

## THE PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW

### METHOD AND SYSTEM IN HEGEL

THE philosophy of Hegel shares two traits with the thought of the great moderns who preceded him: a conscious concern with method, and the application of method to the construction of a philosophical system. In these respects Hegel profited by the efforts of his predecessors, in that he saw clearly the great common danger of method and system; namely, that both have a tendency to narrowness. His fundamental criticism of his predecessors is that they were hampered by methods which, so far as followed out, forced them to overlook important aspects of the world; and in consequence produced systems which, though reasonably consistent, were nevertheless conceived from a standpoint so specialized as to preclude that comprehensiveness which is the unique characteristic of philosophy. His problem was, to work out a method which should enable him to make a place, and a definite place, for all the aspects of the world as he knew it. With the achievements and attempts of others before him, he attacked the problem vigorously, tenaciously, and thoroughly; if not more seriously than others had done, at least with a fuller awareness of the difficulties involved. In these days, when method is so much in the foreground of discussion and system is so generally deprecated, it may be instructive to consider the views of the last great systematic thinker of classical modern times on these questions.

In intellectual inquiry we seem to work in either of two directions, toward our premises or away from our premises, toward first principles or away from first principles—that is to say, toward our starting point or away from it. The second procedure is intelligible enough, but the first is a paradox. How can we work toward our own starting point or first principle? When we think, we must always have a point of departure, a beginning, for obvi-