

Hegelianism of the 'Right' and 'Left'

Author(s): H. S. Harris

Source: *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (Jun., 1958), pp. 603-609

Published by: [Philosophy Education Society Inc.](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20123669>

Accessed: 22-06-2015 19:35 UTC

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Philosophy Education Society Inc. is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Review of Metaphysics*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

HEGELIANISM OF THE 'RIGHT' AND 'LEFT'

H. S. HARRIS

THE fate of Hegel in the history of philosophy is an odd one. Almost before his death his pupils were already quarrelling about their heritage, and the eventual issue of their quarrel was two-fold: on the one side, the idealism of the "block universe" against which William James protested so vigorously because it made human moral endeavour seem ridiculous, and on the other side the materialism of the "class struggle" in which philosophical orthodoxy has become a primary concern of party politics. Neither result, one feels, would please Hegel himself much. But we need not trouble about that, or about the question which of these results is more genuinely "Hegelian"; what we have first to understand is how such opposite conclusions could have sprung from a common root. Two recently published French books will help us in this task. M. Pucelle has provided a history of English idealism from Coleridge to Bradley ¹ and M. Hyppolite has published a collection of essays bearing largely on the origins of Marxist theory in Hegel's *Phenomenology*.²

Except for the work of Hiralal Haldar published in 1927,³ Pucelle's book is the first systematic account of the influence of German idealism in England. On the flyleaf he quotes Muirhead's remark in his study of Coleridge that "the history in England of what at the present day is known as idealistic philosophy still remains to be written". The implication may seem somewhat unfair to Muirhead's own subsequent effort to fill the gap in *The Platonic Tradition in Anglo-Saxon Philosophy*. But this is not the case. Muirhead characterized his own work as "studies" and made no attempt to write a complete history, whereas Pucelle gives a full account of the idealist "school" and even sketches

¹ Jean Pucelle, *L'Idéalisme en Angleterre de Coleridge à Bradley* (Neuchâtel, Switzerland, 1955).

² Jean Hyppolite, *Etudes sur Marx et Hegel* (Paris, 1955).

³ Hiralal Haldar, *Neo-Hegelianism* (London, 1927). Even this volume is not a history—as its author confesses.

in the related currents of thought in poetry (Wordsworth, Browning) and theology (F. D. Maurice, James Martineau, Newman). Careful comparison reveals that he has tried as far as possible to avoid going over the ground that Muirhead had already covered. Thus he gives a full account of the work of Ferrier, where Muirhead was only interested in Ferrier's abortive struggle to understand Hegel; but when he comes to the *Essays in Philosophical Criticism* (1883) he is content simply to indicate their nature and the reason for their importance, and to refer his readers to Muirhead's full analysis. Even in the case of Bradley, who is treated at length by both authors, the two discussions are complementary in that Muirhead was concerned with the *development* of Bradley's thought while Pucelle treats it as a system.

In a sense this laudable desire not to plagiarize, even in the most respectable way, is the cause of one slight weakness in Pucelle's book. He succeeds in making clear what a variety of influences went into the making of English idealism, but there is one element to which he does not give sufficient prominence. He discusses Green's criticism of Plato and Aristotle in epistemology but never his debt to them in ethics and political theory; and he mentions but does not discuss Bosanquet's concern with Plato. This is a pity because the common debt of the two thinkers (and of the whole tradition) to Plato and Aristotle would provide him with a key for something which remains in his presentation a paradox. He follows Nettleship in regarding T. H. Green as essentially a "Kantian" thinker whereas his colleagues and successors were for the most part "Hegelians." But he also makes clear the complementary roles played by Green and Caird in the development of idealism at Oxford, and emphasizes the fact that Bosanquet's work in political philosophy—of which he thinks very highly—was a faithful continuation of Green's work in the same field.⁴ Yet Caird and Bosanquet are perhaps the purest "Hegelians" in the whole group.

⁴ Pucelle does not make clear the extent to which the English idealists tried to make their social theories effective in actual practice. He appears not to be acquainted with the work of F. P. Harris, *The Neo-Idealist Political Theory* (New York, 1944), in which the continuity of the radical tradition from Mill to Green and Bosanquet is emphasized.

Pucelle hardly seems aware of any difficulty here because what he means by the "Kantian" element in Green's thought is in fact something rather peculiar and not specifically Kantian at all. He distinguishes three main themes in the tradition of English idealism: personal freedom, the synthetic relation of subject and object, and organic totality.⁵ None of these themes was a novel importation but the first was reinforced by the influence of Kant and the third by that of Hegel—the second can be regarded as neutral ground. Thus what seems to be crucial in Pucelle's mind when he distinguishes between Green and Bosanquet is that Green believed in personal immortality whereas Bosanquet did not.⁶ But this criterion would make McTaggart a "Kantian" thinker and Caird an enigma. It is a pity that Pucelle hardly does more than mention McTaggart. Apart from being the most serious lacuna in his book, a comparison between McTaggart and Bradley with respect to their debt to Hegel would make clear that the relation of the free individual person to the Absolute is a fundamental problem *within* the Hegelian tradition. In so far as it is true that Green was a "Kantian," his Kant was the Kant of Edward Caird, a Kant seen "with Hegelian spectacles";⁷ and to see Kant with Hegelian spectacles is one way of being a Hegelian.

The difficult problem of defining Bradley's debt to Hegel Pucelle handles very well. For he shows clearly how the idea of a kind of dialectical coherence is first Bradley's destructive weapon in his critique of "Appearance" and then his constructive postulate in the theory of "Reality." This, "the coherence theory of truth" as it came to be called when Joachim dragged it out into the open⁸ is what the English idealists made out of the Hegelian dialectic. It represents both their common debt to Hegel and their most distinctive and original contribution to the Hegelian tradition. The great problem in the Hegelian tradition

⁵ The three themes are first made explicit on p. 54 where Pucelle is about to embark on his analysis of Ferrier.

⁶ Cf. pp. 293-294.

⁷ The phrase comes from Rudolf Metz. Cf. *One Hundred Years of British Philosophy* (London, 1938), p. 273.

⁸ It is odd that, although the theme of organic wholeness plays such an important part in his history, Pucelle does not mention Joachim's work at all.

is whether the coherence exists or whether it has to be brought about. Bradley's position in the history of philosophy is secure because he grasped this nettle firmly and drew all the logical conclusions from a belief in the real existence of the Absolute. Almost all of the other English Hegelians believed in a real Absolute, but they wanted to eat their cake as well as have it. They wished to have their being in God, and yet to live and move by themselves and have the significance of their life and movement acknowledged. It has often been pointed out that Hegel's system was generally regarded by its English adherents as a bulwark for the truths of the Christian faith; and this was the paradox of the religious attitude as Bradley saw it—that the Christian is required to believe that God exists while acting as if everything still depended upon himself.

The only coherent alternative to Bradley's impersonal Absolute, and his denial of ultimate value to human moral striving, lies in regarding Hegel's Absolute as a pure ideal. This is tantamount to a denial of the existence of God; hence it was no accident that the split between "right" and "left" in the Hegelian tradition began on this issue. McTaggart alone among the English attempted this path; and, for all the waywardness of his interpretations, it must be said that he was almost alone among them in taking the dialectic process seriously as an essential part of Hegel's message. The dialectic rather than the Absolute was his link with Hegel. But he was not a real Hegelian of the "left" for he shared the intellectualism of his compatriots on the "right." He did not regard the dialectic as genuinely creative; it merely reveals a moral order of the Universe which is very reminiscent of Fichte. Indeed he could not regard the dialectic as creative, for he held, like Bradley, that time is "unreal"—from this point of view his system is not Hegelian at all but rather recalls Leibniz as Bradley recalls Spinoza.

The static intellectualism of the Hegelian "right" springs from their tendency to concentrate attention upon Hegel's *Logic*, treating it almost as if it were an old-fashioned system of metaphysics and forgetting its essentially historical character. The "left" took their stand from the beginning upon the *Phenomenology*; and the interest of M. Hyppolite's studies in Hegel and

Marx arises largely from the very mixed feelings that their views produce in him. For he is an "orthodox" Hegelian—if there be any such—but one who feels that the *Phenomenology* contains the essence of Hegel. His concern therefore is twofold. First he seeks to show that Marxism does have material and not merely formal roots in Hegel; and secondly that Marx was wrong to reject as much of Hegel as he did reject.

The official Marxist view is enshrined in the claim of Marx that he stood Hegel upon his head. This would seem to mean that Marx began as a student of Hegel but ended by retaining nothing except the dialectic method, for which his own studies in economics, and the actual experience of Engels, provided the content. Hyppolite argues that Marx derived his whole approach to economics from his reading of the *Phenomenology*, and that something like an embryo of the *Communist Manifesto* can be seen in his early study of the *Philosophy of Right*.

The resemblance between Hegel's theories about labour and money in certain sections of the *Phenomenology* and the views of Marx is easy to see. What is more interesting to observe is the difference. Hegel regards man's active relation to the world as a self-alienation, the source of an unhappiness which is only really healed by the final reconciliation in the Absolute, a reconciliation which can only be theoretical or contemplative. But for Marx this theoretical reconciliation is a fraud—a philosophical heaven in place of the old religious one. What we have to do is not to understand the world but to change it; the Hegelian Idea must be realized in our ordinary life. Hegel's "idealism" was only necessary because he had confused "objectification" with "alienation"; he mistook the historical condition of capitalist society for the nature of reality. Man expresses his nature objectively by molding the external world; the fact that he then finds that he is alienated from his own real substance is simply a result of social and economic conditions which must be transcended not just in theory but in practice. Thus in Marx the dialectic becomes wholly practical; and whereas the *Phenomenology* moves from the world of social relations to the realm of the abstract intellect, the dialectic of *Capital* moves in the opposite direction from the abstract notions of economics to the concrete realities of the class

struggle. This is M. Hyppolite's most interesting and perhaps his most important thesis,⁹ for in the light of it he is able to explain the apparent contradiction between the first and third books of *Capital*.

M. Hyppolite presents this view of Marx' relation to Hegel with care and sympathy for both sides. But throughout his discussion there is a continual suggestion that the Marxist solution is too simple, that it leaves out too much. Within the Marxist frame of reference it is impossible to do more than raise the question, or make a hint. Hyppolite points to the notorious difficulty of conceiving the "end of history," and asks whether there is not in fact a "will to power" operating in the dialectic of *Capital* which cannot be made to disappear by any economic revolution. Suspicions of this kind will presumably not trouble the Marxists much; but they lend some weight to Hyppolite's view that the problem of self-alienation is more than a merely economic one. The bulk of his book, which consists of essays expounding various parts of the *Phenomenology*, provides an apt commentary on this theme.

The final essay, however, requires a word to itself. It is entitled "Essay on the Logic of Hegel," but it preserves the unity of the book by being in fact a discussion of the relation of the *Phenomenology* to the *Logic*. When the dialectic is regarded as a purely practical matter—as in the case of Marx—the *Phenomenology* no longer leads us to the *Logic* but rather vice versa; and so we emerge with an absolute humanism. This does not satisfy M. Hyppolite, but his own conclusion, at least in this book, is peculiar to say the least of it. Faced with the choice between humanist historicism¹⁰ and a philosophy of the absolute which transcends all history, he suggests that a possible middle way may lie in taking the *Phenomenology* seriously and regarding history as a preparation for absolute knowledge. "But this would involve a kind of end to history in the proper sense of the term, or at least the appearance in human history of an absolutely novel

⁹ P. 157.

¹⁰ Hyppolite calls this "the usual heritage of Hegelianism" (p. 203). Clearly he has the Italian Hegelians as well as the Marxists in mind, but he seems to be ignoring the Anglo-Saxon tradition altogether.

phase."¹¹ We may be pardoned for thinking that even the classless society and the withering away of the State are less fantastic than this. The reconciliation of the two wings of Hegelianism does, perhaps, lie in taking the *Phenomenology* seriously; but that means taking the distinction between history and absolute knowledge, between time and eternity, seriously. The "right" deserve at least that much in justice. What they must surrender is the substantial reality of the Absolute, so that clearly the "left" will come off best. Since the Absolute is unhistorical it must forever remain an ideal; and then if it is to have any function in history at all it must be a *regulative* ideal. In any such reconciliation Hegel himself would have to surrender the ideal of philosophy as pure speculative contemplation, a sharing in the life of God, which he derived from Aristotle. The philosopher must be the critical conscience of his society. He must, in short, come back to the Cave.

The University of Illinois.

¹¹ P. 204.