

HEGEL AND ARISTOTLE

ALFREDO FERRARIN

Boston University



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INTRODUCTION

To bring latent reason to the understanding of its own possibilities and thus to bring to insight the possibility of metaphysics as a true possibility . . . is the only way to decide whether the telos which was inborn in European humanity at the birth of Greek philosophy – that of humanity which seeks to exist, and is only possible, through philosophical reason . . . is merely a factual, historical delusion, the accidental acquisition of merely one among many other civilizations and histories, or whether Greek humanity was not rather the first breakthrough to what is essential to humanity as such, its entelechy.

(E. Husserl, *Krisis der Europäischen Wissenschaften*)

§1. Preliminary Notes

When Perrault, Fontenelle, Boileau, and Bayle inaugurated the quarrel between ancients and moderns, the confrontation with the ancients had been a marginal topic confined to literary questions. At the end of the 18th century, over a hundred years afterward, it was becoming a recurrent theme. Often such a confrontation was part and parcel of modern philosophy's self-understanding; it helped define its identity by gauging its proximity and distance from old models. More frequently than in the previous two centuries, which were busy severing their ties with tradition, we find appeals to revitalize ancient philosophy or civilization. But all such appeals say less about the sources to which they refer than about the purpose they served at the time, in the conditions in which they arose, about the historical needs from which they originated. In other words, the proposal of resuscitating Greek or Latin models was instrumental to the dissatisfaction or crisis that spurred it.

The slogan of a return to the classics acquired opposite functions depending on how one filled the empty box which now came to be called "Greece." For example, it is significant that Robespierre longed for the embodiment of virtue and frugality he found in the "free republics" of Rome and Sparta against the *ancien régime's* curbing of freedom while forgetting, as his opponent Termidorian Constantin Volney pointed out, how deeply the massive use of slavery was rooted in the political structure of Greece itself.¹

The Greeks were not studied as an object of critical historical scrutiny; they were rather invoked in contemporary discussions, especially in political and aesthetic domains. This is even more the case in Germany, where the tradition of Greek studies was more continuous than in France (which was keener on the Latin tradition), and where a few years later Wilhelm von Humboldt proposed the study of Greek as a *Bildungsfundament* (foundation of education) for Germans in his project of education reform (1808–9).² The disputes in German classicism and early Romanticism, from Lessing to Winckelmann to Schiller and Goethe, were united by one trait: Greek art and society had experienced a form of harmony that the scissions of modernity had made impossible.

In this connection Hegel, Hölderlin, and Schelling studied classical antiquity, and Plato in particular, in a similar vein and with similar purposes. Along with Spinoza's thought, a certain image of Greece – whether informed by Schiller's ideal of beauty, Hölderlin's *hen kai pan*, Schelling's and Hegel's idea of a natural harmony between *polis* and nature – had to be adapted to and brought back to life in the framework of the crisis of post-Kantian philosophy. Reflection is intrinsically unable to grasp the original unity from which stem all its oppositions: this primordial being is rather intuited as beauty. The fragmentation of unitary bonds between individual and community, reason and sensibility, nature and civilization, science and life, are for the young Hegel indicative of the need for a popular religion in which classical and Christian elements, a new understanding of life and love as immaterial bonds, are fused together.³

1 Compare Canfora, *Ideologie* (1980: 7–19). Montesquieu's and Rousseau's reflections on Athens, Sparta, and Rome should form the background for a study of this phenomenon no less than Rollin's widely read *Histoire ancienne* (1730).

2 P. Berglar, *Humboldt* (1970: 90).

3 See Taminiaux, *Nostalgie* (1967: 1–15, 206–55); Henrich, *Kontext* (1971: 9–72); Düsing, "Jugendschriften" (1977: 28–42); Barcella, *Antike* (1974: ch. 1).

A study of the formation of Hegel's thought cannot fail to take into account his extensive readings in ancient philosophy in the context of what he perceived as the spiritual needs of his time. A more difficult task is that of delving into all the textbooks and handbooks used by Hegel in various disciplines in his early years to detect the traditional, Platonic or Aristotelian elements that he probably absorbed unwittingly at Stuttgart and Tübingen and that later proved to be influential for the genesis of his own thought on such diverse matters as logic and philosophy of spirit and of nature.

However important such investigations may be for the reconstruction of Hegel's early philosophy, I think it is more fruitful for the light it would shed on the comprehension of the inner tensions in Hegel's thought, as well as philosophically more relevant, to focus on yet another approach to the problem of Hegel's confrontation with the ancients: his mature reading of Plato's and Aristotle's philosophy. This runs throughout Hegel's post-phenomenological works; unlike in his formative years, this confrontation is from 1805 (or so) on less sporadic and instrumental (whether simply predatory or enthusiastic) and is based on a more attentive, thoughtful, and free, if periodical, study focusing on Greek philosophy in its own right.

Even if at first Hegel placed Plato higher than Aristotle but later reversed this order, he always coupled the two as "teachers of mankind" and would have extended to Plato as well Dante's famous characterization of Aristotle as the "master of those who know."⁴

This book will concentrate on Hegel and Aristotle. Aristotle is such a recurrent figure in Hegel's mature work that sometimes it is difficult not to be misled by Hegel's praise. Hegel's panegyrics of Aristotle sometimes tend to obscure the fact that his references must be understood in their polemical function as directed to contemporary topics, or in their pedagogical role; elsewhere, they may have the character of historical remarks externally supporting points that had already been independently established. At other times, though, the impression is that Aristotle is not quoted where Hegel develops his own thoughts, that is, where Aristotle's philosophy has a decisive influence on Hegel, whether as an antecedent to theories developed by Hegel, a foil to his own thought, or anyway as an alternative model to keep in mind in relevant contexts.

Obviously there is no easy way to determine such different intentions; only a comprehensive study of the entirety of Hegel's explicit and

⁴ *Inferno* (IV: 131). Cf. also *Convivio* IV, II, 16.

implicit references to Aristotle can help refine our hermeneutical skills in this task. I hope this book will show in sufficient detail that Aristotle's importance for Hegel, over and above the heritage of 18th-century philosophy, cannot be overestimated.

Why does Hegel claim that an adequate conception of spirit needs the revitalization of Aristotle's *De anima*? Why does Hegel write in the preface to the second edition of the *Encyclopædia* that understanding "Plato, and much more deeply Aristotle [. . .] is at once not merely an understanding of that Idea, but an advance of science itself" (*ENZ.B* 18, *EL* 17)? How does Hegel purport to retrieve the deep meaning of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*? Is it necessary to keep in mind Aristotle for an understanding of Hegel's notions of teleology, nature, time, the Concept, thinking, sensation, passions, or ethical life? How does Hegel explain the relationship between what he calls Aristotle's finitude of thought and what he takes to be its speculative culmination, the divine thought thinking itself?

These are some of the questions this book will try to tackle. This work does not merely intend to show the extent to which Hegel is indebted to Aristotle or the degree to which his interpretation of Aristotle is at times arbitrary or misguided. To be sure, it will also spell out such points, but it is not intended simply to be an exposition of Hegel's interpretation of Aristotle. It can be characterized as a detailed analysis of the relation between Hegel's interpretation of Aristotle's thought and his usage and elaboration on it. Its main task is to show the tensions that result from this contrast.

Even though an exact interpretation of Hegel's relation to Aristotle is far from being a matter of unanimous consent, his indebtedness to Aristotle is common knowledge among Hegel readers. For example, according to Nicolai Hartmann, "Hegel perceived himself as the Aristotelian who . . . recognized and completed the work of the master."⁵ Likewise, Glockner writes that Hegel was "modernity's only great Aristotelian."⁶ The impression of a profound speculative affinity between Hegel and Aristotle was common already among Hegel's contemporaries: "in 1810 Bachmann, in his review of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in the *Heidelberger Jahrbücher*, compared Schelling to Plato and Hegel to Aristotle." Rosenkranz, who reports this judgment of Bachmann's, probably the first to express this similarity, continues without hiding his

5 Hartmann, "Aristoteles" (1923: 215). 6 "Voraussetzungen" (1929: 115).

own skepticism on the matter: “from then on such a comparison has become a stereotype.”⁷

This should cause no surprise. Hegel had always praised Aristotle’s speculative greatness to his students. In the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* Hegel devotes to no other philosopher so much praise and such extensive attention; there is nobody whom he seems to admire as much.

At the end of what is considered his system, after the three syllogisms of the Berlin *Encyclopædia*, Hegel simply apposes one of the most famous passages from Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*; he does not translate the text, which he quotes in Greek, let alone comment on it or explain it. One can hardly imagine a stronger endorsement, especially given the rarity of such unqualified approvals in the Hegelian corpus: Aristotle’s passage on divine thought appears like an authoritative seal affixed to the system of the true.

In his preface to the second edition of Hegel’s *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Michelet reminds the reader of a note written by Hegel in his Jena notebook, which was to provide the basis for all subsequent classes on the history of philosophy, which says that the treatment of Aristotle went well over the first half of the semester.⁸ Even a cursory glance at the catalog of Hegel’s personal library (*Verzeichniss*) suffices to show how in the list of books owned by Hegel the texts of ancient philosophy and the studies on Greek thought were of a preponderant and steady interest. The extent of Hegel’s debt and admiration for Aristotle was very well perceived by Hegel’s pupils, who while divulging and popularizing their teacher’s thought unfailingly emphasized the Aristotelian origin of many of Hegel’s points. Gabler’s and Erdmann’s books, intended as introductions, respectively, to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Science of Logic*, are rich with references to Aristotle.⁹

According to Gabler, who audited Hegel’s classes in Jena, a thorough study of Aristotle on Hegel’s part has to be dated back to 1805.¹⁰ Since the publication of the Jena system projects in the critical edition (*GW* 6–8), many Hegel scholars concur on the necessity to shift back the date. This is not a question of a chronological ordering that could be the exclusive interest of philologists and scholars. What matters in this is the determination of the range and extent of the influence of classi-

7 *Hegels Leben* (1844: 201).

8 See “Vorwort” (reprinted by Glockner in the Jubiläumsausgabe: JA 17: 13).

9 Gabler, *Lehrbuch* (1827); Erdmann, *Grundriss* (1841).

10 Quoted in Kimmerle, “Dokumente” (1967: 70–1).

cal metaphysics on Hegel's thought in the most volatile moment of its shaping. Hegel shows signs of intensive reading of Plato's *Timaeus* and *Parmenides* in the *Differenzschrift* and in the *Verhältnis des Skeptizismus zur Philosophie* (1801–2).¹¹ This last work “is dominated throughout by nothing less than a myth of ancient thought as the golden age of speculation, but there is no trace of the preponderance of Aristotle which will succeed shortly thereafter.”¹²

According to Heidegger, Hegel already construes his own concept of time on that of Aristotle's *Physics* in 1804/5.¹³ Walter Kern, who has edited and published a translation made by Hegel of *De anima* III 4–5, dating it around 1805, notes that in 1806 Hegel was too busy writing the *Phenomenology* to have time to prepare the translations from Aristotle which he used during his first course on the history of philosophy:¹⁴ hence “Hegel's study of Aristotle happened anyway even before 1804/5!”¹⁵ Ilting has studied Hegel's confrontation with Aristotle's *Politics* in the early Jena years.¹⁶ According to Chiereghin, the section on Metaphysics of Objectivity in the Jena *Logic, Metaphysics and Philosophy of Nature* (*JS* II: 138–54) is already influenced by Aristotle's notion of soul.¹⁷

Interpreters of different schools and orientations have repeatedly noted many such affinities, which also constitute the subject matter of several monographs, intended at times as an analysis of Hegel's *Lectures*

11 Compare *Dok.* 303–6; Chiereghin, *Metafisica classica* (1966).

12 Landucci, *Coscienza* (1976: 4).

Unless otherwise noted, all references in this book are to be understood as references to the original sources utilized. Whenever English translations of the works used are recorded in the List of Abbreviations (before the Introduction) and in the Bibliography (at the end of the book before the Index), quotations will be from them (in case several translations are recorded, I will specify which one I will be adopting). Otherwise, translations from Greek, Latin, German, French, Italian, Dutch, and Spanish are my own.

13 Heidegger, *SuZ* (1927: 428 ff.).

14 Kern, “Übersetzung” (1961: 60).

15 *Ibid.*, 60 n. It appears actually that the translation edited by Kern stems from Hegel's Nürnberg years. Professor Pöggeler kindly informed me that the paper used by Hegel in Nürnberg, which is the same on which the translation is written, substantially differs from the paper used by Hegel in Jena. In a private conversation, Professor Meist argued that Hegel's grammatical remarks in the margins of the translation can only be accounted for if we remember that the manuscript was conceived for a lecture on Greek language or philosophy to the students of the Nürnberg Gymnasium. For this reason, as Garniron and Hogemann report (“Vorlesungen,” 1991: 114 n.), the critical edition of the manuscript appears in vol. 10, *Nürnberger Schriften*. All this obviously does not rule out Hegel's knowledge and study of the *De anima* in or before 1805.

16 Cf. Ilting, “Auseinandersetzung” (1963).

17 “Griechische Erbe” (1991: 9–20), “Antropologia” (1995: 434–42).

on Aristotle and as a critical discussion of the plausibility of Hegel's interpretation, at times as an evaluation of Hegel's use of Aristotle, more rarely as a critical comparison of interpretation and assimilation of Aristotelian themes on Hegel's part.¹⁸

§2. On the Object and Method of This Book

The leading thread of this book will be the notion of *energeia*. In contradistinction to the existing literature, this book does not limit itself to an analysis of Hegel's lectures or even to a general discussion of *energeia*; rather, this notion will serve as a guide to show how the idea of a self-referential activity operates in the details of Hegel's interpretation of Aristotle as well as in particular contents of Hegel's own thinking on subjectivity.

Energeia, usually rendered in English as "actuality" after the Latin translation "*actus*," is by and large translated by Hegel as *Tätigkeit* (activity) or as *Wirklichkeit* (actuality), even though in the context of single works he will prefer different words (e.g., in the *Philosophy of Spirit* and the *Logic* *Aktuosität*, actusity, while in the *Phenomenology* a closely related notion is that of *Entwicklung*, development). However he translates it, though, he invariably means the same, an actualization of a potency originally immanent in the subject of the process or movement. Hegel interprets *energeia* as the self-referential activity that he finds at work in its several manifestations: from the self-grounding of essence to the Concept, from the teleological process to natural life, from the essence of man to the forms of knowing and acting down to its most obviously free and self-determining dimension, absolute thinking that has itself as its object. This latter notion is for Hegel to be found in Aristotle's *noê-*

18 For a bibliographical survey of the existing literature the reader can consult Kern, "Aristotelesdeutung" (1971); Longato, "Studi" (1976), "Hegel" (1980); Düsing, *Geschichte* (1983: 97–110); Samonà *Dialettica* (1988: 203–26); Ferrarin, *Hegel* (1990: 227–32), "Metafisica" (1990).

Most works on Hegel and Aristotle are in German, French, and Italian. To my mind the best work on the topic in English is Mure's unjustly forgotten *Introduction to Hegel* (1940). However, Mure's book is virtually useless when it comes to a discussion of specific passages; the level of generality at which Mure keeps his considerations makes it sometimes impossible to understand if he is speaking of Aristotle or of Hegel. Taylor finds in Hegel's notion of self-realization a convergence of two related strands, Aristotelian form and modern, Herderian expressivism (*Hegel*, 1975: 15–18, 81, 367–8, and passim). As I argue throughout the book, for Hegel the two strands are not parallel or alternative; *self*-realization is the core of Aristotle's philosophy.

sis noêseôs,¹⁹ which is the refiguration of absolute spirit and which as we saw is used as the closing quotation of the *Encyclopædia* itself.

In this connection Hegel appropriates and transforms the meaning of *energeia* to define spirit. Spirit is actuality, the self or subject containing in itself its own movement and purpose and expressing in the actualization of its potentialities its identity with itself and its permanence in its dealing with ever new and different contents. In the *Lectures on Aristotle* Hegel says: “*energeia* is more concretely *subjectivity*” (VGPh 2: 154, my italics). This must sound striking to those who are used to the modern idea – reflected in the philosophical lexicon only after Baumgarten and Kant but originating roughly around Descartes – that subjectivity is par excellence the cogito opposed to a realm of objectivity standing over and against it. What we will have to discuss is therefore the Hegelian notion of subjectivity in its relation with the Aristotelian *energeia*.

Hegel’s exegesis of Aristotle found in the *Lectures* is naturally selective. Hegel does not write a commentary on Aristotle’s works or an essay on the unity of his philosophy. Yet his clear intention is that of presenting his students with a genuine Aristotle, in opposition to the philosophical historiography of his own age. His choice of some fundamental concepts is guided by what he sees as their convergence in a unitary interpretation, in light of what he takes to be the new Aristotelian principle, subjectivity. For him the return to, and close study of, the Greek text is crucial.²⁰

If it is therefore necessary to follow Hegel’s methodical and systematic reading of the Aristotelian philosophy as it is expounded and understood by Hegel, and to forsake any analysis of textual stratifications and any reconstruction of the evolution of Aristotle’s thought, we will nevertheless have to examine also some pivotal Aristotelian concepts in order to show the one-sidedness and the presuppositions of Hegel’s interpretation.

I will follow the order of the *Lectures*, focusing especially on *Metaphysics*, *Physics*, *De anima*, *Nicomachean Ethics*, and *Politics*. We will see how Hegel emphasizes the centrality of *energeia* in his reconstruction of the *Metaphysics*. Here Hegel finds a distinction of three types of substances,

19 Throughout this book I adopt this shortened formula used by Hegel and by the secondary literature. Aristotle writes: “*hê noêsis noêseôs noêsis*” (in God’s case, “thinking is thinking of thinking,” *Met.* A 9, 1074b 34–5).

20 Michelet, “Vorwort” (*JA* 17: 10–11).

the sensible *ousia* (substance) as a substrate of change, the finite *nous* (intellect) as a formative principle of a given externality, and the divine *nous*, the absolute activity of thinking itself and of manifesting itself in nature and spirit. If *ousia* is identical with its concept, and this is the subject of its own actualization, on the one hand God is, *qua* thought thinking itself, the complete identity of subject and object after which the entire cosmos strives. On the other, Hegel finds in *phusis* (nature), in the theory of the form which has in itself the drive to actualize itself or the movement to reach its own telos, his own idea of natural subjectivity. But if the peak of the *Metaphysics* is for Hegel represented by its speculative Idea, God, and yet thought thinking itself and substances in the sublunar world are two independent principles, then it is the *De anima* which represents for Hegel the Archimedean point allowing for the unification of natural subjectivity and spirit, from its finite to its absolute forms.

For Hegel, in the *De anima* ("the best or even the sole work of speculative interest ever written on the philosophy of spirit," *ENZ.C* §378), the subject of experience is understood as a *hexis*, an active potency, an *Aufhebung* or negation of externality. Hegel argues that in this work the different forms of life, knowing and acting, are unitarily conceived as gradual moments in the actualization of the same process, the entelechy of living spirit. Thus in the *De anima* Hegel finds the soul as life, an activity inseparable from its manifestations and a self-development in and through its relation to otherness (in the lexicon of the *Logic*, the immediate Idea); the negativity of spirit, for which each finite form becomes matter for the superior form of considering reality; the necessity for spirit to emerge from nature as the truth of the latter; sensation, *qua* identity of perceiver and perceived, as an activity within receptivity, and the actualization of the senses as spirit's shaping of its own receptivity in determinate directions; the notion of the I as an abiding and formed power (potency) or *hexis*, which preserves and idealizes givenness in memory, warranting the continuity of experiences; the intellect that thematizes the inferior forms of knowledge, and in so doing comes to know itself; finally, the unity of will and reason.

There is much to be questioned about this interpretation and appropriation of the *Metaphysics* and the *De anima*, naturally, as will appear in due course. What is important to note here is that Hegel takes Aristotle to have made nature, change, and all becoming intelligible in and of themselves. We must not oppose substance as a passive substrate to movement, nor form or essence to becoming. In fact, Aristotle's

progress over Plato lies solely in the concept of immanent form, in which Hegel finds the principle of “pure subjectivity” that is “missing in Plato” (*VGPh* 2: 153). Immanent form is for Hegel an *archê* or cause that is not definable in abstraction and isolation; the cause does not also happen to be subject to change, in addition to and independently of its essence. Its very being consists in the process of its own actualization. If the essence of the living being does not exist independently of it, it must then be the form understood as end – Hegel calls this the concept – that moves the living being in the process of attaining to its end or telos. Differently stated, in the living being the concept becomes concrete. *Energeia* is what Hegel means by subjectivity, the concept as a cause of its being and movement, or self-actualizing form.

The concept exists *realiter* in nature, it is not our imposition; and yet it is present in it only in a hidden form, in potentiality with respect to its existence as an object of actual thinking. If the universal is the essence of a natural being, of physical laws, and if it constitutes the objectivity of the living, it cannot at the same time be found as such in nature. It is a moment of the Idea, a product of the activity of absolute thought.

With a very arbitrary interpretive move Hegel identifies the existing universal, the objective intelligibility of all that is, with the Aristotelian passive *nous*, only to oppose to objectified thought-determinations the active *nous*, self-consciousness, the concept as absolute I. The object as a conceptual synthesis is produced in the I by the unity of thought; it is posited by the Concept that in the object relates to otherness as to itself, and is the unity of itself with itself, the identity of subject and object.

If in this relation between active and passive *nous* it is more difficult to recognize Aristotle than the idealistic, especially Fichtean development of the Kantian transcendental deduction, it remains true that for Hegel Aristotle is retrieved as a model of *Vereinigungsphilosophie* (philosophy of unification) over against the philosophy of reflection and the scissions of modernity. The sensible is not opposed to reason; nature is not opposed to spirit. It is rather its immediate substance (*Grundlage*), the otherness of the Idea, out of which spirit emerges to attain to itself. It attains to itself in a process of actualization which is at the same time God's, that is, the self-thinking Idea's gradual appropriation of itself. In all this spirit does not have to reach an end outside itself, for its end is internal to it; if spirit is the movement of positing itself as its other and of negating its otherness, then, in Aristotelian terms, its activity is

complete (*teleia*) even when it is a production, for production, like theory and practice, is for Hegel spirit's *self*production in reality. In the words of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, we can say that spirit's *energeia* is its own *eudaimonia* (happiness), its activity is its own flourishing. "The eternal Idea which is in and for itself actualizes, produces, and enjoys itself as absolute spirit," read the last words of the *Encyclopaedia* before the Aristotle quotation (*ENZ.C* §577, my transl.). In this *Beisichselbstsein* or being-at-home with itself, it seems then that Hegel makes a strikingly un-Aristotelian identification of Aristotelian *theōria*, *praxis*, and *poiēsis* (knowing, acting, making).

The task of this book is to show why it is fruitful for a better understanding of Hegel to examine his thought against the backdrop of his comments on Aristotle. This sheds light on many of Hegel's presuppositions as well as on the relation between natural subjectivity and spirit that I have just sketched.

In the remainder of the Introduction I discuss methodological questions surrounding the structure of this book (§2) before turning (§3) to Hegel's understanding of *energeia* as subjectivity on the basis of a review of some attacks from its most prominent critics, and, subsequently, of an examination of Aristotle's employment of the term.

In Part I, I discuss Hegel's conception of the history of philosophy and its place within the system of philosophy. The relation between historical and natural time, philosophy and history, as well as Hegel's idea of a history of philosophy will be scrutinized and critically assessed (Chapter 1). Given the order and structure of the lectures on Aristotle, which mirrors the order of the *Encyclopædia*, we will pass on to an examination of some systematic and architectonic questions turning around the presence of the logical element (*das Logische*) in the philosophy of nature and of spirit (Chapter 2). The very arrangement of the material expounded in the lectures will prove to be significantly biased on a few substantial counts. This chapter, which discusses Hegel at length, and in which textual and systematical exegeses are intertwined, forms the basis for my further interpretations and for my eventual conclusions on Hegel's relation to Aristotle. In other words, understanding how Hegel conceives his system and the relation between thinking and *Realphilosophie* (philosophy of nature and spirit) will later be of crucial importance in helping us understand why Hegel misconstrues the analogous relation between philosophy and sciences which he thought he could find in Aristotle, and why he ignores that the *De anima* is not a philosophy of spirit in his sense.

In Part II, I examine the lectures on the *Metaphysics* and show to what extent Hegel's understanding of form as cause can be read back into Aristotle (Chapter 3). After showing the tacit confrontation with the *Metaphysics* taking place in the *Science of Logic* (Chapter Four), Aristotelian and Hegelian treatments of essence, concept, definition, and composite substance are compared and contrasted (Chapters 5 and 6).

Part III deals with Hegel's *Realphilosophie* in its relation to the Aristotelian supposed philosophies of nature and of spirit. While Chapter 7 focuses on teleology in nature, and on questions such as motion, matter, space and time, mechanics and organics, Chapter 8 concentrates on the teleological (self-)constitution of spirit. This ranges from the most elementary and seemingly heterodetermined forms in which spirit's activity acts as an entelechial impulse (notably sensation, but the entire Anthropology in general), to knowing qua recognition of reality as the existence of the Concept, and then up to the self-referentiality of thought and the unity of intelligence and will which eventually finds in ethical life its second nature. Given Hegel's extraordinary praise of the *De anima*, a good deal of attention will be devoted to the philosophy of subjective spirit. Finally, we turn to Hegel's usage of the *Politics* in the Objective Spirit and Philosophy of Right and to his judgment on the difference between Greek and modern States (Chapter 9).

After, and thanks to, the comprehensive analysis developed up to this point, the conclusions (Chapter 10) show both the originality and legitimacy of many of Hegel's points, but also the reasons why his implicit assumptions – such as a different “ontology,” a different concept of truth, a relation between divine intellect or absolute thinking and finite *nous* into which Hegel reads more than Aristotle was willing to concede – induce him to separate speculation and finitude in Aristotle's philosophy in a way that should be called in question.

In Chapter 11 I discuss the historical question of the pictures of Aristotle during the time of Hegel's formative period. I try to determine when and how Hegel comes to acknowledge a deep elective affinity between his positions and Aristotle's, and thereby to revitalize before Bekker, Bonitz, Brandis, Trendelenburg, Zeller, and Brentano a philosophy that had been largely neglected in the previous two centuries.

Before we pass on to §3, let me dwell on some methodological points and clarify at the outset that this study shares some Hegelian assumptions, specifically the following three.

A first preliminary remark has to do with the usage in the history of philosophy of categories such as that of “influence.” Hegel can be said

to have been “influenced” by Aristotle on some relevant points. Yet we must be clear about the meaning of such influence. The employment of categories such as causality or external determination in the history of philosophy postulates the polarity of an active cause and a passive recipient; in this relation the recipient is understood as a matter shaped by a form imposed on it from without. However important genetic studies sometimes are, this often is the presupposition: namely, that through the reading of or exposure to a text a philosopher shapes his views on a determinate subject before eventually reaching his own position. This approach often seems to me to tend to bracket, if not insult, the philosopher’s intelligence and freedom; more importantly, it runs against the truth. A given author cannot influence me unless I let him or her speak to me, unless I have made myself recipient to his or her message. But even if and when I do, whatever I assimilate is transformed within the preexisting framework of my thought.

Hegel has shown that external causes only work in mechanism; living nature and especially spirit can only accept something from without once they are disposed and ready to do so. All talk of external causes, writes Hegel, should be banished and rephrased as an occasion, an external stimulus, if applicable at all (*WL* 2: 227–9, *SL* 561–3). Spirit transforms causes into stimuli for its own development; by inwardizing a cause, it transforms it into something else and eradicates it from its externality. Differently stated, Hegel is “influenced” by Kant or by Aristotle in the sense that he adapts and assimilates what he reads in them within the framework of his own thinking. Hegel does not arrive at thought’s self-consciousness because he reflects on Aristotle’s *noêsis noêseôs*; rather, he can at most find in Aristotle help for his own thinking once he is already on his way there. And what he finds is what he is looking for. At the risk of sounding trivial, what I mean to say is that different authors who may have been influenced by Kant or Aristotle find very different motives of inspiration in them, and no two of them come to the same conclusions.

Second, as Hegel put it in the *Phenomenology*, it is easier to judge and dismiss philosophers – that is, point out limits that only an external and cleverer observer can see – than to do them justice by understanding comprehensively and sympathetically the essence of their thought (*W* 3: 13, *PhS* 3). Whether Hegel actually practiced this teaching is a different question that we need not take up now.

A third point taught by Hegel is that thinking is by nature critical, in the sense that it negates the absolutization and self-subsistence of any

of its determinate contents. Thought affirms, denies, and then unites speculatively the first two moments it has produced. Again, whether one emphasizes the third moment *at the expense* of the second, turning thought into a ratification of the existent, as the Left-Hegelians thought Hegel eventually did, or one simply stops at the second moment suppressing the third altogether, as does Adorno's negative dialectics, is a question to be left unanswered in this book.

Any serious study in the history of philosophy, as well as any comparative study and fruitful approach to similarities and differences between historical figures, must take its bearings with these three points if it does not want to run the risk of futility and externality to the thing itself. Accordingly, what I try to do in this book is to read *critically* Hegel's appropriation of Aristotle while trying to remain fast to the thing itself, that is, *without* stepping above Hegel or denouncing his mistakes, thereby pretending to a superiority over him that I think nobody can claim. If one stands on the shoulders of giants, one must not forget why it is that one sees farther.

Thus Aristotle is often examined in a different light than is Hegel, as well as contrasted with his reading. I believe the latter to be a very instructive and interesting overinterpretation, if not distortion, and an important chapter in the 23-century-long history of Aristotelianism. But my aim here is not that of chastizing Hegel for his supposed blunders, let alone that of opposing a truer Aristotle to Hegel's. What I try to do is understand the reasons and contexts behind certain choices, interpretations, or transformations of Aristotle on Hegel's part.

If on the preceding points the approach here adopted can be called Hegelian, two counts on which it is somewhat less so are the following: as I said, this work is not merely an exposition of Hegel's interpretation of Aristotle; rather, it tries to bring together his interpretation of Aristotle with his elaboration and to highlight the resulting tensions of which Hegel was often unaware. Here my procedure is comparable to a study in chiaroscuro bringing into relief otherwise hidden similarities and differences *by contrast*. Contrasts are valued as a means for a better understanding of the specific arguments of each author, and for the identification of what sets them off from one another. For example, if Hegel says that only Aristotle has understood the nature and workings of sensation, and he, Hegel, must revitalize Aristotle's doctrines, our task is to go beyond this simple assertion to test whether Hegel correctly understands Aristotle, and if he does, whether he simply repeats Aristotle while revitalizing him or significantly departs from him on matters of greater or lesser importance.

Part of this procedure involves a task that is definitely non-Hegelian in view of the way Hegel practiced his history of philosophy, but that could not be more Hegelian if we keep in mind his definition of truth as the adequation of a reality to its concept. I mean to say this: we will have to see how and why Hegel often neglects what conflicts with what he is interested in finding in Aristotle and does not evaluate whether there corresponds to some incidental programmatic assertions an actual, univocally and conclusively proven argument that in fact carries out such a program on Aristotle's part. Differently stated, if Aristotle clearly wants, say, in the *Metaphysics* (E 1) a theory of being that is also a theory of pure actuality, but upon closer scrutiny it turns out that this synthesis is fraught with difficulties, then appealing to Aristotle for an "onto-theology" does not work – for Hegel *or* for us. Hegel often rests content with programmatic assertions that he does not test critically, judging philosophers more for their intentions than for the realization of those intentions. We have to do otherwise if we want to judge Hegel's interpretation of Aristotle fairly: if Hegel taught us that the only internal criticism is one that brings to its consequences the principle under consideration, then the only way to read Hegel critically is to judge his accomplishments against the standard of his intentions.

§3. Can *Energeia* Be Understood as Subjectivity?

An illustration of this kind of procedure is offered in this section. It has been repeatedly pointed out that Hegel's translation of *energeia* by "activity" misconstrues the Aristotelian meaning. I agree it does in some crucial respects, most notably in the interpretation of the Aristotelian God. Hegel interprets, as we shall see in our examination of the *Lectures on the Metaphysics*, God's pure *energeia* as an actuality that contains potentiality sublated in itself and includes reference to movement. However, if we try to understand the rationale and motives behind his reconstruction we perceive the importance of his connection between natural and spiritual subjectivity for a reading of *Metaphysics* Θ–Λ.

The first thing to clarify in this regard is the precise meaning of Hegel's "activity," which as I said is not his only translation of *energeia*.²¹ Kant had drawn a distinction between *Handlung* and *Tätigkeit* (*Critique of Judgment*, §43); nature operates (*agere*, *Handeln*), while man (*vis-à-vis*

21 About the meaning of Hegel's *Tätigkeit* cf. Menegoni, "Teoria dell'azione" (1991: 776 ff.), *Agire* (1993: 7 ff.).

art or *technê*) makes (*facere, Tun*). Hegel reverses the meaning of these words: activity (*Tun*) is a generic name applying to whatever change is initiated, no matter by whom or what. Thus it can denote both natural and spiritual transformations provided they do not happen, to use Aristotle's language (*Phys.* I 4–6), by chance or automatically. An action (*Handlung*), in turn, is the result of deliberation and is that for which the agent claims full responsibility; it is the expression of rationality and spontaneity, or, in Kantian terms, of causality through freedom. Unlike in Kant, however, I am not only responsible for the maxims of my actions but also for their consequences. We see in Chapter 8 (§8) the measure of Hegel's indebtedness to Aristotle's theory of *eupraxia*, successful action; the stress on the importance of the deliberation of the means marks all the difference between Aristotle and Kant. But in Hegel's theory of activity there is certainly nothing like Aristotle's contrast between *praxis* and *poiêsis*, action and production; activity is often used synonymously with *Hervorbringen, Erzeugen, Wirken* (different ways of emphasizing production or efficient causality).

We can say that the distinction is both about the end and about the beginning of the action; thus it is both Aristotelian and Kantian, and neither. Activity, in sum, has to do with directed processes initiated by an agent as opposed to mere change happening to a patient. Further, it is not distinctively human: human beings can be patients (say, subject to sudden meteorological change), and an animal can be the agent of, say, its growth, reproduction, etc.

The second thing to notice is that Hegel's translation of *energeia* as *Tätigkeit* is the same as that adopted by Humboldt in the same years. When he compares language to the infinity of an organic form against those who take it as a finished product (*ergon*), Humboldt – in a more Schellingian than Hegelian vein – advocated for this reason a genetic definition of language.²²

This understanding of *energeia* as including process came very soon under attack. Back with a vengeance, Schelling poked sarcasm at Hegel's absolute as a God who knew no Sabbath. Hegel's God is an eternal incessant activity and not a simple final cause like Aristotle's.²³ On the occasion of the award of a prize on essays on the *Metaphysics* in the

²² *Kawi-Werk* (1831–5: 36).

²³ *Münchener Vorlesungen* (in *Werke* 5: 230); *Philosophische Einleitung in die Philosophie der Mythologie* (in *Werke* 5: 641 ff.); *Einleitung in die Philosophie der Offenbarung* (in *Werke* 6, *Ergänzungsband*: 100–6).

1835 contest organized by Victor Cousin in Paris, which crowned Ravaisson and Michelet, Schelling protests against the “condescending” award to Michelet, “one of the most limited heads generated by Hegel’s school.” The comparison between Hegel and Aristotle, continues Schelling, could only be established by “some ignorant people in Germany.”²⁴ Even though Schelling, just like Hegel, sees the progress from Plato to Aristotle in the notion of *energeia* over simple essence (*Philosophie der Mythologie*, 498),²⁵ he takes great care to show that Aristotle’s God is not moved, but is *to prôton kinoun akinêton* (“the first unmoved mover,” *Münchener Vorlesungen*, in *Werke* 5: 138). And on this score he is obviously right.

It is all the more striking how Kierkegaard wants to preserve this immobility while denying it. In the *Philosophy Crumbs*, he writes that “God must move Himself and remain what Aristotle says about Him, *akinêtos panta kinei*.”²⁶ In a note of his diary Kierkegaard writes: “as far as I remember Schelling drew attention to this in Berlin.”²⁷ In any case, Kierkegaard’s study of Aristotle is no more inspired by Schelling than by Trendelenburg, as is his criticism of Hegel’s integration of movement in the logic in the *Conclusive Unscientific Postscript*.

Heidegger reiterates the same critique: “*energeia* has nothing to do with *actus* or with *Tätigkeit*, but with the *ergon* as experienced by the

24 Letter to Cousin of April 1838, quoted by Courtine, “Critique Schellingienne” (1991: 217–18). Cousin was Hegel’s longtime correspondent and admirer. When he was arrested in Berlin in 1824 on charge of complicity with the *Burschenschaften* (fraternities), Hegel wrote to von Schuckmann, Minister of Internal Affairs and Police, to pledge his innocence. He spoke of him as a serious scholar, author of philosophical essays, and editor of Descartes’s, Plato’s, and Proclus’s works. Hegel reminded von Schuckmann that the fourth volume of the Proclus edition had been dedicated by Cousin to Schelling and Hegel (*Briefe* 486, *Letters* 634–5).

25 This is one of the points for which Hegel’s reading is widely accepted in the central decades of the century and is echoed even in the works of many interpreters who do not share his views. For example, Zeller (cf. Chapter 4 below, n. 1) and Haym agree that Aristotle’s progress over Plato consists in the notion of purpose and *energeia* is “*Verwirklichung*” (realization), “*Selbstbewegung und Entwicklung*” (self-movement and development; Haym, *Hegel*, 1857: 227, 228).

26 The Greek means “God moves everything without being moved,” a sentence that, although quite genuinely Aristotelian in meaning, I could not find in the *Metaphysics*.

27 The title *Philosophy Crumbs*, translated into English as *Fragments of Philosophy*, is in Danish *Philosophiske Smuler* (in *Samlede Waerker*, vol. 6: 27; the passage from the diary is in vol. 4/A: 157). I wish to thank Knud Haakonssen for his help with the translation from the Danish. About Schelling’s, Trendelenburg’s, and Kierkegaard’s usage of Aristotle against Hegel, compare Samonà, *Dialettica* (1988: 51–92), and Courtine’s essay quoted in note 24 above. For a Hegelian response to Schelling, cf. Brinkmann, “Schellings Hegelkritik” (1976: 121–210); Horstmann, “Logifizierte Natur” (1986: 290–309).

Greeks and with its being-brought-forth in presence [*Her-vor-gebrachtheit in das An-wesen*].”²⁸ In other words, the couple *kinêsis-ergon* (movement-work or finished product) is the paradigmatic context for the definition of *energeia*.

A few distinctions are in order here. First of all, when Hegel understands *energeia* as subjectivity he means nothing less and nothing more than what I have argued in §2: *energeia* is the actualization of a potentiality originally internal to the subject of the process. Hegel is quite adamant that Aristotle did not know the infinite subjectivity and the absolute value of individuality that were only affirmed by the Christian revolution in the post-Greek world (e.g., *PhR* §124 A, §185 A). “The principle of modern states has prodigious strength and depth because it allows the principle of subjectivity to progress to its culmination in the extreme of self-subsisting personal particularity, and yet at the same time brings it back to the substantive unity and so maintains this unity in the principle of subjectivity itself” (*PhR* §260). The modern state is far more complex and profound than the Greek city-state for the simple reason that it holds together dispersed individuals and is not shattered by differences. That means that individual freedom, the pursuit of individual ends with all its arbitrariness and potential conflict with the common good, is a principle internal to modern society, unlike in Greece. And this is not a necessary evil but a deeper, more pervasive and concrete existence of freedom and subjectivity: the reconciliation of metaphysics and politics.

Aristotle opposed such freedom that would pursue particular ends, calling it the random life appropriate to slaves; genuine freedom is only that of citizens caring for the common good (*Met.* Λ 10, 1075a 16–25). This is clear, and there is no way that this pivotal difference might be downplayed or underestimated (Hegel goes to the point of calling philosophy a “science of freedom,” *ENZ.A* §5). But it should be no less obvious that Hegel uses “subjectivity” in a general, “metaphysical” (“logical,” in Hegel’s words) sense and in a moral-historical (“objective,” in Hegel’s words) sense. (In the *Lectures* on Aristotle, he distinguishes between “particular” and “pure” subjectivity and says that the latter is proper to Aristotle: *VGPh* 2: 153.) The two concepts need overlap as little as the Hegelian concepts of in-itself and for-itself; the former acquires individual existence in the latter at a particular turn

²⁸ “Hegel und die Griechen” (1976: 269/435).

in history (for Hegel, Christianity).²⁹ I can only refer the reader to Chapter 1 for a closer discussion of the question; this should suffice, however, to counter the shallow argument so pervasive in the secondary literature on Hegel that subjectivity was in principle absent from Greece and that Hegel's identification of *energeia* with subjectivity must have been a careless slip of his tongue, or pen, inconsistent with his standard doctrine.

A second remark necessary in this context is the following: that Hegel's interpretation of Aristotle is in many points arbitrary can hardly be doubted; but he certainly is no incompetent translator. Hegel reads, and correctly understands, the Greek edition edited by Erasmus.³⁰ Hegel's knowledge of Greek is quite remarkable. According to Rosenkranz, he loved Greek much more than Latin. At the age of nine he translated the Letters to the Thessalians and to the Romans from the New Testament (*Dok.*: 12, 20); at 15 Epictetus, and at 17 excerpts from Euripides, the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and Sophocles; then, in Bern, Thucydides (Rosenkranz, *Leben* 1844: 11–13). According to Clemens Brentano, when Hegel was teaching at Nürnberg, he translated the *Ring des Nibelungen* into Greek. His competence was so well known that Friedrich Creuzer, professor of classical philology at Heidelberg,

29 Let me clarify at the outset that when I refer to Hegel's Christianity or Lutheranism in this book all I mean is what he means: the reconciliation between divinity and interiority. The absolute is present and alive in the human community, which is God's self-consciousness. Belief in this is equivalent to trust in the objectivity of reason. If the function of Christianity is so crucial, it is also instrumental to philosophy, the way representation first makes us familiar with truth and is a preliminary and defective version of thinking.

30 *ARISTOTELOUS HAPANTA*, Basileae 1531. According to Kern ("Übersetzung," 1961: 79–80), Hegel uses the third edition (1550). Even though we cannot exclude it, according to the catalog of Hegel's personal books he possessed the first edition (see *Verzeichniss*, n.378). Wieland writes that "after a long time Hegel is the first great thinker who studies Aristotle in the original again" (*Physik*, 1962: 34). In the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* Hegel says that "only after the Reformation was there a return to the original sources for Aristotle" (*VGPh* 2: 145). Actually the "return" was a widespread late Renaissance phenomenon. Aldo Manuzio's first Greek edition was printed in Venice in 1495–8; later, Sylburg's edition appeared in 1584–7 and Casaubon's in 1590. Buhle's Bipontine edition, in five volumes (Strasbourg 1791–1804), which could have been easily available to Hegel, does not include the *Metaphysics* or the *De anima*, since it contains only the *Organon*, the *Rhetoric*, and the *Poetics*. Bekker's fundamental edition begins to appear only in the year of Hegel's death, 1831; Schwegler's commentary on the *Metaphysics* and Bonitz's works do not appear before the 1840s. Victor Cousin's *De la Métaphysique d'Aristote* is printed in Paris in 1835, and the following year Michelet's book *Examen Critique de l'Ouvrage d'Aristote intitulé Métaphysique* is printed, again in Paris.

agreed to translate Proclus' *Theôlogikê Stoicheiôsis* (*Elementatio Theologica*) "provided he could be assisted by Hegel."³¹

The third, and in this context the most urgent, remark concerns *energeia* and the criticisms of Hegel's translation and understanding of it. Hegel understands, for example in the *Philosophy of Nature*, *energeia* and *entelecheia* in line with a long tradition from Cicero to Leibniz, namely, as *endelecheia* and thus abiding self-motion (see Chapter 7 below). This affects his reading of *Met.* Λ and of Aristotle's God. It is certainly true that divine *energeia* is beyond all potentiality, and that Hegel misinterprets God's life (*hê gar nou energeia zôê*, *Met.* Λ 7, 1072b 27) as a principle that repeats itself in the sublunar world. I show in Chapter 3 how Hegel is misled in making this move by the Erasmus edition.

But more important for the purpose of an evaluation of the plausibility of Hegel's interpretation and his possible contribution to our understanding of Aristotle, I believe we should reverse the question of the correct interpretation of *energeia*: Is it possible at all to understand Aristotelian *energeia* starting from its pure instance in first substance, an actuality (*and activity*, that of thinking itself) that is exempt from potentiality? Save in first substance, which is pure actuality and a simple undivided being, potentiality and actuality are always correlative concepts in Aristotle; actuality is always the actuality *of* a potentiality. If pure *energeia* is not directive for the standard understanding of actuality in Aristotle, then what should we take our bearings with when we interpret *energeia*?

Heidegger's thesis that *energeia* is being-at-work should be understood literally to refer to the world of production, *poiêsis*.³² Other senses of *energeia* are derivative from this being brought forth. In this he is followed by Strauss (*Natural Right*, 1953: 127 ff.), Arendt (*Human Condition*, 1958: 301–2), Aubenque (*Prudence*, 1963: 175 ff.), just to name some distinguished and authoritative philosophers. By this interpretation, Heidegger suppresses any sense of finality from *energeia*: *actus* is a faulty translation just because it suggests an actualization, not to say a self-actualization, which is absent from Aristotle's understanding of *en-*

31 Cf. Kern, "Übersetzung" (1961: 80). Kern's report that Trendelenburg acknowledged Hegel as the rediscoverer of Aristotle in his time seems to me overrated ("Antinomie," 1957: 340 n.). About Hegel's knowledge of Greek and about his now acknowledged inspirational role for the contemporary philosophical comprehension of Plotinus, cf. Beierwaltes, *Platonismus* (1972: 145 n., 157 n. and 86).

32 E.g., *Metaphysik Theta* (1981: 117; 189–90), "Phusis" (1976: 283/355 ff.), or *Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie* (1975: § 11–§12a). About production in Heidegger's reading of Greek philosophy, cf. Rosen, *Being* (1993: ch. 1).