Hegel Reading Group Notes

6/28/23

* Descartes initiated the criterion that philosophy must be methodical
* Hegel initiated the criterion that philosophy must be able to account for the existence of the plurality of philosophies
  + Not simply critique them
  + Explain why they are there in the first place
    - Directly analogous to Darwin’s effort 50 years later to explain the existence of the plurality of animal species
  + Why?
    - Philosophy cannot but appear futile without this
    - Critiques will only add another corpse to the battlefield of futility
      * They will also not be adequate since the position critiqued will not be properly understood
        + Just as it is not possible to adequately understand animal species until one has explained how/why they evolved/emerged
    - Necessary for self-knowledge
      * The different philosophies are different historical moments in the process of the mind coming to know itself
    - Fundamental philosophical problems cannot be solved without this self-knowledge
      * I.e. problems of knowing, objectivity, reality, truth, being, value
* Hegel’s answer to the question: What explains the existence of the multiplicity of philosophies?
  + The polymorphism of consciousness, *Die Gestalten des Bewusstseins*
  + Gestalt = form, shape, pattern
  + Different philosophies are expressions of the different forms consciousness has taken on over the course of its history
    - For Hegel, the whole is in each part, so ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, i.e. in some sense at least, the totality of the history of forms of consciousness are recapitulated in each individual, to a greater or lesser degree
      * The development of any given individual, however, can be forestalled, truncated, distorted, etc. and so they will opt for a philosophy that expresses their current level of development, i.e. self-knowledge
  + What is a form of consciousness?
    - It is a quality or structure of consciousness with its correlative object
    - The “object” here is the generic object, the totality of what counts as “real” for this form of consciousness
      * E.g. the Platonic form of consciousness with its correlative object, the Aristotelian form of consciousness with its correlative object, the Cartesian, the Humean, etc. Although, these all will fall under more technical terms for forms of consciousness, e.g. Sense-certainty, Perception, Self-consciousness, etc.
    - Thus, there is not just the question of knowing, objectivity, reality
      * There is this problem for each viewpoint/form of consciousness
      * For the lower viewpoint, that which is real for the higher viewpoint just won’t be real
        + Cf. Piaget’s child for whom the taller, skinnier glass just obviously holds more water, i.e. for whom the principle of “conservation” is not part of their objective reality
        + If they were to debate an older sibling, they would invariably disagree but until the younger child develops, the disagreement will be insurmountable because the viewpoints are incommensurable
        + So we disagree with Plato because we’re not on his level. We think we’re critiquing him but we’re just critiquing the “Plato” that appears on our level, to our form of consciousness (Plato as he appears on the wall of the Cave. Yes, Plato understood the polymorphism of consciousness but did not develop a method for studying its dynamic development ontogenetically or phylogenetically.)
        + Hence, Phenomenology of Spirit will be study not only of different ways in which things appear to consciousness but the different forms of consciousness that determine these appearances.

Couple important notes & terms, etc.:

In-itself, For-Itself, In-and-for-itself

* Example: Freedom
  + In-itself: Libertarian freedom: natural inclinations, individual self-will
  + For-itself: Kantian freedom: freedom as autonomy, self-rule, self-directedness, universal will reason’s abstract laws applying the universal law to nature, i.e. freedom quintessentially a kind of negating of natural inclinations
  + In-and-for-itself: Ethical life: the education, sublation of natural inclinations to conform to universal demands of reason, i.e. a second nature, virtue, Aristotle

Position, Negation, Negation of the Negation

Immediacy, Reflection, Unity

Thesis, Antithesis, Synthesis (Yes, this is Fichte’s phraseology, not Hegel’s)

Father, Son, Spirit (Heilige Geiste)

Potency and Act

Concept/Begriff

Spirit/Geist