

## Announcements and Reports

### International Symposium on Hegel and Whitehead

Fordham University, June 2–6, 1984

RECENT interest in the ‘Continental’ dimensions of Whitehead’s philosophy in Europe has prompted a number of international conferences there devoted to his thought. At the first of these, in Bonn in 1981, the participants agreed that some form of ‘scholarly exchange’ between Hegelkenners and Whiteheadians would be extremely timely and beneficial. However, such an exchange, they argued, ought not to occur in Europe, owing to the present somewhat anomalous status of Hegel scholarship in Europe (where at least three distinct ‘International Hegel Societies’ compete for allegiance), as well as to the dominant role that Hegel’s thought already plays in contemporary European philosophy generally.

Accordingly, the University of Santa Clara, in cooperation with Fordham University and with a matching Research Conference grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, sponsored an international symposium focused upon critical and comparative assessments of both philosophers. The symposium took place over a five-day period from June 2 to 6, 1984 on the campus of Fordham University.

Over 75 Hegelians and Whiteheadians from Germany, Poland, Belgium, Great Britain, Canada and the U.S. gathered for a formidable (and somewhat crowded) agenda, featuring 33 symposium papers, plus interaction in a number of thematically organized discussion groups devoted to philosophy of science, social ethics and political philosophy, metaphysics, philosophy of religion and the like. In light of the agenda, many participants (including the project director) counted themselves fortunate simply to have *survived* this protracted encounter with two such formidable systems (not to mention their even more formidable disciples!). But survive we all did—and perhaps with a renewed commitment both to the critical importance as well as to the delightfully-creative aspects of systematic thought generally.

Michael Welker (Tübingen) comforted the more frustrated followers of Hegel or of Whitehead with a reminder that ‘Geteiltes Leid ist halbes Leid’. In exploring the nature of universal theorizing, he cautioned against the temptation merely to engage in transformations from one systematic language or method into another, and argued instead for a ‘polycontextual’ perspective from which the formidable categorial

languages of both Hegel and Whitehead could be understood as a protest against the pervasive modern tendency to differentiate sharply (and often trivialize by comparison) the realm of human experience over against the larger realm of nature.

Errol E. Harris (Cumbria, Britain), long an advocate of a common systematic approach grounded in both philosophies, portrayed Hegel and Whitehead in his opening 'keynote address' as foils to the popular but self-refuting view that 'metaphysics is dead'. Synoptic reflection, while not a panacea, is an important resource for balanced and responsible judgment in a deeply divided and troubled world—and few better examples of or resources for such synoptic vision can be had than those offered by Hegel and Whitehead.

Klaus Hartmann (Tübingen), on the other hand, opened the very next morning's session by charging that the two respective approaches to philosophical explanation are fundamentally incompatible: Whitehead opting for 'metaphysics' via an all-inclusive categorial scheme, while Hegel engaged in a *critique* of mutually exclusive forms of categorial thinking generally; Whitehead opting for a theory-laden approach to ontology via a commitment to atomic 'actual entities', while Hegel repudiates all such specific ontological commitments as pretentious.

It is, of course, possible to reply that discussions of generic features of 'actual occasions' are likewise intended as heuristic rather than as 'theory-laden' ontological commitments of a specific sort, and that the Hegelian critique of conceptual incompleteness, bifurcation and lack of inclusiveness in pre-modern ontologies is mirrored in Whitehead's later description of the categorial 'obligations' of systematic thought generally. Nonetheless, Hartmann's informed and perceptive analysis reminded all symposiasts early on of their critical responsibilities, and served to guard against the sort of easy syncretism that might otherwise have come to dominate a cross-cultural philosophical venture of this sort.

This responsibly critical tone persisted in most of the remaining presentations. Hans-Christian Lucas (Hegel-Archiv, Bochum) and Ernest Wolf-Gazo (Münster) offered critical historical exegesis to account for, compare, and examine the respective adequacy of, Hegelian and Whiteheadian categories. Tom Rockmore (Fordham) decisively demonstrated Whitehead's inadequate historical understanding of that 'absolute idealism' which he felt himself to be 'transforming onto a more realistic basis', while Robert Whittmore (Tulane) indicated how Whitehead, like Hegel before him, had effectively abandoned the realist/idealist dichotomy in which much late modern and contemporary philosophy has remained mired. Finally, George L. Kline (Bryn Mawr College) in effect reinforced the polycontextual and 'heuristic' interpretations of the function of categorial thinking generally by means of a sophisticated linguistic analysis, comparison, and contrast of salient features of *der Begriff* and 'conrescence'.

J.N. Findlay (Boston) discussed philosophy of nature, suggesting that for both Hegel and Whitehead, 'the grounding of nature is in a metaphysical system that transcends nature'. He described in particular how Hegel's approach demonstrates the

need for something antithetical to 'lifeless nature' which lends to it a more complete significance through the mutual interpenetration of opposites. From the Whiteheadian side, Ivor Leclerc (Emory University) offered an interpretation of the historical development of the concept of 'nature' from Leibniz and Kant to Whitehead, designed to portray Whitehead's motivation as the recovery of a metaphysic of nature within which a genuine knowledge of external nature would be both possible and meaningful. Joseph Earley, a chemist from Georgetown University, discussed the significance of Ilya Prigogine and the 'ontology of compound individuals' in nature. Dissipative structures in Prigogine's non-linear chemistry are 'fundamental' entities which nevertheless are *not* primarily characterized by a corresponding chemical simplicity. Hegel, in particular, may have been correct to argue that 'substance' does not necessarily entail 'composed of simple and mutually identical parts'; whence reductionistic explanation may not constitute the 'last word' in scientific methodology.

Turning then to the realm of historical experience specifically, John E. Smith (Yale) discussed the common protest of both philosophers against the apparent loss of importance of significant dimensions of human experience (such as the feeling of transcendence). Hegel and Whitehead re-imposed the constraint upon systematic thought generally that it take account of, and interpret 'what's what', regarding every dimension of such experience—including the moral and religious. Thomas Auxter (University of Florida) responded with a detailed discussion of the historical development of moral experience, and the concern of both philosophers with the development of 'intellectual pathologies' within given cultures, which are the occasion of individual suffering and injustice, and of collective cultural degeneration. Curtis Carter (Marquette) then outlined the surprising similarities of emphasis by both philosophers on the nature and significance of aesthetic and religious symbolism.

Robert Neville (SUNY-Stony Brook) criticized the quest for wholeness and totality in philosophical explanation, arguing for cultural and philosophical pluralism, while Jan Van der Veken (Leuven) likewise pleaded (especially with his European Hegelian colleagues) for a more 'open and humble' form of Hegelian holism, which he perceived as embodied in Whitehead's approach to systematic thought. George Allan (Dickinson College) eloquently summarized this line of criticism by emphasizing the tragic historical dimensions (both in theory and *praxis*) that the quest for such totality (what Welker had denigrated as 'the dogmatic lust for power') effects in the realm of experience and historical explanation thus providing an interesting counterpoint to the triumphalist claims of more devoted advocates of synoptic thought, such as Harris.

It is, frankly, disappointing to note the extent to which scholarship in both these sub-fields of systematic philosophy is still a 'male vocation'. This dominance was challenged only briefly by example during the symposium: Susan Armstrong-Buck (Humboldt State University) offered an intriguing Whiteheadian alternative to conventional philosophies of mind and language, while Sue Booker (Claremont

Graduate School) gave an electrifying assessment of Whitehead's struggle with 'dialectical logic' in the final transition to his mature 'atomist' position.

A revised collection of several of these papers will be published in 1985 by the State University of New York Press (Albany, NY), while others will appear in *The Owl of Minerva* and *Process Studies*. Together, these suggest the coming assimilation of Whitehead scholarship into a more promising and hospitable 'Continental' context, as well as indicating a new and healthy focus for ecumenical dialogue and exchange between Europeans and Anglo-American philosophers generally.

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## The Young Hegel

The Sixth Annual Conference of the Hegel Society of Great Britain, 13th–14th  
September 1984, St Edmund Hall, Oxford

THIS year's meeting discussed Hegel's writings up to but not including the *Jena Phenomenology* of 1807. Norbert Waszek's paper 'David Hume and the young Hegel' was read by Stephen Houlgate as Dr Waszek was absent lecturing in New Zealand. It was a scholarly historical tracing of the influence of Hume on Hegel dealing both with Hegel's acquaintance with Hume's thought via German historians and with his direct reading of Hume in the 1790s. Waszek argued that Hume, as historian, influenced Hegel's philosophy of history in three important ways: (1) Hegel made use of Hume in effecting the transition from Greek to modern culture; (2) Hume provided a prototype for Hegel's view that the totality of an action—described as including its unintended consequences—is not apparent to the agent. This apparently was an anticipation of the doctrine of the 'cunning of reason'; (3) Waszek claimed to find the origins of Hegel's concept of the world historical individual in Hume. Most of the discussion of the paper centred around the latter two issues. M. Petry, who chaired the discussion, emphasised the value of Waszek's research in the reconstruction of this period of Hegel's life and work.<sup>1</sup>

The second paper, 'The character of the modern state in Hegel's early writings', was read by Colin Lines (Thames Polytechnic). This was a clear and carefully argued

1. 'David Hume and the Young Hegel' is an extract from Dr Waszek's University of Cambridge Ph.D. thesis. The paper is being published by the journal *Clio*.