

absolute more or less perfectly or in making progress towards it. But if Hegel did not, what are we to make of his philosophy?

At one point Lamb offers an account of 'abstract idealism' as treated by Hegel. We hope for something on idealism proper, but do not find it. The failure to follow up the topic is unfortunately typical of the book. It is a pity Lamb did not publish his thoughts first in article form, waiting until he had sorted them out better before putting them in a book. As it is he has produced a work which has many merits, but is also in some respects disappointing. With more time he could have made more of the material at his disposal, eliminated certain gross infelicities of wording ('Mechanists have been attributed with the desire...') and perhaps even read his proofs.

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Rüdiger Bubner, Zur Sache der Dialektik. Stuttgart, Philipp Reclam jun., 1980, pp. 164, pb.

There are, indeed, no commentaries on Hegel's Science of Logic to compare with the corpus of scholarship which has always surrounded Kant's Critique of Pure Reason. But is this, as Dieter Henrich has suggested, a result of Hegel scholars' regrettable tendency to deal in generalities - an unwillingness to examine the trees for their fascination with the wood? Or is there something about the Hegelian text which makes it peculiarly resistant to commentary in the sense that we (by which I mean those trained in traditional philosophy) are accustomed to? There is something to both ideas, and it is not the least merit of Rüdiger Bubner's Zur Sache der Dialektik that it gives them both weight.

If the science of logic really does follow the immanent, self-constructing path that Hegel says it does, then this severely limits the value of general considerations, set out in advance of embarking on the book's actual course. Bubner's very title makes this apparent. Dialectic concerns the Sache - not

treatment of living phenomena. The object of the passage about Socrates, as it turns out one of the most perceptive in the book, is to show that Hegel saw him as living in one form of life yet introducing or anticipating another; in these circumstances he was not just engaged in civil disobedience but in subversion of a more radical kind, and his being put to death is accordingly not the folly or crime it is often taken to be (there is some shrewd criticism of Wozzley's article on the subject). The chapters on the observation of organic nature offer a persuasive account of the centrality in all our thinking on this subject of the concept of the organism as a living whole. Mechanistic biology, it is argued, abstracts from this concept, but is committed to it all the same, a truth which, Lamb says, has been rediscovered in our own day by writers such as Bertalanffy.

One fault with the book, as will appear, is that it progresses from topic to topic with not much appearance of system. It amounts, in effect, to a sporadic commentary on the Phenomenology, one which is illuminating as far as it goes but leaves many questions unanswered. Its exegesis of Hegel is often fresh and suggestive; along with the short book by Richard Norman it should help to open up the mysteries of the Phenomenology for non-Hegelians. But though it may intrigue such readers it is hardly likely to satisfy them. First, because it takes up topics without pursuing them sufficiently far (what about Kantian objections to the introduction to the Phenomenology, or the argument that Hegel thought of designation as if it were something attempted by a disembodied mind?). Second, because it makes too little of the differences between Hegel and Wittgenstein as opposed to what they have in common. Hegel, according to the title, wanted to replace recourse to 'Foundations' by recourse to 'System'; there are things in On Certainty in particular which emphasise system in a similar way. But if we look closer it seems that while Hegel sought to present all thought as falling within a single system, Wittgenstein repudiated this idea. Hegel believed in system, Wittgenstein in systems. Lamb speaks of 'Wittgenstein's later definition of the absolute' and says that Wittgenstein 'had some knowledge of the absolute': even if this language can be accepted, with 'the absolute' simply meaning 'reality', Wittgenstein surely never believed in grasping the

just a 'thought' or a 'thing' but the subject-matter which actually includes both. We cannot first learn the steps and then set out on - in Bloch's phrase - 'the a priori process waltz'; at least, if we can, Hegel's least sympathetic critics are right and dialectic is no more than a device for manically pumping out triads, irrespective of context. As Bubner puts it, to the extent that dialectic is a method, it is one from which the question of its application cannot be separated.

And yet... how to embark on a commentary of an author who sets himself so directly against the whole received conception of philosophical discourse? It would be absurd to make commentary on Hegel a matter of fixing the semantics of the text, inserting unstated premises, and displaying structures of inference, when everything Hegel says (and does) challenges this as a conception of philosophical argument. True philosophical reasoning is not like deductive inference or scientific experiment, he says; it shakes the fixed ground of language and 'destroys' the normal form of the proposition.

Bubner balances such difficulties admirably. Zur Sache der Dialektik consists of four essays. In the first two Bubner advances bold and comprehensive answers to the question of Hegel's conception of philosophical reasoning; then, in the third (the longest) he sets out an account of one of the Logic's most arduous stretches, the chapter on the Begriff (notion or concept). Finally, in the fourth essay, he uses a comparison between Hegel and Plato to give a well taken corrective to a fashionable tendency in Hegel interpretation, to reduce dialectic to dialogue.

Like most truly original authors Hegel has been prey to various forms of revisionism. To some readers (especially those who would like to see the Master as a salonfhriger ecumenical progressive) the doctrine of Absolute Knowledge has always been embarrassing: revisionist Hegelianism plays it down, just as revisionist Marxism plays down the class struggle, and revisionist Freudianism the primacy of sex.

When the Phenomenology of Spirit monopolized interest in Hegel, scandalous claims to Absolute Knowledge could be avoided

by concentrating on the pre-eminence of phenomenological experience. But, in recent years, this has become less tenable, as that experience itself has come to seem more and more dubious. As Bubner points out, 'the unquestioned assumptions of historicist, Marxist or existentialist views of historical life [have] receded in conviction' (p.70).

Once attention turns to the Science of Logic, however, the stronger claims are inescapable. Hegel says that he is articulating the categorial structure of absolute reality. Moreover, in doing so, he explicitly rejects the Kantian qualification that such a priori knowledge is only relative - knowledge of appearances, not knowledge of things as they are in themselves.

In response to the apparent excesses of these claims an approach to Hegel has developed in Germany which one might call 'ultra-Kantian' or 'ultra-anti-realist'. The key to this reading is that it inverts the obvious interpretation of Hegel's strictures on Kant. Hegel is not, it is said, just turning back towards a pre-Kantian conception of metaphysics. To the contrary, he is taking Kantianism to its logical conclusion: since we cannot know truths about objects a priori, except as truths about the structure of our experience of them, these truths about the way reality presents itself are, indeed, truths about reality's ultimate structure. Kant's restriction of a priori knowledge to knowledge of appearances collapses once it is realized that, properly understood, appearances are things in themselves.

But there are difficulties with this approach, plausible though it is. By transposing Kantian-type arguments into a Hegelian context there is a danger of bringing with them a Kantian distinction between form and content. No Hegelian can accept such a division, which is itself, in fact, a product of Kant's distinction between appearances and things in themselves: the things in themselves are the unknown source of the content of perception, which is then constituted as experience by the activity of the forms of thought.

Bubner fastens on this point. Those authors who see Hegel's dialectic solely in terms of a philosophy of dialogue (in the spirit, for example, of a Habermasian 'consensus theory of truth') miss the fact that what Hegel praises in Plato is pre-

cisely the way in which dialogue is integrated into a unified exposition: the tendency towards system. And this, Bubner claims, means that the dialogue approach neglects the fundamental point that dialectic does not (just) deal with 'forms of thought' or 'structures of intersubjectivity': it generates form only out of the unity of form and content. Form develops in the course of the reflective movement of the single Sache.

This conception of reflection is quite fundamental to Bubner's own reading of Hegel. The rigour of philosophical argument depends on it; but it is not capable of being established by any more fundamental argument in its turn.

The activity of science and presupposition are related to one another. In the incapacity to get by entirely without presupposition the irreducible fact of reflection is shown. There is reflection and without reflection science too cannot think. No scientific enterprise can go beyond or lay aside this 'there is'; for it rests upon it itself. (p.48)

In this way Bubner sees Hegel's dialectical reflection as analogous to Descartes' Cogito. Just as the structure of the argument of the Cogito cannot be given non-circular specification (for it is more fundamental than any inferential structure), so, Bubner is claiming, it is impossible to ask that reflection be specified independently. There is an ineliminable element of self-evidence in dialectical reasoning. If we loosen the grip which formalistic prejudices have on our conception of argument we can lay ourselves open to what dialectic shows. But that perception is indispensable.

Bubner's emphasis on reflection neatly answers the question of how dialectic can be rigorous, despite not having an independently specifiable method (it proves itself in its application); and why philosophy should be said to destroy the normal form of language (philosophical discourse is poised between what we say - more accurately, what we think we say - and what we really mean). Bubner has an elegant account, too, of the relationship between Phenomenology and Logic (in the former the movement through presuppositions is not clearly comprehended; in the latter it has been integrated as a constitutive part of the method itself).

Nevertheless, the interpretation is not without difficulties. One which Bubner acknowledges himself (pp. 37-39) is how reflection could genuinely be said to lead to logically richer categories. One might imagine that the effect of criticizing presuppositions would be to relativize - not to strengthen - the categories with which one starts. But this is evidently weaker than what Hegel aspires to.

Another is that it seems to leave no room for Hegel's claims about the closure of the system. If speculative philosophy is, as Bubner says, the practice of reflecting on and making thematic the presuppositions which govern everyday consciousness, then the completeness of this process is bound to be a contingent matter - unless, that is, some way could be found to make good the claim that the forms of everyday consciousness are necessary and complete. I do not see how any such demonstration could fail to be unacceptably self-supporting. For the necessity and completeness of the forms would, of course, be being shown relative to a particular collection of forms of consciousness, which (apart from that demonstration itself) cannot be guaranteed to be necessary and complete.

And yet, if there is no independent reason to establish the closure of the system, Hegel's achievement is seriously weakened: there is no longer, it seems, any right to assert that the progress through the presuppositions of everyday consciousness amounts to the career of the unique Sache selbst.

It is a measure of the quality of this elegant and lucid work that the reader is led to these epic questions as he should be: through - not in spite of - the details of interpretation.

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Richard Norman and Sean Sayers, Hegel, Marx and Dialectic: A Debate. Brighton, Harvester Press, 1980, pp. 200, £18.50, pb. £4.50.

For several years Richard Norman and Sean Sayers have conducted a debate on the Hegelian and Marxist dialectic. Their respective