

An Unknown Page from the Last Months of Hegel's Life

BENEDETTO CROCE

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

This translation of this little-known piece by Croce appeared in *The Personalist* 45 (1964): 329–53. It is the imaginative fulfillment of two impossible wishes, stemming from the Hegelian basis of Croce's idealism: (1) to gain from Hegel directly an assessment of the essence of his philosophy; and (2) to gain Hegel's approval of Vico as his predecessor. Croce's *What Is Living and What Is Dead in the Philosophy of Hegel* (1907; English trans. 1915) remains an excellent source for the study of Hegel's metaphysics, showing that the Hegelian dialectic is based on the contrariety of opposites, not on contradiction. Croce's *The Philosophy of Giambattista Vico* (1911; English trans. 1913) remains a valuable study of Vico's thought, despite its failure to recognize the originality and importance of the "imaginative universal."

Croce made Vico into the Italian Hegel, but there is no evidence that Hegel ever read Vico. Hegel founded his philosophy of history without any knowledge of Vico as the founder of the philosophy of history. In Croce's narration, Hegel's "Neapolitan visitor" introduces Vico as "a genius whom you could recognize not only as your precursor but also as someone who satisfies some needs that were overlooked by you." Croce presents Vico as not only Hegel's precursor but also as his successor,

whose thought, now rediscovered, can become the transporter of Hegel's system and dialectic into the future. The translation of the *Scienza nuova* to which the visitor refers would be Weber's German translation of 1822. Hegel could have read Vico's work, as the translation appeared nearly a decade before his death in November 1831 (Croce's imagined conversation takes place in Berlin toward the end of the summer of 1831). When Croce returns to Vico near the end of the narration, we find Hegel sometimes "reciting the lines of old Giambattista Vico, which he had learned from his Neapolitan friend." Croce's wish is fulfilled; he has had Hegel read Vico and confirm the connection between their philosophies—coming close to a death-scene confession.

The line Croce quotes when introducing Vico to Hegel, "From this trembling hand falls my pen, / And the treasury of my thoughts has been closed," is from Vico's sonnet to Gaetano Brancone on the occasion of the nuptials of Raimondo di Sangro and Carlotta Gaetani, which took place in 1735. Giovanni Brancone, the father of Gaetano Brancone, received the appointment as *segretario* of the city of Naples for which Vico had applied in 1697, just prior to securing his professorship at the University. As Croce uses the line it reflects Vico's general decline in health and his declaration, in his autobiography, that when he had completed his major work his genius was exhausted.

Who is Francesco Sanseverino, Hegel's young Neapolitan visitor? He is first of all Croce. The characterizations, criticisms, and questions he advances about Hegel's philosophy are a reflection of Croce's own position. It seems likely that Croce selected the name Sanseverino to convey that the young visitor is a member of one of the oldest and most noble families of Naples. In a footnote to a passage in the *Scienza nuova*, concerning the origination of sovereign civil fiefs and the liege vassals attached to them (par. 1066), Nicolini gives examples from southern Italy which Vico may have had in mind—the *baroni* of the Sanseverino, Caracciolo, and Carafa families. The young visitor is a gentleman scholar. Like Croce, he can devote himself to philosophy and to the Republic of Letters. Croce, the son of wealthy landowners, although not of such a noble lineage, never needed to earn a living.

All in all, this piece stands out more for the views and criticisms it offers concerning Hegel's philosophy than for what it offers concerning Vico's thought. It is an example of a rare genre of philosophical expression that includes Vives's "Fable about Man" and Dilthey's "Dream," although Croce's contribution is more prosaic than either of these. It is

a Vichian curiosity—a part of the Vichian museum, but it also marks the fact that Croce's philosophy has fallen into neglect. Now that the Crocean interpretation of Vico has successfully been overcome, it may be time to assess what is living and what is dead in Croce's philosophy, including his treatment of Vico.

Donald Phillip Verene

TRANSLATORS' INTRODUCTION

Croce was without doubt one of the great intellectual leaders of Italy, and not since the Renaissance has any Italian received such international fame. If anyone in modern times has come close to being a "universal man"—in the Renaissance sense of the term—it was Croce. What is truly amazing is that he was able to make significant contributions to so many different disciplines: e.g., literary criticism, aesthetics, economics, politics, history, systematic philosophy, and logic. But in English speaking countries he is known primarily for his work in aesthetics, and his more rigorously philosophical works are by and large neglected. This neglect is unfortunate, for as G. R. G. Mure has pointed out, "The work of the British Idealists and that of modern Italian philosophy have been the best products of serious effort to criticise and develop Hegel."

Croce's first important essay on Hegel, *What Is Living and What Is Dead in the Philosophy of Hegel*, was published in 1907 and translated into English in 1915. In 1948, Croce wrote an essay on Hegel in dialogue form called *An Unknown Page from the Last Months of Hegel's Life*. This dialogue represents his most mature thoughts on the Hegelian philosophy. In a footnote added to a later edition of this essay Croce asks the reader: "Is it necessary to warn you that this 'unknown page from the last months of Hegel's life' is a product of my imagination, a bit of whimsy that came to my mind one sleepless night, and which I wrote down in the morning?" The content, however, is not just whimsy, for as Croce states, "I have taken the material from my familiarity with Hegel's thought and from my frequent internal dialogues with Hegel." Even the setting of the dialogue "is not altogether without historical foundation, for traces of a fruitful and critical attitude toward the Hegelian philosophy are truly to be found in the nineteenth-century Neapolitan culture, and if not in 1830, at least about the middle of the century." Croce closes the footnote with the observation that "Criticism,

as well as the power to state a new truth, which are always indivisible, have, in the present case of Hegel, a particular importance, because they have the power to determine the general direction of philosophy in our time, that is, the road which it must necessarily and logically follow, and which, moreover, it has in fact already begun to travel.”

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“Who is it?” said Professor Hegel, raising his head from the large writing desk and from the papers in which he was immersed. The servant, who had just answered the knocking at the front door, was entering Hegel's study.

“A foreign gentleman who would like to speak to you, and wishes to know if you will receive him. He has written his name here.”

The professor read: “Francesco Sanseverino of Naples,” and he suddenly remembered the young Neapolitan who had come to pay him a visit in Berlin about seven years ago, in the spring of 1824, furnished with a letter of presentation from an Austrian general and diplomat who had been in Italy at the time. This young man had become acquainted with Germany in 1812–1813 as an officer in one of the Neapolitan regiments which participated in the Napoleonic expedition in Russia, and later in the factional wars which followed in German territory; and, intelligent and studious as he was, he had tasted the quality, vigor, and originality of the intellectual life of that country, and had been attracted to it.

When he returned to Naples he continued to procure and read German books and to nourish his desire to revisit Germany in order to become better acquainted with its new culture and its new philosophy. And when, in 1819, he had the chance to go to Berlin for the second time, he was able to witness the ascent of the Hegelian star, and to hear the impressive inaugural speech which Hegel had given the year before to introduce his university lectures (wherein the German people were designated as the “elect of God in philosophy”), and he observed how after the war of liberation the impetus toward greatness and philosophical superiority had united with the impetus toward faith in the new power of the Prussian state.

In 1824, when he embarked on his journey, he had already completed a careful reading and had seriously studied all the books published by Hegel: the *Phenomenology*, the large *Logic*, the small *Encyclopedia*, and finally the *Philosophy of Right*, and he had even obtained some of the essays published here and there in magazines; but he was still in a period of learning and of turning over in his mind what he had learned, more eager still to listen than to speak. He paid a visit of respect to Hegel, in which he made known his admiration and the labor that he was dedicating to the Master's works and that he hoped to find himself through them.

Hegel was pleased with the simplicity and sincerity of his words, and also with the Neapolitan irony by which he looked at himself

objectively, with an understanding that does not exclude a smile. Sanseverino listened to Hegel's lectures at the university, and met and talked with some of the greatest Hegelian scholars of the time such as Marheineke, Gans, Henning, Hotho, Michelet—the Master's faithful disciples; but not even with them did he engage in discussion. He told Hegel of his intention to come back and visit with him within a year and was kindly encouraged to do so.

Back in Naples he resumed his study and meditation, and he was able to tread the *Encyclopedia*, published in 1827, which had been greatly amplified and enriched, and he resigned himself to his inability to obtain the course of lectures which the students were later to publish, although they were undoubtedly very useful for the development they presented, especially that of the history of philosophy and aesthetics, and for which the books written by Hegel provided *in nuce* the principles and essential outline. He finally returned toward the end of the summer in 1831, and found that the Master had recently arrived from the countryside, where he had taken his family in order to avoid the main part of the cholera epidemic which had spread to Germany.

He was courteously received by Hegel, who was a well-mannered man, free of that roughness of which Germans sometimes vainly boast. After he had told Hegel about his work during the intervening years (he avoided, however, any mention of his participation in the Neapolitan constitutional revolution of 1820–1821, knowing how Hegel thought in politics, and how these revolutions and convulsions were judged by him as due to an “inferiority of the Latin people”), the Master asked to what conclusions his studies had led him. This brought Sanseverino to the point of his visit and the topic that he wanted to discuss.

Sanseverino asked first of all for permission to give a more detailed account of the reasons why he greatly admired Hegel's philosophy, or rather, the very attitude of his philosophy, which seems to have originated in mental needs far richer and more modern than those of even such a revolutionary as Kant.

“Kant,” he said, “was oriented toward the physico-mathematical sciences as the true and proper field of human knowledge, and he had also been a direct cultivator of these. But he neglected and almost ignored the history of mankind, and even had but a it and miss knowledge of the history of philosophy itself. He was not very sensitive to poetry: his poets were Horace and Pope. He had no experience of the other arts, with the exception perhaps of music, which he judged the ‘indiscreet

art,' because it makes itself heard even when one does not wish to hear it. By a miracle of critical acumen, by gathering the observations of those who were beginning to discuss the nature of taste, he came to recognize in a negative but profound way some aspect of beauty; but he did not identify this with art, and he understood art as a game combining intellect and imagination, which was a conception not too far removed from the traditional one of art as an imaginative embellishment of a didactic content.

"The lack of a historical sense weakened his theory of politics; the lack of a poetic sense weakened his religious conceptions; his own ethics were austere, but also abstract and not very human. He was a revolutionary who preserved a culture almost entirely of the eighteenth century; he was a romantic in his *a priori* synthesis, in his conception of the beautiful, in his postulation of the practical, while his education had been classical and intellectualist.

"But your philosophy," the Neapolitan interlocutor concluded, "is an entirely different matter: it is not oriented toward physics and mathematics, but toward poetry, of which it is a complement, toward religion, which it clarifies, and toward history, which gives it concreteness and actuality. With this kind of interest it answers more than any other to the nature of philosophy, and to the moral needs of the modern era.

"And then," he added, "there is something else in the physiognomy of your philosophy that pleases me. Despite its severity and sometimes didactic aridity, I can perceive a man who has felt passionately, a man who has loved and has lived. Could Kant ever have written those words of the *Philosophy of Right* that define and dignify the conjugal state, in which the natural instinct loses its importance and above it is formed a spiritual and substantial bond, indissoluble, and superior to the accidents of our passions and desires?

"I will not repeat how the old bachelor Kant defined matrimony, which for him was a contract. Nor would a Kant ever have become as enchanted as you in admiring the penitent Magdalen, as portrayed by Italian painters, in such a way as to show indulgence toward Magdalen and to interpret kindly her sentiments and her life, because (and one would say on this point even you were conquered by the seductions of the sinner) with her beauty, with her overflow of feeling, she could not help but to love nobly and profoundly, and one could say that her error, her beautiful and touching error was her excess of sorrow and penitence.

“And what disdain and scorn toward the ascetics who pursue their own moral perfection, toward those scrupulous ones who torment themselves in their eagerness for that perfection! ‘What does the world care,’ she says to them, ‘about your belabored and studied perfection, which, after all, is a rather egotistical and vain pursuit? What does the world care since it wants and expects constructive works? You have sinned: well, don’t think too much about it and redeem yourself through works.’

“Beneath the philosopher I like to find a man who loses his patience now and then and who has a sense of humor. For example, when you thought about Newton (understood as standing for the mechanical conception of reality) and his discovery caused by an apple falling on his head, you jokingly observed that the apple had always been an evil omen for mankind: it was responsible, through Eve’s sin, for man’s expulsion from his earthly paradise; and also, through the judgment of Paris, for the Trojan War, and now for Newtonian physics. Another example of your humor is when you told your worthy colleague Schleiermacher, who restricted religion to a ‘feeling of dependence,’ that on these terms ‘the best Christian would be a dog.’”

Hegel smiled at these quotations from his satirical remarks, and particularly those which recalled to memory events of his life, his loves, the natural son whom he had brought into the world, and even the moments of jealousy which he occasionally caused his young wife, whom he loved and venerated, by his excessive attention to beautiful singers.

“After having declared my sympathy, if I may say so, with your philosophy, with the physiognomy of your philosophy, it is now for me to determine the great truths that you have introduced into philosophy, the great truths which, even though they could be misunderstood, denied, or abused (and in your present adversaries one can already see the signs of such reluctance and rebellion), no one will ever be able to destroy them, because they will always spring up again from their roots. But for this too I need your permission. I cannot state these truths as you state them, using the same words in the same order, with the presuppositions, consequences, and references that these truths introduce. If I had to state them in this way it would be better for me to remain silent. The poetry of a poet I can, rather I must, read by transfusing and immersing myself into his words, sounds, and rhythms, thus joining my soul to his, actively participating with him only in those things in which he reveals himself as a poet. But a philosophical sentence must be received by thought,

that is, one thought received by another thought, the latter receiving it by embracing and enveloping it, and only through critical elaboration can it be comprehended.”

“Indeed,” Hegel observed, “I have become rather impatient with the frequent repetition of my formulas. Some time ago a Hungarian used to follow me around, and in order to prove to me that he knew my philosophy, he memorized page after page of my books, and he used to recite them to me; and I, in order to get rid of him, had to tell him that this was heroic and admirable, but that it showed little speculative talent. Even our dear Mr. Cousin does not give me much comfort, for he is very interested in my philosophy but refuses in advance to understand it as something above and beyond him. ‘Ah, how difficult this all is!’ he would exclaim, pressing his hands to his head, whenever any of my pupils would offer an explanation to one of his questions. And he was impatiently awaiting, as he told me in one of his letters, the publication of the new *Encyclopedia* in order ‘to grasp something,’ and ‘to adjust to his size some shreds of my great thoughts.’ Even my students disappoint me with their excessive fidelity, which has a tendency to make static that which I feel in me as dynamic, and I am afraid of a slavish dependency whereby faith in the teacher predominates, for with this comes the partiality and fanaticism of a school.

“I also wish, and have so far waited in vain, to see my thought return to me via the mediation of another mind that understands and comprehends; that is, as you said, that critically understands and translates into other words. Therefore I am listening with great interest to hear from you in your own words what those great truths of mine are.”

“First of all, you have put an end to the absurd theory of philosophical concepts, separated from facts, thinkable in themselves apart from facts; you have also put an end to the no less absurd theory of facts established in themselves without concepts. The concept, which is the concrete universal, or Idea, as it may be called, is the unity of the universal and the individual, and therefore is judgment in action. Thus, the new concept of the philosophical concept has its origin in the Kantian *a priori* synthesis; but it is to your credit that you have lifted this out of the physico-mathematical sciences for which Kant had at first constructed it, and have recognized it as the law of knowing (or better still, one should say, of the spirit) in all its forms; and you have seen that the true judgment is not merely a classification or empirical proposition, but is a judgment of categories, that is, a judgment of value.

“Now, given the concept of the concrete universal, the distinction between the ‘truth of reason’ and the ‘truth of fact’ vanishes, each being a truth of reason and a truth of fact at the same time; and, as a consequence of the greatest importance, not only does the separation between history and philosophy vanish, but also the distinction between them. Every historical proposition contains a philosophical affirmation, and every philosophical proposition contains a historical affirmation. History is redeemed from the contempt in which it has been held for centuries as a mere report of facts, and philosophy is redeemed from the vacuity and uselessness of which it has been and still is accused. But this implicit identification, which is of the greatest importance to the mental life, this healing of a generally admitted and acknowledged scission, is accompanied by a separation—which is the second great truth and of no less importance—a separation of two mental forms which were badly fitted together and molded on one another, and whose unity has always been attempted, that is, of philosophy and science.

“The concepts of science—as you have observed—are a product of the intellect, not of reason, are arbitrary and not necessary, and obey not philosophical but practical needs. With this, philosophy acquires its full autonomy in regard to science, and science in regard to philosophy: the problem of the one is not that of the other. The third great truth is the definitive resolution of the dualism of positive and negative, of good and evil, of light and dark, of Ormazd and Ahriman, thanks to the demonstration that the negative is not opposed to but within the positive, that evil is not opposed to the good, that non-being is not opposed to being but is in being, so that true being is becoming. The negative moment is not reality in itself, but reality caught in its becoming, in the effort of the separation and overcoming of one form and the reaching of another, when the form which must be overcome and which resists or tries to escape overcoming presents itself for this very reason as negative and as evil, as error, ugliness, and death.

“From this dialectic comes the important aphorism that ‘what is real is rational and what is rational is real,’ that is, the sacred and divine (because willed by God) character of the past and of history, on which we build and from which we progress, but of which no part can be denied or condemned without denying or condemning and destroying the whole texture of history and reality. but the undisputable truth of that aphorism sometimes seems to vacillate in the person who feels the actual and terrifying presence of the evil he is fighting against; for

this reason it is necessary to add that the duality of the rational and the real, which is abolished by historical thought, is posited, re-established, and firmly held by the practical and moral conscience, through which it defines its own terms (*Sein* and *Sollen*), and which is not theoretical but practical and moral action. This should reassure all those who are afraid that the moral conscience will disappear from the world, that evil will be equated with good, and that the brutality of fact will be substituted for judgment and moral action."

"In your interpretation," said Hegel, "I recognize my own thought; but there is also something more, something that I have not put there, and which, it seems to me, I cannot put there, like the identification of philosophy with historiography, the practical character of the natural sciences, and the different relation of the rational to the real in historical reality and in practical and moral action; and above all there is much less of what I have brought together as essential to my system."

"It is for this reason," replied Sanseverino, "that I felt it necessary to declare at the beginning that your thought, such as I would have stated it if I had to summarize it, was only such as I could expound as true or verified after passing it through my mind, and consequently it includes inferences which you did not make and excludes other inferences and developments which you did make, but which I am unable to accept as true. Would you be so kind as to make allowance for one of my statements by removing from it every shade of arrogance, and by taking it only in the sense that even a genius, besides being divine, is also human, which brings out the splendor of the divine?"

"When I pass from your great and fertile principles to their actual application in your system, it seems to me that a malign force has frequently intervened, preventing these principles from reaching their logical consequences, and forcing you to accept that which was intrinsically extraneous and contradictory to them, and worse still, applying the dialectic to that which it does not fit, and, worst of all, rendering the dialectic superficial and mechanical by forcing it to be used in this way. Now, I cannot say how this has happened, because if truth justifies itself and affirms its own reasons, then error cannot point to its origin as non-truth because with that it would reveal itself as an error, and would deny itself, and the critic, or the author turned critic of his own thought, can well define what a given error consists of, but never exactly how it arrived with him in the world. On this point only more or less abstract and psychological conjectures are possible, unless one is willing to be

satisfied with a generic statement, like the one that every error originates in following an impulse different from pure thought, an impulse different in kind but basically always, in one way or another, utilitarian.

“If I said, for example, that you have given birth to error by letting yourself be dominated by traditional religious conceptions, or by the traditional doctrines, divisions, and methods of the schools, then I certainly would have indicated a connection between those errors and those conceptions and doctrines, but I would not have explained the inexplicable, for how is it possible that your powerful genius, which as rebelled against and destroyed so many time-honored convictions and preconceptions, could have remained subject to them in other cases, that is, why could it not have proceeded with the great work of refutation? Indeed, it is impossible to assign a ‘why’ to that which has not taken place; and an error is in the final analysis an assumed but unactualized concept, which is not thinkable, and therefore has not taken place.”

“Well,” Hegel said, “let’s put aside the question of the ‘why’ which even I do not believe can be defined, and which perhaps does not even exist, and tell me all about the part of my system which you find unacceptable. Also, make a point by point indictment against me, and I will willingly listen, for it will be a great relief from the insipid criticism which is directed against me in the magazines and journals, and from the frequent praise and agreement which surrounds me. I see clearly that you are not one of those haughty opponents, of whom there are plenty, who bore me with their useless and vain contradictions. But you have a thoughtful and meditative mind, in which contradictions are born in inquiry, and are part of the inquiry itself.”

“And I,” replied the Neapolitan, “will take advantage of your generosity and license, for it allows me to present a sort of indictment, as you call it, which, because of its boldness, is a form favorable to the preciseness of critical formulations, and which is as agreeable to me as it should be to you, since you have no time to waste: boldness, after all, in this case is a literary form and not an indication of lack of respect. To start with, I would like to ask what has given you the right to conceive and work out a ‘philosophy of nature’? This really surprises me for you had already exposed the fact that the science of nature is a construction of *Verstand*, of abstract intellect which proceeds via conventions and arbitrary divisions of the indivisible, and from that you reached the necessary although not explicitly expressed conclusion that Nature as something external has no other reality outside of this natural science,

with which it entirely coincides; that is, it is no longer permissible to speak of Nature either as a form or degree of reality, or as 'the other in itself,' opposed to spirit, for the mystery of nature has already been exposed by you, thanks to a simple logical analysis.

"Well, notwithstanding that, and in spite of that, you have continued to acknowledge the reality of nature, and a super-science or philosophy of it, the 'philosophy of nature,' by which you have in fact revived antiquated Aristotelianism and the semi-mythological natural philosophy of the Renaissance, because of which and against which Galileo had erected a physico-mathematical and experimental science, whereas you have taken the antiquated philosophy of nature from the hands of your young friend Schelling, elaborated it, and made it your own; and you have not been afraid of this gift which was handed to you by that lively and agile genius, though you recognized the weakness and speculative inferiority of his thought in relation to yours. It would not have been so bad if this philosophy of nature had joined itself to your system, beyond and above the science of nature, without being bound to it in any way, as an allegory or fantasy to be either accepted or rejected. But you have placed it in a relation of continuity with the science of nature, whose concepts 'would pave the way' and would prepare for the final work of philosophy. Philosophy cannot accept those concepts since they are arbitrary and conventional, either as its forerunners or as its helpers, and thus philosophy must get rid of them at the beginning, because they don't belong to it, not even as construction material.

"And in addition to this practical negation of the logical theory of the natural sciences, which is one of the most important principles established by you—a redeeming principle—you have also formed in another field a philosophical discipline which is the negation of the unity of philosophy and history: the 'philosophy of history.' If philosophy and history become identical in the unity of the concrete universal, then one cannot conceive of a philosophy that treats history philosophically, a history which is already in itself and for itself philosophical; and you, because of that philosophy, have lost the intimate unity of philosophy and history. Contributing to this is the little esteem in which you have always held historians as unthinking narrators of facts; but a more sensitive examination would have shown you that whenever history and not chronicles is in question, thought intervenes to interpret, qualify, and spiritualize the narration; and far better, deeper, and richer is that narration insofar that the work of thought is better, deeper, and richer,

so that there is no way of breaking the unique and continuous process and of indicating the point at which the work of philosophy which was really present from the beginning, could be inserted.

“Indeed, in this respect there should not be anything else to do except to make a pedagogical recommendation: that is, for the historians to develop, correct, and deepen the philosophy which is implicitly adopted and to dismiss their fear of philosophizing, and for the philosophers to cast off their disdain and ignorance of historical things and to attend to a philosophy better than that which they held in the past and which they still hold, a philosophy which is much more pertinent to a knowledge of man and history.

“The ‘philosophy of history’ can be found in the Hebrew prophets and in Christian theology, and, after having disappeared almost completely in the historiography of the Renaissance (though it was kept alive in the theology of the Christian universities), it reappeared in the Neo-Kantian philosophy, and it has found in you an authoritative supporter, although it is neither philosophy nor history but an oscillation which equally injures both the philosophical moment and the historiographical one. Even though you have been highly praised for your new and original interpretations of the great philosophers, proving that you are a genius of equal caliber, for you have raised the history of philosophy above purely erudite history and above those who are partially pledged to engage in the defense of a single school or of a neutral and eclectic philosophizing—even though you have done this, the method of the philosophy of history introduces into the history of philosophy the predeterminate design of a unique problem which philosophy would undertake to explore to its beginning, would continue to explore more deeply in the course of time, and would finish by resolving it, and with this close its own history.

“The same or analogous thing happened in the history of art and religion. They were all placed, thanks to that philosophical treatment of super-history, in Procrustean beds, and all were eager to get rid of these restraints and to take a freer course—a course all the more truly philosophical the less one introduces into it a repetitious and arbitrary philosophy, an artificial and preconceived design.”

Hegel attentively followed this accusation, especially what was said about the disturbing element which had introduced itself into his very popular lectures on the history of philosophy, art, religion, and the state; but he did not say a word.

Sanseverino continued: "I also did not understand why you ever wanted to preserve the tripartition which was common to the German schools of the eighteenth century, and which has had a long history, going back to the ancient times of the Stoics, of logic and metaphysics on the first level, and philosophy of nature and philosophy of spirit on the second level. After we have banished the philosophy of nature, for the reasons I have given, and compared the logic and the philosophy of spirit with one another, it is difficult to see why the first does not completely jump over into the second and dissolve itself in it. A philosophy of spirit in which the logical spirit does not have its whole development can hardly last. On the other hand, the logic that you have presented is itself already partially a philosophy of spirit, because it embraces the cognitive spirit, the practical spirit, and the absolute or dialectic spirit, which is the backbone of philosophy, and it also embraces the anti-dialectic, dividing, and abstracting function of the intellect, which is the father of science.

"From this one can see that your categories are understood at least in part as forms of spiritual activity, although others of these categories are omitted, and in other parts the categories follow one another as a catalogue of concepts to be clarified. I abstain from entering into details concerning your theories of right, politics, art, religion, and absolute spirit; but it seems certain to me that the Logic, placed at the head of the system, occupies the same place as it did in the old school systems, functioning as an organ whose purpose it is to build the system, whereas a philosophy such as the philosophy of spirit cannot be constructed if it does not at the same time construct the whole, that is, the full concept of the spirit. But that which mainly comes before me in this system as contrary to the above established great logical principles is not only its divisions and the place given to the various doctrines, but also and above all the end to which your system is directed and the method which you use.

"It corresponds completely to a history of the world and its creation, or rather to God before the creation of the world, who has at His disposal all the categories necessary for the creation of the world, and at last He decides to create it by getting out of Himself, by transforming Himself into something else, by making Himself nature, and then from nature, which is animated by His divine breath, He re-emerges in man, in the consciousness and spirit of man, and little by little he becomes subjective or cognitive spirit, and from this is transformed, converting Himself into objective or practical spirit, and creates the world of right, of morality, economics, politics, history, and from history He finally

returns to Himself as absolute spirit, at first through the two progressive but insufficient attempts of art and religion, and then as pure Idea, being completely satisfied and happy with Himself.

“Such is the picture of your philosophy, which is the picture of the cosmos, and a history with a given theme and a predetermined end, so that all the steps which are completed in it are a concatenation of solutions which become less and less imperfect, but which are imperfect nevertheless, except the final one which marks the end of the world and the entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven. But how does it happen that a thought, which by means of the concept of the concrete universal had liberated man from the phantasm of nature and made of it a voluntary construction, voluntary but evidently not arbitrary because it turns out to be useful for certain ends, and in compensation you have given it the endless field of history, with its perpetual becoming and the infinite creation of always new forms—how does it happen that this thought relapses into a conception of transcendental religiosity, in such a way that I have already heard from the students who surround you, and with whom I had a chance to talk, of a renewed theism and a renewed and clarified Christian theology?”

The Master had listened to this criticism without batting an eye; but Sanseverino, even though he was hurrying at the end, added this corollary:

“And what about the method” he said, “the method which should have been the dialectic one, and which you employed under the name of dialectic in the construction of your system, is it not perhaps the destruction of the dialectic itself, that is, if a great truth could ever be destroyed once the mind had grasped and formulated it?”

“Not even you, Master, could destroy the force which you have set free from the dark cave in which it was shut; by now the force is in the world and no one will ever be able to drive out, cancel, or weaken it, not even its own liberator, at whose disposal it has never really been, and even without him it will continue by means of its own vigor and right to dominate, correct, and judge, searching and finding others who will perform these services which it seems that you, after having rendered one of the greatest and most memorable services, no longer wish to give it. Either you do not want to see it, or you cannot; but such is the fate of man, of the superior man who comes into the world with a mission to perform, who knows that the work of thought, the human work, goes on to infinity, and he must resign himself to the fact that the lamp of life will pass to other hands.

“A great Neapolitan philosopher, whom you have probably not yet read or been able to study, although in these last few years his major work has been translated into German, a genius whom you could recognize not only as your precursor but also as someone who satisfies some needs that were overlooked by you, and who, although Catholic by profession, is much more free from the ties of ancient religious beliefs—I am speaking of Giambattista Vico—who after he had written and rewritten his masterpiece several times, stopped, and felt that he had completed his task in the world, and in two lines of one of his sonnets he touched on this event of his personal history:

From this trembling hand falls my pen,

And the treasury of my thoughts has been closed.

“But, to return to the dialectic, how did it originate, and what did it later become? It began as an attempt to sweep away the dualism of positive and negative, of truth and error, of life, and death, of good and evil, and the terms it used for this were the forms, the categories, the values of the spirit, the true, the beautiful, the useful, and their contraries; and because of this the act itself was a distinction between these forms and a transfer of one into the other, a becoming, through the purgatory or hell of nothing, or as one might call it, the negative potency—impotency of being, in such a way that man at every instant conquers the good, the beautiful, the practical, the true, and at every instant risks losing them, unless he acquires another new one, as it is imposed upon him by his own spiritual nature. But this categorial character and this intrinsic distinction in the dialectic have been obliterated by you in the course of the construction of the system, in which, by means of an arbitrary dialectic and a mere formula, you have dialecticized that which cannot be made dialectical, that is, the empirical concepts and the collective historical processes; this is the result of the historical-theological design that you have accepted and have attempted to carry out.

“The reflective man will never be able, before the display of that wearisome history of continual delusions, to utter the cry of Faust to the fleeting moment:

Stay, you are beautiful;

and he will always find himself before an act which does not give this moment of satisfaction and repose because it never becomes united within itself, contradiction remains intrinsic to it, and intrinsic also is

the anxiety to get outside it. Indeed, in this vision good and evil break out of their confines: the good which is not changes into the evil which always is, except in the final and definitive instant, where we find the further inconvenience that that which no longer is is the world itself—the world in which we live and with which the philosopher must acquaint us, encouraging us to live in it with dignity.”

Hegel did not interrupt Sanseverino, and he remained attentive but silent. He felt that it would be a sign of little courtesy or intelligence to engage in a dispute with a man who had meditated over his books, and who had confidently come to pour into his soul and mind the conclusions of many years of labor, which deserved to be rethought by him before making them the object of contradiction and dispute, or even of major or minor assent; nor, on the other hand, did his interlocutor expect an answer, aware as he was that when confronted by objections of this kind a serious mind cannot surrender, but only rethink them at the right time and place, and wait to see if they will give new stimulus or open new ways to his own thought in its original course.

Therefore he listened and kept silent; and instead of engaging in philosophical discourse, he stood up, familiarly put his arm under the interlocutor's arm, and led him over to a window of his studio. His house was a small one on the arm of the Spree at Kupfergraben, close to the city but far from its noises; and he pointed across to the castle of Monbijou, which could be seen ahead, with its gardens and the recently begun buildings of the huge museums. And, at the break in the conversation, Hegel asked simply and affectionately what Sanseverino was planning to do upon his return to Naples.

“I plan to continue to be your scrupulous, grateful, and devoted disciple, who will never forget how much he has learned from you, and how by you he has been led to higher altitudes of thought, freed from doubts and tormenting struggles, and made a despiser of that vulgar and superficial philosophy to which most people adhere. The task that I will set myself will be to outline a systemization which, in my opinion, follows logically from your great speculative truths but which is not that which the surrounding society and the German tradition have induced you to make: not a theological one but a secular one; not complicated and heavy but simple and agile.

“If the unity of philosophy and history can be inferred from the concept of the concrete universal—an inference which you refused to make and still do not want to admit, but which is necessary—then that

which truly occupies and fills in the entire field of knowledge is history; furthermore, it conforms to a human need, which is not to know ideas in themselves but facts, i.e., concrete reality, to which the knowledge of ideas is indispensable but instrumental. And if this is the way things are, what form will philosophy take? None other than a logic of history, that is, a clarification of the concepts by means of which historical interpretation is carried out. And this logic or methodology is a thing of no little value, because it is neither more nor less than an entire philosophy of spirit; it is a philosophy which cannot be exhausted by any book because it is in a continual process of growth, and because history, with its movement causing new problems for thought, creates a never-ending process.

“Philosophy is never definitive, and systems are not static but always in process, and it is better if we call them provisional systemizations, intervals where one can catch one's breath whenever it is possible to do so, as at the end of a period of completed meaning. None of the problems which have presented themselves as problems to philosophy remains excluded by this philosophy of spirit, which welcomes them all and resolves them by reducing them to problems of the spirit, in whose sphere solely, if they have a meaning, they are solvable. Therefore, the professor of philosophy should not be afraid that the methodological conception of philosophy is an impoverishment of philosophy, because, on the contrary, it is an enrichment, and it wants lively minds which, to speak truly, we do not usually find in those professors who amuse themselves with ancient, inconclusive, and sterile problems. And in this philosophy of spirit it will be necessary to reconstruct the theory of art and aesthetics by removing from it what remains of ancient rhetoric and poetics and of recent psychologism, and by understanding the aesthetic principle in its originality by purifying and preserving it from contamination, whether panlogistic or hedonistic.

“It will be necessary at the same time to found a philosophy of vitality, or of utility, as one may call it, by unifying that which is dispersed in the various theories of politics, economics, motivation, etc. It will be necessary to formulate a theory of historiography, including a criticism and history of this theory; and I leave out other *desiderata* that I have in mind.

“Naples, with the minds that gather there from the provinces of southern Italy, is a city in a certain way disposed to these studies; it has given to Italy almost all its philosophers worthy of the name, and it is

always open to sublime speculation, yet not without a certain sense of realism which recalls the concrete and historical. Herder, Hamann, and even Goethe were aware of and sensed the philosophical strength of Naples. And now, with the new young king, one can breathe; hope and faith are reborn; 'private studies,' as they are called, which are schools of university level outside of the university, multiply rapidly, and they are due to the free choice of those eager to learn; foreign books circulate, and serious magazines are published by well-prepared writers—so I am not disappointed to have to return down there. Even your philosophy is beginning to be known, but alas, just in a way I wish it would not be: as a sort of rationalized religion, whose cultivators already assume an air of priestly intonation, and they will attempt to form a church. This is a danger which it will be necessary to counteract.”

Thus conversing they finished the day, and their hearts felt as close as their minds, for the opposition of ideas sometimes creates a sort of nearness and brotherhood. Hegel, when Sanseverino was leaving, said to him with a certain moving affection that he was counting on another visit of his to Berlin in the not too distant future.

But in the days that followed he always had in mind that conversation, attempting to re-examine his own theories in the light of the objections that had been raised by the Neapolitan gentleman. He tried to defend them to himself and was retaken by doubts which had occurred to him at other times, but never with the same force as they now had. Hegel had conceived a philosophy which had given a foundation to the universe and closed history; his system completed, ordered, and fulfilled a millennium of philosophical work; it recognized the contribution that every other system had made and reconstructed them all in a powerful final act of correction and synthesis. And, after this, the history of man reached its completion by reconnecting the beginning to the end, and it was not possible to see from where a new stimulus or material for work could come. But this, which would seem to be a colossal presumption, was the consequence of the design adopted by a philosophy modeled on the traditional religious account of the Creation, of the laborious course of the world, and of its resolution in the world beyond. Because of this its author was free from that self-glorification, that expectation of present applause and future triumph, and from that fanaticism which animated Tommaso Campanella, the foreteller of the City of the Sun and the perfection that the world would reach before chaos could turn everything into one.

The philosophical sovereignty which Hegel had exercised over the last decade of his life, and which still retained its full vigor, did not intoxicate him. Nor must it be believed that he was satisfied and secure with his own work; his son Charles heard him exclaim: "What God has damned me to be a philosopher?" His wife said that often in the midst of his work she used to hear him muttering: "I cannot get my hands out of it!" It seems to me that it is just as Thaulow has written, that Hegel perhaps thought that philosophy began with him, but not that it ended with him. That objection, so neat and sharp, which had been raised and discussed by a visitor who had come from far away but who had nevertheless become very close, was fixed in his mind: the guiding thought is extremely ingenious, but the system, instead of strengthening the value of it, contaminates, weakens, and compromises it.

On the other hand, his mental life had been consolidated by long study in this rich system; and even though he accepted the criticism that was now coming to him, not from an adversary but from a disinterested, open-minded, unbiased and diligent reader and disciple, the task, if it really occurred to him, of retracing the road that he had traveled for more than forty years of hard work, and of changing his course and arriving at a point different from that which he had believed to have been the terminal one, and on which he had woven and extended the great canvas of his teaching, which by this time had become an aspect of the political mission of Prussia—such a task would have overwhelmed him and almost frightened him.

Because from where could he have drawn the energy necessary for such a demand, that energy which is not of pure thought but a concentration of all the forces of a human being, even of the physiological ones, of his emotions, enthusiasm, dedication, sacrifice, as if nothing else in the world existed, or rather all is dedicated to the end to be reached, and only thus can he physically live and breathe? This he had experienced in the past, especially during the great mental crisis upon emerging from youth, as a hellish anguish and a divine joy, and when he composed the *Phenomenology* (he put the manuscript of it under his arm while the echoes of the cannons of Jena were still reverberating) he felt himself voluptuously consumed by that work of pain and love. But from where would this energy now flow back into his veins? And would not this flowing-back be a miracle, a miracle of such a nature that if it did happen it would be against nature and almost incestuous?

A feeling of humility and renunciation rose in his heart, and he thought that the work that he had completed, with its truth and its error, had not been willed by him but by inspiration and necessity, by the best he had in himself, although inscribed and circumscribed by human weaknesses. It was well that it should remain in the world in this form, in the historical moment at which the world had arrived, as a teaching but also as an experiment and admonition, both on account of what it brought to it that was positive and perennial and on account of what it put before it that was negative, contradictory, insufficient, to be undone, to be straightened, to be placed in a different way—the material for a new work—for a new work to be created, and by a new man. A feeling came to him, which had at the same time something heroic and paternal about it, similar to that of Hector who, looking with pride on his young son, thought that people would say:

The father was not this strong.

He even surprised himself sometimes by reciting the lines of old Giambattista Vico, which he had learned from his Neapolitan friend, about the treasury of thought which had been widely opened for him all these years and was now closed, and it would have to be reopened for others; and together with humility, which demanded *dimittite*, a tranquil conscience arose in him that he had been a *servus Domini*, and at the altar of God he had deposited the work that He had commanded him to do and had allowed him to accomplish within the limits set by Him.

Yes, all this was true, and the conclusion just. But when it is pointed out to a man of thought that there is an error in his thought in which he rested as though it were the truth, or if he suspects that there is an error, how could the prick of remorse be laid asleep in him, and how could he live with that error without investigation, correction, or confutation? How could one expect him to remain cold and indifferent toward that which had been the goal of his life and toward which he felt the moral responsibility to care for and protect its uncontaminated purity?

Not being able to turn his mind away from this piercing inquietude, Hegel completely renewed his faith in his life's work, which was the bread that he had broken for the enthusiastic listeners in the hall of the Berlin University. He was still rather rich in mental vigor; indeed, that same year, having been shaken by the rumor of the revolutionary events in France, he had written (in conformity with his political faith, and with the robust spirit of a conservative suspicious of the *hommes*

à principes who had risen against the *hommes d'état*), a long essay against the English *Reform Bill*. He continued to enrich himself with the lessons of new developments, for he would not have been able to accept the counsel of wisdom and to stop at what he had already done supposing he had lost the certitude of the truth that he had once acquired and held.

This was his state of mind when the cholera, which had started to withdraw from Berlin, suddenly returned and in all its fury took away in a few hours Hegel himself, the greatest philosopher of his time, on November 14, 1831. When Hegel's faithful and affectionate students began to publish, in addition to the works he had written, a dozen volumes of his lectures, they emphasized the form of the system, in the way that it had been organized and particularized in academic teaching, yet at that time the origin of the system remained little or not at all known. The history of the laborious formation of his thought had to wait until a century later when it was reconstructed from the unpublished papers of his youth.

And only about a century later was the critique which the Neapolitan scholar had presented to Hegel in the above-reported conversation renewed; then Hegel the philosopher was contrasted with Hegel the architect of a system, the Hegel alive, as it was said, and the Hegel dead. This crisis no longer confined itself to the Neapolitan circle, where Hegel had been much studied in the nineteenth century and where he had faithful followers even in the era of positivism, but it also spread to the rest of Italy; and in Italy the philosophical thought of Hegel has since renewed its vigorous action in a systemization completely different from that which pleased him, and consequences have been drawn from it that he did not wish to draw, and theories that he had accepted from his predecessors which could not be maintained had to be completely rebuilt from top to bottom. Even the name of the system itself had to be changed, because "absolute idealism" was no longer suitable and failed to grasp the fundamental features, for which reason a new name, proper to it, automatically suggested itself—that of "absolute historicism."

However that may be, Hegel now belongs to us; that this is not enough for us is the obvious effect of his belonging to us and of the possession of him which we have, for the possession of a thought is valuable only insofar as it prepares for a new life and new thought.

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