

Review

Tim Rojek. *Hegels Begriff der Weltgeschichte. Eine Wissenschaftstheoretische Studie.* Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2017. ISBN 978-3-11-050147-6 (hbk). Pp. 310. €109.95, US \$126.99, £100.00. ISBN 978-3-11-062696-4 (pbk). €19.95, US \$22.99, £18.00.

To begin with a shameful canard: the story is told that, while lecturing on the philosophy of world history in Berlin, one of Hegel's disgruntled students interrupted his presentation by saying 'Aber Herr Professor, the facts are otherwise'. Hegel is meant to have replied, 'So much the worse for the facts!' As apocryphal stories go, this suggests a real problem. For many there has always been something ahistorical about Hegel's history. The suspicion is that Hegel sees history as his to construct and reconstruct. That is, the very events of history themselves exist to be arranged in a way that exemplifies the progress of spirit and vindicates the Hegelian system. What Hegel calls 'history's blank pages' must be scribbled over with Hegelian philosophy in order to show themselves aright. So the story goes.

I hope I have not caricatured the caricature, but the accusations continue to have life. Did Hegel care about actual history as he produced his monumental lectures on the philosophy of history? Is there any evidence at all that Hegel knew of and made use of the writings of his contemporaries in history, historiography and the social sciences? Does Hegel take sufficient account of the work of non-philosophical historiography, and can he link it to the philosophy of world history so that it does justice to the formal philosophy of history? To each of these questions, Tim Rojek answers 'yes'. He argues that Hegel not only has an interest in the actual events of history, but also that he pays close attention to how history has been written, how his own contemporaries were writing it, and how his own work requires and expands upon the formal philosophy of history as a normative and scientific study of history. Rojek casts his book as a study of how Hegel moves between the formal and material philosophies of history, clearly demonstrating that for Hegel the two approaches to philosophical history are linked.

Rojek's argument depends upon a clear and close reading of Hegel's texts dealing with history, including the lectures on the philosophy of history, the *Rechtsphilosophie*, and the sections of the *Enzyklopädie* dealing with absolute spirit. For both philological and methodological reasons, Rojek concentrates mainly on the editions of the world history lectures, and in chapter 1 he gives a concise

but thorough history of the editions. Rojek pays careful attention to the manuscripts with an eye to uncovering the sources that Hegel used, and readers interested in the development of Hegel's thought will find this chapter, particularly §1.6, especially enlightening. Summary accounts of Hegel's five series of lectures on the philosophy of world history in Berlin are easily available, but meticulous study of the manuscript sources is unusual and Rojek's contribution to this aspect of Hegel studies proves invaluable. Hegel's lectures on the philosophy of world history only appeared in popular form in 1840 with Karl Hegel's version, but a critical edition in German had to wait until Lasson's four-volume work of 1917–20. Thus, the reception of Hegel's philosophy of history was detached from Hegel's actual writings, with predictable results.

Chapter 2 serves two purposes. One, to survey and make a substantive argument about the fraught relationship between post-Hegelian philosophy of history and scientific historiography. Two, to explore the relationship in Hegel's work between non-philosophical historiography and the philosophy of history. Regarding the first, post-Hegelian philosophy of history was regarded by the emerging social-scientific study of history as a sort of intellectual dilettantism, devoid of serious source critical methodology and hobbled by its own presuppositions. Writers such as Georg Gottfried Gervinus and Ernst Bernheim saw in Hegel's philosophy of history a paradigmatic case of treating historical facts as philosophical concepts. Nineteenth-century historiography self-consciously distanced itself from the sort of putatively non-scientific work that it understood Hegel to have been doing, giving rise to much of the antagonism between so-called 'systematic philosophy' and 'empirical investigation', as if the two were antipodes. Rojek shows that this was never the case for Hegel. As he states later in the book, 'For Hegel, the material philosophy of history is dependent on non-philosophical historiography insofar as it uses it as data for its own purposes' (286). That is, Hegel was concerned about the formal study of historiography and empirical, social-scientific studies of history informed the development of his material philosophy of history. Rojek demonstrates that Hegel's philosophy of history makes excellent use of the sources available to him and that his work is methodologically clear and coherent.

Chapter 2 also reveals part of the larger project Rojek engages in in this work, and I found this chapter to be the most interesting and suggestive of the book. He seeks to reintroduce a philosophically robust perspective into the writing of history, particularly the history of nineteenth century reception of Hegel's philosophy of history and its relation to the development of German Idealism. He writes that for Hegel,

Certain forms of established historiography are of particular relevance to the stability of the organic totality of the moral structures in communities. Thanks to historiography, it is possible to refer to the past with epistemic and methodical certainty. At the same time, the forms of general historiography make possible a reference to history, which goes back beyond the present of each and is able to intervene in the past. (211)

Thus, the use that philosophy makes of historiography directly affects the progress of human communities and provides a way for speculative philosophy to access historical events analeptically, turning back to them to develop their meaning for human communities while respecting their historical facticity. ‘Speculative philosophy refers speculative-conceptual information to historiography as data for its own reconstruction work’, Rojek explains. ‘The form of representation found there serves as a means of orientation for the philosophical explication of world history for one’s own present’ (213). Rojek maintains that even though Hegel rejects a priori readings of history, he nevertheless privileges the point of view of speculative philosophy, as the contemporary endpoint of philosophical development. According to Rojek, this is why Hegel makes no mention of the philosophy of history in, for example, Augustine and Condorcet. Only the point of view provided by speculative philosophy is truly able to illuminate the process of history; and, in turn, speculative philosophy’s perspective is guaranteed by its close attention to the findings and methods of empirical historiography. Such historiography provides data for speculative philosophy’s historical reconstructions, and speculative philosophy is able in turn to show which aspects of historiography’s work are philosophically rational and so necessary. The dialectical movement between these two sources is the theme of the entire book. Speculative philosophy and non-philosophical historiography are not equal partners in Hegel’s project, but without the empirical findings of the latter, the former is directionless. Rojek notes that this gives rise to an unresolved tension between Hegel’s speculative philosophy and his use of non-philosophical historiography. The degree of dependence that philosophy has on the findings of empirical sciences for Hegel seems to call into question Hegel’s claim that his system is ‘unavoidable, infallible and complete’ (215). Recent work on Hegel has called into question whether or not Hegel expected such a thing of his philosophy—Hegel’s assurance in the *Rechtsphilosophie* that philosophy is its own time comprehended in thought, for example, is more than a rhetorical flourish. Of course, Hegel did see his philosophy as the culmination of philosophical work up to his own time, and so perhaps as unavoidable, infallible and complete, *for now*. This is not a point worth quibbling with Rojek, since he is correct that the way to relieve this tension is to bear in mind the intersecting nature of

Hegel's philosophy of absolute spirit and the dependence of the necessary whole on each contingent part.

Well-armed with the historical sources and a grasp of how they relate to Hegel's philosophy, in chapter 3 Rojek turns to Hegel's philosophy of history itself. Rojek develops an interpretation of Hegel's concept of freedom in order to examine how far history, apart from the scientific-theoretical analysis of historiography, can be an independent object of philosophical inquiry and reflection. It is not an obvious choice, but one that Rojek amply justifies in his analysis. Rojek's intimation here is that the philosophy of history plays a therapeutic function, if I may put it so, allowing us rationally to integrate our histories into our present realities, both as individuals and as constitutive members of the state. As Rojek explains earlier in the text, Hegel's philosophy of history 'makes a contribution to the stabilization of the moral conditions of the present, which makes possible living together in a prosperous state with intelligible institutions' (8). In Hegelian terms, Rojek demonstrates the philosophy of history's ability to reconcile human freedom and contingency with rational necessity. Freedom for Hegel forms both the object and the criterion for the assessment of world-historical events; something is 'real' to the extent that it participates in the outworking of freedom, for example, and it is 'rational' if it is necessary to that outworking. Not every factual event is either real or rational for Hegel, and Rojek argues that the reality and rationality of historical events in this Hegelian sense play a role in how human communities develop a critical self-awareness. Rojek rejects positivistic oppositions between the state and the individual. For Rojek, Hegel's philosophy

succeeds in overcoming [...] any form of subject-object opposition [...] without simply leveling out these differences. Within the framework of objective spirit, [Hegel shows] that social institutions, especially the social structures of the state, are not opposed to us as foreign and anonymous powers whose intrinsic logic is opposed to the rationality of autonomous individuals. (225)

Freedom is the situated freedom of the social world (the evidence for which is provided by empirical science) and the exercised freedom of the individual (the meaning of which is explicated by speculative philosophy); explaining how and why this works as it does is a goal of Hegel's philosophy of history.

In his conclusion, Rojek ties together his interpretive threads to bring home his point that Hegel's philosophy of history is an attempt at a very specific sort of hybrid scientific-speculative approach to history. The methodological and epistemological approach that one takes to the study of history determines whether history seems to have a progressive bent (contemporary historical epigones such as Steven Pinker should take note of this Hegelian insight). 'Hegel's historical-

philosophical project largely reflects on the methodological prerequisites of a specifically philosophical approach to history', writes Rojek. 'Hegel saw that a material philosophy of history [...] must clarify how it relates to other ways of accessing history, especially historiography' (285). Rojek's great contribution to the study of Hegel's philosophy of history in this book is to detail with such clarity Hegel's explicit appreciation and use of the historical writing of his own time and place. That is, to use a word that appears on almost every page of Rojek's study, Hegel is interested in *der Rahmen*, the context or framework within which one presents the facts and events of history in order to give them meaning and by which they do whatever work they are able to do.

Hegel's philosophy of history is not focused on the future, and Rojek's book avoids the pitfall of speculating about Hegel's future speculations. The contents of history, 'which in the narrower sense are described as "necessary" and "reasonable", remain dependent on the developments that have taken place in the past' (218). Hegel makes this explicit in his brief mention of the Americas in his lectures. So pervasive has been the a priorist reading of Hegel's philosophy of history that these sorts of comments have too often been ignored. What may or may not happen in the future outworking of spirit is not for Hegel to say, although he is certain that it will be the progress of freedom however understood. Rojek's deft analysis of Hegel's use of contemporary historiography demonstrates how far Hegel's speculative project rests firmly upon concrete analyses of actual history. This is in line with perhaps the most important caveat that Hegel makes regarding the philosophical uses of history: namely, that the philosopher is not a prophet. The picture Rojek paints is of the speculative Hegelian philosopher, relying upon the data collected, arranged and disseminated by empirical historiography, then sifting this data to understand and make use of it in the project of uncovering rational necessity. It is a very Hegelian picture, and one that rings true. Rojek's book is a valuable contribution to the ongoing renaissance of concern for and reinterpretation of Hegelian philosophy of history.

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