



**Gregor Moder, *Hegel und Spinoza. Negativität
in der gegenwärtigen Philosophie*
[*Hegel and Spinoza. Negativity in Contemporary
Philosophy*]**

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**A Dialogue with Hegel and Spinoza:
One is either for Hegel and Spinoza, or not
a philosopher at all**

The author of *Hegel und Spinoza* is well-known to Slovenians, but also to the international public as a philosopher and theater practitioner. He is a former research fellow at the Jan van Eyck Academy in Maastricht, Netherlands, a current member of the editorial board of Slovenian philosophical journal *Problemi*, and one of the founders of *Aufhebung*, an international Hegelian Association based in Ljubljana.

This monograph is based on the doctoral dissertation where the sometimes impenetrable complexity of scholarly discourse in general is brought closer to general readership, without losing the necessary rigor of philosophical thought. It deals with one of the most controversial and most far-reaching dilemmas of modern philosophy, one that can be summed up in the question: Hegel or Spinoza? This, in fact, is the title of Pierre Macherey's book that was recently translated into English (2012).

In his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Hegel states that one is either a Spinozist, or not a philosopher at all (Hegel 1970a: 163–64). It was Spinoza who, in *Ethics*, ventured to understand the consubstantiality of being and thought in the concept of the substance which he argued against the pure negativity of the Cartesian subject. But if the jump from Descartes to Spinoza implies a jump in thinking from the negativity of the subject to the affirmative and self-identical substance, then the move from Spinoza to Hegel is a move from the substance to the famous formula from *Phenomenology of Spirit*. According to the *Phenomenology*, in philosophy everything depends upon understanding the true not only as substance, but also as subject (Hegel 1970b: 22–23). We can look at the

entire history of modern philosophy from this perspective: we must either affirm Spinoza's substance as one indissoluble and complete identity, or accept Hegel's concept of the substance as something which is curtailed by the negativity of the subject as its own innermost essence.

Explicitly or implicitly, this question kept resurging in the post-Spinozist and post-Hegelian philosophical tradition. Two almost hostile camps have formed. The first camp followed Hegel and his understanding of Spinozism as the necessary entry point into philosophy ("one is either a Spinozist..."), but not as a sufficient ground of philosophy ("...to understand the absolute not only as substance"). The other camp sought refuge from the traps and detours of Hegelian dialectics precisely by taking up the philosophical legacy of Spinoza and attempted to break the spell of Hegel's concept of negativity, expressed in the somewhat paradoxical definition of the absolute as both substance and subject, by clinging to the Spinozist concept of the affirmative substance. The question itself is therefore not new; however, the quality of Moder's book is not to take one side or the other of this divide, while at the same time knowing full well that a "neutral" position of an impartial observer is simply impossible and the problematic is too acute to allow for an indifferent approach.

This is the road, then, that Moder's book takes us; it is a kind of a Möbius strip that on the one side takes us on the path of the substance, and on the other side on the path of negativity—or to paraphrase the author's own wording, to understand subject as the torsion of the substance itself (96ff.)—only to bring us to the conclusion that this is one and the same road. The path is neither straight nor simple, but full of impasses and U-turns.

Starting with the introductory delimitation of the problematic and the question of how the relationship between Hegel and Spinoza is received, between substance and negativity, the author quickly advances to the heart of the problem as posed in Hegel's section on pure being within *Science of Logic*. If the introduction ("Hegel and Spinoza") takes the perspective of the historical background of the problematic, the second chapter ("History and Logic") discusses the question of historicity itself from an ontological viewpoint, listing various historical ontologic topics such as "The Orient and the problem of beginning," "Dialectics of the Eleats," "Neoplatonism," etc. The sound structure of the book is manifested in one further repetition of the problem of the relationship between history and philosophy when after the third chapter, the most Hegelian one ("Telos, Teleology, Teleiosis"), we come to the fourth chapter, where the problematic of temporality is presented with a Spinozist twist—through a discussion of "Death and Finality." The trajectory is closed with a contemporary reading of Althusser's theory of ideology, which is presented as an example of the Hegelian-Spinozist theory ("Ideology and the originality of the swerve").

However, one need not wait until the last chapter of the book to get to concrete examples of how the problematic of Hegel and Spinoza oper-

ates in contemporary philosophical debates. Such examples are discussed throughout the monograph and illustrate some of the hardest philosophical problems, including even those of comedy and porridge, demonstrating that perhaps there can be no (Hegelian) Spirit without some wit.

It is said that a critique is no good if it fails to find something lacking or worthy of improvement in the object of its inquiry. And since this review seeks to be a good critique, we must now use a knife, hoping not to stab it in the author's back, but rather directly in the chest—so as to recall Brecht's allegory of Hegel's concepts, constantly and violently at each other's throats during the day, only to sit calmly at dinner in the evening (Brecht 1982: 1460–62). In the movement of the book's argument as described above, which is to say in the movement of historical temporality, posed at the same time as the external object of philosophy and as the internal problem of philosophy itself, we may detect a kind of a blind spot that is the most manifest as the lacuna in the bibliography section. The path from Spinoza to Hegel and from Hegel to Althusser lacks a clear reference to an analysis of one crucial step that could prove to tie the entire problematic in a coherent whole: namely, Marx.

It seems that this blind spot, a Hegel without Marx—in contrast to the early Althusserian attempt at a Marx without Hegel—is common to the majority of contemporary human science and social science intellectuals, and especially to those that understand the relationship between Hegel and Marx to be one of exclusion, of an alternative much like the alternative between Hegel and Spinoza. They fail to see that there is no Hegel without Spinoza, and that there is no Marx without Hegel.

But to finish on a positive note, just as good manners teach us, we shall, in this review, not end with a reproach but with a call to readers to take a closer look at this book and its author. The true alternative is not “either Hegel or Spinoza,” but, to paraphrase Hegel himself, it is this: one is either for Hegel *and* Spinoza or one is not a philosopher at all.

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