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Review of *A Reading of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*

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HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

a glowing appreciation of the completeness and imaginative beauty of Descartes's account of the Vortex, and he laid the text aside. But something happened in 1758 which forced him to change his mind. The return of Halley's comet in that year, as Sir Isaac Newton had predicted, forced him to add the following words to his essay:

Even we, while we have been endeavouring to represent all philosophical systems as mere inventions of the imagination . . . have insensibly been drawn in, to make use of language expressing the connecting principles of this system, as if they were the real chains which Nature makes use of . . . Can we wonder, then, that it should have gained the general and complete approbation of mankind. (P. 34)

Foley concludes that there is a note of disappointment here, as well as a hesitation to publish. But I am inclined to think that Adam Smith's devotion to vortex theory is exaggerated, to say the least. The real excitement in Adam Smith is the famous passage about systems and machines (given on p. 30), which reveals his realization that the astronomy of the solar system has become a genuine science, and that the solar system behaves like a machine. And it suggests to him that his own social physics may be a genuine science, not mere political, economic theory, confirming the faith that Gassendi gave him. His brief, early essay on Greek physics, which ends abruptly, also suggests that his ambitious plans to survey all the branches of human learning had become pointless.

The study of what Foley calls "Greek Anthropology," the conceptual "history" of mankind's evolution, turned out to be not a "veiled inheritance" but a practical asset for Adam Smith in his intense discussions of the subject with his Scottish friends.

The fact that some of his use of the psychology of sympathy in shaping his Theory of Moral Sentiments can be found in Polybius is worth noting. The quotation on this subject by the Scottish classicist John Gillie is certainly an exaggerated statement, but by no means unreasonable. The shift from Hutcheson's emphasis on "disinterested benevolence" to "the impartial spectator in the human breast," though it is developed in a way that reflects the Glasgow background, is nevertheless the result of an independent psychology. There are a few moralists in Adam Smith's background who, better than Polybius, could throw light on this emphasis.

As for other sections of the book, the chapter on Quesnay, blood-letting, and physiocracy, is a delightful story, well told. The attempt to link the "invisible chains in things" with "the hidden hand" and other references in The Wealth of Nations seems to me far-fetched. And as for "the division of labor," it seems to me that this is related by Adam Smith primarily to the advantages in machine production rather than to anything in Greek metaphysics. "The beauty of utility" to which both Smith and Hume sing praises, needs further discussion.

The book is full of good points to argue about and to speculate with.

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Until the present, comparatively few intensive studies in English of Hegel's Phänomenologie des Geistes had been available. There was the J. B. Baillie translation, Loewenberg's commentary, Heidegger's short expatiation on the introduction, Kojève's eclectic Lectures—and not much more.1 But in the last few years, as if to begin to make up for a serious void, a veritable outpour-

ing of work on the Phänomenologie has taken place. In addition to Lauer’s Reading, we now have Judith Shklar’s study of political and social ideas in the Phänomenologie, Richard Norman’s Introduction, Werner Marx’s commentary, a complete translation of Hyppolite’s famous French commentary, a commentary on the First Part by this reviewer, and a new translation by A. V. Miller—-not to mention books of wider scope by Plant, Taylor, Rotenstreicht, Cook, and others, and several anthologies, which also include close studies of the Phänomenologie.

Quentin Lauer is fairly well known as a lecturer on the Phänomenologie at Fordham University, and like Loewenberg at Berkeley he was finally impelled to organize materials imparted in lectures over the years between the covers of a book. Lauer’s entitling the book a “reading” rather than a “commentary” bespeaks a commendable modesty about his work: he considers himself to be offering just one interpretation among many possible on the points covered, and he is solicitors to show appropriate recognition of, and deference to, the extraordinary difficulty of Hegel’s text.3

Lauer’s work might best be described as “professorial”—-featuring a thorough and painstaking explication de texte. After a very short introduction, Lauer plunges without further adieu in medias res—a chapter-by-chapter and sometimes line-by-line analysis of the Phänomenologie itself. His only major departure from the order of the text is in placing his exposition of the preface (which was written after the composition of the Phänomenologie) at the end, rather than at the beginning. Like Loewenberg, whom Lauer quotes more frequently than any other single authority,4 Lauer has produced a book that is definitely intended primarily for those already familiar with the text. With most chapters, one who has not read Hegel’s text would have difficulty following Lauer’s analysis of Hegel’s arguments. At any rate, unlike more presumptuous commentators such as Ivan Soll,5 Lauer at least does not entitle a nonintroductory work “Introduction,” nor does he give any intimation that it is an introduction. It is not. In fact, it seems that Lauer and/or the publisher go out of their way in some respects to avoid providing editorial adjuncts which might be of use, let us say, to an advanced undergraduate student getting his first taste of Hegel—for example, an index, explanatory subtitles (such as Hyppolite uses in his commentary to break up the developments into their often triadic patterns of movement), a schemata of, or a comprehensive introduction to, the complicated structures of the Phänomenologie,6 and so on. The only “model” which Lauer introduces in a couple of places for following…

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3 A difficulty which is sometimes exaggerated. This difficulty is due in great part to an extrinsic condition—a lack of familiarity in the present age with the historical, literary, and philosophical figures Hegel uses as paradigms (generally without specifying them by name). The difficulty is also compounded by translators who do not understand Hegel’s unique and highly unorthodox, often etymological, usage of common German philosophical terms like Konkrete, Abstrakte, Einzelne, Geist, Begriff, and so on.

4 Lauer generates some confusion in his manner of reference to Loewenberg’s commentary, which is in dialogue form. Lauer refers to the statements by each of Loewenberg’s “characters”—Hardith and Meredy—as if they were statements by Loewenberg himself. However, Loewenberg states in his introduction that Hardith and Meredy are meant to typify two different points of view. It would seem that Loewenberg as a kind of “playwright” in this literary context should not be simply identified with either (or both) of the divergent viewpoints.


6 To add a personal note, I recall my first exposure to Hegel’s Phänomenologie as a sophomore in college, when one of the few clues available as to what was going on there was provided by Hegel himself—the outlines and summaries provided by Hegel in his Propadectics (Loewenberg trans.). Whereas Hegel himself was very liberal in offering to his students such introductions to the basic structures of his work (structures
the pattern of phenomenological development is the model of a "dead-end street"—an analogy that does help to bring out the "trial-and-error" character of Hegel's phenomenological enterprise but that is not felicitous if one wants to avoid giving the impression that the great majority of mental excursions in the Phänomenologie "lacks necessity" and could have been avoided if Hegel were more judicious, more direct, less verbose, and more editorially sophisticated.

On the positive side, it should be remarked that the textual work is very assiduous: the "readings" are literally packed with hundreds of short quotations from the text, which are for the most part appropriate, although in some places the sheer multitude of textual citations seems to submerge the interpretation. Lauer makes an extraordinary number of very useful references to the German, bringing out Hegel's constant play on the meanings and even the sounds of words—important subtleties that must almost completely escape any reader of the BAILLIE translation.

It is evident that it is Lauer's intention that, if he is to err in interpretation, he will err on the side of caution rather than adventuresomeness. In view of his strong (and warranted) criticisms of Kojève, who wants to read the whole Phänomenologie from the vantage point of a Marxist construal of the Master-Slave dialectic, it would seem that Lauer is perhaps determined to avoid at all costs such subjective arbitrariness in his own interpretation. He adheres stringently to the actual text, scrupulously avoiding bringing in any examples or even historical allusions that Hegel does not explicitly refer to. The most notable departures from this studied caution are found in the chapter "Virtue and the Course of Events," and in the initial series of sections on "Spirit," which are concerned with developments in social and political consciousness, and which this reviewer must confess he found the most interesting and illuminating sections of Lauer's book as a whole. Perhaps in the remaining parts of the book Lauer was trying to lean too far in the other direction from Kojève.

It will be impossible in the space of this review to go into great detail on a number of issues where I would take exception to Lauer's interpretations, but I will indicate some of the more notable points at which Lauer's "reading" seems to be imperfect, or at least unsubstantiated. I will locate the interpretation via abbreviated chapter headings from the BAILLIE translation (Lauer sometimes alters these headings for didactic purposes).

1. Introduction. In the very last paragraph of his introduction Hegel says that consciousness in the Phänomenologie will "arrive at a point where it puts aside its illusory appearance of being burdened with something foreign . . . and precisely at this point its presentation will be identified with what is properly speaking the science of spirit; and finally, because it itself will have grasped this, its being, it will show forth the nature of absolute knowing itself" (Lauer's trans., pp. 39f.). Lauer takes this passage as proof that Hegel (contrary to the opinion of Haring et al.) intended from the very beginning to write the last half of the Phänomenologie, concluding with the chapter "Absolute Knowledge," and not just the first half, which concludes with the chapters on die Sache selbst. While I think Lauer is on the right track in his thesis, the passage he refers to does not really suffice as proof for this thesis. The passage need not refer to the chapter on Absolute Knowledge at all. It could be a reference to the type of consciousness which appears in the sections on die Sache selbst, a consciousness which, Hegel says, "ist die absolute Sache" and "gilt als das Absolute." Also, as Pöggeler mentions in a study of the Phänomenologie, Hegel indicates in a fragment (1805) that "Absolute Knowledge" begins with the sections on die Sache selbst, although the chapter specifically entitled "Absolute Knowledge" is reserved to the end.

which, for a believer in system like Hegel, are all-important, some of Hegel's interpreters seem to think such introductory materials unnecessarily condescending, or at least superfluous.

7 VI, B, I and II in the BAILLIE translation.
9 Ibid., p. 302.
2. Sense-Certainty ... Toward the end of this chapter comes Hegel’s well-known double metaphor of the Eleusinian mysteries and the instinct of animals for “eating them up.” Lauer (p. 50) interprets this metaphor as a pejorative assessment of the way that some advocates of sense-certainty try to avoid skeptical doubts. But the context seems to indicate that Hegel proposes the metaphor as a positive example of the way that sensible philosophers (phenomenological idealists) should deal with the supposed independence of sense objects, in contradiction to the advocates of “universal experience” who claim that “reality, or the existence of external things as ‘theses’, i.e., sense objects, holds some kind of absolute truth for consciousness.”\footnote{11}

3. Force and Understanding ... Toward the end of this chapter, the concept whose development out of (Kantian) “Understanding” is traced here becomes the concept of an “inverted world” (die verkehrte Welt), in which ideas turn into their opposites. Lauer interprets these passages as showing how “consciousness has fallen into a hole it cannot get out of, on the level of understanding” (p. 84) and that at this stage concepts “can ‘mean’ what the subject wants them to mean” (ibid.) and that the “inverted world’ of understanding” is to be contrasted with the “true world of self-consciousness” (p. 92). In other words, Lauer sees the “inverted world” as a kind of “dead-end street.” But Hegel himself sees the development of the insight into the “inverted world” as a necessary and sufficient step to the paradoxical “Infinite Concept,”\footnote{12} the harbinger of true speculative-dialectical “Reason” in the Hegelian sense, thence providing the transit out of Understanding to the stage of Self-Consciousness Proper.\footnote{13}

4. Stoicism. Lauer (pp. 113, 117) presents the “Stoical” self-consciousness as a development out of the Slave-consciousness in the Master-Slave dialectic just preceding this section, in spite of Hegel’s statements\footnote{14} to the effect that the Master consciousness also develops from its own motivations into Stoicism. Thus, when he comes to explicate (p. 114) Hegel’s allusion to a “sublated Master” such as Marcus Aurelius, the explanation does not jibe with his continued emphasis on the sublation of the Slave consciousness.

5. Reason. Lauer’s presentation of Hegel’s primordial “category of Reason” as “pure ego” (p. 130) makes Hegel sound overly Fichtean. Hegel makes it quite clear that the Category he’s talking about is the primordial identity of Self-Consciousness and Being.\footnote{15}

6. Lauer interprets Absolute Knowledge (pp. 258, 280) in a kind of quantitative fashion, as if the most important thing from the final “absolute” standpoint was to be able to “see” all the preceding developments in the Phänomenologie in their multitudinous and complex interrelationships. This is no doubt why he thinks the next logical step for the reader after arriving at the chapter on “Absolute Knowledge” would be to reread the whole book for a second time (to better fill out the skeletal “Absolute” view with all of its concrete details). But surely the most important characteristic of the “Absolute” viewpoint is that it signifies that one has finally comprehended the basic dialectical unity-in-distinction of subject and object, being and thought, amidst all the subordinate “categorical” oppositions and dialectical movements delineated in the course of the Phänomenologie. Some other points on which I think Lauer could be rebutted: His ambivalence as to whether “Life” in initial sections of Self-consciousness is to be interpreted organically (p. 94) or supra-organically (pp. 97, 98); his interpretation of death in the “Life and Death Struggle” preceding the Master-Slave dialectic as “metaphorical”; his failure to recognize that in the con-

\footnote{11} P. G., p. 87.
\footnote{12} Ibid., p. 124.
\footnote{13} Ibid., p. 128.
\footnote{14} E.g., ibid., p. 153.
\footnote{15} Cf. ibid., p. 167: “Die Kategorie ... ist dies, dass Selbstbewusstsein und Sein dasselbe Wesen ist ... einfache Einheit des Selbstbewusstseins und des Seins. ...” Hegel certainly does not mean this in a Cartesian or Fichteian sense, i.e., as a unity discovered in. or produced by, the pure ego in abstraction from being or objectivity.
text of the chapter on "Pleasure and Necessity" the "pleasure" spoken of seems to be specifically erotic; his application of *die Sache selbst* to the activity of scholars—an interesting interpretation which is found also in Hypollite, but for which there seems to be insufficient textual or contextual justification; his overly facile remark that "a quick perusal of Kant's *Metaphysics of Morals* would indicate that it comes up with no conclusions which are not already considered morally acceptable" (p. 221n.); and his similarly facile identification (pp. 262–63) of "the absolute" with God (God is an "absolute," but so is the state, and so is the sophisticated Rational Consciousness, and in a certain sense so is Being).

Aside from the above exceptions, Lauer's interpretations seems to me plausible on most points, and he certainly manages to avoid the egregious errors and stereotypes that have plagued Hegel scholarship for too long.

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One can think of a number of fascinating but lesser known figures in the history of recent philosophy who deserve the kind of treatment Octave Hamelin (1856–1907) has been given in this volume by Fernand Turlot of the University of Strasbourg. The study is at once systematic and masterly, and it places Hamelin in historical perspective. It draws on Hamelin's own writings in detail, makes use of later interpretations, and adds richness by citations of Hamelin's letters to such contemporaries as Renouvier. It is a model of thorough and clear exposition with full but unobtrusive documentation and useful bibliographies. One would like to have seen, however, some few pages of biographical information.

Though there were a few critical studies on Hamelin in the journals in the first decades of this century, his thought was apparently not dealt with as significantly by his contemporaries as was that of his mentor Charles Renouvier, who had so much influence on William James. In a series of published letters between Emile Meyerson and Harald Höffding, dating from 1918 to 1931, Hamelin is mentioned but once. And in earlier correspondence between William James and Théodore Flournoy (1890–1910), we do not find his thought discussed at all. Nor does his countryman Jean Wahl cite Hamelin in his study of pluralism (1925), though he might well have shown how Hamelin's thought vigorously preserved pluralistic idealistic personalism while incorporating facets of Hegel's monism.

Hamelin's uncompromising idealism, which he characterized "as nothing more than the doctrine of consciousness and of the person" (p. 221n.), emerged more from his diligent study of Kant, Descartes, Renouvier, and Aristotle than from any immersion in the thought of Berkeley or Hegel, though the latter thinker's influence regarding the dialectic is evident (see pp. 175–88). While Hamelin made a place for Fichte too (p. 170), and distinguished his personalism from Leibniz's monadism (pp. 211–15), he thought, observes Turlot, that German idealism was incapable of attaining "le vrai concret, la personnalité" (p. 11). And that may well have been true, but Hamelin seemed unaware of the work of R. H. Litze and especially the many British and American pluralistic idealists his efforts spawned. Turlot instructively shows Hamelin's affinities with Maine de Biran, Lequier, Lachelier, Boutroux, Ravaission, Brunschvicg, and Bergson and suggests implications for current French thinkers like Ricoeur, though the more direct ethical personalism of Emmanuel Mounier is not mentioned.

While it is true that "la liberté est au coeur de l'hamelinisme" (p. 311), that central theme is arrived at only after significant wrestling with alternative outlooks. Accordingly, the first five