Hegel on the Values of Humanistic Education

By GUSTAV MUELLER

IN THE YEAR 1806 Napoleon defeated the Prussian army in the battle of Jena. George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, at that time professor of philosophy at the University of Jena, interrupted his writing—he was just finishing the last pages of the *Phenomenology of Mind*—in order to watch from his window the French conqueror riding on his white horse into the surrendered town. "I saw this world-soul on horse-back," the philosopher dryly wrote to a friend.

The war brought a social revolution, a change from the half-feudal order to the liberal law of the Code Napoleon; Hegel had to give up his position (the University having next to no money) and had to accept a job on a newspaper in Bamberg, from which his friend Immanuel Niethammer, Bavarian Minister of Education, rescued him. He was appointed director of a humanistic Gymnasium in Nurenberg, which he was to modernize. He filled this administrative post from 1809-1815, besides teaching elementary philosophy to high-school students, and working on his second major work, the *Logic*, which appeared in 1816 and brought him the call to the University of Heidelberg. As director he gave five addresses, one each year, on graduation day. These addresses together with his *Philosophische Propädeutik* for his high-school students now form the third volume of his works. Those simple speeches as well as the confidential reports and advice to Niethammer are not only a human, personal document, but also a classical statement on the educational values of humanistic education. I report the following observations which are as applicable today as when they were written:

We are living in the midst of an immense historical crisis. Being occupied we are deprived of our own independent public life. We are threatened with hopelessness and indifference, evils of the soul which are greater than the sight of ruins and corpses of cities. Under such circumstances it is elevating to observe the enthusiastic response with which the citizens rally around the great project of saving and renewing our educational institution. Rightly so, for it is the young generation who must be prepared to meet the challenge of the new situation. What has gone is gone irrevocably. It is vain to miss it or to wish it back. What is old is not preferable, because it was adequate or perfect for its own time. The young generation must not be troubled through futile regrets and fond memories; it must be prepared to shoulder the new tasks and to make itself worthy of a happiness in the new world of the future. It is not up to them that good things may come out of many years of troubles and deprivations. This new life, however, would not be possible, if we were to succumb to the temptation to take too seriously the ups and downs, the external successes and diversions of the world-show. To orient our youth merely in the momentary and transitory changes of the world would give them a "false concept of the value of things." Have we not recently seen that states which neglected or even despised to cultivate such an inner core of the soul in their members and only trained them to mere utility, degrading the spirit to the function of a mere means, were caught in dangers without fortune and were brought low in the midst of plenty of their useful supplies? Having thus firmly sized up the historical situation, Hegel then turns toward the function of the school in this situation:

The school is a transition from the life in the family to the life in public; and it mediates between the past achievement of mankind and its hopes for future. From the point of view of the pupil, school-time is the time of growth, learning, expansion, progression; from the point of view of the educator, school-time is the time of recurrent cycles of learning and of generation; from the point of view of itself, its temporal interest is to endure as an ideal whole throughout the slow changes of historical times. It cannot understand itself merely as an experiment.

The life in the family consists of personal, private relations. The family relates its members through feeling, natural piety, and mutual confidence. This relation is not an objective bond of common causes, but a natural bond of blood. The child is recognized here because it is the child of the family. It meets the love of its parents without merit and has to stand their tempers without recourse to right.

In public life, on the contrary, a man has validity through that which he is, does, and represents: he has value only insofar as he has earned it. He is receiving little out of love or for love's sake. His cause, which he represents, not his private personality, is that which makes him valuable. Public life goes on independent of his peculiar subjectivity, and he has to make himself fit to enter one of its many objective spheres of activity.

According to Hegel, the school, then, is the transition between those different spheres of the human mind. Education has the effect of separating the adolescent from his immediate background. It leads him from the life of feeling to the freedom of thought and of intellectual self-activity. This strengthens his power to become master over immediate impressions and shifting externalities.

On the one hand, the school still continues personal-individual guidance and care; on the other hand, it already prefigures the public, adult world of serious activities. The pupil gets used to strangers as equals in a competitive game of competitive efforts. The feeling of the child's dependence gradually is changed to a feeling of self-activity, integrity, and independence. This is brought about, as Hegel points out, not through external discipline or obedience, but through the means of

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Dr. Gustav Mueller, Professor of Philosophy, presents in this article a digest of Friedrich Hegel's ideas on the contribution which the study of the classical languages and cultures can make to modern education. It is an interesting companion piece to the article by Mr. Artman, which deals with the practical problems of applying to the study of foreign languages in our elementary schools.
of acquiring culture, and where practical, the ancient languages were the only means and philosophy.

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