

HENRY S. HARRIS, *Hegel's Development*, Vol. I, *Toward the Sunlight: 1770–1801*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972. Pp. XXXII, 574 S.

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BOOK REVIEW

Hegel's Development. Toward the Sunlight. 1770–1801. By HENRY S. HARRIS. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972. Pp. XXXII, 574 S.

In the case of Hegel, as in the case of other writers, there is a strong *prima facie* argument against placing much emphasis upon manuscripts which the author himself made no effort to publish. This argument might seem particularly strong in the case of Hegel, because he actually published relatively little and, as many have lamented, those few published works have never been analysed with the same degree of rigor and detail that we have come to expect from commentaries on the works of other major philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, and Kant. Why, then, another book on Hegel's unpublished early manuscripts?

There are many plausible answers to this question. The first, and most important, is that it remains insufficiently clear what Hegel was trying to accomplish in his first major publication, the *Phenomenology*. Thus one might try to reconstruct Hegel's early development in an effort to throw some light on the aim of the published works. Unfortunately, previous studies of his *Jugendschriften* have contributed relatively little to this end.

Secondly, Hegel's early writings have—for better or worse—simply become the acknowledged object of legitimate research in the scholarly world of the present century. But until the appearance of Harris' book there was no work in English to set beside studies of such continental scholars as Dilthey, Rosenzweig, Haering, Lukács, Lacorte and Peperzak. It can now be said that the English speaking world has its own 'Dilthey.' Indeed, if the question is one of sheer scholarship, the tables have been turned completely. Harris has incorporated into his richly documented study the major results of all recent German, French and Italian researchers on the young Hegel. He has also taken account of Schüler's chronology of the manuscripts, Pöggeler's argument for Hegel's authorship of "Das älteste Systemprogramm" and Henrich's historical studies on the significance of Hölderlin for Hegel's development in Frankfurt.

But to evaluate Harris' achievement in light of such considerations would be to miss its genuine contribution to our understanding of Hegel. For Harris has, so far as I am aware, provided the first general account of Hegel's early development that gives a coherent answer to the question why Hegel *did not* publish the manuscripts on which he had worked so assiduously between 1795 and 1801. Paradoxical as it may seem, Harris' answer is that Hegel did not publish the manuscripts Nohl entitled *Das Leben Jesu, Die Positivität der christlichen Religion, Der Geist des Christentums und sein Schicksal* and the essay of which we only have the *Systemfragment* because they each formed a part of a *coherent project*, a project which was avowedly nonphilosophical, and because he had discovered, through carrying out the project as well as through external circumstances, that he was condemned to *become* a philosopher.

What, then, was the project? It has generally been assumed that the project implicit in Hegel's early writings was the 'project' of becoming 'Hegel,' i.e., the mature philosopher who represents the culmination of that epochal movement of thought from 1781 through 1831, the development from

Kant to Hegel.¹ But as Henrich has rightly stressed, “die meisten entwicklungsgeschichtlichen Arbeiten ... verfehlen ihr Ziel, weil sie von dem, was sie verständlich machen wollen, implizit ausgehen und sich somit im Zirkel und in Tautologien bewegen.”² Harris, in radical opposition to this interpretative tendency, has provided (for the first time, I believe) a strictly *immanent* interpretation of Hegel’s early development.

Instead of beginning with tacit assumptions about the result of Hegel’s development, Harris organizes his study in terms of an implicit project that he discerns in the earliest known writings of the philosopher-to-be. His initial clue, so it seems, was provided by Lacorte’s detailed analysis of Hegel’s Stuttgart essays and excerpts (XVIII, 36–7). In his extensive analysis of *Über die Religion der Griechen und Römer* (1787), for example, Harris notes that the essay is “outwardly dominated by the contrast between ‘folk-religion’ and enlightened religious insight” (34). But he goes on to emphasize the schoolboy’s “assumption that all folk-religion contains a solid core of rational faith” and that this rational core of a folk-religion can be “made explicit and separated from its superstitious overgrowth by enlightened reflection” (34). It is in just such an enlightened exposition of the rational truth *already present* in a folk-religion (and most notably in the folk-religion of his own time and culture, Christianity) that Harris finds the seeds of a project that Hegel was to formulate explicitly in Tübingen and develop with great care and consistency in Bern and Frankfurt.

Throughout his analysis of this project, Harris is intent to show that Hegel was, from the beginning, indifferent to purely theoretical philosophical speculations. The young Hegel was, on the contrary, a “pragmatic rationalist” who made what use he could of *existing* philosophical theories to clarify and make practically effective his basic but undeduced “ideal of human nature.” In other words, his original aim was to *apply* all the available philosophical theory that was relevant to his project, not to engage in philosophical speculation himself. Viewed in this way, Hegel’s rather indiscriminate borrowings of technical language—from Kant, Fichte, and Schelling in Bern, from Hölderlin in Frankfurt—need not lead us (as interpreters of Hegel) to speculate about his role in *their project* of solving the metaphysical problem of German Idealism. As Harris argues, “if we want to understand what *he* meant we must study his own ‘applications’” (288) and we must not forget that his “more theoretical excursions”—such as the much discussed fragments on “Liebe” (Nohl, 374ff.)—“certainly appear rather slight when compared with the imposing mass of his historical studies” (288).

What Harris presents in the main body of his large book is a detailed reinterpretation of every essay and fragment that remains of the young Hegel’s “imposing mass” of historical studies. He attempts to show how each constitutes a step toward elaborating the programme of religious reform first outlined in the so-called “Tübinger Fragment” of 1793, and especially Hegel’s answer to the

¹ The canonical formulation of this line of interpretation was, of course, given by Dilthey: “... die Voraussetzungen, unter denen Hegels Entwicklung sich vollzog, lagen ... in dem Zusammenhang des philosophischen Denkens, der von Kant zu Schelling führte; in dieser Entwicklung lagen die Gründe dafür, daß er vom Standpunkt der kritischen Erkenntnistheorie, den er so gründlich durchgedacht hatte, übergehen konnte zur Arbeit an einer neuen Metaphysik.” (Wilhelm Dilthey: *Gesammelte Schriften*, IV, 43–4).

² Henrich: *Hegel im Kontext*, Frankfurt a/M, 1971, 42.

question “How must folk-religion be constituted?” The three requirements Hegel lists in answering this question are interpreted as the ‘canons’ that guided his researches for the next eight years:

- I. Its doctrines must be grounded on universal Reason.
 - II. Fancy, heart and sensibility must not thereby go empty away.
 - III. It must be so constituted that all the needs of life—the public affairs of the State are tied with it.”
- (Nohl, 20; Harris’ translation, 499).

Harris believes that, for Hegel, only the folk-religion of classical Greece had ever satisfied *all* of these canons. But, with Schiller, Hegel also realized that the gods of Greece were irrevocably gone. His project was therefore to investigate the nearly two thousand years separating the aging spirit of his own time from the Greek “spirit of youth” in order to grasp the contrast between them and to find “the way to rejuvenation” (152).

The key to Harris’ interpretation of the Bern period is accordingly the first of the Tübingen ‘canons.’ The essays and fragments of 1793–96 are said to exhibit Hegel’s conviction that Kant’s moral philosophy provided a clear account in theory of what the Greeks had realized in practice, namely a form of religion that satisfied the needs of human reason. And Hegel began by focussing upon this ‘canon’ because it was only in respect to it that the folk-religion of his own time, Christianity, seemed capable of being made “fully adequate” (412). Thus *The Life of Jesus* applies the Kantian theory of rational freedom to make manifest the “rational ideal” of Christianity, and its “companion piece,” the *Positivity* essay, shows how the ideal of rational autonomy came, in the course of the development of Christian doctrine, to be overlaid with teachings based on positive authority. Once this was seen, however, the practical aim of stripping off the overlay of positivity could be realized and, with respect to doctrine at least, contemporary folk-religion might become the concrete context for reintegrating the modern ideal of enlightened rationality into the Hellenic ideal of a rational harmony of life.

“With the writing of the *Positivity* essay the application of the first canon has now been completed and it is time for Hegel to move on to the second: ‘Fancy, heart and sensibility must not go empty away’” (234). But whereas it was relatively easy to see how contemporary folk-religion might be reformed to satisfy the first canon of his Greek ideal, Hegel’s first efforts (beginning with *Jedes Volk hatte ihm eigene Gegenstände der Phantasie*; Nohl, 214ff.) at finding a basis in modern German religious life for applying the second canon were entirely negative and inconclusive (e.g., “Christianity has emptied the Valhalla of the German *Volk*” (235, a paraphrase of Nohl, 215).

Harris therefore rejects all suggestions that Hegel was attempting at this time to develop “a speculative theology of his own” (241) and, *a fortiori*, that he had become a “mystical pantheist.” Instead, all of the fragments, including the poem *Eleusis*, the so-called “Earliest System-programme of German Idealism,” and the much debated Frankfurt writings concerning love and life, are interpreted as contributions to the project of discovering the practical applicability of the second ‘canon.’

It is in this connection that Harris’ novel strategy for a reinterpretation of Hegel’s development produces its most challenging results, and will, no doubt, evoke the greatest controversy. For in explicit

opposition to Dilthey, Rosenzweig, Haering, Lukács, and Henrich, Harris argues that there was no radical change, much less a ‘revolution,’ in Hegel’s thought when he arrived in Frankfurt (see 259, 264–7, 294, 326). He maintains that Hegel knew all along “where he wanted to go” but that “he did not know how to get there” (266), and he attempts to show that “all the elements of his eventual solution of the difficulty” (267) of applying the second canon are already present in the manuscripts of 1793–94. Hegel’s treatment of Christianity in Frankfurt was therefore different from that in the Bern essays, not because his project had changed, but because he was now focussing on another aspect of the same project: the application of the second ‘canon.’ Moreover, “Hegel knew from the beginning that when he moved on to consider the needs of *Phantasie und Herz*, Christianity would no longer be adequate” (380–1). The *imaginative*, as opposed to the rational, ideal of Christianity is indeed *love*, and this notion—first formulated with a “wholesale” exploitation of Hölderlin’s terminology (288)—is a central theme in the *Spirit of Christianity* essay. But whereas *The Life of Jesus* exhibits a rational ideal whose eclipse, rediscovery and practical project for restoration are detailed in the *Positivity* essay, the *Spirit of Christianity* shows that love, the imaginative ideal of Christianity, succumbed not to an alien force but to *its own fate*.

As in the case of Jesus the teacher of the rational ideal, Jesus is presented here too in completely *human* terms. But now he is no longer, like Socrates, a teacher who simply shows us what we already are, i.e., autonomous moral subjects; as an *imaginative* ideal, Jesus is the embodiment of our oneness with other human beings, the loving forgiveness in which we rise above “all claims about rights and all judgments of wrongs” (354). Nevertheless, this could only be the imaginative ideal of the ‘beautiful soul’; “it is a ‘too beautiful effort’ which ‘overleaps nature’” (381; Nohl, 322). “Unlike the ideal rational society, therefore, the ideal society of ‘beautiful souls’ cannot simply be reconstructed and used directly for the drawing of practical conclusions” (381). For as Hegel shows, the beautiful Christian community of love requires the elimination of all private property; but “eine solche Forderung hat keine Wahrheit für uns. Das Schicksal des Eigentums ist uns zu mächtig geworden ...” (Nohl, 273).

It is Harris’ contention that the theory of “‘life’ in its four phases” (381) implicit in the *Spirit of Christianity* provides the framework for grasping not only the fate of Christian love but also the basis upon which a more adequate ideal was formulated. And at this point in his argument he is forced to become highly conjectural. For he tries to show that this formulation of an adequate imaginative ideal was actually undertaken by Hegel in a lost ‘metaphysical treatise’ whose structure is suggested by the two fragments that have come to be known as *Systemfragment von 1800* (Nohl, 345–5). His argument is therefore that the lost manuscript stands in a relationship to the *Spirit of Christianity* that is parallel to the relationship of the *Positivity* essay to *The Life of Jesus*. His general conclusion is that “the two essays (the *Positivity* essay and the one that is lost) together formed a systematic statement of Hegel’s philosophy of religion and of his programme for religious reform” (381–2).³

³ This hypothesis also provides Harris with a very plausible basis for answering the much disputed question why Hegel began a revised introduction to the *Positivity* essay on Sept. 24, 1800. See 399–407.

Harris' interpretation of the attempt to apply the second 'canon' of the "Tübinger Fragment" already shows why Hegel's *practical* programme of reform ultimately required him to become a *theoretical* philosopher in his own right. This was the dilemma that Harris finds Hegel expressing in the letter he wrote to Schelling just six weeks after the completion of the 'lost metaphysical treatise': "In my scientific development, which began from the subordinate needs of men, I was bound to be driven on to science, and the ideal of my youth had to be transformed at the same time into reflective form, into a system. I ask myself now, while I am still occupied with this, how I am to find a way back to intervention in the life of men."⁴ Harris takes this self-description of Hegel's own 'scientific development' to provide a confirmation for the reconstruction presented in the first five chapters of *Hegel's Development*. In the last chapter, subtitled "the 'Way Back to Intervention in the Life of Men,'" Harris attempts an interpretation of the *Verfassungsschrift* in terms of the third 'canon' of 1793. Since I find this effort rather more obscure than the interpretations based on the first two 'canons,' I will not try to include an account of it in this short review.

My major objective has been to reveal the basic structure of Harris' new interpretation of Hegel's early development. I have attempted to suspend judgment on his treatment of many controversial questions because my primary concern has been to suggest why the book is important and that it deserves and will repay detailed examination. As Pöggeler rightly observed in his paper for the Hegel Conference in Royaumont (1964): "Die Frage nach dem Ansatz der *Phänomenologie* wirft uns ... nicht nur zurück auf den Versuch, die Entwicklung der Hegelschen Systematik in Jena herauszuarbeiten, sondern darüber hinaus zurück auf den Versuch einer neuen Deutung von Hegels Jugendschriften" (*Hegel-Studien*, Beiheft 3, 69). Harris' book is an unparalleled contribution to this effort. I am happy to add that the author is presently at work on a sequel to the book under review. It will continue the story of Hegel's development from 1801 to 1806.

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⁴ *Briefe*, I, 59–60.