

THE SENSE OF PHILOSOPHY IN CONNECTION WITH A FORGOTTEN MANUSCRIPT

Ioana LEMENYI

Department of Philosophy
"Babeş-Bolyai" University, Cluj

The greatness of a creative spirit is revealed not only by his work but also by the large amount of ideas and controversies which it stirs among his contemporaries or the generations which follow him. Kant is perhaps the best example in this respect. Great systems of thought and ephemeral ideas were born in the attempt to assimilate or exceed his philosophy.

The appearance of a manuscript of Hegel aroused the interest of philosophers at the beginning of this century. It was first published and commented in 1912 by Franz Rosenzweig, historian of philosophy, in the *Annals of the Heidelberg University*. The title, *Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus (The Oldest System-Program of the German Idealism)* was kept by the specialist literature.

From its discovery and publication up to the present, this manuscript aroused passionate debates and controversies which could not lead to a united stand regarding the issues raised by commentators. The authorship of the text is at the centre of the debate: it might have been written by Hegel, Schelling or Hölderlin.

For thirty years this fascinating manuscript was forgotten by Hegelian exegesis. In 1965 Otto Pöggeler launched his thesis, uncontested in its essence until today, that Hegel wrote and conceived the *Program*. Commencing with the finding that Hegel had already formulated some of the ideas of the *Program* at Berne, ideas which were considered non-Hegelian before, Pöggeler reaches the conclusion that the *Program* was probably written at Frankfurt, under the influence of Hölderlin. His influence on the idea of beauty of the *Program* is unquestionable. In his article *Hegel der Verfasser des ältesten*

Systemprogramms des deutschen Idealismus Pöggeler points out how the *Program* integrates in the evolution of the early works and thought of Hegel. Commencing with this article we will try to understand the sense of Hegelian meditation at that time, the influence of the main ideas in the epoch and the evolution of some of these ideas.

When Hegel received the first writings of Schelling he wrote him that he found in them clearly formulated and explained issues which he himself had presupposed only. He added that these writings cleared his views on Kant's theory of postulates. He understood this theory by asking "What does it mean to come close to God?" He confesses that he intended to write a paper on this subject. According to Kant practical reason does not only mean freedom and self-determination; it also implies God who assures the equilibrium between morality and happiness, which we miss in fact. This idea is criticised by Hegel. He conceives freedom as absolute, independent and perfect, as Schelling does. The longing for harmony between morality and freedom is a false need of the reason, says Hegel. Only by renouncing its false needs and asserting itself by valid postulates can reason come near God. It is only in a metaphysics which has become moral that reason appears as a complete system of all ideas and postulates. The idea is that which exists in itself in a perfect way. The unique idea which develops then in the multitude of ideas is the absolute idea of freedom. Freedom is the essence of reason and therefore ideas are practical postulates, modes of self-assertion of the reason according to its real needs. According to Fichte the whole philosophy originates in practical philosophy, therefore all ideas are postulates and absolute freedom which is, in Kant's view, the corollary of all types of existence with different origin, becomes the origin of everything that exists. This was an attempt to transform the sense of Kant's theory of postulates and to develop, commencing with this theory, a new philosophy, a moral metaphysics. A fundamental change occurred: philosophy had to modify its existence. Metaphysics became moral and philosophy ethical.

Schelling acquired Spinoza's notion of ethical philosophy and tried to prove that philosophy was always ethical and will also be ethical in the future because it springs from practical needs. Only a philosophy which went beyond the Kantian differentiation between theoretical

knowledge and knowledge for practical reasons could arouse the interest of the young Hegel.

The reference to Kant (in agreement with Schelling) was in fact the “esoteric” centre of Hegel’s thought in his Berne period. This could be perceived in few fragments. However, the “exoteric” works of the young Hegel, works which tried to express the idea of morality, i.e. freedom and self-determination in relation with traditional political and religious concepts, arised from this centre.

The *Program* tries to present this essence of Hegelian thought. However, these ideas were not always attributed to Hegel. This is due to the fact that even today we do not have a clear knowledge of the way he relates to Kant and the way in which his controversy with Kant became an essential point for him.¹

The absolute of self-determination is the starting point of his essays written at Berne as well as of the *Program*. He tries to go beyond the contradiction between freedom and self-determination in relation with nature and destiny on the one hand, and the hazardous world on the other. In Hegel’s view the free, self-conscious ego and the world are born from the nothing at the same time, in the process of creation: “With the free, self-conscious ego a whole world is born from the nothing - this is the only real and imaginable creation from the nothing.”²

If the contradiction between the world and freedom can be surpassed, the world must be built in a way that allows the existence of a new moral being. Only if physics represents such a world will a “creative” spirit born for freedom be satisfied. The author of the *Program* does not wish to create a new philosophy of nature, he expects the physics of the future to place ideas, that is, postulates at the basis of the given experiences. Pöggeler presupposes in his article that Hegel refers to Kant, namely, to some ideas of the *Critique of Judgement*, when he formulates these ideas. It is significant, says Pöggeler, that Hegel treats

¹ Pöggeler Otto, *Hegel der Verfasser des ältesten Systemprogramms des deutschen Idealismus*, in: *Hegel-Tage Urbino 1965, Vorträge*, edited by Hans Georg Gadamer, 1969, (Hegel Studium Beiheft 4), p.17-32.

² Idem.

the problem of physics, i.e. the philosophy of nature from the point of view of the *Critique*, not Newton's analysis of physics, as Kant developed it starting with the *Critique of Pure Reason*. According to Hegel as well as Schelling, the mission of the philosophy of nature is to show, through quantitative determinations, that nature is in fact life.³

There is a tension in the *Program* because Hegel designates the idea of the beautiful as the unifying principle of all ideas. The question arises: should the complete system of ideas not be an ethics? How can it culminate in aesthetics? This turn in the *Program* might be explained by the fact that Hegel, who took morality as a guide when he went to Frankfurt, became convinced under the influence of Hölderlin that beauty is the most important, not morality. The opposition between nature and freedom disappears in the idea of beauty. The idea of beauty was the supreme idea for Hölderlin at that time. We must remember that Hölderlin as well as Schlegel were devoted to Greek culture. The exemplariness of this epoch in terms of beautiful culture had a great impact on Hölderlin, for a long time: it stimulated him but also chained his creativity.

The recognition of the fact that the Greeks cannot be surpassed in their aesthetic sense led him later on (around 1800) to the conviction that history is the reason for modern art being behind, as compared to ancient art. Cultural epochs in Greece seemed to grow from one another in a harmonious way, as though it would have been the organic development of a single individual. The "feeble shoots"⁴ of modernity were perhaps withered by a too tumultuous history.

These ideas became popular in Germany mainly through Herder, then they were taken over by Hölderlin and Schlegel. However, their historical-philosophical models linked this metaphor to the transcendental philosophy of Kant. They combine the notion of culture with the Kantian differentiation between the causality of nature and the causality of freedom and create a historical-dialectic model which has

³ Ibidem.

⁴ Herder, *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit*, in: Herder, *Werke*, Part I, W. Press München - Hauser, 1984, pp.589-683, 605.

consequences on their conception of art as well. Hölderlin passes from a more or less “classical” position to a historical-philosophical theory of poetry based on the opposition between ancient and modern culture. Similarly to Hegel, his early concept of history and culture originates, as P. Szondi⁵ observes, in his love and admiration of Greek culture and his wish to protect modern culture by stating that it has another principle of development than ancient culture.

In his early works the issue of the causality of nature and freedom was solved by the appeal to the beautiful. However, after 1798 he cannot answer the questions “How does freedom appear in the sensible world?” and “How does nature become divine?” by referring to the beautiful. As he was no longer interested in the pure representation of ideas in art, but their realisation in social and historical practice, art could not be the supreme aim of his creation. At the beginning he believed in a non-temporal beauty as the supreme aim of art. Later on this was replaced by his concept of the historicity of poetry.

In the fragment *The view we must have on Antiquity* (1798) Hölderlin already ceases to lionise ancient Greece. Nevertheless it is only when he begins to write *The Death of Empedocles* that he breaks definitively with the classical doctrines of those from Weimar. The *Empedocles* project ends with recognising that it is impossible to reconcile modern history and the natural process of cultural formation.

According to the Greek model nature and destiny are devised identically. Man is dominated by a thirst for knowledge which differentiates him from other beings and designates him the “accomplisher” of nature. This idea is formulated in a personal and direct way in Hölderlin’s letter to his brother Karl, written on 4 June 1799. Hölderlin claims that the whole human culture is a product of the need for “art and culture” which is in fact a service offered nature by man.⁶

⁵ Szondi, P, *Das Naive ist das Sentimentalische: zur Begriffsdiagnostic in Schillers Abhandlung*, in: *Schriften*, II, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1978, p.59-105.

⁶ Hölderlin, F, *Sämtliche Werke*, Große Stuttgarter Ausgabe, edited by F. Beissner, Stuttgart - Kohlhammer, 1943, Part 6, p.329.

It is obvious that “art” for Hölderlin is not only “fine art”, but it is used in the Kantian sense, meaning any human creation, from tilling the land to poetry. It is clear that in Hölderlin’s view art in itself cannot be the “active principle”, it is only that which derives from nature.

Hölderlin as well as the young Schlegel conceives modern man as a yet completely natural being, whose thirst for culture takes him out of unconscious nature. However, man remains linked to unconscious nature as to an “active principle” or “driving force”. The odes *The Voice of the People, Nature and Art or Saturn and Jupiter* and *The Hymn of Feasts* show Hölderlin’s belief in the eternal pre-eminence of nature which contains, as an “all-embracing” mother, the origin, the aim and the confines of culture. Nature is older than the times and it is above the gods; it is spirit and the spirit is the unifying unity.⁷ His thought will later on depart from this pre-eminence of nature. His letter to Böhlendorff (dated 4 December 1801) is the first document which proves his liberation from classical dogmas and pantheistic principles. It marks the point when Hölderlin catches up with the young Schlegel and enters the horizon of the history of pre-romantic philosophy. Hölderlin declares in this letter that the pre-eminence of nature cannot be asserted in relation with the modern. For the first time he places the reason of modern man alongside nature which was specific to the Greeks as a “heavenly fire”⁸.

The “excentric trajectory” whose starting point and end was for Hölderlin nature until 1800, departs after 1800 from the way of formation of ancient culture. Lucidity is the primary feature that the modern artist must acquire first of all. Therefore Hölderlin’s and Schlegel’s concept of culture is based on a dialectics of nature and art (freedom) which gives an impulse to any historical development of man. It is exactly because man naturally belongs to two different worlds and his intelligible being is necessarily in a continuous conflict with the natural, that he can be constituted historically.

⁷ Heidegger, M, *Gesamtausgabe, 1Abt, Band 4: Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung*, V. Klostermann, Frankfurt am Main, 1981.

⁸ Hölderlin, F, *op. cit.*, p. 426.

In the conception of Schelling, Schiller, Novalis and Hegel fine art (and the “absolute spirit”) levels poetically or philosophically the contradiction between nature and art (freedom) whereas Schlegel and Hölderlin are aware of the “infinite abyss”⁹ which separates the “particular from the general”¹⁰ and “art from life”¹¹. The pre-romantic poetics of Schlegel appears in that “gap between theory and practice”¹² which cannot be filled by even fine art in modernity. He considers that history is the supreme mission of poetry as well. After 1800 Hölderlin also approaches poetry as something that “directly interests the country or the epoch”¹³. His poetry and thinking are also under the badge of a historical mission.

This was the direction of the evolution of Hölderlin’s thought. However, the starting point, that is, the idea of beauty by which the opposition between nature and freedom disappears, left its mark on Hegel’s *Program*. This is why Hegel could write in the *Program*: “I am convinced now [after the discussions with Hölderlin] that the supreme act of reason is an aesthetic act.”

If we recognize that Hegel is the author of the *Program*, we must also recognise the fact that he was influenced by Schelling and Hölderlin. Regardless of its authorship the *Program* offers a good opportunity for the researchers of Schelling, Hölderlin and Hegel to gather for a common debate.

⁹ Schlegel, F, *Kritische Ausgabe seiner Werke*, edited by Ernst Behler, Schöningh, Paderborn - München - Wien - Zürich, 1958, Part 1, p.289.

¹⁰ Idem, Part 7, p.16.

¹¹ Ibidem, Part 1, p.37.

¹² Ibidem, Part 1. p.274.

¹³ Hölderlin, F, *op. cit.*, Part 6, p.435.