

## Response to Critics

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In a near-prophetic manner, Eduard Gans anticipated the history of the reception of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* in his foreword to the first edition of Hegel's works by diagnosing an extraordinary disproportion between its substantial value on the one hand and its recognition and distribution on the other (Gans 1833: 3). He also described the character of this work of practical philosophy quite appropriately: according to Gans, freedom was the *one and only metal* from which these thoughts were forged. My monograph *Das Denken der Freiheit* is devoted—as its title states—to the task of explicating this fundamental concern, to prove freedom to be the *alpha and omega* of Hegel's philosophy. In this regard, there is shared ground with the reviewers Alberto Siani and Sebastian Stein. This also concerns the book's fundamental philosophical claim, namely, to ground the *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right* logically in Hegel's *Science of Logic*. At the same time, there seems to be an agreement between the author and the reviewers as regards a third substantial point: that an investigation of the *Outlines* from the perspective of its pertinence to recent debate appears to be of significant theoretical relevance. Accordingly, I emphasize, with reference to Dieter Henrich amongst others, the extraordinary modernity of this conception of practical philosophy: in its significance as a theory of society and the state which includes their historical conditions of development, *Hegel's oeuvre is beyond comparison*.

The matter continues to be particularly significant: Since the Berlin professor paid homage to the cosmopolitan sense of the saying 'it is un-German to be merely German,'<sup>1</sup> he was dismissed as a non-German thinker at three focal moments of German history—in 1870, 1914 and 1933. A crucial passage in his *Philosophy of Right* unambiguously expresses Hegel's intention: 'A human being counts as a human being in virtue of his humanity, not because he is a Jew, Catholic, Protestant, German, Italian, etc.' (PR: §209R).<sup>2</sup> He assigns infinite importance to this principle of a *universal human right of the person*. The validity of this cosmopolitan universal renders untenable any distinctions of eligibility between persons, as well as all acts of submission and suppression. It is in particular because of this conclusion that Hegel was condemned as an anti-German, anti-national cosmopolitan by the Nazi ideologue Alfred Rosenberg. Rosenberg's radical version of national relativism is based on the claim of a fundamental difference between nations and cultures. He decisively

rejects the idea of humankind, explicitly turning against absolute universalist systems of the type represented by Hegel, which are said to involve the danger of a unitarisation of souls. This alone ought to be reason enough to confidently abandon those legends and clichés climaxing in a denunciation of Hegel as a predecessor of totalitarianism. Instead, one ought to turn to Hegel's modern philosophy of freedom and justice.

I will now turn to some selected problems, addressed by both reviewers with profound expertise. In doing so, Hegel's above-mentioned core claim will again come to the fore: The entire process of thought, in its essential steps and forms, is to be understood as resting on the logical *Geist*. Hegel sees his new, innovative logic as a science of thinking—a logic which fundamentally differs from both its predecessors as well as its mostly analytic successors. The nature of the logical *Geist*, a particular kind of philosophical demonstration that Hegel calls speculative cognition (*spekulative Erkenntnis*), was developed by him in detail in the *Science of Logic*. Although Hegel insistently demanded an interpretation of the *Outlines* that is strictly in accordance with this foundation in logical thinking (or as he also called it *begreifendes Denken*), this has been 'hardly been carried out until today'—as Hans Friedrich Fulda, one of the foremost experts on Hegel, claims in the best of all introductions into Hegel's philosophy (Fulda 2003). According to the proposition to be demonstrated, an appropriate interpretation would require such an approach, in the sense of assessing whether this logical foundation has been successful and whether it is possible at all. Robert Pippin, in his study *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, more than once emphasizes the inextricable link between the logic of the concept and the logic of freedom (Pippin 2008). The following key passage clearly expresses the standard set by Hegel himself: 'that the whole, like the formation of its parts, rests on the logical [*Geiste*]. It is also from this point of view above all that I should like my book to be taken and judged.'<sup>3</sup>

## I

Alberto Siani considers it to be an achievement of the monograph that it shows that Hegel's practical philosophy cannot be adequately recognized and understood without this logical foundation—a theory of freedom requires a theory of the Concept. At the same time, he argues that *our contemporary* understanding of logic is largely inspired by analytic philosophy and completely different from Hegel's. What seems to be problematic, though, is his use of 'our' in this context—unless one wants to appeal to the *consensus gentium*, in which case what seems to be right to the majority would be what *is* right in philosophy. But fortunately, we do not vote on what is true and what is not. It is in this sense that

a Hegelian perspective is far from being isolated, from subsisting in a *splendid isolation*, but represents the position of a minority in philosophy. And such minority views ought not to be rejected simply because they are allegedly isolated. A subtle strategy of marginalization, for example, is to proclaim an era of so-called post-metaphysical thought. Further, one might ask what exactly ‘completely different’ refers to in this context? Does it simply express the attitude *contra negantes est non disputandum*, or is there common ground underneath the two opposing views?—which is what Siani obviously prefers. Insofar as this is true, a dialogue between the sort of logic that is fashionable today and a Hegelian logic is without doubt necessary and meaningful.

However, such a dialogue is not simply necessary ‘as a matter of fact’, simply because some of these points of convergence are already discussed today. Indeed, we ought generally to abandon the idea that there are such things as pure facts in philosophy. According to Hegel, what is given and found has not yet been cognized. Yet if such a conversation is to be had—initially in the field of logic, which was not the object of my monograph—this will require both sides to undertake a self-confident presentation of their particular perspectives. This is something different from being radical. The differences between these distinct approaches to logic must not be conflated from the outset. For instance, each side would need to spell out what it understands by the term ‘concept’. As is generally known, Hegel uses it primarily in the singular, which already indicates a significant gap between both sides. Otherwise we might end up unduly homogenising important differences.

Furthermore, Siani’s talk of the *philosophy of our own time* requires further clarification. When Hegel speaks of the *Geist der Zeit* this is emphatically not identical to the *Zeitgeist*! As is well known, the word ‘*Geist*’ is notoriously difficult to translate into English—both *spirit* and *mind* fail to capture the word’s meaning. Ever since Nietzsche’s ‘unfashionable observations’, one may legitimately raise the question whether one does not all too often simply chase the latest fashion or let oneself be awestruck by it. The present author is familiar with being accused, in a more or less friendly manner, of cultivating an old-fashioned style. However, following Nietzsche and Hegel, perhaps philosophy ought to be an untimely affair and avoid following some given trend. For to do so would enforce an expectation of being up-to-date, the failure to adhere to which would brand one as old-fashioned, as not keeping up with the times. What the agenda requires are imitation and uniformity—a global process of homogenization, for instance, with regard to cars and clothing. Should this count as a standard in philosophy too? For all these reasons, my monograph explicitly contains the metaphorical invitation to rummage in the attic. As a sidenote: the above-mentioned dialogue with proponents of other views is already well under way, however radical it may or may not be.

## II

To Siani, my reflections on world history appear to be ‘quite optimistic’ and to form an ‘irenic depiction’. However, what I was concerned with was first and foremost to accentuate the *principles* that Hegel lays down as governing a *possible* realization of freedom, justice, and peace—principles that function as conditions of possibility, as it were. Hegel’s talk of the *end of history* precisely does not imply a definite conclusion of all human endeavour, in the sense of attaining a state of perfection or in the sense of achieving the best of all possible worlds. Nowadays, human endeavour takes place in a global framework, which entails the internationalization of essential processes of life. To speak of the ‘end of history’ [*Geschichte*] does not so much articulate a stratified view of history [*Ge-Schichtung*] but rather the global and active effort at *shaping* [*Gestaltung*] universal freedom. According to Schiller, an ‘end’ can mean both a ‘purpose’ [*Zweck*] and an ‘objective’ [*Ziel*], and the word ‘teleological’ ought not to be used in an exclusively pejorative sense—which, unfortunately, is not uncommon today.<sup>4</sup> The ‘end of history’ means the actual *beginning of the possibility of human existence*. Humankind faces the challenge of conceiving and shaping freedom, which is the human condition itself. The monograph explicitly emphasizes that from Hegel’s perspective this endeavour will not be a comfortable journey on an easy pathway, nor a walk in the vineyards of Tuscany or through the Buddhist gardens of Kyoto, nor a stroll through Cambridge or Jena. Rather, it constitutes the most difficult and risky challenge to humankind, which has now acquired the means of self-destruction. This endeavour resembles a major risk, a tightrope walk without safety net, a scaling of Mount Everest without a rope team. It resembles someone who has put on magic boots enabling him to take giant steps but moves in them as in childrens’ shoes. The endeavour is still in its initial phase and its success cannot be taken for granted (as the twentieth century has painfully shown). For the moment of arbitrariness, which is inherent to freedom itself, reveals itself with particular prominence in modernity. Pandora’s box is wide open, metaphorically speaking. However, human action faces a basic alternative—either to shape history reasonably, or to face annihilation. The fact that this lies in our hands is not supposed to sound optimistic or irenic.

## III

Sebastian Stein, who has an excellent command of Hegel’s logic, focuses in his review on the important question of the logical foundation of philosophy. In doing so, he locates an Achilles’ heel, insofar as the monograph diagnoses a

violation by Hegel of his own logic in his chapter on the state—which, according to the author, was motivated by political considerations during the period of the Carlsbad Decrees (1819). Although conclusive proof of this is unavailable, the claim can at least be circumstantially corroborated. Responding to Stein's objections would seem to require a clarification based on Hegel's text. It is a simplification when Stein states that I argue from the perspective of the syllogism and concentrate on the disjunctive syllogism. After all, the monograph foregrounds Hegel's discussion of a *totality of three syllogisms*. In this context, I explicitly discuss the limitations of the syllogistic form—for example, in discussing Hegel's two key passages pertaining to the system of three syllogisms *in the chapter on objectivity*, which is situated well beyond the sphere of the (subjective) syllogism.

Initially, we are only confronted with the Concept in the form of subjectivity, not yet with the Idea as the unity of subjectivity and objectivity. The argument's point of departure is Hegel's claim 'that everything rational [such as the state—K.V.] shows itself to be a threefold syllogism [*Schluss*], and it does so in such a way that each of its members occupies the position both of an extreme and of the mediating middle.' (EL: §187A).<sup>5</sup> Thus, ethical life can be considered as a *concluding-with-itself* [*Mit-sich-selbst-Zusammenschließen*] of the *Concept*, which relates to itself through its other and thus determines itself. As is well known, Hegel considers the state to be the highest form of actuality of the ethical idea: 'What is *ethical life*? That my will *is posited* according to the Concept—its subjectivity sublated ... recognition of the objective' (PR: §142A).<sup>6</sup> Ethical life thus is defined as the idea of freedom, as having '*developed into the existing world and the nature of self-consciousness*' (PR: §142). Following this central point, it may not be amiss to draw attention to a number of substantial sections in the monograph, which directly—although very briefly—refer to the limitations of the syllogism as such:

a) The category of *purpose*—the central category of objectivity and its transition into the Idea—makes manifest that the Concept has to become reality. This throws into relief the logical rigour of the ontological dimension of self-determination. Purpose is not a formal syllogism, but 'the [C]oncept in its ... existence' (SL: 12. 155),<sup>7</sup> the unity of subjectivity and objectivity, an objectivity of the Concept in the sense of being universal and true. The entire doctrine of the Concept encloses the logical development of the principle of self-determination—the principle of freedom—up until the fulfilment and completion of the Concept and of freedom—the Concept is what is free—as manifested by the one Idea, the objective or real Concept.

b) The 'limitations' of the syllogism are clearly apparent. The monograph resolutely discusses the loss of formality: the formal syllogism 'lacks the essential dialectical moment of negativity' (SL: 12. 247). To persist with the formal syllogism is to ignore the basic idea of negativity. The 'loss' of the Concept's formality remains an indispensable trait of Hegel's *Logic*—a thought that

understandably provokes criticism and rejection from the perspective of more analytic approaches to logic. (A conversation about the notion of negativity could turn out to be very interesting.) The formality (the formalism) of syllogising constitutes a necessary point of transition, so that the syllogism has to be further determined. The syllogism must not remain an empty timber-frame to which its fulfilment is merely ‘externally’ added. Instead, the subjectivity must decisively choose [*sich entschließen*] objectivity. What was formally concluded [*zusammengeschlossen*] is opened up [*aufschließen*]; what was locked up [*verschlossen*], becomes resolved [*entschlossen*] in actual, ethical action—the idea of ethical life, in which reality and objectivity gain the form of the world.

c) On the level of objectivity, in which mediation becomes a formal connection [*Zusammenschluss*], ethical life—especially the state—has to be understood as a *system of three syllogisms*: firstly, the state as an aggregation (or mechanism); secondly, as a process constituting a concrete universal (chemism), which ‘[t]hrough the difference of the objects—their particularising—the Concept, as the concrete universal, con-cludes itself with the singularity, i. e., with the product, and thus only with itself’ (*EL*: §201); and thirdly, as purposiveness in the sense of a syllogism constituting a teleological, systemic process in which the purpose ‘makes itself into the other of its subjectivity and objectifies itself. It [the purpose] has con-cluded *itself with itself alone* and has *preserved itself*’ (*EL*: §204). Finally, in the realized purpose and the transition to life the state is conceived as something that is alive, as an *organism* (see Wolff 1985), as the living processuality of an individual. ‘The living being [*das Lebendige*] is the syllogism whose very moments are inwardly systems and syllogisms (*EL*: §§198, 201, 107). But they are active syllogisms, or processes; and within the subjective unity of the living being they are only *One* process. Thus, the living being is the process of its own con-cluding with itself’ (*EL*: §217).

d) From a logical point of view, *each* moment of the determination of the Concept (universality, particularity, singularity) may appear as the totality of the syllogism as well as the mediating ground: the citizen, the civil society, and the political state as a community of citizens. Each moment serves as the middle and ‘has proven itself to be the totality of the moments, hence the whole syllogism’ (*EL*: §192; cf. §187). Everything rational has to be understood as such a threefold syllogism, as a triad, a threefold con-cluding [*Zusammenschließen*]. Thus the formalism of syllogising, the subjectivity of the syllogisms and of the Concept is transcended (*SL*: 12. 125).

Stein legitimately demands that Hegel’s conception of the Idea be applied as a ‘standard of truth’. However, the structure of the syllogism has to be conceived as sublated in the Idea, in the rigorous Hegelian sense of being negated, conserved, and elevated. All three dimensions must simultaneously be kept in view. Everything rational thus has to satisfy the fundamental condition of being a syllogism, while the state is a totality of three syllogisms. This is the necessary condition that has to be

met by a free, rational state. Without this pillar, without this ‘formal timber frame,’ we would not be faced with a rational state. If, for example, there is no appropriate division of powers, then we are not entitled to speak of a modern state. Thus, the structure of the syllogism may be described as a point of transition that is necessary but not sufficient. Practical philosophy belongs to the sphere of the objective *Geist*, whose elements are not ‘always already unified and differentiated’. The con-cluding [*Zusammen-Schließen*] that is required by ethical life, the conclusions [*Zusammen-Schlüsse*], are supposed to conform to the appropriate logical form, yet may equally fail to do so. In the case of such failure, the labels ‘rational’ and ‘free’ cannot be applied. The precise relationship between logic and practical philosophy remains to be determined—a task that requires further work.

I am particularly grateful to both reviewers for their appreciation of the monograph *Das Denken der Freiheit* as well as for their sophisticated questions and objections. May the philosophical debate about these issues continue.

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<sup>1</sup> A phrase coined by Friedrich Meinecke in his *Weltbürgertum und Nationalstaat* (1915).

<sup>2</sup> Quoted after Hegel (2008: 198). Abbreviations: *EL* = Hegel, *Encyclopaedia Logic*; *PR* = Hegel, *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*; *SL* = Hegel, *The Science of Logic*.

<sup>3</sup> Hegel (2008: 4).

<sup>4</sup> An excellent study regarding this question is Pierini (2006).

<sup>5</sup> Quoted after Hegel (1991: 263).

<sup>6</sup> Translation by Susanne Herrmann-Sinai.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted after Hegel (2010).

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