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# Hegel and Egypt's African Element

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## Abstract

Contrary to the widespread view that Hegel excluded Africa from what he called world history proper, the specifically African element of Egypt was indispensable to his account of the pivotal dialectical moment that saw spirit's release from its immersion in nature. Hegel's racist caricature of Africans in the early part of the lectures was not gratuitous, something that commentators can leave to one side. It was integral to his dialectical account of world history because it served to generate the contradiction that saw the Persian Empire give way to Greece. This understanding is confirmed by the newly completed four-volume edition of Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* in the *Gesammelte Werke*. These new volumes also enable us to gain critical insight into how the editors of the first two published versions of the lectures, Eduard Gans and Karl Hegel, sought in their different ways to shape the reception of Hegel's lectures.

## I. The Editions

The ongoing publication in the *Gesammelte Werke* of critical editions of notes taken during Hegel's lectures presents scholars of his work with the opportunity to follow the development of his thinking across a wide variety of topics. In particular, the four new volumes of Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* enable us not only to address questions about how his account developed over time, but also to scrutinize some of the decisions made by previous editors, especially the first two, Eduard Gans in 1837 and Karl Hegel, the philosopher's son, in 1840, with an eye to assessing how they might have distorted our understanding of Hegel's philosophy.<sup>1</sup> Georg Lasson's edition, beginning in 1919, added a great deal more material to what these earlier editors had already supplied, but, by integrating these additions into their earlier work, his composite edition only succeeded in taking us further away from anything Hegel might have said on any one of the five occasions on which he gave the lectures: 1822–23, 1824–25, 1826–27, 1828–29 and 1830–31.



Now for the first time we can follow Hegel's train of thought on each of the four occasions where transcripts of his lectures survive.<sup>2</sup> We are missing notes only for the 1828–29 lecture course. As a result, we are finally able to witness how his account changed as his philosophical ideas developed and as the opportunity of repeating the lectures gave him occasion to explore a wider range of sources or familiarize himself with new scholarship on the topics addressed. In this essay, I explore Hegel's treatment of Egypt as it is presented in the new volumes, highlighting the differences between the transcripts and the published editions that up until now we have been forced to rely on.

It is widely acknowledged that the discussion of Egypt occupies a pivotal place in the lectures on history (Pope 2006: 151; Hodgson 2102: 107; Stone 2017: 267–68). It is in the transition from Egypt to Greece that spirit, hitherto locked in nature, frees itself from it. Hegel accomplished this by presenting Egypt as an enigma encapsulating the two extremes of African harshness and spirit's quest for freedom. It was only through the extreme character of this contradiction that the conditions for spirit to sublimate nature were put in place. I will argue here that it was to enhance the sense of this contradiction that Hegel took it upon himself to portray Africa in an even more negative light than his already biased sources gave him license to do (Bernasconi 1998; McCaskie 2019). In an earlier essay I claimed that Hegel egregiously distorted these sources, not gratuitously but precisely in order to generate the contradiction internal to Egypt that would generate the dialectical transition to Greece (Bernasconi 2007a), but that attempt suffered from having to rely on the composite edition of Hegel's lectures edited first by Gans and subsequently revised by Karl Hegel.<sup>3</sup> The faithfulness of these editions has correctly been viewed with some suspicion, a suspicion enhanced when one compares them. For example, Gans's edition of the lectures, which was largely based on Karl Hegel's transcription of the 1830–31 course, contained less on the African aspect of Egypt than Karl Hegel's own 1840 edition that sought to incorporate transcripts from earlier occasions on which Hegel gave the course, most notably the 1822–23 version (*KH*: 253; *A*: 188). This invited the question as to whether Hegel, in the course of giving the lectures over a ten-year period, had chosen to limit his focus on the contribution of Africa proper to an Egypt that he separated from it at least geographically (*GW*: 27.1: 101). It also raised the possibility that it was Karl Hegel and not his father who had decided on his own initiative to give additional emphasis to Egypt's association with Africa. The newly available texts collected in the first four parts of volume 27 of the *Gesammelte Werke* resolve these questions. They show it was Hegel himself who repeatedly highlighted what he had already in the 1822–23 course he called Egypt's 'African element' (*GW*: 27.1: 249).<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, the new editions are unable to provide definitive answers to all the questions one might have. There are sometimes significant variations between

the lecture notes taken by different auditors. However, on those occasions when the various sets of notes from a given year are in substantial agreement with each other, we can be confident that they capture Hegel's thought at least at the moment he delivered them. The standard warnings issued against the earlier editions of the *Lectures* have been vindicated, but the fog of textual uncertainty that has blanketed them is now lifted where the surviving transcripts agree with each other. The textual disputes are by no means at an end, but at least in some cases they can be resolved by careful comparative work of the kind I try to practise here.

We know that some of the texts that Gans, Karl Hegel and Lasson used to produce their composite editions have since been lost, but the most serious loss is that no notes from Hegel's 1828–29 course survive, if there ever were any. It is tempting to assume that the numerous passages in the early editions for which no corresponding text in the surviving version can be found derive from this missing course. Nevertheless, the more one examines such passages in the 1837 and 1840 editions, the more likely it seems that most of them owe their origin to the efforts of Hegel's first two editors to render his thought accessible. Gans and Karl Hegel were primarily concerned with establishing a readable text in which the logic of his presentation as each of them saw it was itself legible. Neither of them was attempting to conform to modern editorial standards as they sought to draw from the various manuscripts available to them and turn them into a seamless whole. Readability, not fidelity, was the major preoccupation of Hegel's first editors operating as they were under the collective title 'An Association of the Friends of the Deceased'. Nevertheless, the controversial nature of some of their choices is hinted at in Karl Hegel's Preface to his edition when he referred to the fact that his work was submitted to the scrutiny of 'three representatives of Professor Gans' prior to publication (*KH*: xxiii–xxiv; trans. *S*: xiii).

Fortunately, by studying some of the most important passages in Karl Hegel's transcription of the 1830–31 course that neither Gans nor Karl Hegel included, and by comparing those passages with what they did include, it is possible to develop a clear sense of the direction in which they wanted to take Hegel's readers and how their understanding departed from Hegel's own aims.<sup>5</sup> With this new appreciation of their editorial role, it is possible to look more critically at those passages that are in the early editions but missing from the surviving transcripts and see which of them are most likely to be genuine and which not.

In sum, the new volumes on world history in the *Gesammelte Werke* edition give Hegel scholars the opportunity to investigate how Hegel's early editors sought to influence how the lectures would be understood, sometimes even to the point of distorting his ideas. For this reason, all previous discussions of Hegel lectures have now to be reassessed: to the extent that those discussions engaged with those lectures textually, we must ask whether the cited passages can be found in the new volumes and, if they are not, then we have to try to decide whether these might

not have been additions introduced by one or other of the editors on their own account. In this essay I confine myself to showing how the new volumes help to clarify what is at stake in Hegel's account of the role of Egypt in world history and how this impacts our understanding of the relation of Egypt to what Hegel problematically called 'Africa proper'.<sup>6</sup>

### II. The Alleged Leave Taking from Africa

In this section I illustrate the kind of inquiry that I believe the possession of the new volumes on the philosophy of history opens up, one that allows us to call into question the legitimacy of one of the more famous claims attributed to Hegel, the notorious announcement found in Karl Hegel's 1840 edition, where, following his discussion of Africa at the end of the introduction, he allegedly announced, 'At this point we leave Africa, not to mention it again' (*KH*: 123; trans. *A*: 91). In Eduard Gans's edition of 1837 there is a similar statement, albeit in place of the relatively mild verb *verlassen* one finds the harsher *abstossen*, which has a more violent connotation, as if Africa had been thrust to one side (*G*: 97). But when we turn to the four volumes of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* in the *Gesammelte Werke* we find little evidence of such a dramatic leave taking. In 1822–23 Hegel described Africans' 'frightful savagery' in only a few sentences, at the end of which he announced that Africa had no further connection with history, except in so far as Africans were enslaved. Strikingly both the Griesheim and Hagenbach manuscripts have him saying something very different: the Africans have *not yet* any connection with history (*GW*: 27.1: 84–85).<sup>7</sup> The discussion of Africa in 1824–25 ends by putting aside that part of Africa he somewhat arbitrarily identified as 'Africa proper' with the assertion that there is no history proper there (*GW*: 27.2: 526), but the same judgement would have applied to his treatment of China and India, because from the outset 'history proper' did not begin for him until Persia, where history proper is marked by continuity and progress (*GW*: 27.1: 205; *GW*: 27.3: 919–20).<sup>8</sup> In 1826–27 Hegel went into even more historical detail about Africa, and, according to Joseph Hube's notes, the discussion ended abruptly: 'Enough of this initial savage form of human beings' (*GW*: 27.3: 845). This seems to be the most dismissive formulation that survives, because when we come to Karl Hegel's notes from the lectures of 1830–31, there is no dramatic leave taking of Africa proper, although Johann Heinrich Wichern's account from the same year has Hegel brushing aside this part of the world in roughly the same terms he had used in 1824–25 (*GW*: 27.4: 1230). On this occasion he added: 'Later we will consider Egypt in the journey of the human spirit from East to West: besides Africa has shown itself to us as unhistorical and closed and accordingly we have put it to one side as such' (*GW*: 27.4: 1230). This now must be understood

to mean that Africa proper has to be put aside until the discussion of Egypt brings it back, albeit in a form that, as I will show, does not allow it to be assimilated into the march of history.

Although it is theoretically possible that the famous phrase in which Hegel declared that he would not mention Africa again derives from a missing manuscript, it is unlikely, not least because it is not true. In the next section I shall not only investigate Hegel's frequent references to Africa in his account of Egypt, but I shall also show why his early editors, and especially Karl Hegel, thought those references integral to the dialectic of history. It was in so far as Africa was closed and indeed unhistorical that Egypt could not fully assimilate it. One could almost say that Africa was integrated into world history only in so far as its immersion in nature made it impossible for it to be integrated. This is what generated the contradiction on which Hegel's account of the progress of the dialectic and specifically the transition to Greece relied. Teshale Tibebu is one of the few commentators to emphasize the place of contradiction in Hegel's discussion of Egypt (Tibebu 2011: 158, 276, 280, 293), but he has a different account from mine here. He sees Hegel as seeking to 'resolve the contradiction' and treats the fact that it proves 'irresolvable' as a source of criticism (281–82), whereas I am focused on identifying how through this contradiction Hegel presented the dialectic of history at work.<sup>9</sup>

One should not be surprised that Hegel found an African element in Egypt. He repeatedly referred to Egypt's relation to what we know as the Kingdom of Kush, but that he knew as Ethiopia. Indeed, in 1830–31 he was able to support the claim that 'Egypt received its culture from Ethiopia, in particular from the Island of Meroë', by referencing a modern hypothesis about a priestly people there (*GW*: 27.4: 1312).<sup>10</sup> More importantly, the consensus in Hegel's time was that the ancient Egyptians were Black (Bernasconi 2007b. See also Bernasconi 2007a). This was a view supported by Herodotus's description of them as 'black and woolly haired' (Herodotus 1975: 392–93). Furthermore, Hegel owned the 1792 edition of Volney's *Les Ruines ou méditation sur les révolutions des Empires*, a work that no doubt spoke to Hegel because it reflected on the historical transition that takes place when empires fall but nevertheless pass on a certain legacy (*GW*: 31.2: 1312). In it he would have read of 'a people now forgotten who, when all the others were barbarians, discovered the elements of the sciences and arts; a race of human beings who, today rejected from society because they have kinky hair and black skin, based on the laws of nature those civil and religious systems that still govern the universe' (Volney 1792: 22, my translation). To be sure, the consensus surrounding the Blackness of the ancient Egyptians was beginning to collapse at the time Hegel was giving his lectures. In 1817 Georges Cuvier broke with the broad consensus and insisted that the ancient Egyptians were 'of the same race as ourselves' (Cuvier 1817a: 273, my translation), and perhaps for this reason in

the same year Volney dropped the previously quoted sentence from the fifth edition of *Ruins* (Volney 1817: 26). It is likely that Hegel was unaware of either of these developments, although it is possible that he was familiar with another text, again from 1817, in which Cuvier categorized the Egyptians within the Caucasian race (Cuvier 1817b: vol. 1, 95). However, Hegel did have in his library the fifth edition of Cuvier's *Discours sur les révolutions de la surface du globe* (*GW*: 31.2: 1398), and so he might have noticed that its author there listed as the three oldest civilized peoples of the Caucasian race the Indians, the Chaldeans, and the Egyptians (Cuvier 1825: 180). But, given that he went on to say that they were extraordinarily similar not only in temperament but also in their political and religious constitution, it would have been impossible for Hegel to embrace this view.

Although this is not the place for an extended discussion of Hegel's understanding of race, the question inevitably arises as to the role Hegel's philosophy of history ascribes to race. In the 1830–31 lecture course, describing the Persians as 'the first historical people', he identified them as belonging to the Caucasian race, that is to say, to European stock. The Chinese and the Indians, the discussion of whom he had just completed, were referred to the distinctly different Mongolian race (*GW*: 27.4: 1290).<sup>11</sup> Hegel's use of the term *Caucasian* here is striking. It was a term that had been introduced by Christoph Meiners and subsequently popularized by his Göttingen colleague Johann Blumenbach (Meiners 1785; Blumenbach 1795: 285–90). Hegel's deliberate invocation of it here suggests that he thought that there was a racial basis to history where race was to be understood in terms of natural history (Bernasconi 2000). In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Subjective Spirit* he had shown himself most familiar with Blumenbach's approach to race, as well as that of others including, for example, Kant's (Hegel 2008: 231–39). However, the new editions of the lectures on the philosophy of history show that it was only in the 1830–31 course that he invoked natural history by using the terms Caucasian and Mongolian. The outlines of the passage to Persia are the same in all four versions. The transition within the philosophy of history from India to Persia was likened to the change that a European traveler would experience even in Hegel's own time. In fact, Hegel had a specific European traveler in mind: Mountstuart Elphinstone, a British envoy to Cabul, who, traveling from West to East, made the observation that until they crossed the Indus river, European travelers could still believe they were in Europe.<sup>12</sup> In the 1822–23 course, which was the occasion on which Hegel described Persia as 'the proper beginning of world history', a phrase Karl Hegel incorporated in his edition (*GW*: 27.1: 205; *KH*: 212),<sup>13</sup> Hegel also announced that even in his own time there was in Persia a race 'more beautiful' than that found on the other side of the river (*GW*: 27.1: 205–6).<sup>14</sup> The reference to beauty is important because both Meiners and Blumenbach, in spite of all their other differences, had insisted on the unsurpassed beauty of the Caucasian race. This could therefore be an implicit reference to the

account of at least one of them. But the fact of the matter is that at this decisive point in the lectures in 1824–25 and 1826–27, Elphinstone is evoked to highlight the difference that separates the Persians from the Indians, but there is no specific mention of race (*GW*: 27.2: 597; *GW*: 27.3: 919–20). The silence about race suggests at very least that the beginning of world history proper is not to be explained on these two occasions in terms of natural history and it even raises questions about how seriously committed he was to the reference to the Caucasian race as such in 1830–31. At very least it speaks to Hegel's awareness that his own understanding of race diverged from that of the natural historians. This is most apparent if one thinks of the Kantian account where race is understood strictly in terms of permanent hereditary characteristics from which he diverges.<sup>15</sup> I subscribe to the basic outlines of the account given by Daniel James and Franz Knappik: they argue that Hegel adopted what they call a 'bio-cultural conception of race' that allows for the inheritance of acquired traits alongside what he calls natural dispositions (Hegel 2008: 244–45; James and Knappik 2023: 107–8). Such a conception seems strange to us because for many people today race is a strictly biological concept divorced from culture. This has led to the view that racism can be restricted to biological racism, an argument that has been used to exonerate Hegel of racism (see McCarney 2000: 144), although biological racism is only one, relatively recent, form of racism. But, for Hegel, as for many early nineteenth century authors, up to and including Gobineau, the identity, meaning and character of the various races is more fully revealed in history than through the new science of race. In other words, the philosophy of history is a better source for understanding race in all its dynamism than the static accounts of race that one finds in Blumenbach. In fact, there are clear signs that Hegel believed, as Gobineau also did, in a dynamic account of race where race mixing was capable of playing a positive, as well as a negative role (Gobineau 1884: 545).<sup>16</sup>

### III. The African Element of Egypt

In this section I investigate some points of convergence and divergence across the multiple versions we now have of Hegel's discussion of Egypt in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, focusing most especially on those most relevant to an understanding of its African element. In his lectures on aesthetics and on the philosophy of religion, Hegel addressed the transition from the natural to the spiritual that is also the focus of the lectures of history, but the approach is very different. In particular, when Hegel was lecturing on these other subjects, he acknowledged the enigmatic character of Egypt but did not insist on finding a contradiction there as he did in the lectures on the philosophy of history.<sup>17</sup> Because the historical passage from Egypt to Greece represents the freeing of spirit from nature this

dialectical transition as it is represented in the lectures on history needed to be more stringent.

In Gans's edition, Africa is introduced into the discussion of Egypt on only three occasions. One of these references is somewhat extraneous and is not carried over by Karl Hegel into his edition: according to Gans, Hegel associated the tale of the *One Thousand and One Nights* with African sorcery or witchcraft (*G*: 200). In a second reference to Africa, just prior to that one, Gans included an incisive account of how Egypt embraced both sides of the contradiction between nature and spirit in abstract independence of each other: 'We have, therefore, on the *one* side, naturalness, barbarous sensuality, with African cruelty, harshness, animal worship, enjoyment of life. [...] The other side is the struggle of spirit for liberation – the fantasy of images alongside the abstract understanding of the mechanical labors connected with the production of these images' (*G*: 227–28). This formulation is not found in any of the surviving transcripts, but it provides such a faithful summary of a major part of Hegel's discussions that it would not be a surprise if Hegel had said something like this on one occasion or another. There are parallel comments in a number of the transcripts. In the notes from 1824–25, he said that 'we find the outlines of the most savage, most harsh, African sensuality in Egypt' (*GW*: 27.2: 635). In 1826–27, he identified in Egypt, on the one side, nature worship, harsh African superstition, and harsh restriction and, on the other side, the transformation of the natural element into the spiritual, the symbolic (*GW*: 27.3: 954–55). Furthermore, the passage in Gans's edition of the *Lectures* reflects Hegel's association of reverence for animals with African harshness as found in the 1830–31 lecture course (*GW*: 27.4: 1324). This is one of the most schematic formulations of the African element in Egypt and so it is no surprise that Karl Hegel in his edition retained it, albeit with minor modifications: in place of 'naturalness' we read 'monstrous partiality (*Befangenheit*) and restriction to particularity' (*KH*: 267).<sup>18</sup> What are we to make of the differences between Gans's version and the Karl Hegel version? Does this reflect the differences between two different transcripts? Or is it a case of Karl Hegel finding a text in Gans's edition that he believed should be modified to bring it more into line with what he believed was Hegel's position, a possibility enhanced by the fact that Hegel did indeed use the phrase 'deep restriction to the particularity of intuition' in 1824–25 (*GW*: 27.2: 630)? The most plausible conclusion seems to be that we cannot attribute the formulation found in either Gans's edition or Karl Hegel's edition to Hegel himself with absolutely certainty. It could well be a case of the editors trying to point Hegel's readers in the right direction, as they saw it.

The only other mention of Africa in the discussion of Egypt in Gans's edition highlights the dialectical transition itself and, like the passage just considered, is also schematic: 'The freedom of the spirit, which lay dark in the Egyptian principle, was however already contained within it: it embraces the Asiatic and African element,



but also the determinate transition to the European' (*G*: 207–8). This is taken over directly from Karl Hegel's transcript of the 1830–31 lecture course with only very minor modifications (*GW*: 27.4: 1311).<sup>19</sup> And yet, in the course of revising Gans's edition, Karl Hegel himself decided to delete this passage even though it is one that he himself had recorded. Furthermore, neither Gans, nor Karl Hegel, included from the 1830–31 course one of Hegel's most striking claims about the African element of Egypt. Following a reference to 'the African sky', Hegel recognized in Egypt an activity against nature that opposed human productions to it, but immediately juxtaposed it with the claim that the Egyptian view of nature also reflected the persistence of an African waywardness (*Unbändigkeit*) (*GW*: 27.4: 1319).<sup>20</sup> What makes the omission of this passage especially significant is the fact that in his discussion of Africa early in the same lecture course Hegel had twice referred to African *Unbändigkeit* (*GW*: 27.4: 1223, 1229). This suggests that Hegel was deliberately tying the discussion of the African element in Egypt with the earlier discussion of sub-Saharan Africa. Nor is this the only case where such connections could be established. Karl Hegel introduced the phrase 'the African imprisonment (*Gedrungenheit*) of ideas' and placed it alongside the infinite impulse of the spirit to realize itself objectively (*KH*: 253; trans. *A*: 188).<sup>21</sup> It should be noted that Hegel had in his treatment of sub-Saharan Africa referenced the *Gedrungenheit* of African nature in 1824–25 (*GW*: 27.2: 518), that is to say, its being compressed within itself, as Nisbet translates it (*N*: 177; see also Pope 2006: 169).

Nor was this enough for Karl Hegel, who recognized that more needed to be said about the African element within Egypt than could be found in Gans's edition. For that reason, he drew on the 1822–23 lectures to introduce into the discussion of Egypt further references to Africa, thereby showing a deeper understanding of the systematic structure of the lecture course than we find in Gans. Gans was certainly focused on the contradiction between nature and spirit which is at the core of the discussion of Egypt, but he did not emphasize as much as Karl Hegel did the role of Africa in establishing the contradiction. For example, both Gans and Karl Hegel included Hegel's reference to Herodotus's description of the Egyptians as the wisest of human beings (*G*: 211; *KH*: 211; from *GW*: 27.4: 1316; see also *GW*: 27.3: 973), but only Karl Hegel immediately qualified it by introducing a statement that explicitly referenced African stupidity, even though, so far as we know, Hegel himself felt the need to do so in the same context only on the first occasion he gave the course (*GW*: 27.1: 245). The qualifying statement in Karl Hegel's edition is formulated to highlight the contradiction. It reads: 'It also surprises us to find among them, alongside African stupidity, reflective intelligence, a thoroughly rational organization characterizing all institutions and most astonishing works of art' (*KH*: 249; trans. *A*: 186). The surviving manuscript that comes closest to this formulation was Karl Gustav Julius von Griesheim's transcription of

the 1822–23 lecture course that refers, on the one hand, to African stupidity and, on the other, to their reflective intelligence, rational organization, and admirable works of fine art, especially of architecture (*GW*: 27.1: 245).

In sum, even though it might seem anomalous that Karl Hegel omitted the statement about the Asian and African elements of Egypt that Gans had included, he more than compensated for this by introducing other passages from the transcripts that supplemented Gans's more limited references to Africa. In doing so, he was clearly following his father's intention to show the intimate link between so-called Africa proper and Egypt.

### IV. 'We see the Egyptians in Contradiction'

In this final section, I highlight the fact that although Hegel repeatedly followed Herder in referring to Egypt as an enigma (Herder 1787: 109), his main aim was to demonstrate that Egypt's elements gave rise to a contradiction, thereby opening the way to a dialectical reading.<sup>22</sup> In the introductory overview of the lectures on only the second time he delivered them, he explained that the inner transition of world history to the Greeks took place in Egypt because the struggle of the different abstract antitheses were so contradictory (*GW*: 27.2: 541). It was a point he developed two years later, when, in 1826–27, he made it clear that, while the external transition was from Persia to Greece, the inner transition to the principle of free life that is found in Greece took place as the resolution of the contradictions that permeated the Egyptian principle (*GW*: 27.3: 850). Furthermore, the contradictions arose from the opposition between the human and the natural that he had already introduced in the discussion of Africa proper but that now in the account of Egypt were produced by the return of the African element (*GW*: 27.3: 837).

On Hegel's account Egypt was neither an immediate nor a concrete unity, but a problematic combination of nature and spirit in which both sides were opposed to each other to the point of contradiction. On the first occasion Hegel gave the lectures, one of the auditors, Karl Rudolf Hagenbach, recorded Hegel as having said that with the presence of the African element there was a uniting of contradictions (*GW*: 27.1: 249). Later in the same lecture course, another auditor, Karl Gustav Julius von Griesheim, wrote down the words: 'we see the Egyptians in contradiction' (*GW*: 27.1: 264). As he was the only one to record this phrase, it is possible this was Griesheim's summary as he listened to Hegel, rather than Hegel's actual words, but he seems to have clearly understood Hegel's intent. At the same point in the lecture course Heinrich Hotho went into more detail about the Egyptians' ways of intuiting essential being: 'bound up in the intuition of nature, spirit's task was breaking through this restriction (*Gebundenheit*),

transitioning to the contradiction, switching the spiritual into the animal and vice versa' (GW: 27.1: 264). In keeping with this account, Hegel began his account of Egypt in the 1824–25 lecture course by describing the figure of the sphinx, half animal, half human: 'the spiritual, which tears itself away from the animal, the natural, begins to look away from it, but, not yet liberated, is still caught up in this contradiction' (GW: 27.2: 619). The worship of animals took its point of departure from the bluntness of African superstition, which he called inhuman, and which he associated with African obstinacy (GW: 27.3: 962). Contradiction was the content of Egypt (GW: 27.2: 633).

In sum, Hegel's discussion of Egypt is decisive for an understanding of Hegel's dialectic of world history in general, but it is especially significant for the way it makes it necessary to revise the common misunderstanding that Hegel placed Africa altogether outside world history. Things are more complicated than that. He constructed his account of Egypt in such a way that it embodied the contradiction, symbolized by the sphinx, and what made the contradiction sufficiently extreme to generate the dialectical transition was the presence of the African element especially within Egyptian religion. As he explained, according to Hagenbach's transcript of the 1822–23 course, the Egyptian drives the contradiction apart dialectically (GW 27, 1: 278). That phrase does not appear in Hotho's text, but at the same point in the course we find Egypt described there as 'the land of conflict, of dialectic, the land of problem' (GW 27, 1: 278).

This much must have become clear to Hegel already on the first occasion that he gave his lectures on world history. In 1822–23 he had little to say about Africa at the beginning of the course, but by the time he reached Egypt he knew he had to generate the contradiction that would explain the release from nature that would begin in Greece. When he gave the lectures a second time, he extended his treatment of Africa, brazenly distorting even the most extreme caricatures of Africans available to him. In doing so, he was not simply filling a 'lacuna' (Hodgson 2012: 85). There is nothing extraneous about Hegel's extended and vicious racist portrait of Africa that is present in all of the lecture courses after the first one. Some commentators have taken at face value the suggestion that Hegel, having discussed Africa at the beginning of the lectures, intended never to mention it again and this seems to have blinded them to its role in the discussion of Egypt (e.g. Hodgson 2012: 85, 104–8). In this essay, I have shown that one cannot read Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* as if his racist discussion of Africa at the beginning of the lectures was irrelevant to what followed. It was on the basis of his exaggerated and deliberately distorted caricature of Africans that Hegel postulated the decisive transition from the Persian Empire to the Greek world with its freer relation to nature. Perhaps he could have found another way of generating the contradiction that he could reference to account for the transition that saved spirit forever remaining locked in nature, but this is the one he

consistently adopted. His anti-Black racism is integral to his account of world history in the form that he left it to us.

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### Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The new editions are Hegel 2015, 2019a, 2019b and 2020 abbreviated as *GW*: 27.1, *GW*: 27.2, *GW*: 27.3 and *GW*: 27.4 respectively. All translations from these editions are my own, although I have consulted the standard translations of Hegel's lectures on history to see how they translated similar passages.

Other abbreviations used:

*A* = Hegel, G. W. F. (2011b), *The Philosophy of History*, trans. R. Alvarado.

*G* = Hegel, G. W. F. (1837), *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, ed. E. Gans.

*KH* = Hegel, G. W. F. (1840), *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, zweite Auflage besorgt von Karl Hegel.

*N* = Hegel, G. W. F. (1975), *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction*, trans. H. B. Nisbet.

*S* = Hegel, G. W. F. (1956), *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree.

<sup>2</sup> Strictly speaking, that was already possible for the 1822–23 lectures with the publication of Hegel 1996, trans. *A*.

<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, Timothy Brennan (2013: 154–56 and 2014: 103–8) seems not to have been aware of Bernasconi 2007a when he responded to Bernasconi 1998. Had he done so he would have recognized that referencing Hegel's treatment of Egypt in no way helps his case. In addition, the current essay shows that, now that we have the four volumes of the *Gesammelte Werke* 27, the interpretive problems that arise from using the early editions of the lectures are largely resolved and demonstrate how fully committed Hegel was to his false and distorted use of sources about Africans.

<sup>4</sup> 'Element' is an important word in Hegel's vocabulary. In his work it often means more than a constituent part or component. It often means what supports or sustains as when one says that someone is under certain circumstances in their element like a fish in water. Lampert already drew attention to Hegel's distinction between the African and Asian elements found within Egypt (1995: 51). His essay remains important for his critical comments on Hegel's use of his sources.

<sup>5</sup> This time-consuming process of comparing the different versions needs to be performed not just for the philosophy of history lectures but for all the lecture courses and it may well be found that there are substantial differences between the practices of a number of Hegel's early editors leading scholars today to judge their reliability differently.

<sup>6</sup> I would offer Ladha's *The Architecture of Freedom* (2020) as an example of an extremely rich and informative reading of Hegel's Africa that fully recognizes the African element of Egypt, but which was nevertheless held back from seeing how that element operated dialectically because it was written too soon to have access to some of the relevant volumes of the *Gesammelte Werke*.

<sup>7</sup> It is a suggestion that folds nicely into Du Bois's account of history where it is said that 'the full, complete Negro message of the whole Negro race has not as yet been given to the world'. (Du Bois 2000: 112). For other aspects of the relation of Du Bois to Hegel, as well as other aspects of Hegel's account of Egypt, for example his interest in hermeticism, see Pope, although he focuses more on 'an antithetical opposition' Egypt and Greece (2006: 162), whereas my focus here is on the contradiction within Egypt arising from what Pope calls 'the Africa in Egypt' (168).

<sup>8</sup> Only the transcripts by Karl Gustav Julius von Griesheim and Karl Rudolf Hagenbach read 'world history proper', but this is presumably what is meant. The idea that Africa is outside history is regularly associated with Hegel as if he had invented this trope, but he would have been familiar with, for example, Adam Ferguson's suggestion that the fact that Africa furnishes the historian with few materials, is a form of proof of 'weakness in the genius of the people' (1768: 108–9).

<sup>9</sup> Pinkard acknowledges a 'sense of contradiction at work in the initial thoughts about reason and nature' among the Persians and Egyptians, but his reading seems more gradualist than dialectical (2017: 66).

<sup>10</sup> This is almost certainly a reference to Frédéric Cailliaud's *Voyage à Méroé*, which was published in four volumes in 1826 and 1827. McCarney cites the statement that 'Egypt probably received its culture from Ethiopia' and attempts to use this as evidence that exonerates Hegel of (biological) racism. He argues that there is nothing in Hegel's theoretical position that could have prevented him from seeing Africa as the birthplace of spirit and, even more amazingly, that 'a firmer theoretical basis for the fundamental equality of human beings than Hegelian spirit provides can scarcely be imagined' (McCarney 2000: 144–45). He can only make this claim because he chooses to ignore the important role of Egypt in Hegel's lectures on history. The suggestion that we should only be concerned about biological racism is equally bizarre. I return briefly to the question of the role of biological races in the philosophy of history later in the essay.

<sup>11</sup> The term Caucasian is found in Karl Hegel's transcript, but not in that of Adolf Heimann, who also has *Geschlecht* instead of *Race* (*GW*: 26.4: 1290). On this issue both Gans and Karl Hegel followed the Karl Hegel manuscript in their editions (*G*: 176; *KH*: 211; *A*: 157).

<sup>12</sup> Elphinstone (1815) 150. Hegel probably knew this text from the German translation: Elphinstone 1817, vol. one, 238. See also Hegel 2011c: 606.

<sup>13</sup> Of the four surviving transcripts it seems that only two, those of Karl Gustav Julius von Griesheim's and Karl Rudolf Hagenbach, include the word proper (*eigentlich*).

<sup>14</sup> The term *Rasse* appears in the Hotho transcript but not in that of von Griesheim where one finds the word *Menschenart*.

<sup>15</sup> In an important essay Susanne Lettow shows the clear difference between the Kantian conception of race and Hegel's. Her account might need to be modified, albeit only in one of its details, given that she draws heavily on a sentence in the *Zusätze* attached to paragraph 393 of *The Philosophy of Spirit* where Hegel seems to dismiss the salience of *Abstammung* in the assessment of human beings (Hegel 1845: 65; Lettow 2021: 264). That particular sentence is not found in the surviving record of Hegel's lectures from which Ludwig Boumann, the first editor of Hegel's *Encyclopaedia* drew the surrounding sentences (see Hegel 2011c: 956).

<sup>16</sup> More work still needs to be done on Hegel's understanding of race mixing. James and Knappik remind us that State life became possible under the geographic conditions of South America 'thanks to "European blood"' (2023: 107). This opens up the possibility that one way in which Egypt, and thus Africa, enters into world history is when Africans mix with Europeans and not just through cultural contact.

<sup>17</sup> There are a number of valuable studies of Hegel's treatment of Egyptian religion and of Egyptian art that should be consulted by anybody interested in his overall approach to Egypt. For example, for the *Aesthetics*, see Stewart (2015) and for the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* see Erp (2012: 93–97) and Stewart (2019). Stewart (2017) is more wide-ranging and integrates a discussion of art, religion, and history, but it leaves aside the question of the African element and also of the specifically dialectical aspect of the transition to Greece that is my concern here.

<sup>18</sup> Sibree (*S*: 218) and Alvarado (*A*: 199) translate the phrase 'prodigious confusion and limitation to the particular'. *Befangenheit* is especially difficult to translate in this context. Hegel uses it at numerous points in the 1822–23 lecture course (*GW*: 27.1: 261n, 262, 267, 277 and 278). Robert F. Brown and Peter C. Hodgson translate it variously as 'unselfconscious state', and 'self-enclosed state' (Hegel 2011a: 353, 367, 366). The added phrase 'restriction to particularity' echoes Hegel's reference to 'the deepest restriction to the particularity of intuition' (*GW*: 27.2: 630).

<sup>19</sup> One of the auditors, Jan Ackersdijck, added the further phrase: 'total intermingling (*Vermischung*) of the different elements'. The word *Vermischung* was frequently used for race mixing and this would seem to be a possible meaning here. Ludwig Buhl in 1837 in reporting on Hegel's lectures described how in Egypt the Asiatic and African forms of life were wrapped up in the enigma (1837: 60).

<sup>20</sup> This immersion in nature is reflected in the Egyptians' immersion in the sun and their reliance on the Nile. 'The fundamental conception of that which the Egyptians regard as being rests on the naturally-determined world in which they live, and more particularly on the enclosed physical circle which the Nile and the sun mark out' (*A*: 189).

<sup>21</sup> In translating *Gedrungenheit* as 'imprisonment' Alvarado was following Sibree (*S*: 207). The only reference to this form of imprisonment that I have so far found in Hegel's discussion of Egypt as a possible source justifying the introduction of this word is a reference to the imprisonment of the Egyptian soul in Hotho's transcript of the 1822–23 lectures at a point where

Hegel was explaining that the power of the Egyptian soul is not yet directed to the universal, does not know it, and thus does not know itself (*GW*: 27.1: 277). In this context Robert F. Brown and Peter C. Hodgson translate *Gedrungenheit* as compulsiveness (Hegel 2011a: 366). The word is not found in Griesheim's transcript, where the word *Kraft* stands in its place.

<sup>22</sup> As Jon Stewart points out (2017: 55), Plutarch already ascribed to the religious teachings of the Egyptians an enigmatical wisdom (1936: 24–25).

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