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**HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY**  
**G.W.F. HEGEL**  
**HIS LIFE, WORKS AND THOUGHT**

*translate by*

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

7	Introduction
9	Chapter I Life and works
11	Chapter II The young Hegel
15	Chapter III The underlying theses of the system
19	Chapter IV The partitioning of philosophy: Idea, Nature and Spirit
23	Chapter V Dialectics
27	Chapter VI Criticism of earlier philosophies

6 *Indice*

31 Chapter VII

The position of the *Phenomenology* within the hegelian system

7.1. Consciousness, 34 – 7.2. Self-Consciousness, 34 – 7.3. Reason, 38 – 7.4. The Spirit, 40.

43 Chapter VIII

The position of the *Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences* within the hegelian system

8.1. Logic, 43 – 8.2. The Philosophy Of Nature, 47 – 8.3. The Philosophy Of The Spirit, 49 – 8.3.1. *The Subjective Spirit*, 49 – 8.3.2. *The Objective Spirit*, 51 – 8.3.3. *The Philosophy of History*, 58 – 8.3.4. *The Absolute Spirit*, 60.

63 *Conclusion*

69 *Bibliography*

## INTRODUCTION

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's thought (1770-1831) is generally and rightfully considered by scholars of the History of Philosophy as the supporting pillar of the whole development of the western contemporary ideological horizon. The influence that Hegel's thought had throughout the XIX century, is equal perhaps only to that of his stronger opponent, Karl Marx. His influence during the XX century was subsequently proved by the – positive or negative – revival of his structural and methodic system, by the different philosophical schools living during the century of the two world wars (phenomenology, existentialism, epistemology and hermeneutics). Still today, Hegel's approach seems to put forward hidden requests and demands, concerning the shaping of the economically and politically globalized world. For this reason it is very important to analyze the genetic modalities and the structure of Hegel's thought's articulation, to assess the efficacy of the system as an intellectual and moral lead for mankind. Or on the contrary, such study could attempt to indicate the necessity and concrete possibility to leave the said approach behind.

The challenge and the aim of the present work of recapitulation of Hegel's speculation is to show how it is made of two distinct moments, one opposed to and consecutive to the other. The first moment is related to the production of the so-called *Early Theological Writings*. The second one – with decisive consequences for the identification of the

whole and complete Hegelian speculative system – includes some crucial works, such as *The Phenomenology of the Spirit* and the *Encyclopedia of the philosophical Sciences*. To formulate the deep and elevated core of his own thinking, during the first stage of his speculation, Hegel seems to re-draw from **the doubly dialectical and creative infinite principle** which had set off the history of western philosophy (with Ionic philosophy and later naturalist authors), to be then occulted by the couple Plato and Aristotle. The said principle was then handed to Giordano Bruno's thinking passionate revival at the beginning of modernity, to be then again left in the hidden and underground oblivion of every later revolutionary proposal until the rise of the French Revolution. The second moment of Hegel's speculation instead seems to deny from the root the vitality and the open intellectual rationality of the principle of infinite creative through an abstract and distinct overturning of the same. The Hegel of maturity abandons his revolutionary and Romantic ideals to begin to structure the ideological system that will eventually make the traditional and absolutistic element of subjective form, compatible and con-possible with the rational and enlightenment element of the objective and concrete content. He will indeed make a synthesis (in an anti-Schelling prospective) of Fichte's and of Kant's positions. Therefore Karl Marx was not actually mistaken, when, following the critical thoughts put forward by Ludwig Feuerbach, he accused the philosopher from Stuttgart to be a philosopher of "reaction". In his principle, Hegel had capsized and overturned the real and concrete world, to devise it from an alienated "head", built on abstraction and separation from reality and from its productive power (therefore practicing a Hegelian style criticism to the very foundations of absolute idealism).

By systematically and briefly addressing Hegelian philosophy the present work will cast a light on the essential turning points of the transition from the first to the second stage, hence showing the possible criticisms that the revival of a creative-dialectical position on natural and rational infinite could and can still be put forward against Hegel's global approach.



## CHAPTER I

### LIFE AND WORKS

**Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel** (1770-1831) was educated according to the rigid principles of a strict religious and political orthodoxy. He pursued his first humanities and science studies in Stuttgart. As an adolescent he was interested in the Classical world and the Bible and he became acquainted with the works of Goethe, Schiller and Lessing. In 1788 after obtaining his diploma, Hegel was admitted to the theological seminary of Tübing (the *Stift*), where he had the chance to meet and befriend Hölderlin and Schelling. Here he developed a strong aversion towards the method and the dogmatic content of teachings, as well as the rigid structures of human relationships expressed by teachers. He grew close to the positions of the French revolutionaries, and became very passionate about the history of rationalist thought (Greek Classics, Enlightenment thinkers Kant and Kantians). In 1790 he was appointed *Magister Philosophiae*. In 1793 he terminated his studies. Working as tutor, he began to write works concerning religious criticism: *Life of Jesus* (1795), *National Religion and Christianity* (1795), *The Positivity of the Christian Religion* (1796).

In 1797 he moved from Bern to Frankfurt, where together with Hölderlin and Schelling he wrote the *System-Program*, the manifesto of German idealism. Hegel also wrote *The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate* and *Fragment of a System* (1800), which were the first drafts of a general philosophical theory. In Jena, where Hegel had moved in 1801,

he published *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's Systems of Philosophy* (1801). Hegel secured the position of lecturer by submitting *De orbitis planetarium*. In Weimar he met Goethe and Schiller. Between 1802 and 1803 he began a profitable philosophical collaboration with his friend Schelling, and together they published the *Critical Journal of Philosophy*. Hegel witnessed the Napoleonic occupation of Jena to then move to Bamberg. When Hegel returned to Jena, he published the *Phenomenology of the Spirit* (1807), the work where he reached the critical detachment from his friend's Schelling speculation. At the end of 1808 he was appointed headmaster and professor of philosophy at the Gymnasium of Nuremberg.

Between 1812 and 1816 Hegel wrote the *Science of Logic*. From 1816 he began teaching philosophy at the University of Heidelberg. In 1817 he published the *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*. In 1818 he was appointed chair of philosophy at the University of Berlin. In 1820 he published *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. He then travelled to the Netherland, he visited Prague and Vienna. In 1827 in Paris he met the philosopher Victor Cousin. In 1829 he was appointed Rector of the University of Berlin, celebrating the alliance between the Prussian State and the freedom of teaching that was granted to scholars. In 1830 he condemned the liberal revolutions occurring in France and Belgium. Shortly before dying in 1831 he also condemned the extension of voting in England, preferring to preserve the traditional system by social order. On the basis of the notes collected by his students the following works were published posthumously: *Lectures of the Philosophy of Religion* and *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (1832), *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (1837) and *Lectures on Aesthetics* (1836, 1838).

## CHAPTER II

### THE YOUNG HEGEL

The utter, complete and absolute (universal) liberty of the factor, of the agent, expressive and creative cause (the *Spirit* and God), is the foundation, the principle and the essence of Hegel's juvenile philosophy. Indeed in his juvenile works (1793-1800) the German philosopher gets caught up in the revolutionary enthusiasm of the early Romantics, libertarians and egalitarians (his friends Schelling and Hölderlin), evoking the doubly dialectic, concrete and material, spirit of the creative infinite. In this manner the theological argument here introduced, allows to critically revisit from the root all dogmatic and systemic (theoretical and practical) contributions of creed and of Christian Church. Hegel's aim is to redraw the original and revolutionary creative root of Christian religion, to rediscover its liberating, egalitarian and fraternal power (which is neither separated nor abstract). In this way he naturally gets close to the spirit and the concreteness of the facts and the events of the French Revolution, in the attempt of bringing to Germany the same mystical, religious and rational afflatus for a deep and radical transformation of the religious, ethical and political concept concerning the life of European people, and nations (states). To be restored, such a panic, total and revolutionary impulse had to bring forth a new thinking and a new creative imagination. Thus the soul of young Hegel leaped on this spoor, in his very own Hunting of Actaeon. With his fellow colleagues of the *Stift*, Hegel sets off to find this phoenix that always resurfaces in

the history of western thinking (especially at times of crisis). The young Hegel begins to develop a new *mythology of reason*, with the vision of its evolutionary history and its historical manifestation. In the unity including reason and heart, this path showed an infinite multiple richness, as well as a deep, radical and original creativity of imagination.

This was the principle of the *Spirit* of the infinite that materialized and lived by moving and by being realized in the history of the world. Through his personal readings of Rousseau, Lessing and Spinoza, the young Hegel, naturally entered the context and the historical conditions of the German Protestant Reformation, which from a mystical, Neo-Platonism and at the same time very concrete point of view had merged together the religious aspect of salvation and the immanent political determination. For this reason, the original open community of free, equal and fraternal men, of the early Christian unions (sharing reason and heart) could provide the model and the archetype, the horizon for comprehension and the ideal for rules of a new society and of a new civil living. The latter could even be able to dissolve the idols of the distinct and overturned ruling of the Church and of its modernly secularized form: the State, which was still organized feudally according to separated and distinct social orders.

In this model community, which was at the same time Edenic and earthly, the acknowledgment of mutual liberty, was the drive and the impulse to accept the possible widening and universal rooting of an equal reason of the heart and of sentiment. The latter was to run throughout space and time, in close communities and people as well as in distant ones, in the persuasion for the possible permanence of the *Spirit* itself. Therefore young Hegel began to explore by going back in history the connections, the affinities and similarities of such reason and of such *Spirit*. In this way in *Life of Jesus* and in *The Positivity of Christian Religion* (1795-1797) Hegel grasped the deep difference – the actual overturning - between the message of love and equal liberty originally argued by the Nazarene and the doctrinal and disciplinary formulation of the Christian Church that succeeded to him. Inspired by the Kantian difference between heteronomy and autonomy, young Hegel accentuated the juxtaposition between an intimately felt and lived faith, strong of a shared and equal liberty, and a manner of belief based upon images and the extrinsic

determination, which had been imposed due to the total emptying of human spiritual discretion, will and intellect. In the *Spirit of Christianity and its Fate* (1789-1799) the orderly and not felt adherence to Christian dogmas, the compliance to discipline norms conveyed by the ecclesiastical magisterium are drawn back to their historical cause of Jewish religion. In fact, Jews believe in a God who is the principle and cause of salvation, as it is imagined as a totally alien and dominating power on nature in general and on humanity in particular. The immediate consequence of this entrustment and of this emptying (self-annihilation) is the qualification and definition of the very divine power as a force of destruction, to which Jews submit to, and consequently practice towards both nature in general and the people near them. The God of armies and destruction, the God who is the Lord justifies them for the alienation that they themselves pursue towards their own humanity and towards their fraternal sentiment (towards nature and brotherly people). As they deny any opening and relationship, Jews themselves (as in a self-fulfilled prophecy) inevitably suffer the effects of such negations, which are casted upon them by the Alien (natural or human) who they themselves encountered. In this sense, Jews fulfill their own end by identifying with the logic (and divine relativity) of violence and war.

The new spirit brought about by Jesus of Nazareth refutes the logic of the mandatory reflection of the Identical. The humanely and naturally creative that used to be annihilated and fought against for being a treason against the superior lordship of a separated and abstract divine power (absolute in its own hypostasis) is, here and now, reaffirmed and reinforced, supported and multiplied, for its true, real and good inherent power, by the very *Spirit* of infinite life. The infinite and immanent creative together with infinite liberty are united to manifest, show and determine the rationality, beauty and goodness of the countless multiplicity of natural and human tendencies. The logic and the reflective necessity of the Identical – please consider the Fichtian position – is thus overturned and overruled by the open and infinite breach made by equal and loving liberty. Thence the logic of necessity is revolutionized by the logic of open possibility.

The absolute and irremediable contradiction of Jewish religion, wrenching in the revenge catapulted by the reaction of those who are

excluded, denied and annihilated, is now unraveled by a solution that restored the correct order of the Being. By affirming this, the young Hegel could thus recall that Mediterranean civilization that had made this tendency the core of its foundation, its essence, its horizon and the order of its civilizing work: the ancient Greek civilization. Indeed Ancient Greeks had moulded their cultural development without ever separating or juxtaposing nature and reason: sentiment, desire, will and intellect were always considered as implanted one in the other, proving the rational evolution of their spirit. However the position expressed by Jesus and by ancient Greeks has been historically overwhelmed (even though it always awaited revival and rebirth): indeed the perpetuators of the evangelical message overturned real and authentic faith, replacing it with a fetish and an idol of power (divine and secular), reviving the violent spirit and the logic of partition and of separation, of contrast and of the need for victory of authority. All modern Churches – Catholic and Reformed – throughout the subsequent history of western civilization brought up again the separated and abstract idea and reality of a dominating and supreme God, fighting for success, thence justifying all sorts of violent assertions by those who self-proclaimed themselves loyal instruments of God. All assertions were generally also cloaked with ostensible justice, reason, goodness or respect for the divine and correct (natural) order of things. For young Hegel's reflection it was thus necessary to return air and voice, as well as space and hope, to the eternal and true faith: the *Spirit* of infinite and universal love.