenhauer's philosophy of will, Marxism, positivism of various forms, Kierkegaard's Christian personalism, Feuerbach's atheistic anthropology, etc.), but the rapid change in the European life itself, for which Hegel's philosophy, describing a completed rather than a becoming world, seemed to be absolutely

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unprepared. Scientific and technological development, changing human life literally in front of people's eyes, turbulent social processes, and, first of all, a new series of revolutions across Europe, all these set new problems before European thought about which the 'patriarchal world' of the beginning of the century knew almost nothing.

The twentieth century, with its turbulent upheavals, had to write off, once and for all, Hegel's philosophy into a historical archive. Indeed, as Slavoj Žižek remarked, who would have risked writing a new 'Phenomenology of Spirit' on the material of the twentieth century with its world wars, totalitarian societies and the collapse of colonial systems.

However, Hegel's philosophy once again turned out to be in demand and topical, moreover, in the very midst of these upheavals, namely during the Second World War and in the first years after it. Philosophers, and not only they, are emotionally discussing the question of the extent to which the Hegelian philosophical system is responsible for the emergence of totalitarian states and the kindling of a world war fire by them. Herbert Marcuse in his book 'Reason and Revolution' [1] stands up for the defence of the German philosopher, responding to accusations against him by the thesis: "... the development of authoritarian forms was not about any of the Hegelian principles, rather than any consequence of these ... The ideological roots of authoritarianism have their soil in the violent reaction against Hegel that styled itself as the 'positive philosophy'." [1, p. 418] (Marcuse uses the word 'authoritarian'; the word 'totalitarian' became widespread after the Second World War). A different assessment of Hegel's philosophy was proposed by Bertrand Russell in 'The History of Western Philosophy' and Karl Popper in the book 'Open Society and Its Enemies' (both 1945): they saw a theoretical justification of the totalitarian principle in the very totality and completeness of the system created by Hegel.

But soon the discussion about Hegel acquired a wider meaning: Hegel's philosophy was increasingly seen as a key to understanding modern history, including the history of thought. For example, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty wrote in 1948, "Hegel is the origin of everything great in philosophy for the last century" [2]. The same idea is concretized in one of the post-war works by M. Heidegger: "Hegel's philosophy is a system of thought of the Modern Age (one of the few) that was consciously and widely placed in the perspective of historical time, which correlated itself and philosophizing as a whole with historical roots and the transformations of the historical spirit" [3].

Moreover, in the early post-war time, people started to see in Hegel's philosophy a key to understanding the current historical situation and even the future of European culture. For example, the phrase uttered by Aleksandr Kojève in 1946 in his lecture course on Hegel's 'Phenomenology of the Spirit' – "it is possible that, in reality, the future of the world and, hence, the meaning of the present and that of the past depend, in the last analysis, on the way in which the Hegelian writings are interpreted today" [4] – can hardly be attributed to a philosopher of the second half of the 19th or even the beginning of the 20th century.

The assessment of Hegel's philosophy as a kind of basis of the modernity's self-consciousness or, at least, as an event that opens modernity, was repeatedly expressed throughout the twentieth century. For example, the following J. Habermas' opinion is characteristic, which he formulated in the book 'The Philosophical Discourse on Modernity': "Hegel is not the first philosopher to belong to the modern age, but he is the first for whom modernity has become a problem" [5]. However, another well-known author, Paul Ricœur, in the same year 1985 spoke in his trilogy 'Time and story' about the still topical problem of renouncing the Hegelian heritage (Ricœur even called this renouncing the 'exodus from Hegel', recognizing him as the most important chapter of modern philosophical thought [6]). This direction of thought, seemingly opposite to Habermas' thesis, in fact, does not contradict his reasoning: according to Ricœur, it is the apparent ease of breaking with Hegelianism that raises the questions. Ricœur believes that we are still in the orbit of the Hegelian universe, which is why it is difficult for us to make it the object of our own thought.

2. Hegel as a thinker of modernity

Such assessments of Hegel, namely, as a philosopher who first undertook a philosophical analysis of modernity, and who became, somewhat paradoxically, the basis of modernity, have passed into the present century as well. For example, A. Speight in his book 'The Philosophy of Hegel' develops the Habermas' thesis (whom he mentions) in the sense that "Hegel is the first great philosopher to make modernity – in all its cultural and philosophical complexity – his subject. And on whatever lines that modernity is to be explored by our own present generation ... the Hegelian construal of it remains essential for coming to terms with how we understand ourselves, as agents in and contemplators of a world with a number of characteristics than Hegel was either the first or the most articulate in calling attention to." [7]

Even those authors who, like the mentioned above S. Zizek (in his 'Hegel and Infinity'), are basically critical of Hegel's philosophy (mentioning the historical events that resulted in the 'collapse' of Hegel's philosophy, Zizek concludes: "One cannot really be a Hegelian after this break. Hegelianism has lost its innocence forever" [8]) recognize a special, unique place of Hegel in the history of European thought, namely the place of transition, in the words of Zizek, of philosophy into anti-philosophy.

However, what makes Hegel so important a figure in the modernity's self-understanding, or, in other words, what is the uniqueness of Hegel's 'place' in the European philosophical tradition? Surprisingly, different authors manifest very little disaccord in this issue. In the most general terms, their answer is reduced to the fact that Hegel's philosophical project sets for itself, as a goal, a fundamental overcoming of the dualistic model, which philosophical thought has followed throughout its more than two thousand-year history. The dualities of a thing and idea, matter and form, subject and object represent, according to Hegel's thought, some modifications of the same cognitive attitude and some versions of the same

problem: the opposing sides cannot unite in the 'system' proposed by the philosopher, but they can be easily embraced, nevertheless, by his thinking.

However, various authors suggest a number of dissimilar to each other justifications of the dualism which preceded Hegel's philosophy. Some researchers give it a purely epistemological interpretation; for example, E. Caird and M. Jansen believe that the original problem for Hegel was Kant's philosophical system, where the dualistic principle of Cartesianism came to its logical end. For example, according to E. Caird and M. Jansen, in the philosophical system of Kant, "sense and understanding, necessity and freedom, the phenomenal and real self, nature and spirit, knowledge and Faith, are pairs of opposites which he can never either separate or reconcile" [9]. The researchers also note that the attempts to overcome Kant's dualism, undertaken by Fichte and Schelling, led only to partial success, since they were connected, in essence, with a 'subjectivist' and 'objectifying' reading of Kant [9, p. 99-100].

A different, 'socio-historical' interpretation of the pre-Hegelian dualism was suggested by Raymond Plant in his classic work on Hegel [10], according to which the initial problem which Hegel's thought was confronted with was the fragmentation of the contemporary European culture: the problem which was earlier considered by Schelling and even earlier, by the writers of the "Sturm und Drang" period [10, p. 18]. As noted by Plant, Schelling, whose philosophy was a reference point for early Hegel, considers several aspects of fragmentation: one of them is related to the specialization of scientific knowledge, the other, with the division of religion into the public sphere and the sphere of individual feeling. However, the most dramatic form of fragmentation according to Schelling is the disintegration of the individual him/herself, which again found expression in Kant's philosophy, which observes a deep division between mind and passion, duty and inclination, autonomy and heteronomy, cognitive, will-related and affective aspects of human nature [10, p. 20-21]. Plant thinks that, to these forms of fragmentation, one should also add political fragmentation of Germany in Hegel's time.

Both interpretations of dualism, or dualisms, which are the initial problem and the initial situation of Hegelian thought, do not contradict each other, but the second one points to not only the unifying but also the transformative pathos of Hegel's thought. Hegel could have said, at least in the early period, the words later said by Marx (expressed by the latter in his comments to Hegel's 'Philosophy of Law'): "a war against German order, certainly war!" And it is unlikely that Hegel, not only the 'early' but also the 'mature' one, would object to Marx's well-known thesis that philosophers only explained the world, but the goal should be to change it, adding, perhaps, that the philosopher should give such an explanation of the world that is equivalent to its changing. Hegel's first major published work, 'The Phenomenology of Spirit' (1807), demonstrated the seriousness of his intentions. As Albert William Levy writes in the article 'Hegel's 'The Phenomenology of Spirit' as a philosophy of culture', "Kant died in 1804. The Phenomenology was published in 1807. But this three year interval

signifies something infinitely more important than the end of one philosopher's life and the first significant publication of another." [11, p. 445]

What did this interval mean? In his article, Levy says that the philosophical thought of Kant and Hegel was in different thought horizons: according to Levy, Kant was guided by the scientific and philosophical thought of Newton, Laplace, Leibniz, while Hegel more or less belonged to the philosophical and poetic universe of Goethe, Schiller, Hölderlin [11]. It is possible that the model proposed by Levy somewhat simplifies the essence of the differences between Kant and Hegel, but it is basically correct. Kant's 'Critique of Pure Reason' is the philosophical justification for the scientific cognition of nature; and, in this sense, it continues the tradition of natural philosophy, making us recollect that the nature itself (the Greek *fusis* (φύσις)) has been originally a philosophical concept. The search for the arches of the world – whether to search these arches in elements, as Greek 'physiologists' have done, in atoms following Democritus or Gassendi, or after the Cartesians in the substance having extension (*res extensa*) – in all these cases, the arches are thought of as unchangeable and independent of the subject cognizing them. Even the Plato's ideas that have set the forms of things are essentially the same arche, with the same invariableness and self-sufficiency.

3. From nature to culture

The new thing that Hegel proposes is, first of all, a change in the direction of view. As Levy writes, "the new direction taken by Hegel is based upon the central conviction that the human spirit is the proper subject of Philosophy and that the general character of spirit will differentiate itself in a series of cultural forms or phrases of development culminating in Philosophy" [11, p. 447]. And this is not at all the shifting of view from the cognizable natural object to the cognizing subject, which, in its empirical givenness, is as diverse as the world of natural objects that it cognizes. However, this is not a return to the transcendental subject of Kant, which contains in its 'a priori'-s the entire sphere of things, being completely separated, at the same time, from the only real thing-in-itself (as Plant writes, to achieve the sought-for unity, "first of all, Hegel would of course reject the notion of either Nature or History having the status of thing-in-themselves" [10]).

What is 'spirit'? Based on the texts of Hegel, the answer to this question can be given in both simple and detailed versions. The first is given, in particular, in the above-mentioned book by Caird and Jansen: "'The spirit that is conscious of itself as spirit.' This to Hegel is the solution of the difficulty in which the individualism of ancient and of modern times has involved itself." [9, p. 159] But the spirit is not just consciousness, it is also freedom. As Hegel writes about this, "the being of Spirit cannot in any case be taken as something fixed and immovable. Man is free; it is admitted that the original being consists merely of dispositions, about which a man is free to do much as he wishes, or which require favourable circumstances for their development; i.e. an original being of Spirit is equally well to be spoken of as a being that does not exist qua being." [12]

So, the spirit has self-consciousness and it is free. In both of these qualities, it easily crosses the boundaries of individuality, giving meaning to both the historical process and the entire sphere of human culture, thus becoming the World Spirit. But the natural world also does not remain the other side of the opposition; otherwise, the philosophy of Hegel could not overcome the difficulties of his predecessors. First of all, according to Hegel, nature is an alienated spirit, turning by its other side: the multiplicity of things in existence. But, at the same time, nature is an indispensable condition for self-cognition of the spirit. Or, as Caird and Jansen write about it, “nature is for Hegel extreme of possible opposition to spirit through which, and through which alone, it can fully realize itself” [9, p. 151]. But in a concrete historical process, the spirit realizes itself only by means of culture-creative activity of human being who thus turns out to be in the Hegelian system not a ‘junction’ of all oppositions, as was in Kant's thinking, but the region of their reconciliation, because (again quoting Caird and Jansen) “nature rises to self-consciousness only in man, who thus becomes conscious not only of it, but of himself and the world, or between consciousness and self-consciousness, and so to realize his unity and the unity of all things and beings with the absolute spirit ‘in whom they live, and move, and have their being’” [9, p. 151].

In the ‘Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences’ Hegel identifies the Absolute Spirit with the sphere of human culture “in the narrow sense of the word”, that is, with the field of man’s spiritual achievements in art, religion and philosophy. It is in these areas, according to Hegel, that not only the spirit and its alienated form, nature, but also the individual and the social, and various aspects of the individual itself, are reconciled. Thus, one can rightfully call the phenomenology of Hegel “the philosophy of culture”; as Levy writes in an article with the same title, “the Absolute as the spirit of human culture – the grandest conception of all – unfolds its purpose and realizes its development in the process of historical continuity” [11, p. 454].

4. From reality to actuality

Thus, in short, the change in direction of view proposed by Hegel is a change from nature to culture, a change that presumes not only a new object, but a new way of seeing it. Nature is immovable, while the culture develops; the basis of nature is laws, while the basis of culture is human activity; finally, nature is *reality*, while culture is *actuality*.

The latter difference is of particular importance. Actuality, as can be understood already from the very etymology of this word (act, action, activity), is procedural, anthropological (only man can act), systemic (the action presupposes an agent, the object of action and the instrument of action) and gravitates to the pole of the concrete (one can think of a ‘log in abstracto’, but one cannot lift a ‘log in abstracto’). Finally, what is perhaps most important, reality is inexhaustible in the cognitive respect. All the subsequent philosophy – from Feuerbach and Marx to at least Heidegger and Sartre – would be the pursuit of

actuality/action. And, although it is precisely attention to actuality that separates Hegel from his philosophical predecessors, Feuerbach, Marx, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche reproached him for inclination toward the abstract to the detriment of the actual, and every time it was not just about the actual, but about the actual human being. Feuerbach, for example, wrote that “Wahrheit ist der Mensch, nicht die Vernunft in abstracto, das Leben, nicht der Gedanke, der auf dem Papier bleibt” (The truth is a man, not reason in abstracto, life itself, not the thought that remains on paper) [13]. From the point of view of Marx, “...since for the socialist man the entire so-called history of the world is nothing but the creation of man through human labour, nothing but the emergence of nature for man, so he has the visible, irrefutable proof of his birth through himself, of his genesis” [14]. As Kierkegaard wrote, “but pure thought is detached altogether, not like abstract thought which though disregarding existence still retains a relation to it, whereas pure thought, suspended mysteriously between heaven and earth, and with no relation to someone existing, explains everything in its own terms except itself. Thus, to one existing who asks how pure thought relates to one existing, and what he should do to enter into it, pure thought provides no answer.” [15] Nietzsche argued that “humans first placed values into things, in order to preserve themselves – they first created meaning for things, a human meaning!” [16]. Moreover, each of these thinkers tried to give as much concreteness as possible to the actuality, correlating it either with the production of cultural values, or with religious experience, or with the creation of the human being him/herself and the society. In this respect, the closest to Marx is Heidegger with his concept of human being’s world based on activity (although, according to Heidegger, activity has more of an individual character than in Marx’ thinking). As Heidegger wrote, “der Stein ist weltlos. Pflanze und Tier haben gleichfalls keine Welt; aber sie gehören dem verhüllten Andrang einer Umgebung, in die sie hineinhängen. Dagegen hat die Bäuerin eine Welt, weil sie sich im Offenen des Seienden aufhält.” (The stone is world-less. Similarly, plants and animals have no world; they belong, rather, to the hidden throng of an environment into which they have been put. The peasant woman, by contrast, possesses a world, since she stays in the openness of beings.) [17]

The list of philosophers who turned after Hegel to the issue of actuality in the sense of activity and the connected with it topic of practice can, of course, be continued, but even the above examples allow us to say that Hegel's thought initiates a certain way of philosophizing. However, are the philosophers that develop this theme right in their criticism of the Hegel’s concept of actuality? As Marcuse noted in his above-mentioned book, “Hegel describes actuality as a process totally permeated by conflict between possibility and reality” [1, p. 150], that is, using rather abstract categories. But, perhaps, Hegel was precisely striving for abstractness in this case, since the notion of ‘actuality’ contains a dangerous duality that fully manifested itself during its further, more specific development.

Here we should recall the above thought that Hegel's philosophical project itself was in a sense an activity aimed at changing the situation of fragmentation that existed in European thought and the wider culture, both at the social and

individual levels. And as a transformative activity, this project inevitably carried a negative charge. As Marcuse writes, "Hegel's philosophy is indeed what the subsequent reaction termed it, a negative philosophy. It is originally motivated by the conviction that the given facts that appear to common sense as the positive index of truth are in reality the negation of truth, so that truth can only be established by their destruction." [1, p. 26-27]

5. Conclusions - The reason for the relevance of Hegel's teaching and the infinity of the 'exodus' from Hegel

The intertwining of the creative and negative potential inherent in the actuality and, more broadly, in culture itself, determined the further development of the themes raised by Hegel in European thought. In this respect, Hegelianism, with its division into the 'right' (conservative) and 'left' (revolutionary) directions, corresponds more not to various schools of Neo-Kantianism, but to the development of psychoanalysis after Freud, when a number of his followers have taken up the 'revolutionary' aspect of his teaching, while others - the 'conservative' one, which, generally speaking, is not surprising, since the activity-oriented Freud is more 'Hegelian' than 'Kantian'.

So, trying to overcome the numerous oppositions and antinomies which develop along with the sophistication of the Cartesian cognitive attitude, Hegel introduces the concept of culture (precisely, the concept, not the notion of culture that Hegel hardly uses), which turned out to be an exceptionally effective mediator that reduces all substantive diversity of the world surrounding the human being to a dialectically organized integrity, including seemingly irreconcilable worldview antinomies. However, the concept of culture, considered in the historical dimension, revealed the concept of actuality/activity with its inevitably dual meaning, which could not but become the new opposition that defined a grid of thought coordinates not only for subsequent philosophical projects, but also for the entire cultural policy and even human activity as such. It is here that the difficulty of the 'exodus from Hegel' noted by Ricoeur lies, because the more effective the human activity, the more opportunities it opens, the more acute the accompanying antinomy of creation/destruction is. It would be naive to think that overcoming this antinomy is possible only on the philosophical and speculative arena: it, in turn, requires more ambitious changes even in comparison with those that made the Modern Age itself possible.

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