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Hegel and the viability of philosophy

1. Introduction

In the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel claims that philosophy ought to become “exoteric, comprehensible, and capable of being learned and possessed by everybody.” Yet philosophy appears as “the esoteric possession of a few individuals” insofar as it is “only available in its concept or in what is internal to it.”¹ In this way, Hegel raises the issue of the viability of philosophy. In this article, I would like to focus on the way Hegel tackles this issue in the different versions of *Encyclopaedia* at the level of subjective spirit.² In the first part of the article, I will deal with the fact that philosophy appears unintelligible to ordinary consciousness. In the second one, I will defend the thesis that in order to be viable philosophy should become practicable in the first place.³

2. The unintelligibility of philosophy

In the § 3 of the Berlin edition of his *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel claims that a decisive condition for the actualization of philosophy is the replacement of representations with thoughts. By representations he means the determinations of feeling, intuition, desire, and volition, insofar as we are conscious of them. Representations transform a sensuous material into a spiritual content, but at the same time they maintain the intuitive form of the external material.

¹ GW 9, 15, translated by Terry Pinkard, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Cambridge 2018, 10.

² In his challenging essay “Theory and Practice in Hegel: Union or Disunion” in *The Ancients and the Moderns. Rethinking modernity*, New Haven and London 1989, 107–117, Stanley Rosen criticizes the conviction that “the unity of theory and practice occurs decisively in objective spirit” (ibid., 116) by showing that “there is no apparent reason why a satisfied citizen should become a philosopher” (ibid., 117). This conclusion inspired my research on the way in which the adoption of a philosophical attitude becomes and understandable option and a compelling need for one’s life.

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