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*Critique: Hegel and
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Edited by Giovanna Luciano
and Armando Manchisi

G. Andreozzi, M.G. de Moura, M. Gante,
P. García Cherep, F. Gregoratto, G. Hindrichs,
H. Ikäheimo, M. Lopes Miranda, A.L. Prestifilippo,
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HEGEL AND CONTEMPORARY CRITICAL THEORY. AN INTRODUCTION

by Giovanna Luciano* and Armando Manchisi**

We are very glad to present this special issue of «Verifiche. Rivista di scienze umane», *Critique: Hegel and Contemporary Critical Theory*. This issue is devoted to an in-depth study of the notion of 'critique' and its historical and systematic development from classical German philosophy, and in particular from Hegel, to the most recent interpretations and reuses in the framework of contemporary Critical Theory.

'Critique' is a fundamental and widely spread notion within classical German philosophy. From the Enlightenment culture, it goes to Kant and Hegel, and further extends to Marx; from there it is taken up by that ensemble of thinkers that came to be known as the Frankfurt School, and through complex paths (touching for example on American pragmatism), reaches the present day, raising new and revived interest¹. *Critique: Hegel and Contemporary Critical Theory* examines the theoretical and practical dimensions involved in this tradition, in order to give an assessment of Hegel's

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¹ On the revival of the topic of critique in contemporary philosophy, cf. R. Forst, M. Hartmann, R. Jaeggi and M. Saar (eds.), *Sozialphilosophie und Kritik*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 2009; R. Jaeggi and T. Wesche (eds.), *Was ist Kritik?*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 2009; K. de Boer and R. Sonderegger (eds.), *Conceptions of Critique in Modern and Contemporary Philosophy*, London-New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012; T. Stahl, *Immanente Kritik. Elemente einer Theorie sozialer Praktiken*, Frankfurt am Main-New York, Campus, 2013 (Eng. trans. by J.-B. Oduor, *Immanent Critique*, New York-London, Rowman & Littlefield, 2022); R. Jaeggi, *Kritik von Lebensformen*, Berlin, Suhrkamp, 2014 (Eng. trans. by C. Cronin, *Critique of Forms of Life*, Cambridge (Mass.)-London, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018); A. Särkelä, *Immanente Kritik und soziales Leben. Selbsttransformative Praxis nach Hegel und Dewey*, Vittorio Klostermann, 2018; G. Hindrichs, *Zur kritischen Theorie*, Berlin, Suhrkamp, 2020.

contribution on the matter. In doing so, it aims to answer questions such as: What justifies a critical claim and its normative value? What is the relationship between theoretical analysis and transformative action? Is critique an individual or a social practice, specifically philosophical or necessarily interdisciplinary? Does Hegel's idea of philosophy have critical meaning? And if so, does it have any place in contemporary Critical Theory?

Hegel's philosophy is generally recognized as a benchmark within the philosophical tradition that through Western European Marxism leads to the various generations of the Frankfurt School and to critical theorists in a broader sense². However, it has been repeatedly challenged by critical theorists of different generations, and from different disciplinary points of view. One could say that especially in Hegel's idea of philosophy it has been retrieved the stem of a contradiction involving the philosophical function of comprehension of the present. Indeed, the relation between philosophy and reality established throughout Hegel's system has been taken as a symbol of a passive acceptance of the order of things, the expression of an innocuous idea of knowledge, limited to standing in front of the world without participating in the social, political, and historical change; or also as the *post-festum* justification of the rationality of the epoch, the greatest supporter of reaction. Nevertheless, the 'owl of Minerva' that comes to the scene of the world with the falling of the dusk has been read at the same time as the image of a critical and negative philosophical activity. In showing and developing the contradictions of the dying forms of life that dramatically coexist in the present, the idea of philosophy proposed by Hegel would be at the same time able to contribute to destabilizing the status quo, without becoming abstract prescription or ideology. We consider such a tension to be particular poignant for this editorial project, not only in order to keep investigating Hegel's philosophy in its different elements, often difficult to harmonize, but also to rethink the dialogue between contemporary Critical Theory and Hegel by focusing on the critical nature of reason and knowledge at its core.

² Cf. P. Giladi (ed.), *Hegel and the Frankfurt School. Traditions in Dialogue*, New York, Routledge, 2021.

Clear examples of the twofold – and ambiguous – role played by Hegel’s philosophy can indeed be found in works that are fundamental for the very definition of what critical theory, philosophical criticism, and critical thinking more generally are, such as Max Horkheimer’s seminal essays *Traditional and Critical Theory* and *The Social Function of Philosophy*. In these writings, while Hegel seems even to stand back from Kant in endorsing a non-critical and affirmative idea of reason³, Horkheimer openly incorporates elements on the epistemology of Hegel, «the philosopher to whom we are most indebted in many respects»⁴, in order to retrieve in criticism the eminent societal function of philosophy. Indeed, according to Horkheimer, on the one side with his philosophical system Hegel provides a justificatory reading of reality, on the other side the dialectical core of his philosophy appears to be active – as a *List der Vernunft* – against Hegel himself. In this sense, in *The Social Function of Philosophy*, Horkheimer writes:

But thought is a peculiar factor. To justify the Prussian state, Hegel had to teach man to overcome the onesidedness and limitations of ordinary human understanding and to see the interrelationship between all conceptual and real relations. Further, he had to teach man to construe human history in its complex and contradictory structure, to search out the ideas of freedom and justice in the lives of nations, to know how nations perish when their principle proves inadequate and the time is ripe for new social forms. [...] In the long run, Hegel's work did more serious harm to that reactionary institution than all the use the latter could derive from his formal glorification. Reason is a poor ally of reaction⁵.

³ M. Horkheimer, *Traditionelle und kritische Theorie*, in Id., *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 4, ed. by A. Schmidt, Frankfurt am Main, Fischer, 1988, pp. 162-225, p. 195 (Eng. trans. by M.J. O’Connell, *Traditional and Critical Theory*, in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, New York, Continuum, 1982, pp. 188-243, p. 204).

⁴ Id., *Die gesellschaftliche Funktion der Philosophie*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 4, pp. 332-351, p. 349 (Eng. trans. by M.J. O’Connell, *The Social Function of Philosophy*, in *Critical Theory*, pp. 253-272, p. 270).

⁵ Ivi, p. 350 (Eng. trans. p. 271).

The rationale of this special issue is therefore the conviction that Hegel's philosophical tradition is of primary importance today for an analysis of society and knowledge capable of representing an alternative both to strategies of critique 'from nowhere', which impose ideal and abstract categories on reality, and to attempts to provide a mere description of the world, which end up passively accepting the existing state of affairs. In fact, the core of the Hegelian account of critique is the idea that knowledge is neither a mere abstract intellectual possession, nor the assimilation of an external given, but rather an ongoing dialectical process that radically changes and produces both subjectivity and objectivity. Through the mediation of Marxist thought, this conception has had profound effects on the Critical Theory of Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse, up to Habermas and the more recent positions of Honneth, Fraser, Jaeggi, Menke and Rosa. Examining these effects then allows us not only to reconstruct an important area of contemporary philosophy, but also and especially to understand how philosophy today as a critical activity can contribute to the reflection on the present and to its transformation.

The idea for this special issue of «Verifiche» develops from the international conference *Critiques of Reason: Hegel and Contemporary Critical Theory*, hosted by the University of Padova on June 29 to July 1, 2022. The three-day conference was the result of the fruitful collaboration between the Australian Hegel Society, the Sociedade Hegel Brasileira and *hegelpd*, the research group on classical German philosophy at the University of Padova, testifying a lively international interest for themes involving social criticism within Hegel scholarship. For this reason, we decided to open the volume with the keynote address delivered by Gunnar Hindrichs on the first day of the conference. We thank Prof. Hindrichs for kindly allowing us to publish it in this special issue.

The volume consists of papers from invited contributors (Gunnar Hindrichs, Federica Gregoratto, Heikki Ikäheimo) and contribution selected through a call for papers (Giovanni Zanotti, Marloren Lopes Miranda, Markus Gante, Eliza Starbuck Little, Paula García Cherep, Giovanni Andreozzi, Antonio Ianni Segatto and Matheus Garcia de Moura, Agustín Lucas Prestifilippo).

We would like to thank the editorial staff of «Verifiche», and in particular Francesco Campana, Paolo Giuspoli, Paolo Livieri, Elena Nardelli and Barbara Santini for their valuable work in the final stages of publication, as well as the scientific coordinators for supporting this project. Finally, we thank the authors who participated in *Critique: Hegel and Contemporary Critical Theory* for their outstanding contribution.