



G.W.F. Hegel

Hegel ' s SCIENCE OF PHILOSOPHY Phi losophy of Nature

| Phil Nature | Home | Subscribe | About | Contact | What's New |

EVOLUTION

by Beat Greuter

1. The World as a Concept and the Concept as World

In his article on "Evolution and Hegel" Robbert Veen wrote:

"In par. 248 of the Encyclopedia Hegel argued that nature is determined both by necessity and chance as opposed to freedom. The stages meant here however are the various concepts of the sciences of nature."

If we agree at the outset, that development is merely logical and an inner property of the logic of natural sciences, it is important to state that we are not dealing with a "real" order.

But what does Hegel mean by saying that the notion is "partly a mere inner principle"? According to the remark, it is the "dialectical Notion which is the inner principle of the same, and guides its stages for-ward". If it is an "inner" principle it apparently has no empirical reality and as such belongs to the ideality of natural science and not nature. Because Hegel is taking nature to be completely "external" unto itself, as externality as such, there can be no "inner" notion in a real sense."

I must confess that I do not understand this. Or as we say in German: I think I am in the forest. Until I read this passages by Robbert I thought that I would have understood at least the principle of Hegel's philosophical idea. Now I fear that I have to start once more.

What Robbert does show us here as Hegel's philosophy is pure subjective idealism or pure dualism: On the one side we have only a concept which belongs to the natural science, to the ideality but not to nature itself and therefore not to the the 'real' order, and on the other side we have an empirical reality: "There can be no 'inner' notion in a real sense".

My opinion on this I wrote earlier, once for the Online study of the PhdG and once for the Hegel-L. I should like to give here a summary in logical terms (see also ENC, Ë 247 - 251 and Ë 337-376):

NOT WE OR THE NATURAL SCIENCES HAVE A CONCEPT OF NATURE AND SPIRIT BUT THESE ARE THEMSELVES A CONCEPT !!!!

Hegel's Major Works

- History of Philosophy
- Philosophy of History
- Phenomenology of Spirit
- Science of Logic
- Encyclopedia Logic
- Encyclopedia Nature
- Encyclopedia Spirit
- Philosophy of Right
- Philosophy of Fine Art
- Philosophy of Religion
- Other Writings

Online Courses

- Phenomenology Study
- Introduction to Hegel
- Philosophy of Religion
- Science of Logic
- Science of Logic

Other Sections

- Philosophy of Nature
- Hegel and Personalism
- Illustrated Biography
- Quotations
- Hegel Gallery
- Hegel Bookstore (650+)
- Hegel Bibliography
- Useful Links

Participate

- Become a Subscriber
- Submit an Article
- Join our Mailing Lists
- Live Dialog
- Recommend This Site
- Link To Us
- Your Feedback

First the concept is only in itself (solar system, earth etc.). The next stage is the organical life in which the concept becomes for-itself but within the first two stages (plant and animal) only as existing in-itself or as Hegel says in ENC ? 337, Addition of the Phil of Nature: The existence of the particularities are now moments of a Subject that means subjected and therefore adequate to the unity (or universality) of the concept. Or space and time are now within the concept.

With the human being the concept is also for-itself (because it is a living being) but now it exists as in- and for-itself that means as SC opposite to Life and this is the concept of Spirit or the concept of freedom. Only here and not yet in Nature - where it is only as teleological purpose - Spirit appears (PhdG, ?177). Now the process of history as the actualization of this concept of Spirit or freedom can begin. This dialectic process shows the development of the relationship between the in-itself (substance) and the for-itself (subjectivity): from mere identity to extreme opposition, to a reconciled independency of both or to the actualized concept of freedom.

But freedom lies from the very beginning in Nature as a POTENTIALITY within the concept of the concept: The Universal (the genus, the species) sets itself negative and let the Other (the shape as a tree, a horse, a man) free (selbst-st鋘dig). The concept is therefore not only an inner principle with an empirical reality outside of it, but it gives itself reality and is all reality. If reality would not be a concept then a concept like the human being could impossible have a concept of this reality.

2. Evolution and Concept

Mike wrote:

"Hegel clearly established himself against the concept of a Darwinian-type of evolution, i.e. evolution in the objective sense. We have to be mindful that for Hegel the Concept (Notion) is the Reality of which Nature is the Appearance. So actual movement occurs in the Concept and is only reflected in Nature. For this reason we could not expect Hegel to ever agree with Darwin's theory."

Hegel writes in ENC ?248:

"In this outward appearances (of Nature) the determinations of the concept have the pretence (Schein) of an indifferent (gleich-g黚tig) subsistence and singularization toward each other; the concept is therefore as inward. The Nature has therefore in its EXISTENCE (Dasein) no freedom but necessity and chance (Zufall)."

I agree with Mike that Hegel would have rejected the more empirical concept of understanding that Darwin has established for the phenomenon of evolution. But I think that he would have accepted the modern theory of the DNS-Structure as a teleonomical concept.

Jacques Monod, a French biologist says in his book "Chance and Necessity, Philosophical questions of the modern biology" (1970) that the living beings are distinguished from all other objects in this world by three characteristics (chapter I):

a) They have a plan which at the same time is expressed in their macroscopic structure and carried out through their performances (concept of Teleonomy).

b) An inner determinism (law, mechanism) is responsible for their outer complex structure (autonomous morpho-genesis as a teleonomical apparatus)

c) They are able to conserve, to transfer and to reproduce the Informations of their own structure without changes (reproductive invariability)

The conclusions out of this three characteristics of life as living beings in comparison to Hegel are:

a) The teleonomical apparatus is fully logical, rational and fit for conserving and reproducing (chapter I). This could be written by Hegel! It is the Self-actualization of the Concept.

b) Evolution is the product of a contingent change in the inner mechanism (mutation) without any relation to the consequences for the teleonomical macroscopic functions or the plan (chapter VII). This I think is exactly the same as Hegel's statement that within Nature the inner is totally separated from the outer and there is no mediation between the two.

c) And therefore after the (CONTINGENT) incident of the changed inner (microscopic) mechanism there is only a rigid NECESSITY of Selection on the macroscopic level of the organism or better of the living concept. But this living concept is very CONSERVATIVE because of its complex regulation, and therefore only such mutations can be accepted which can strengthen the concept or even give it (very seldom) new possibilities (chapter VII). This could be written by Hegel who says that the living concept can only exist as an entire and full concept. Otherwise the macroscopic structure would become a monster, that is an object which would no longer be fit as a living concept.

d) According to the modern theory, Evolution is therefore not the principle or characteristic of Life because its cause lies within the imperfection of the mechanism of conservation (chapter VI) or as Hegel would say: Changes in Nature are based on CONTINGENCY and therefore a development occurs only as process of the Concept and this is not a question for the natural sciences but for the science of philosophy.

3. Evolution and Time

Robbert wrote:

"Hegel believed that space was the dimension of nature while time was the dimension of the Spirit."

Robbert, could you tell me where Hegel says this?

In my opinion, according to Hegel Time AND Space are important presuppositions for the arising and development of the Idea of Spirit as well as Nature. Concerning the Idea of Spirit Hegel says in his Lectures of the Philosophy of History

(Introduction: geographic basis for the World history):

"The shapes of the Idea of Spirit in World history are in both, in time as in space"

What we have to distinguish is the kind of time. There are two kinds: Continuity (quantitative difference) and Discontinuity (qualitative difference). For Hegel the Idea of Spirit and Nature has to be grasped as a discontinuous process. Hegel says in ENC, ¶249, Addition (cited by Mike):

"It turns out to be a hopeless task to attempt to arrange the planets, metals or chemical bodies in general, as plants, and animals, into a series (Continuity), and to look for a law governing such a series, because nature does not distribute its formations into series and member, and the Notion distinguishes according to qualitative determinateness, making leaps in the process. The old saying, or law as it is called, 'non datur saltus innatura' is by no means adequate to the diremption of the Notion. The continuity of the Notion with itself is of an entirely different nature."

I think it is quite clear now. For Hegel, the development is the development of the concept and this is a qualitative development or a development in qualitative leaps (or stages). This does exactly correspond to the modern theory of Evolution as described above. But even if there would be in Nature a kind of Continuity - as also Jacques Monod does not exclude fully - this would not be of any philosophical interest because this continuity would be only a contingent process which gets new significance only after reaching an other (higher) stage of the actualized concept: Four, five, six or more kinds of parrots are as contingent incidents not a matter of philosophy because this is "freedom" within the concept. And "freedom" cannot philosophically be determined, only the presupposition for "freedom".

Until today the biologists have not yet a concrete (theoretical) idea about this (continuous) evolutionary process. They know quite a lot about the DNS-Structure of some living beings, and the palaeontologists can give us some empirical evidence of this process (whereby Man does not come of the Ape but of a common earlier living form or concept that also does sustain Hegel's theory of the qualitative leaps).

But even if natural sciences would reveal some day the full continuous process of Evolution, would this bring a new and better insight into the stages of life as living beings (plant - animal - man) which were developed out of qualitative leaps? Or asked other around: Could you imagine an other NATURAL stage beyond man that could be distinguished from the inorganic substance on the one side and God on the other side? (see also the "Marionette-theater" by the German poet Heinrich von Kleist).