

## Hegel Reborn. A Brief Introduction to HEGEL 250 — TOO LATE?

Modernity begins with Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. He is the defining philosopher of the transition to the modern world. Today, with the globalization of hyper digital capitalism, we are entering a new massive transition, so on the occasion of Hegel's 250<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2020 serious attempts were made to rethink Hegel's relevance and to reimagine modern society's debt to Hegel for our contemporary age.

Hegel's immense international influence largely depends on the depth and richness of his thought. For him, history displays a rational process. It has a direction, which we can discern. It is heading towards a goal, which we can welcome. The meaning of history is to develop and to fulfill its purpose: the world-spirit realizing its final goal, the freedom and self-consciousness of humanity. The history of the world is a progression towards the consciousness of freedom. Hegel concluded that a fully rational organization of the world was about to unfold, creating a truly free community. As a consequence, reason and freedom would come to fruition. In our contemporary age, we wish we could share Hegel's unshakeable optimism which causes some bemusement.

In Ljubljana, Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* meets French structuralism. It is here that the Society for Theoretical Psychoanalysis, whose main goal is to achieve a synthesis between Lacanian psychoanalysis and the philosophy of German idealism, was founded in the early 1980s. Slovenia's capital is, and since

Roman times always has been, not only a magnificent, beautiful, and very picturesque city on the river Ljubljanica; it has also emerged as a real cultural power-house in music, the arts, and philosophy, as is evident from the sheer number of top-notch intellectual heavy-weights and their output in academic discourse and research. Nowhere else, I believe, can one find such a high density and impressive quantity of most exquisite, internationally highly respected and eminent scholars whose expertise is the philosophy of Hegel.

In Western philosophy, Hegel often enjoys the reputation of being the most impenetrable. For many, he remains simply incomprehensible and is frequently regarded as too difficult, a mountain too steep to climb. In order to make this great thinker more accessible, we proudly presented a multi-faceted exhibition on Hegel at the Ljubljana Town Hall together with our Slovenian partners. Visitors even had the unique opportunity to play snooker with (or against) the *Weltgeist*. And whatever some might find almost too complicated to understand in Hegel's writings, his closest friends in Slovenia explained in several entertaining, sometimes even funny videos. Since then, thousands have visited the digital version of the show. As we know, the proof of the pudding is in the eating: it is possible to present Hegel in a playful way from which we all benefit immensely. As a result, we managed to share the treasure box of German idealism also with a younger audience and the wider public.

*Gewappnet mit der List der Vernunft* and against all odds, against coronavirus-induced uncertainties in times of a worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, international guests from Sweden, Italy, Austria, the Netherlands, and Germany safely arrived and gathered in the summer of 2020, during a brief window of opportunity. These most prolific thinkers joined Hegel's closest local Slovenian friends, famous experts and colleagues, such as Slavoj Žižek, Mladen Dolar, Alenka Zupančič, Zdravko Kobe, and many others, for an exhibition and a great meeting of minds in a symposium

dedicated to freedom, free thinking, and free reasoning in Hegel's thought near the French Revolution Square. This place was wisely and very timely chosen to celebrate Hegel's 250<sup>th</sup> birthday (and Beethoven's and Hölderlin's, too). The volume in front of you presents the bulk of the conference papers and some other contributions to mark this most remarkable anniversary.<sup>1</sup>

My sincerest gratitude to all our partners here in Slovenia and abroad for making this international conference and the exhibition possible: the Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach, the Baden-Württemberg Stiftung, the City of Ljubljana, especially Mateja Demšič and Blaž Peršin, Indigo-Festival, the Internationale Hegel-Vereinigung—Aufhebung, the organizing committee (Bara Kolenc, Ana Jovanović, and Goran Vranešević), Miha Kelemina, and of course, last but not least, my colleague Urban Šrimpf. They truly deserve our deepest gratitude and admiration. Needless to say, my team and I, as the newly arrived director of the Goethe-Institut in Slovenia, felt thrilled, honored, and most fortunate indeed to be part of this first-class gathering. *Der Weltgeist schien auf ihrer Seite zu sein.*

In other words, thank you very much, vielen herzlichen Dank, and hvala lepa!

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<sup>1</sup> The video of the conference is available at <https://www.goethe.de/ins/si/de/kul/sup/heg.html>