

Hegel on the Values of Humanistic Education

By GUSTAV MUELLER

IN THE YEAR 1806 Napoleon defeated the Prussian army in the battle of Jena. George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, at that time professor of philosophy at the University of Jena, interrupted his writing—he was just finishing the last pages of the *Phaenomenology of Mind*—in order to watch from his window the French conqueror riding on his white horse into the surrendered town. "I saw this world-soul on horse-back," the philosopher dryly wrote to a friend.

The war brought a social revolution, a change from the half-feudal order to the liberal law of the Code Napoléon; Hegel had to give up his position (the University having next to no money) and had to accept a job on a newspaper in Bamberg, from which his friend Immanuel Niethammer, Bavarian Minister of Education, rescued him. He was appointed director of a humanistic Gymnasium in Nuremberg, which he was to modernize. He filled this administrative post from 1809–1815, besides teaching elementary philosophy to high-school students, and working on his second major work, the *Logic*, which appeared in 1816 and brought him the call to the University of Heidelberg. As director he gave five addresses, one each year, on graduation day. These addresses together with his *Philosophische Propädeutik* for his high-school students now form the third volume of his works. Those simple speeches as well as the confidential reports and advices to Niethammer are not only a human, personal document, but also a classical statement on the educational values of humanistic education. I report the following observations which are as applicable today as when they were written:

We are living in the midst of an immense historical crisis. Being occupied we are deprived of our own independent public life. We are threatened with hopelessness and indifference, evils of the soul which are greater than the sight of ruins and corpses of cities. Under such circumstances it is elevating to observe the enthusiastic response with which the citizens rally around the great project of saving and renewing our educational institution. Rightly so, for it is the young generation

who must be prepared to meet the challenge of the new situation. What has gone is gone irrevocably. It is vain to miss it or to wish it back. What is old is not preferable, because it was adequate or perfect for its own time. The young generation must not be troubled through futile regrets and fond memories: it must be prepared to shoulder the new tasks and to make itself worthy of a happiness in the new world of the future. It is up to them that good things may come out of many years of troubles and deprivations . . . This new life, however, would not be possible, if we were to succumb to the temptation to take too seriously the ups and downs, the external successes and diversions of the world-show. To orient our youth merely in the momentary and transitive changes of the world would give them a "false concept of the value of things" . . . Have we not recently seen that states which neglected or even despised to cultivate such an inner core of the soul in their members and only trained them to mere utility, degrading the spirit to the function of a mere means, were caught in dangers without fortitude and were brought low in the midst of plenty of their useful supplies?

Having thus firmly sized up the historical situation, Hegel then turns toward the function of the school in this situation:

The *school* is a transition from the life in the family to the life in public; and it mediates between the past achievement of mankind and its hoped-for future. From the point of view of the pupil, school-time is the time of growth, learning, expansion, progression; from the point of view of the educator, school-time is the time of recurrent cycles of learning and of generation;

from the point of view of itself, its temporal interest is to endure as an ideal whole throughout the slow changes of historical times . . . It cannot understand itself merely as an experiment.

The life in the family consists of personal, private relations. The family relates its members through feeling, natural piety, and mutual confidence. This relation is not an objective bond of common causes, but a natural bond of blood. The child is recognized here because it is the child of the family. It meets the love of its parents without merit and has to stand their tempers without recourse to right.

In public life, on the contrary, a man has validity through that which he is, does, and represents: he has value only insofar as he has earned it. He is receiving little out of love or for love's sake. His cause, which he represents, not his private personality, is that which makes him valuable. Public life goes on independent of his peculiar subjectivity, and he has to make himself fit to enter one of its many objective spheres of activity.

According to Hegel, the school, then, is the transition between those different spheres of the human mind. Education has the effect of separating the adolescent from his immediate background. It leads him from the life of feeling to the freedom of thought and of intellectual self-activity. This strengthens his power to become master over immediate impressions and shifting externalities.

On the one hand, the school still continues personal-individual guidance and care; on the other hand, it already prefigures the public, adult world of serious activities. The pupil gets used to strangers as equals in a competitive game of competitive efforts. The feeling of the child's dependence gradually is changed to a feeling of self-activity, integrity, and independence. This is brought about, as Hegel points out, not through external discipline or obedience, but through the means of



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Gustav Mueller, Professor of Philosophy, presents in this article a digest of Friedrich Hegel's ideas on the contribution which the study of the classical languages and cultures can make to modern education. It is an interesting companion piece to the article by Mr. Artman, which deals with the practical problems of carrying on the study of foreign languages in our elementary schools.

personal interest and love in connection with the job of objective learning.

The school which Hegel was thus instrumental in transforming, was an institution for the teaching of Latin and Greek. The new curriculum contained besides Latin and Greek, mathematical and physical sciences, history, modern German literature and philosophy.

Hegel says that the old type of Latin school had its justification in a time when the ancient languages were the only means of acquiring culture, and where practical skills could be picked up in practical life itself. This separation was "most unfortunate"; but there now was an equally extremist tendency to do away with the classics altogether on the grounds that a people cannot call itself cultured which is not able to express the treasures of knowledge in its own language. The intimate mastery which we enjoy over our own language is lacking in any other which is merely acquired. But the danger in this tendency, true as far as it goes, must be that it will emphasize triviality, since everyday experiences do not contain the power of cultivating and elevating the mind. We must, therefore, distinguish: there must be a general education, enabling every member of the people to learn things which are essential to them all as human beings as well as special skills; but there remains and persists, nevertheless, a higher education for those who will be scholars in the true and ancient sense of the word. They, too, have a right to receive an education proper to their high calling.

For two thousand years, Hegel argues, European culture has grown in the soil prepared by Greece and Rome. And each renaissance of Western humanity has been connected with a new and deeper understanding and fertilization by principles discovered in our own beginnings. It would be a suicidal, a disastrous superficiality, if we were to listen to the utilitarian educators, who think that humanistic education is superfluous because its fruits are not immediately convertible into cash. The humanistic education in its reformed and new organization must be preserved.

The differentiation of higher education into various branches, therefore, and the differentiation of scholarly education in the departments of classical languages, history, literature, and philosophy marks a spiritual progress. "For the nature of the spirit and spiritual freedom is realized when it is present in different forms (departments) of its own organization, each form representing completely the same goal from its own point of view." Thus each contributing department can do its own work wholeheartedly because each knows that it is a moment of the whole

and as necessary for the whole as are the other departments. Only that which concentrates about its own principle can become consistent and definite.

This statement shows what Hegel means when he says spirit or freedom. Spirit rests on the freedom where each particular sphere of life and its individual representatives may pursue their own interests according to the law of their own concerns; freedom, conversely, rests on an idea of organic wholeness which differentiates itself but which holds its differentiated organs together in its protective unity.

We now turn to the values, as Hegel sees them, of classical studies. That the arts and sciences of a people should stand on their own feet, then, does not imply that the Greeks and Romans are merely learned and antiquarian curiosities good for a leisure class. There are values in those original and founding cultures of Europe, which it would be perilous for us to bypass.

"I believe I do not contend too much," writes Hegel, "if I say that one who has not known the works of the ancients has lived without knowing perfection and beauty." If we care for perfection, therefore, the study of the Greeks primarily, and then of the Romans, must remain a foundation. But a mere external and general acquaintance is insufficient. "We must take up room and board with them, to absorb their atmosphere, their ideas and manners, even their errors and prejudices, in order to become a citizen of their world—the most beautiful that ever existed. . . . If we make ourselves at home in this element, all the faculties of our soul are stimulated, developed and trained, and in appropriating it we are enriched and become substantially improved."

"But this wealth," Hegel continues, "is tied up with languages. Translations are like artificial roses without the tenderness, loveliness, and softness of life: or like stale wine. Language is a musical soul, the element of inwardness, which disappears in imitations." The study of language has both a moral and a logical value. Its moral value lies in the enrichment and strength we acquire. We find ourselves in losing ourselves. The *logical* value is equally great: grammatical rules in abstraction or isolation are a lifeless mechanism. Mechanism is a necessary aspect of the mind, but the whole and living mind has the task of digesting it. The mastery of grammar is thus the beginning of logical thinking. In learning the grammatical rules of the ancient languages we are forced to think, whether we want to or not. We do not have the immediate habit, which brings about the right word-order without reflection, in our own mother-tongue. We must con-

sciously reflect on the meaning of the different parts and particles of the sentences and must remember the rules to fit them correctly. This thinking constantly practices the logical method of subsuming the particulars under universals, and of analysing parts in meaningful wholes. Thus reason becomes a second and trained nature in us.

The danger of this training, Hegel admits, is that it gets stuck in the abstract and dead mechanism of a mechanical intellect or in a mere word splitting without intuition or philosophy.

Done rightly, however, the training prepares young people to enter their profession with an indestructible sanctuary in their souls. In our modern world of practical specializations and complexities it is more necessary than ever that we have a comprehension of life as organic whole. Untrained and undisciplined, young people lose themselves in a vague infinity of demands and expectations, in the light of which they find the present sad and unsatisfactory. Humanistic education teaches them to find wholeness and perfection in measure and limitation. As men we are based on an infinite and ideal ground, but we are also mortal and finite. If we create in ourselves the comprehension of the whole of life, we are calmly fortified against losing ourselves both in the particularities and excitements of the moment, as well as against a pointless longing for utopias. We have a spiritual home in the world.

Much of the five addresses pertains to administrative matters. I conclude by quoting a passage in which Hegel acknowledges the receipt of funds for the support of poor students. These funds were partly collected through their classmates, who organized singing parties in the town, and partly through gifts of citizens:

How many of parents without means were thus enabled to lift themselves above their station, to cultivate their talents which might have remained dormant on account of poverty or which might have taken an evil course! How many honorable and famous men owe the happiness of their lives, their usefulness for the state and for their fellow citizens to such charity, which they will bless for ever.

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For what house is so strong, or what state so enduring that it cannot be utterly overthrown by animosities and divisions?

Cicero, *De Amicitia*, VII, 23.

Translation by W. A. Falconer.

This, however, I do feel first of all—that friendship cannot exist except among good men. . . .

Cicero, *De Amicitia*, V, 18.

Translation by W. A. Falconer.