

# Hegel and Phenomenology: Introduction

Dermot Moran and Elisa Magri

‘Reaction against Hegel—which leads back to Hegel. How?’, we read in Merleau-Ponty’s course notes from the Collège de France (Merleau-Ponty [1954–55] 2010: 63). This interrogative marks the whole history of twentieth-century phenomenology, which is clearly indebted to Hegel’s thought in significant ways. Husserl’s concern with the historical and cultural life-world in the *Crisis of European Sciences*; Heidegger’s ontological interpretation of logic and concern with the historicization of human existence; Merleau-Ponty’s dialectic of the visible and invisible—all involve an implicit return to Hegelian themes and strategies. Surprisingly, however, such affinity was not acknowledged by most of the representatives of the phenomenological movement.<sup>1</sup>

At the dawn of the phenomenological movement both Husserl and Heidegger were deeply influenced by Franz Brentano, who was virulently anti-Hegelian. In his *Four Phases of Philosophy* of 1895, Brentano theorized that philosophy progressed in four phases, including alternating phases of abundance and different stages of decline. Brentano diagnosed his own age as one of decline, hence he advocated a renewal of philosophy as rigorous science. According to his periodization, all great periods of growth in philosophy are characterized by the preponderance of the *purely theoretical interest* and develop a method proper to the subject matter (Brentano 1968: 9). In this first stage philosophy is pursued as a theoretical science. After a while, theoretical activity inevitably weakens and *practical interests* begin to dominate, e.g., the Stoics and Epicureans in the post-Aristotelian period. This applied phase is followed by a third phase when *scepticism* grows, counterbalanced by the construction of sects and dogmatic philosophies (among which he included Kant). Finally, in a fourth phase, *mysticism*, intuitionism and irrationalist world views, ‘pseudo-philosophy’, and religious *Schwärmerei* proliferate (e.g., Plotinus; Schelling and Hegel in recent times), leading to moral and intellectual collapse (Brentano 1968: 58). Hegel, then, was seen by Brentano as a Romantic mystic who betrayed the true spirit of scientific philosophy.

Husserl rarely refers to Hegel. In the 1900 *Prolegomena* to his 1901 *Logical Investigations* he repeats the common prejudice against Hegel that he rejected the Principle of Non-Contradiction (Husserl 1975: §40). The early Husserl in his

*Logical Investigations* proposed to practise it in a new way, avoiding traditional inventing of new philosophies (cf. *C* §7), making edifying speeches, discussing ‘philosophemes’ (*C* 73), that is, common philosophical problems, themes or tropes. Philosophy cannot use speculation and must remain purely descriptive. This critique of speculative theorizing seemed to be directed against German Idealism. Later, in his *Philosophy as Rigorous Science*, Husserl criticizes Dilthey’s philosophy of worldviews (which he sees as essentially Hegelian) as leading to historicism and relativism. However, Husserl came to a more positive view of Dilthey and also began to develop a new appreciation of Hegel—possibly because his new dialogue partner Eugen Fink was deeply interested in Hegel.

Fink was for ten years (1928–38) Husserl’s interlocutor and assistant. As a student, Fink attended both Husserl’s and Heidegger’s lectures in Freiburg. After Husserl’s retirement, Fink continued to attend Heidegger’s courses, including his 1931/32 lecture course on Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Heidegger 1988). Fink’s Hegelian-style speculative thinking greatly influenced Husserl, especially after 1933 when he was intellectually isolated due to the National Socialist enforced *Beurlaubung*. Fink contextualized Hegel in relation to Husserl’s phenomenology and provoked Husserl to take Hegel seriously (Bruzina 2004: 570). Thus, in his *Vienna Lecture* of 1935, Husserl makes his most Hegelian of statements concerning the need for a new ‘objective science of spirit’:

The spirit, and indeed only the spirit, exists in itself and for itself, is self-sufficient (*eigenständig*); and in its self-sufficiency, and only in this way, it can be treated truly rationally, truly and from the ground up scientifically. (*C* 297/345)

Instead of relying on the theoretically compromised conceptions of empirical and descriptive psychology, an entirely new science of subjectivity must be conceived. Human existence now has to be considered more holistically as embedded in an historical and cultural life-world (*Lebenswelt*). Overall, however, Husserl’s assistant Ludwig Landgrebe recorded that ‘Husserl scarcely knew Hegel’s works and at no time studied them’ (Landgrebe 1972: 36). Similarly, when Herbert Marcuse sent Husserl a copy of his newly published *Hegels Ontologie und die Theorie der Geschichtlichkeit* (*Hegel’s Ontology and the Theory of Historicity*), Husserl replied that he had insufficient knowledge of Hegel to appreciate Hegel interpretations.<sup>2</sup>

Fink was preoccupied with Husserl’s idea of phenomenology as an *absolute science* which had to ground itself by self-conscious reflection, through the ‘phenomenology of phenomenology’.<sup>3</sup> Fink was especially drawn to the methodological self-awareness and narrative character of Hegel’s *Phenomenology* (Denker 2003). Fink—perhaps guiding Husserl, perhaps expressing Husserl’s intentions in more Hegelian language—characterizes phenomenology as ‘the *self-comprehension of the Absolute*’.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, for Fink, the Absolute exists only

in its self-manifestation. Phenomenology then, Fink argues, is the ‘theory of the appearance of the Absolute’ (quoted in Bruzina 2004: 407). In general, Fink thinks that Hegel and Fichte are intimately connected with Husserlian transcendental idealism (Fink 1995: 156). For Fink, however, Husserl’s use of the reduction is superior to Hegel’s, while Hegel’s account of the movement of absolute life is superior to Husserl’s (Bruzina 2004: 408). Some of Husserl’s students, including Edith Stein, however, felt that Fink was misrepresenting Husserl’s relation to Fichte and Hegel (see Luft 2002: 157, n. 40).

Husserl’s late appreciation of Hegel went largely unnoticed, except by Hans-Georg Gadamer who is appreciative of Husserl’s *Crisis* in his *Truth and Method* (1960). The impulse to return to Hegel came instead with Heidegger, who arrived as Husserl’s successor in Freiburg in 1928 and almost immediately began to lecture on Hegel and gather students interested in Hegel. Hegel has a privileged position in Heidegger’s retelling of the history of modern philosophy in his lectures on *Identity and Difference*, where Hegel is seen to have accomplished the identification of ontology and logic—the apex of ontotheology (Heidegger 1969: 54). Heidegger, with his emphasis on the finitude and historicity of Dasein, departed from the classic Hegelian approach that emphasized the eternity of being in becoming.

Heidegger offered courses on Hegel’s *Phenomenology* (1930–31), a text which was then being rediscovered by Marxists such as Lukács (and thereafter by Kojève, Hyppolite, and others). Heidegger was insistent that Hegel’s conception of phenomenology had nothing to do with the Husserlian method of the same name.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, inspired by Heidegger, a whole generation of phenomenologically trained students—Fink, Landgrebe, Marcuse,<sup>6</sup> Löwith,<sup>7</sup> Hans Jonas—all read Hegel, especially his *Phenomenology*, seeking ways to address the meaning of history and human being in time.<sup>8</sup>

After 1933, and the rise of National Socialism, phenomenology found a new home in France. This went hand in hand with the rediscovery of Hegel through Kojève (1947) and Hyppolite,<sup>9</sup> as well as Jean Wahl (1929) and Husserl’s former student Alexandre Koyré (1931). Both Sartre and Merleau-Ponty developed phenomenology which already had been “Hegelianized”—for instance, the treatment of the master–slave relation in Sartre and Merleau-Ponty’s use of Hegelian dialectic (see Kruks 1976).

With regard to the appraisal of Hegel’s philosophy within the phenomenological movement, recent studies have brought to light the intrinsic theoretical affinities that link phenomenology to Hegel’s themes and strategies.<sup>10</sup> This special issue aims to contribute to current research on the relation between phenomenology and Hegel by covering some of the most prominent issues involved in the debate. The articles shed new light on the subterranean influence that Hegel’s philosophy plays on Husserl’s, Heidegger’s and Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological endeavours.

This special issue illuminates two fundamental problems in the debate about the philosophical continuity between Hegel and contemporary phenomenology. On the one hand, Ferrarin, Ciavatta, Russon and Staehler show that Hegel's philosophical paradigm rests on theoretical standpoints that are partly compatible with Husserl's and Merleau-Ponty's genetic approaches. While this line of thought opens up new perspectives on Hegel's conception of consciousness and subjectivity, it also suggests that the distance between Hegel's and Husserl's phenomenology must be found in their different approaches to the problems of constitution and the transcendental ego—but, for different views, see Aldea and Rockmore. On the other hand, the issue contributes to showing that Heidegger's ontology can be read as a radicalization of Hegel's (Wretzel, Haas), and yet Hegel has a more developed and articulated theory of individuality and social freedom, as Rukgaber argues.

**Dermot Moran and Elisa Magri**  
**University College Dublin, Ireland**  
dermot.moran@ucd.ie

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<sup>1</sup> Abbreviations:

*C* = Husserl, *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. D. Carr (Evanston: Northwestern Press, 1970)/*Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie*, ed. W. Biemel, Husserliana VI (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976).

*W* = G. W. F. Hegel, *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, ed. E. Moldenhauer and K. M. Michel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1969–71).

<sup>2</sup> See Husserl's letter to Marcuse of 14 January 1932 in Husserl (1994: 401). Bruzina contends that Husserl seemed unable to grasp Hegel's thought (2004: 401).

<sup>3</sup> For this phrase see, e.g., *C* §71, 247/250: 'In order to attain its total horizon, the phenomenological reduction would require a "phenomenology of the phenomenological reduction".'

<sup>4</sup> See Fink (1995: 152), e.g.: 'The truth is that the Absolute is not the unity of two non-self-sufficient moments that, while indeed mutually complementary, also delimit and finitize each other, but is the *infinite unity of the constant passage of one "moment" (constitution) to the other (world)*' (Fink 1995: 146).

<sup>5</sup> Heidegger rejects various misinterpretations of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* including that it is a kind of typology of worldviews (presumably he has Dilthey in mind).

<sup>6</sup> Having completed his doctorate in literature in Freiburg in 1922, Marcuse returned to Freiburg to study philosophy with Martin Heidegger from 1928 to 1932. In Marcuse (1928)

(‘Contribution to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism’), Marcuse argued that Marxist thought needed to be vivified through phenomenological exploration. In his Habilitation thesis, *Hegels Ontologie und die Theorie der Geschichtlichkeit* (Marcuse 1932), Marcuse read Hegel’s *Logic* and *Phenomenology of Spirit* as providing the ‘foundations for a theory of historicity’, as he wrote to Löwith (Wolin 2003: 153).

<sup>7</sup> Karl Löwith was writing about Hegel, Marx, and Weber in the early 1930s; see Löwith 1932, 1941.

<sup>8</sup> As is well known, Hegel rarely uses the term ‘phenomenology’ in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The term ‘phenomenology’ appears in the Preface and the last section ‘Absolute Knowing’, where he writes: ‘Whereas in the phenomenology of Spirit each moment is the difference of knowledge and Truth, and is the movement in which that difference is cancelled, Science on the other hand does not contain this difference and the canceling of it’ (*W* 3: §805). The *Phenomenology of Spirit* documents the self-unfolding and return to itself of conscious culture.

<sup>9</sup> Jean Hyppolite’s 1930s articles were collected in his 1946 *Génèse et structure de la phénoménologie de l’esprit de Hegel*. On the French rediscovery of Hegel see Canguilhem (1948–49) and Baugh (2014).

<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, Russon (2010), Fabbianelli & Luft (2014), Manca, Magri and Ferrarin (2015) and Stone (forthcoming).

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