Thinking the Problem: From Dewey to Hegel

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Abstract

This paper deals with the relation of Dewey's philosophy to Hegel's philosophy and aims to prove that the notion of problem plays a crucial role in Dewey's reading of the Hegelian thought. First, it interests in Dewey's interpretation of Hegel's Philosophy of Spirit and Science of Logic to explain how Dewey considers the dialectical process as problem solving. Secondly, it evaluates the relevancy of Dewey's reading by proposing a pragmatist interpretation of Hegel's philosophy of history, where the notion of problem is fundamental to understand progress in the world history. It leads to conclude that the Deweyan point of view highlights a new comprehension of Hegel's philosophy itself.

Keywords: Dewey, Hegel, Dialectic, Problem, Philosophy of history, Pragmatism

It is known today that Hegel's philosophy was at the center of the development of pragmatism (Bernstein 2013). In particular, the relation of Dewey's philosophy to Hegel's has recently been studied with great attention[1]. Many studies have revealed that the German philosopher had a fundamental influence on the young John Dewey, particularly with regard to his theory of culture (Good 2005, 2006; Garrison 2010; Hickman 2008), for his logic (Shook 2000; Johnston 2014; Garrison 2006), as well as for his psychology (Dalton 1997; Johnston 2010). These new readings propose a profoundly original view of Dewey and explain why he thought of his philosophy as a "*permanent Hegelian deposit*" (Dewey 1929).

Our work aims to contribute to this rediscovery of Dewey's Hegelianism by focusing on a notion largely unstudied by the commentary: the notion of problem. One the one hand, we intend to show that Hegel's thought is very important for the elaboration of the concept of problem in Dewey, not only because he reads Hegel in the light of this category, but also because he formulates his own theory of problem with the Hegelian dialectic in order to clarify his conception in a decisive and rigorous way (I). On the other hand, we will return from Dewey to Hegel's text to reveal the presence of the notion of problem in it and to read Hegel from a pragmatist perspective rather than a metaphysical one (II).

The two main issues of our study are the following: we claim that Hegel's philosophy is essential to understanding Dewey's thinking on problem; secondly, we return to Hegel to reassess the relationship between the two authors in a new way.

Indeed, most of the time it is assumed that this relation is nothing but a translation of the Hegelian concepts of the young John Dewey into the instrumentalist perspective of his mature work. It is presumed that Hegel's categories are idealist and that they should be transformed to be maintained or that Dewey could be a Hegelian only if he "naturalized" (Shook 2010) and "transformed" (Johnston 2014, 72) Hegel. Such readings do not take seriously the famous "*permanent Hegelian deposit*" aspect of Dewey's philosophy because they imply that a transformation or deformation of Hegel is the only way to use him legitimately. On the contrary, we argue that the notion of problem proves Hegel's crucial role in Dewey's philosophy, independent of any naturalization or "pragmatization."

Our ambition is not to identify Hegel's and Dewey's philosophies, nor to deny the irreducible differences between the two authors, but to evaluate these differences in a new light. The conclusion of our work will concentrate on the precise spaces of divergences concerning the notion of problem from a common basis that reunites the thinking of the two.

Dewey's Thinking On Problem: The Hegelian Legacy

We will focus here on two courses on Hegel that Dewey gave in 1897 and 1904: the lectures on Hegel's *Philosophy of Spirit* (1) and those on the *Science of Logic* (2). In the first one, we see how Dewey rereads Hegel in the light of the practical problems that motivate Hegel's philosophy and how he uses Hegel's dialectical concepts to rigorously formulate his own conception of problem. In this lecture, the theory of problem is essentially thermalized from a practical perspective and not yet put in the framework of a general epistemology. It is in the second lecture that such an epistemological questioning becomes central, in which Dewey proposes a profoundly original reading of Hegelian

logic in linking each category of thought to the concrete problems from which they derive.

In order to differentiate what is at stake in each text, it can be useful to distinguish the interpretations of Hegel that Dewey makes, the elements he finds in Hegel's philosophy that he uses to develop his own thought, and finally the reconstructions he elaborates in order to translate his philosophy into a Hegelian language (Renault 2016). We can consider that the two texts, the lectures on Hegel's *Philosophy of Spirit* and the lectures on Hegel's logic, make use of Hegel's philosophy in the sense that they both use the categories of dialectic to clarify and formulate an approach to problem. Not only Dewey uses the principal terms of Hegel's dialectic (opposition, negation, contradiction), but he explains the dialectic which is used by Hegel and does it in a very Deweyan problem-centric way. However, the first text is essentially an interpretation, while the second is more of a reconstruction of Hegel's philosophy because it rewrites the *Science of Logic* in the light of Dewey's instrumentalist and psychologist perspective. This reconstruction expresses the close proximity between Hegel and Dewey, and will lead us to reread Hegel's work in search of some pragmatist intuitions.

The Lectures on Hegel's Philosophy of Spirit

The lectures of 1897 are dedicated to the third part of the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, the 'Philosophy of Spirit'. Dewey notably deals with Hegel's anthropology, morale, religion, and politics. He begins by recalling the intellectual evolution of the young Hegel to contextualize his thought and then he proposes a meticulous commentary on the paragraphs of the *Philosophy of Spirit*. It is principally the beginning of the text that attracts our attention here because, in contextualizing Hegel's philosophy, Dewey insists on the importance of the practical problems in his thinking. He insists in two ways: first, Dewey brings back the speculative thought to the problem from which it originates, then he stresses that Hegel reflected on the problematic condition of his thought and that the dialectic is the philosophical language of concrete problems, and consequently offers the possibility of a logical theory of problem.

Dewey deals with the necessity of finding the concrete problems that constitute the source of Hegel's abstract philosophy. He especially emphasizes the tension, proper to modernity, between the human and the divine, which he sees as the principal problem at the core of all Hegelian philosophy:

> His fundamental problem was the relation of church and state. This question, however, was not to Hegel a problem of external expediency, nor of political machinery; it was the deepest question in life, that of the relation of the spiritual and the worldly sides of man. It

was the question of how man's relation to God stands towards his relation to man. (Dewey 1897a, 337)

Hegel faced the problem of the disappearance of religious absolutes in the modern world and secularized societies. The age of Enlightenment had criticized most of the religious illusions such that the modern man faced a series of tensions—between faith and reason, absolutes and relativity, religion and politics, the sky and earth—these comprise Hegel's "fundamental problem." It should be noted, Dewey insists on the fact that what is at stake in the crisis of modernity does not concern only the individual faith of the believer, but also the practical, political, and social consequences of the relationship between men and God, and on men's relations towards themselves. Since all social relationships are influenced by the religious question, Dewey considers this a vital problem[2] inherent to the most profound aspirations of human existence. This question is precisely the theoretical, historically informed basis in which Dewey locates the birth of Hegel's philosophy: "It should never be forgotten amid all the technicalities and details of Hegel's statement that he has not abandoned his original problem" (Dewey 1897a, 349).

Nevertheless, such a restitution of the practical problems that determine the historical and social context of philosophical systems in principle concerns all philosophers. Hegel has here no priority and no particularity. Long after his lessons on the *Philosophy of Spirit*, Dewey explains in *Democracy and Education* that any philosophy belongs to its time and the historical society in which it appears:

> The problems are such things as the relations of mind and matter; body and soul; humanity and physical nature; the individual and the social; theory—or knowing, and practice—or doing. The philosophical systems which formulate these problems record the main lineaments and difficulties of contemporary social practice. (Dewey 1916, 333)

Soon after, Dewey read Leibniz (Dewey 1888, 285), Socrates, or even Kant (Dewey 1897b, 7–14) with a focus on the motivating problems of these philosophies, without particularly mentioning Hegel's philosophy. Thus, if Hegel could claim any privilege, it would not be due to his philosophy belonging to the practical problems of its time.

The reason for choosing Hegel is more likely be found in the Hegelian dialectic that allows a theoretical conceptualization of the problematic origin of philosophy. Unlike other philosophers, Hegel reflects on the practical problems that motivate philosophical thought and thermalizes them in his dialectical logic. According to Dewey, Hegel's originality is

his conceptual elaboration of the problematic state that determines the need to think:

> All of Hegel's speculative work grew out of this practical problem, the problem of how a free natural life is possible […]. Upon the whole, Hegel is as yet more conscious of the problem than of its solution. He is more aware of the oppositions which must needs [sic] be reconciled than of the unity which says the solvent word. (Dewey 1897a, 339)

In this text, Dewey relates Hegel's philosophy to the problems of its time and stresses that Hegel is aware of the existential conditions of his thought. Here, symptomatically, the term "problem" turns into the concept of "opposition," or, as Dewey says elsewhere, "contradiction," which are the fundamental concepts of Hegel's dialectic.

Hegel's philosophy therefore "translates" in a theoretical vocabulary the historical problematicity that constitutes the basis of all philosophies—a problematical condition that is missed in most cases by the traditional philosophical systems: "Hegel simply translated this process of historical development into terms of thought and by it the character of his method, or of what he called dialectic, was fixed" (Dewey 1897a, 344). In contrast to some traditional readings of Hegel that perceive his philosophy only as an abstract and speculative schematism, Dewey shows that Hegel's philosophy is entirely oriented to practical problems without abandoning the idea of their philosophical conceptualization: "We have already noted that Hegel's original impulse was not from the study of philosophy as such, but none the less he was engaged in the study of philosophy, at least all the time after he left the University" (Dewey 1897a, 346).

Of course, it is not necessary that Dewey's notion of problem itself and his idea of a practical determination of thought come from Hegel. The practical dimension of problems appears before the lectures of 1897 in Dewey's work. For example, when he published his famous article "The Reflex Arc Concept In Psychology" in 1896, a year before the lectures on Hegel, Dewey is already defining the problem as a link between sensation and coordination of mind, conceived as an adequate response to the perception:

> At one moment the various activities of reaching and withdrawing will be the sensation, because they are that phase of activity which sets the problem, or creates the demand for, the next act. […] Just as the discovery of the sensation marks the establishing of the problem, so the constitution of the response marks the solution of this problem. (Dewey 1896, 107–8)

It is then difficult to give Hegel the credit for a concept that Dewey could have found in another place. Even though Dewey would have read Hegel as early as 1882[3], it is clear enough that Hegel cannot be

considered as the only source of Dewey's attention to this notion, and here should also be mentioned Darwin's evolutionism and instrumentalism that this reflexion implies (Pearce 2014).

However, it is significant that in 1897, the same year of the lectures on Hegel's *Philosophy of Spirit*, Dewey published an article entitled "The Significance of the Problem of Knowledge," in which he deals with the relation between theory and practice in exactly the same way as he does in his lessons on Hegel. Why does Dewey come back to Hegel at the very moment when he develops an instrumentalist theory of problem that appears, at first glance, far from the Hegelian speculative perspective? Our hypothesis is that Hegel's dialectic provides Dewey with an adequate language for working through problems. It is as if the dialectical categories of opposition and contradiction could be used by Dewey to express in a rigorous and logical terminology the tensions and the struggles implied in the concrete problematic situations. As he himself claims, Hegel's philosophy is useful as a methodological basis: "This idea of method was deepened and almost transformed by Hegel's conviction of the important place of opposition, of contradiction and of negation in life" (Dewey 1897a, 344). In thinking through practical problems in light of logical concepts, the Hegelian dialectic gives the former a rational formulation and strong conceptualization.

In 1908, Dewey confirmed the methodological character of his use of Hegelianism, arguing that, along with logical formulations, it can grapple with the vital problems of existence that seem to transcend any rational appropriation:

> It was the work of Hegel to attempt to fill in the empty reason of Kant with the concrete contents of history. […] But in intellectual and practical effect, it lifted the idea of process above that of fixed origins and fixed ends, and presented the social and moral order, as well as the intellectual, as a scene of becoming, and it located reason somewhere within the struggles of life. (Dewey 1908, 43)

Dewey understands Hegel's enterprise as an attempt to restore the reason in the Darwinian "struggles of life": the conflicts and problems that require the necessity of reason but that are not immediately formulated in a rational way and that need to be clarified. In Dewey's view, Kant's philosophy leaves out the concrete significance of history; only Hegel's approach addresses this practical and social condition in the theoretical domain. He reconciles theory and practice in a dynamic way by asserting that new practical problems always stimulate the theory intended to resolve them. The very core of the Hegelian dialectic is precisely this capacity of reason to speculatively thematise the vital difficulties of existence that generate thought.

Thus, if it is true, as J. R. Schook argued (Shook 2000), that Dewey's concept of inquiry is a naturalization of Hegel's dialectic, we should

conversely consider that the dialectic is a logicisation of what Dewey calls "inquiry", in the sense that it produces a language adequate to thinking through the problems. It may be the profound meaning of what Dewey calls, in 1894, his "*experimental idealism*" (Dewey 1894, 264), which we could understand to be a mutual transformation of Hegel's idealist dialectic and his own thinking on the problematical experience, in which the theoretical perspective is connected to the empirical problems.

The lectures on the Science of Logic

Some years after the lessons on the *Philosophy of Spirit*, Dewey continued working on Hegel's philosophy and gave some lectures on the *Science of Logic* in 1904. Dewey continues to use the Hegelian categories to describe how thought can rigorously deal with problems, but his objective is not so much to inscribe the speculative philosophy in its context as to reach a general theory of knowledge (Renault 2015b). The practical contextualization is maintained but it is placed in a more general question about epistemology. Moreover, Dewey goes a step further in his appropriation of Hegel; he not only proposes a reading of the Hegelian philosophy, but he also reconstructs it with his own logic.

In 1939, discussing his interpretation of the *Science of Logic*, Dewey explicitly claims his reconstructive ambition: "There was a period extending into my earlier years at Chicago when, in connection with a seminar in Hegel's Logic I tried reinterpreting his categories in terms of 'readjustment' and 'reconstruction'" (Schilpp 1939, 18). This expression that Dewey uses in an interview with his daughter not only means that Hegel's logic was a way for him to elaborate a theory of problem in terms of a reconstruction of experience, but also that the Hegelian logic itself was reconstructed by Dewey (Renault 2016, 222) . In other words, while in 1897 Dewey tries to "translate" the concrete problems in the language of Hegel's dialectic, in 1904 he takes the opposite course and "translates" Hegel's logic in the psychological language of his logic of inquiry. Dewey suggests this himself in a letter sent to Joseph Ratner in 1946: "Probably the effort to translate Hegel's dialectic over into experimentally verifiable, or observable terms out of a self-enclosed 'rational' process is the key to my indebtedness to Hegel and to my divergence from him" (Dewey 1999).

This "reconstruction" or "translation" reveals the intense proximity between Dewey's and Hegel's philosophies in their common perspective on problem and in their will to produce a logic that is not separated from the concrete conflicts of existence that must be resolved by knowledge. Dewey stresses that Hegel's logic develops a theory of inquiry that takes its roots from the problematical situations and that wants to surpass the contradictions of experience. In such a view, knowledge consists in conceptual elaborations that theoretically reconstruct the practical problems in order to act on them, and knowledge is always

dynamically transformed by new problems and by the evolutive character of its relation to its environment. Contrary to those who propose metaphysical interpretations of the *Science of Logic*[4], Dewey reads it from a psychological perspective that places at its center the subject and its relation to the milieu: "Psychologically, the dialectic means that all inhibition is also stimulus, and thereby contributes to building up a new coordination" (Dewey 1904, 2.1562).

The lessons of 1904 assume that " thinking is always relative to a problem" (Dewey 1904, 2.1562). The Hegelian dialectic is then the movement by which the thought, on the one hand, develops from the problems encountered in practice: "The intellectual movement of the dialectic does not motivate its own movement. We must go back to the practical side of action for this" (Dewey 1904, 2.1566). However it is also, on the other hand, the production of knowledge that enables one to act on the problems and resolve them: "Thinking is stating the conditions of the on-going activity. But in stating them it transforms them, and this paradox is the dialectic" (Dewey 1904, 2.1561). Reading Hegel with this lens, Dewey claims that logic must be understood as a process in which theory and practice are intrinsically connected, and this connection can be properly called a "problem". He sets himself the task of reconstructing the *Science of Logic* in this way, by connecting each logical category to the practical problem that it is supposed to know and to resolve.

We can give a brief overview of this objective by studying Dewey's commentary on the beginning of Hegel's logic, devoted to the categories of Being, Nothing, and Becoming. Being is a category that is generated by a specific relation to experience, when the subject has to evaluate and formulate propositions about its environment: "When you begin to *value* your previous experience, then you assert being. Thinking is the asserting or formulating of your experience." (Dewey 1904, 2.1560) Thus, Being is not the eternal essence of the traditional metaphysics since Parmenides and Plato. It is a category produced by experience in order to clarify and unify the problematic diversity in it. In 1897, Dewey had already written: "Hegel already at this time had begun to conceive of the unity as not a mere underlying point of union, or as a common substratum, but as a unity of activity to be realized in and through diversity and opposition" (Dewey 1897a, 357). However, since the situation is constituted by problems, the subject has to deal with dissatisfaction, disappointment, and inadequacy between its knowledge and the world around it. Hence the category of "Nothing", which translates as a negation of what has been confirmed and necessarily restarts the process of seeking knowledge. The notion of Becoming is the conceptual translation of such an indefinite processuality, due to its relation between subjectivity and its problematical world: "The meaning of becoming is, not that it is something that leads up to a

product, but that it is producing something at every step. Product is a cross-section of process" (Dewey 1904, 2.1562).

The categories of Being, Nothing, and Becoming are therefore strongly articulated as dynamic processes of thought by which a subject adapts his or herself to the problems he or she encounters: "The question is only what instrument is most serviceable at any given time for the problem in hand" (Dewey 1904, 2.1583). According to Dewey's reconstruction of Hegel, the logical categories are not some eternal notions, but practical concepts, produced by experience in order to resolve the difficulties of action in existence. Hegel's logic tries to capture the constant renewal of knowledge that improves itself by resolving contradictions. Here is the fundamental principle of a general theory of knowledge that Dewey develops at that time and that meets, in his view, Hegel's philosophy.

What is true for the first categories of the *Science of Logic* is also true for the others. The concepts of cause and effect, for example, cannot be understood, in Dewey's view, if we do not first analyze the problematical context, in which it is necessary to think in terms of causality:

> Such taking would be purely arbitrary if there were not a particular and differential problem to be solved. Given the problem of resolving a gross and indeterminate succession of observed qualitative events into a single continuous history, there is sufficient and necessary ground for taking one event as "effect" or consequent, and some other as antecedent or "cause." (Dewey 1938, 453)

All of Hegel's logic is reread in light of Dewey's pragmatist inquiry, reconstructing the Hegelian theoretical organization of categories according to their practical determinations, which are the concrete problems that are the real source of thought. *The Logic of Inquiry*, in 1938, constituted the culmination of this effort.

G. H. Mead, in notes that he conserved from a lesson Dewey gave on Hegel's logic, insists on the fundamental role of the notion of problem in Dewey's reading of Hegel:

> Hegelian logic helpful toward conception of constitutive and reconstructive nature of thought. Pragmatism denies objects be there through thought. In Problems arising in perceptual world, reflective process can be reconstructive in the experience of an individual, as providing a way out of the difficulty. (Mead 2014, 29)

Mead considers here whether Dewey's and Hegel's logics do not reduce the categories to pure and immutable spiritual entities, but rather analyze them as dynamical productions in constant transformation, created by subjects to respond to the world and act on it, depending on the variation of problems in environment. Similarly, Thayer rightly claims

that the process of knowledge in the Deweyian logic resembles "a little Hegelian universe,"[5] meaning that the determination of thought by the problems that are integrated and resolved by knowledge, before the latter is put back into motion by the problematic situation.

From 1897 to 1904, the lectures on Hegel that Dewey proposes change and evolve, but the notion of problem is always the core of his reading. It appears as the common fundamental element that reunites Dewey's pragmatic philosophy and Hegel's idealism, beyond their differences, in the same orientation of thought. We can sum up what Dewey retains from Hegel in three points: 1. his speculative philosophy has its roots in practical problems and in the historical and social situation of its time; 2. it reflects this problematical condition within the theory of dialectic and thus rigorously formulates a logical language to think through the problems and the conflicts as oppositions and contradictions; 3. Hegel's logic can also be understood as the prefiguration of Dewey's logic of inquiry because, as the latter reconstructs it, it connects all the logical categories to the problems that they know and resolve. If the first point is not absolutely original and concerning all philosophers, in the sense that each philosophy develops in context, the second one has a great importance for Dewey because the Hegelian concepts give him a strong and rational language to propose a theory of problems. The third one indicates the closest proximity between the two philosophers. It invites us to return to Hegel to search his philosophy to find if there is really a profound reflection on the notion of problem and a true conceptualization of it.

The Thought of Problem in Hegel's Philosophy: A Pragmatist Reading of Hegelianism

The importance that Dewey accords to the notion of problem in his reading of Hegel leads us to check if such a notion is really present in the latter's speculative philosophy or of it must be considered as a transformation, very distant from the original. This is a particularly delicate point because the Hegelian commentary does not acknowledge it as a central concept in Hegel's philosophy. Even the neo-pragmatist readings of Hegel do not focus on the importance of the idea of problem in his philosophy (Pippin 1989; Pinkard 1994; McDowell 1994; Brandom 1994). We would like, however, to emphasize the profound thinking on problem in Hegel and claim that it plays a fundamental role in his system. Dewey thus allows us to reread Hegel in a new light, which not only clarifies the persistence of Hegelianism in Dewey, but also offers a more pragmatic, less idealistic reading of Hegel. Furthermore, noting the differences between the two's philosophies will enable us to shed light on some of the singularities in Dewey's reflection on problem.

It is true that Hegel makes little use of the German term *Problem* and does not consider this term as a fundamental concept. On the

contrary, he frequently uses the notion of *Aufgabe*, which means "problem" as well as "task"—or, if we prefer, the problem as its resolution is the matter of its task. The concept of *Aufgabe* is employed by Hegel in essentially two ways. The first concerns the lessons on the *Philosophy of History*, in which Hegel uses the term to design the concrete problems encountered by men in history, notably that of the central problem of freedom (1). The second one implies the specific problems of philosophy and is principally located in programmatic texts, prefaces, introductions, or allocutions (2). We will see that, unlike Dewey, the contradictions that generate knowledge in Hegel's philosophy are *occasional* and that, once in theory, the contradictions are *only speculative*. From Hegel to Dewey, two important evolutions occur: on the one hand, the passage from particularity to generality concerning the connection between thought and practical problems, and on the other hand, the passage from the primacy of theoretical problems to that of practical problems.

The Historical Problems

The lessons on the *Philosophy of History*, given by Hegel in Berlin from 1822–1823, introduce the concept of the notion of *Aufgabe* for thinking through the "problem" that the Egyptian people have had to face historically. According to Hegel, Egypt is the area of transition between the Orient and the Occident. Its role therefore is central to European history because we find there the problem of freedom that is, from the Greeks to the modern Nations, the central preoccupation of the Occidental development.

Egypt retains from the Orient the incorporation of spirit in nature, the cover of spiritual determinations by natural determinations. However, the spirit has been brought to light in its inchoative form in Persia thanks to the Phoenician trade, which presupposes the transformation of nature by man; the Syrian religions, which hold subjective suffering to be sacred; and Judaism, which refuses all naturalist representations of God (Hegel 2001, 330–33). The question of spiritual freedom in its relation to nature appears in these developments of world history and Egypt has to face this problem for the first time:

> There are the elements of a new self-consciousness, which poses for human beings a new and different problem for them to solve (*daß der Mensch eine ganz neue, andere Aufgabe sich zur Lösung stellt*). We have to examine Egypt, as the first land to which is relegated the carrying out of this task (*diese Aufgabe zu lösen*). (Hegel 2001, 333)

Egypt is thus the source of the greatest problem of our history: "Egypt is the land of conflict, of dialectic, the land of the task or the problem (*Aufgabe*)" (Hegel 2001, 367). This is the problem of emancipation of

spirit from nature, the apparition of a free will that is not determined by natural relations and naturalized dominations: "The task (*Aufgabe*) for the Egyptian spirit is that what ought to emerge is the thought in which human beings grasp themselves" (Hegel 2001, 368).

Hegel insists on the awareness Egyptians have of this specific problem. He observes "how the consciousness of the Egyptians represented their own spirit in the form of a problem (*Aufgabe*)" (Hegel 2001, 367). The specificity of the Egyptian people is to formulate the problem of freedom in a very enigmatic and obscure way:

> The answer of this task or problem (*die Lösung dieser Aufgabe*), however, seems rather to be that, in the individuality of the Egyptian people, the enigma (*das Rätsel*) is apparently posed and not solved (*nicht gelöst*). […] We understand it only when we grasp it as hieroglyphic, and the definitive character of Egypt is as such the sphinx, the hieroglyphics, the enigma. (Hegel 2001, 334–335)

The Sphinx is the symbol of Egypt because it represents a mix of humanity and animalism, of spirit and nature that characterizes their place in world history and their inability to become independent of the mystery of the world. The famous enigma of the Sphinx—what has four legs in the morning, two at noon and three in the evening?—is resolved by Oedipus who answers "man" in response. However, the Egyptian monster can only enounce it in a riddle, as if it could not be aware of the true and clear essence of men. Thus, the problem of freedom remains obscure in Egypt: "For the Egyptians truth was still the problem (*Aufgabe*), still this enigma (*dieses Rätselhafte*), and they of course possessed or determined it for themselves in their intuition of the animal" (Hegel 2001, 350).

The Egyptian moment must therefore be overcome, since the resolution of problem needs a clear enunciation of it in the form of an explicit task. The Greeks make progress in formulating the problem of freedom, but only Christianity reaches the perfect consciousness of it and resolves it: "Inasmuch as the Egyptian enigma (*das ägyptische Rätsel*) was now grasped in thought, it was accordingly resolved (*gelöst*)" (Hegel 2001, 452). Spirit is liberated from its natural chains at last, not to abandon or dominate nature, but to reconcile itself with it. In Hegel's view, that is the more profound signification of the Christian God: he becomes a man and reconciles himself with nature. In the reconciliation between divinity and humanity, the man is not the answer to a riddle, but is clearly "envisaged as absolute" (Hegel 2001, 453) and can be free, since his true essence is known. The rest of the world's history—that Hegel called the Germanic world—is the deepening and progression of the principle of freedom, until the modern era in which men are free and equal[6].

The historical importance of the problem of freedom does not imply that it would be the only problem that men have encountered in their existence. First, Hegel specifies that the problem of freedom in itself is plural and that the moment of its awareness—its passage from riddle to the clear enunciation of the task—must be distinguished from the moment of its effective realization:

> This consciousness first arose in religion, in the innermost region of spirit; but to incorporate this principle into secular existence was a further task whose solution and application would require a long and arduous labor on the part of culture. (Hegel 2001, 88)

Hundreds of years are necessary for men to become aware of the explicit task of their spiritual liberty and, also, hundreds of years are necessary for the adequate resolution of the problem.

Secondly, Hegel never argues that the historical conquest of freedom is the single problem man has faced. It is without question the greatest and the most important for him, but not the only one. On the contrary, he insists on a plurality of problems in history and stresses that new problems can always emerge:

> The alterations undergone do not merely return it to the same shape but rather reconstitute, purify, and elaborate it—a process whereby, through the completion of its task (*die Lösung seiner Aufgabe*), it creates new tasks (*neue Aufgaben*) and multiplies the material for its labor. (Hegel 2001, 143)

People do always encounter new problems in their history. This is the reason why History is never finished and why we always have to face unknown difficulties and new conflicts.

Hegel's philosophy of history therefore is not a teleological metaphysics, as the traditional image of his system is usually depicted—in Althusser's criticism of Hegel, for example (Althusser 1969). There is no logical principle that determines man's destiny without his consent, but only concrete problems and the men who face them. The problems, in the *Philosophy of history*, are not prior principles or ideals; rather, there are the immanent difficulties and struggles that men meet in existence. Of course Hegel writes the history of western civilization as progress in freedom, but the problem of freedom itself appears in history: it is not a final goal that concerns humanity from its beginning until its end and that would have oriented each step of its history—Hegel notes that it was not a central problem for a lot of peoples and a lot of periods (according to him, it was not a problem for Asian and African peoples, and in Europe it was not a primordial problem in the Middle Ages). If Hegel can be criticized, it may be because he restricts the problems

of men to the great problems of humanity, notably the problem of freedom, and because he writes the history of human problems in the light of a conceptual reconstruction in his philosophical system, but not because of his teleological and metaphysical point of view.

In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), Hegel had clearly criticized any conception of *Aufgabe* as duty or transcendent essence. In Chapter VI, C, a, Hegel insists on the contradiction in the moral consciousness, oriented toward an ideal duty that determines the teleological horizon of its actions. Unlike in the *Philosophy of History*, he uses the term "*Aufgabe*" (Hegel 2010, 539) not to design a practical problem, but to describe the "duty (*Pflicht*)," the "purpose (*Zweck*)," and the "essence" that is "presupposed" in the moral consciousness (Hegel 2010, 535–536). He understands the task here as the realization of a superior principle, positively determined. He stresses, however, that such an understanding of morality leads the consciousness to contradiction because the moral consciousness is defined by its duty, but the realization of this duty—that is, the disappearance of the duty—abolishes the moral consciousness itself: "[...] contradictions lying in a task which is both to remain a task and which is yet to be fulfilled, and in a morality which is not any more supposed to be consciousness and not any more supposed to be actual" (Hegel 2010, 539).

This understanding of the *Aufgabe* is not the meaning given to the concept in the *Philosophy of History* fifteen years later. In the 1820s, the task does not reflect a non-historical ideal, but a real problem that men have to resolve in history. It is not an essence of duty anymore, but the immanent difficulties on the long and unpredictable path to freedom. Neither a *telos* nor an end, the problem is the occasion for men to create inventive solutions for confronting the difficulties of life. The problematical situations do not possess their solutions in advance; they require the creation of original actions to resolve them and go forward in history, step by step and always in an indeterminate way.

Hegel conceives of history as a scene where men face, come to understand, and finally resolve the problems that they meet in their existence. On this point, his philosophy is very similar to Dewey's. Like him, Hegel considers the problem as a fundamental category for understanding historical action. Like Dewey (Dewey 1910, 234–41), he distinguishes the moment of the knowledge of the problem from the moment of its resolution, but also he differentiates the various manners of becoming aware of a given problem: obscurely, when the problem is seized as a riddle (*Rätsel*) and clearly, such as when it is recognized as an explicit task (*Aufgabe*). There is no rupture or betrayal when Dewey reads Hegel's philosophy and finds in it a powerful thinking on problems. Beyond the opposition between idealism and pragmatism, he is profoundly faithful to Hegel when he insists on the concrete problems in his texts. To see it, however, we need to reread Hegel in light of

Dewey's reading and verify that the former's philosophy is less meta-physical and idealistic than is often said. It may be possible, under certain conditions that we will determine, to qualify Hegel's philosophy *a posteriori* and in an anachronistic way as a true pragmatism[7].

The Philosophical Problems

Hegel does not only use the notion of *Aufgabe* to describe the concrete problems of men throughout history, but also to reflect on the problem posed by philosophy itself. In his writing about *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, a programmatic text from the period of Jena, he insists on the fact that philosophy meets a specific "need (*Bedürfnis*)," which is the "task (*Aufgabe*)" (Hegel 1977, 87–89) of thinking and resolving the problems and contradictions of its time. This task is here described in a very general way, but is specified in each Hegelian text. It would be vain and rhapsodic to refer to every occurrence of the term *Aufgabe* in Hegel's work and each time explain the specific task that it implies. For this reason we will focus on one text which is particularly interesting for our purpose because it establishes a link between theory and practice in a very intense manner.

The text is derived from the preface of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*:

> However, the task (*Aufgabe*) of leading the individual from his culturally immature standpoint up to and into science had to be taken in its universal sense, and the universal individual, the world spirit, had to be examined in the development of its cultural education (Hegel 2010, 24).

In this text, Hegel defines the pedagogical "problem" or "task" of the *Phenomenology* as the education of the naïve consciousness in order to lead it, taught by experience, toward the Absolute Knowledge, the point of view of science which will be developed in the *Science of Logic* and the *Encyclopedia*. The *Phenomenology of Spirit*, indeed, is "the culturally formative stages of the universal spirit" (Hegel 2010, 24), that the common consciousness asks philosophy to elevate it from the point of view of science, from which the entire encyclopedic system can be deployed (Siep 2000, 248).

This education is a problem specific to philosophy; it is the task of the philosopher, that is, of Hegel himself, to accomplish it. At first, the problem seems to be of a theoretical nature. The issue is to propose an "introduction" to the sciences, which would be at the same time "the first part of the System of Philosophy" (Hegel 1986 §25). This problematical circle results from the obligation for the introduction to be a scientific introduction such that it could avoid the gap between ignorance and knowledge. Indeed, a non-scientific introduction would

stay on the threshold of knowledge and would never reach science. Its results also from the other philosophies that Hegel tackles in the preface of the *Phenomenology*, notably Schelling's and Jacobi's philosophies that, in his view, defend the leap to the Absolute, as if it could be thought immediately. Unlike those philosophies of the immediate, Hegel values and rewards "the path of despair" (Hegel 2010, 73). He demands the patience of the negativity and refuses that philosophy engages itself in "the inspiration which begins immediately, like a shot from a pistol, with absolute knowledge" (Hegel 2010, 23). According to him, only the long and difficult progression of experience can lead us to truth.

Nevertheless, it would be erroneous to believe that Hegel's pedagogical problem in *Phenomenology* is only abstract. Actually, it is profoundly connected to practical and concrete problems anchored in the history of its time. In the preface of his book from 1807, he stresses that "our own epoch is a time of birth and a transition to a new period" (Hegel 2010, 9). Hegel is aware of observing "the structure of the new world" (Hegel 2010, 10), the world of the French Revolution and the rule of law, wherein freedom does not concern only one individual or a few of the aristocracy, but all men equally in mutual recognition before the law. He notices, however, that the outcome remains uncertain (Renault 2015a, 32–39). Because the post-revolutionary period is a transition, an ongoing process whose outcome cannot be predicted, he suggests that, even if some "individual symptoms" indicate that the ancient world is close to collapsing, the promises of the new world are only perceptible in "indeterminate presentiment of what is yet unknown". In other words, Hegel deals with a problematical situation of the history, constituted by tensions and conflicts, divergent interests, and profound uncertainties torn apart by the opposition between rationality and irrationality, novelty and the past. This problematical context explains why Hegel wants to bring the consciousness to the capability of science and knowledge. He thinks that the education of thought can be an effective means to reconcile its time and to lead the men to recognize the germs of rationality in the modern era.

While in the lessons on the *Philosophy in History*, the notion of *Aufgabe* is limited to the comprehension of men's actions in the progress towards freedom, the introductions, prefaces, allocutions, and other programmatic texts of Hegel's philosophy reveal another use of this concept: its capacity to comprehend the problems of philosophy itself. However, this insistence on theoretical problems does not mean that they could be isolated from the practical issues of the world. On the contrary, Hegel argues that philosophy itself is dependent from the concrete, social, and historical situation in which it appears. Again, here he is very close to Dewey's pragmatism. Like him, he develops a thought process about problems that highlights the practical determinations of

theory and insists on the idea that the essence of knowledge is to resolve the concrete difficulties of action. Such an articulation of theory and practice is as fundamental for Dewey as it is for Hegel, who claims in the *Encyclopedia* that "free will is the unity of theoretical and practical mind" (Hegel 1986b §481). Even if it goes against our strongest prejudices, based on a metaphysical reading of the Hegelian philosophy, it cannot be denied that here Hegel appears as more of a pragmatist than an idealist.

Conclusion
Dewey's philosophy makes it possible to read Hegel's text from a fresh perspective. Go from Dewey to Hegel leads us to be vigilant regarding the importance of the notion of problem in Hegel's philosophy—a notion that, without Dewey, would have remained invisible. This reading shows the profoundly pragmatist inspiration of the speculative system and reveals the common ground that connects Hegel and Dewey. From this perspective, we can now perceive the real differences that separate the two authors.

On the one hand, Hegel restricts the capacity to generate the speculative thought to a few particular problems. Only the great problems of humanity, and notably the problem of freedom, can motivate philosophical thought and consist in the practical basis on which theoretical elaborations rely. This is the reason why Hegel develops them in the programmatic discussion rather than in the content of the system. Dewey agrees here with Hegel, but extends the practical foundation to any idea and to the everyday lives of men. In other words, he generalizes the causation of the theoretical problems by practical problems. While in Hegel's philosophy this thesis stays particular, Dewey proposes a general epistemology of knowledge from this principle.

Consequently, on the other hand, Hegel does not accord a specific importance to practical problems within the process of knowledge. Dewey can read *Logic* in this way, but it would be a reconstruction and not Hegel's initial intention, who considers logical contradictions as purely theoretical problems. When Hegel is interested in practical problems in the lessons on the *Philosophy of History*, it is to understand the actions of men throughout history, not to explain the activity of knowledge (Renault 2017a, 315). In this sense, it is obvious that, even if Hegel pays attention to practical problems, they are subordinated to the theoretical ones in his system of philosophy. Here, the way from Dewey to Hegel does not concern the passage from particularity to generality, but from the privileging of theoretical problems to the privileging of practical problems inside the dynamic of knowledge.

These two differences constitute the ultimate distinction between Hegel and Dewey. They can be explained by the fact that Hegel is afraid to accord too much importance to the practical problems in theory

because it could be an obstacle to the pure search of truth. In contrast, Dewey is not frightened about the idea of an absolute preponderance of the practical problems in the domain of knowledge because, unlike Hegel, he considers truth to have no value in itself, but only with respect to action. In Dewey's views, truth tends to disappear and is replaced by the criteria of security and utility for the resolution of concrete problems (Frega 2006). It may be this difference of attitude toward truth that ultimately separates Dewey and Hegel, but it should not make us forget the common thought process regarding problem that reunites them.

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NOTES

1 As an introduction to this literature, see the French afterword of *The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy & Other Essays in Contemporary Thought* (Dewey et al. 2016).

2 Dewey's conception of problems here is very close to James in *The Will to Believe* that develops the notion of the "live hypothesis" (William 1896, 15).

3 According to the Introduction of Dewey's *Early Works* (vol. 1, xxiv).

4 See for example Karl Marx' criticism of the link between *Science of Logic* and *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (Marx 1977).

5 "For Dewey, the process of inquiry does not issue in some universal state of consciousness and truth. A specific problem generates and determines the course of thought and circumscribes its conclusions … nonetheless … each individual inquiry is like a little Hegelian universe; an evolutionary struggle of consciousness against 'otherness' proceeding through moments and 'forms (Gestalten) to a unified concrete whole, self-realization and truth; thought mediating existence" (Thayer 1988, 527).

6 According to Hegel, the passage from the ancient conception of freedom to the modern conception relies on a double movement of universalisation and particularisation. On the one hand, freedom begins by concerning only one man, a tyrant; then few men, an aristocracy; and finally all men. On the other hand, freedom becomes more and more particularised because in the modern world it takes into account the will of the individuals. Unlike the ancient Greek city, modern institutions (family, civil society, and State) articulate individual interests and the common good (Neuhouser 2003; Honneth 2016, 2011).

7 From another perspective, focused on the master and slave dialectic, Emmanuel Renault proposed a pragmatist reading of Hegel (Renault 2017b, 8; Renault 2017c, 13–14).