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*Objektiver und absoluter Geist nach Hegel. Kunst, Religion und Philosophie innerhalb und außerhalb von Gesellschaft und Geschichte.* Edited by Thomas Oehl and Arthur Kok. Leiden: Brill, 2018. Pp. xi + 934.

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A recent publication edited by Thomas Oehl and Arthur Kok sheds light on a part of Hegel's philosophy that has long been considered – and it is sometimes still regarded as – metaphysical and unquestionably anti-modern: the philosophy of absolute spirit. Hegel's idea of absolute spirit holds that psychology, ethics, politics, and even history find in art, religion, and philosophy their truth. These three intellectual enterprises are in Hegel's view the only horizons where finitude and biases of social and political forms can be properly defined and eventually evaluated. Comprehensive research on this topic has for long been a *desideratum* in the *Hegel-Forschung*. Only recently has an interest in the last section of Hegel's *Encyclopaedia* begun to resurface. This volume is thus a long awaited reference book for students and young researchers who want an up-to-date introduction to the reasons why one of the peaks of modern thinking makes room for a “suspiciously metaphysical” understanding of the human world, which clearly contradicts the one that the modern mindset is customarily said to possess.

The text reveals its theoretical stance with the help of a crucial quotation from an essay by H.F. Fulda that inspired this editorial project and provided the basic tools for the general evaluation of the last encyclopaedic section.<sup>1</sup> The difference between objective and absolute spirit is further stressed and

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1. Cf. Hans Friedrich Fulda, “Hegels Begriff des absoluten Geistes,” *Hegel-Studien* 36 (2001): 171–98.

analyzed in Fulda's revised version of the beforementioned essay which actually opens the book and grounds its general perspective. In his text, Fulda painstakingly opposes J. Habermas's famous criticism of Hegel's notion of absolute spirit by selecting six fundamental theses which, according to Habermas, should dismiss this last encyclopaedic section. These theses are as follows: (1) there is no real justification to overcome the observing reason, (2) we cannot escape the universe of language and linguistic practices, (3) the universal subject that stands at the end of the section "Absolute Spirit" is nothing but the Fichtean subject, (4) the absolute spirit as such displays how the power of subjectivity rules over the spirit of the people, (5) the passage from objective to absolute spirit cannot be justified in light of the internal dialectic of intersubjectivity, (6) intersubjectivity is lost once absolute spirit is posited (28–29). In light of such an opening, the volume may be interpreted as a development of Fulda's efforts in acknowledging the relevance of Hegel's philosophy of absolute spirit.

A short overview of this lengthy volume can orient the readers and show the variety of perspectives it casts on the subject. The first part of this collection includes essays that treat the social character of religion within the development of the modern world. In the first essay by K. Appel we read that, contrary to Feuerbach's thesis, religion is not a projection but rather it represents the end of any projection. The essays by P. Cobben and C. Weckwerth analyze the notion of social development according, in the first essay, to the terms that Hegel's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* provides, and, in the second, using the *Phenomenology of Spirit* to define the relationship that connects genealogy of knowledge and social development. The second part focuses on the bridge between objective and absolute spirit with F. Menegoni, analyzing the nature of human activity between objective and absolute spirit, while C. Jamme opts for a kind of inquiry that Cobben showed us in

the previous section, but with a historical/philological twist which contributes to a clear reconstruction of the development of the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*.

Of a different nature is R. Adolphi's paper, which goes back to the long-standing debate about the relevance of the philosophy of spirit against the primacy of Hegel's logic. Examples of more delimited focus are the essays by A. L. Siani and E. Magrì. While the first puts the figure of Antigone under the lens of the notion of *Weltgeist*, the second evaluates the notion of *Gewohnheit* as part of conscious spiritual activity. Opening with contemporary debates and stretching beyond the Hegelian texts, the essays by O.I. Tóth, T. Dangel, and P. Cruysberghs tackle the problems of the liberal state by analyzing how freedom is part of the possibilities that humans have in a post-historical time, or by granting religion the role of building citizens' moral consciousness; or, again, by stressing that religion is the fundamental step for the construction of a state but not its ultimate incarnation. In line with these last essays is the contribution of A. Buchwalter, who discusses the pertinence and congruity of religion in a liberal state, which is a problem that also A. Kok somehow reinterprets by comparing Hegel's revealed religion with Rawls' public religion.

In the third part of the volume the reader witnesses a set of broad evaluations of the notion of spirit, as in T. Oehl's essay, where the notion of will is connected to the overall perspective on the nature of absolute spirit. G. W. Bertram and A. Nuzzo take into account the notion of passage in the dimension of spirit, the former by differentiating the three ways of self-understanding – which Bertram claims are not reducible to one another – while the latter takes a specific notion of passage, crisis, to be a key factor for the development of the spirit. Contrary to this theoretical discussions, G. Wenz goes back to a more historiographical approach to the main topic of the volume and focuses on Hegel's *Aesthetics: Lectures on*

*Fine Art*, analyzing the different editions of the German text to stress possible keys to understand the history of interpretations. A few essays of this very rich section of the work suggest different ways to evaluate Hegel's notion of absolute spirit in connection with debates that doted the nineteenth century: C. Iselt highlights the role of art in relation not only to religion but also to the final three syllogisms, while F. Iannelli claims that art remains essential to human's *Bildung*, despite the death of art. In turn, F. Knappik uses the sections on art, religion, and philosophy to emphasize the limits of freedom in the forms of subjective and objective spirit. G. Sans shows how absolute spirit is not reducible to the forms of objective spirit, but is rather a distinct trait of Hegel's non-dogmatism. E. Rózsa uses the notion of love to make explicit some aspects of the passage between objective and absolute spirit. T. Meyer, in turn, investigates how doing philosophy is possible within institutions. Finally, W. Gobsch translates the question about the meaning of philosophy into the question about the meaning of existence.

The fourth section opens with N. Mooren, T. Rojek and M. Quante, using the section dedicated to the *Idea* as an instrument that both orients and defines the whole. With the same kind of systematic approach, the readers see how A. Arndt discusses the double dependency between objective and absolute spirit. In the fifth section, V. Höslé goes back to his study of Hegel's philosophy scrutinizing the systematic claim of knowledge from the Middle Ages to Hegel. Instead, showing his expertise on the Frankfurt period, Y. Kubo sheds light on the fact that ever since the Frankfurt texts on politics, Hegel has always maintained a few key notions that still represent an essential part for the mature definition of absolute spirit. This section comes to a close with two essays by H. van Erp, where a comparison between the freedom in religion and in history is laid out, and by G. Zöllner, where a different contraposition – the one between formal and informal laws of

the spirit – is displayed. The fifth section includes R. P. Horstmann's study of Hegel's critique to Kant, and P. Stekeler-Weithofer's account about the three forms of absolute spirit. The sixth and final section perhaps represents the most epistemological section of the whole project. Here, C.G. Martin claims that truth is understandable only through those structures that are self-reflective, and S. Rödl tackles the prejudice that judgement and its object are two different things. The last and final essay is by A. Kern, who compares McDowell and Hegel in the field of the development from natural to spiritual life.

The volume appears at the 200th anniversary of the publication of the Heidelberg *Encyclopaedia*. Nevertheless, the editors decided for a non-encyclopedic approach to the division of the volume in order to allow intersections between different perspectives and interpretations of Hegel's text. One more plus of this editorial project is the rich Bibliographical Note and a very useful Index of Names and Subjects; they both represent a fundamental tool for future research on the closing section of Hegel's *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline*.