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immune to empirical refutation, mingle ontological and emotional commitments, and are not *universally* endorsed by ordinarily rational beings). Humanitarian reasons are unintelligible without some conception of the metaphysical value of mere human beings, a conception which is not universal. Those who doubt this can consider, by contrast, the legal and moral standing of non-human beings. The sacredness of cows in Hindu India is, presumably, religious. How does that sacredness differ from the sacredness of human beings? And what *secular* reasons are there for any particular code of public decency? Correspondingly, if metaphysically contentious reasons cannot justify particular prohibitions then it is unclear that *any* prohibitions can be justified—including of course the prohibition of ‘illiberal’ laws. Aristotle’s conception of civic virtue—to which Audi makes appeal—rested on ‘civic friendship’, the wish to live with others in pursuit of a shared ideal. Cities may have formed originally to help us *live*: they persist in being so that we may live *well*. There are other forms of human association than that, notably the merely economic union that exists to prevent violent interactions and enforce acknowledged contracts. That association would be something like a very liberal State—though in Aristotle’s day it too would have relied upon a non-secular conception of mutual respect and the importance of oaths. What the authority of Audi’s state can rest on—if not a shared ideal whose historical origins at any rate are religious—seems unclear.

Audi’s achievement is to discuss the problem he poses clear-headedly and calmly. Philosophers whose native societies make no such general distinction between Church and State, or ‘secular’ and ‘religious’ reasons, may not always see the point, concluding either that there is no serious problem or that it is much wider one than he supposes. Either way, they will profit from his discussion.

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Hegel’s Dialectical Logic, by Ermanno Bencivenga. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. Pp. xi + 143. H/b £26.50.

It is curious how the interest in a philosopher may wax and wane. A hundred years ago, Hegel was one of the most dominant influences on English-speaking philosophers. Fifty years later, it would not have occurred to most English-speaking philosophers that anything useful might be gained by reading Hegel. But now, another fifty years later, Hegel, if not restored to his place of former dominance, is certainly making a come-back. A number of—analytic—philosophers are reading Hegel and writing about him again. Bencivenga’s book is a notable example of this.

In just five chapters, and 109 fairly tightly packed pages, Bencivenga gives us his reading of Hegel's dialectical idealism. (There are also 25 even more tightly packed pages of endnotes. It's maybe not a bad idea to skip these on the first reading, since reading them at the same time may distract from the vision of Hegel that the text provides.) Bencivenga's reading of the text, coming as it does from the direction of the philosophy of language, is both novel and challenging. Traditionalists may not like it, but it is a mark of any great philosopher that they can be interpreted in numerous important but diverse ways.

Bencivenga certainly does not endorse Hegel's view of the world, however—on the contrary: he regards Hegelianism as intellectually highly dangerous. For Hegel, everything that happens is, in its own time and place, the right thing to happen. The Hegelean spirit therefore ultimately removes the possibility of a critical attitude. All one can do is *understand* what is happening, and how it fits into the big picture. Moreover, Bencivenga thinks, Hegelianism has been absorbed into the *Zeitgeist* of our time 'behind our backs'. The danger is therefore even greater for being insidious. A clear and contemporary statement of what it is all about is necessary so that we may 'know our enemy' (p. 5).

Chapter one starts with an analysis of Aristotelian logic. It is not the theory of the syllogism that is at issue here, however; it is Aristotle's account of language. Synonymous notions (being one thing) are necessary, Aristotle tells us, if knowledge is to be possible; and synonyms must be clearly distinguished from homonyms (like 'sharp' for both a knife and a sound) if we are not to be misled. But in many cases (such as the different kinds of *being*) we have less than synonymy and more than homonymy: we have paronymy—different senses clustering around a single 'focal notion'. But this drift of meaning threatens to open the door to unbridled homonymy.

The Hegelian, Bencivenga tells us in chapter two, accepts this very result that the Aristotelian fears. Meanings cannot be cleanly individuated, but are constituted by networks of family-resemblances. Moreover—and here's where it becomes radical—the network spreads until it encompasses everything. In the end, everything is just one moment of but a single concept. And 'everything' here means *everything*. Nothing is left outside. The whole of reality is this single concept. This is Hegel's idealism. (I will come back to these matters below.)

The spreading in question is not synchronic. It takes place dynamically, in the same way that a story unfolds. (Chapter two is, in fact, called 'The Semantics of Narratives'.) The story in this case is history, and its unfolding is Hegel's dialectic. And just as a narrative cannot unfold haphazardly—there must be an inner logic—the same must be true of history. Chapter three concerns this. Unexpected things happen in stories (be they fictions or history), but the story is coherent only if the unexpected is really implicit in what has gone before—though we may see this only with hindsight. (Think of a good detective novel.) The making explicit of what was implicit constitutes the necessity of the development.

Novels have readers. Who is the reader of history? Since there is nothing outside the story, the story and the reader are one. The concept—or *Geist* to give it its more usual Hegelian name—is reading a story about itself. In the process, it is getting to know about itself. It is just mystification, however, to think of *Geist* as some super-human consciousness. The knowledge resides in society's records, practices, and other reflective social institutions. By the end of the story, though, *Geist* has got to know itself, and so history comes to an end. Chapter four deals with this, and various other consequences of what has gone before, such as the fact that the meaning of the story must ultimately transcend its narrative.

Here are some of the hardest issues to deal with. Hegel's view that, in his philosophy, *Geist* finally achieves self-awareness, so bringing the story to its end, has met—rightly—with complete incredulity. Both society and philosophy have gone on apace since 1807. Bencivenga tries to avoid this problem by advocating a deflationary view of the end of history. Hegel is committed to this only in the sense that every moment is the end of history. It is the culmination of all that has gone before it.

I think that Hegel is committed to a much stronger and counter-intuitive view of the end of history than this, but let that pass. It is clear that, till this point in the book, Bencivenga has been putting the best face on Hegel's philosophy that he can. For all he is against it, he has an enormous amount of sympathy with it. ('What is wrong [with Hegel] is the same thing that is also so damn right, so inescapably right: his logic', (p. 109).) It is not unknown, after all, to have more sympathy with one's enemies than one's friends sometimes. In the final chapter, Bencivenga unleashes his criticism. And since he has endorsed, in effect, much of the picture, there is not much room left to manoeuvre.

Bencivenga's strategy is to give *more* examples of ways in which things can happen with the Hegelian dialectical pattern: the development of a philosopher such as Wittgenstein, dialectical strategies in debate, and a number of others. The idea here is not to criticize the dialectical process, but, by giving many examples of *different* sorts of situations that fit the dialectical picture, to blow asunder the Hegelian view that this is all part of one big picture. The strategy is an intriguing one, but I doubt that someone who has absorbed the Hegelian picture this far will be very moved. They will say 'thank you very much' for the new examples, and suggest how they *do* fit into the big picture. And if they cannot, no matter. All will become clear in due course; the Owl of Minerva flies at dusk. Hegelian logic has the power to absorb objections mercilessly in the next round of *Aufhebung*.

Most of us who want to reject Hegel's dialectical idealism will want to resist the train of argument that, according to Bencivenga, takes us there. Fortunately, there are several places where one may reasonably do this. A couple of important ones are in chapter two. Even granting that the relations of a word to other words are meaning-constitutive (perhaps in a family-resemblance way),

why should one suppose that the final result is a single unit? Though Bencivenga gives few arguments for the total promiscuity of meaning, there are certainly arguments, perhaps of a Derridean kind, that one might muster here. But a complete holism with respect to meaning is, in the last instance, very implausible. When you and I talk about shopping or football, we both use words that mean exactly the same, even though my idiolect contains words like 'isomorphism' and 'rigid designator', and yours contains the words 'rhododendron' and 'rhizome', but not, in each case, vice versa.

An even more enticing place to jump ship is at the next step. Even if a meaning expands to encompass all meanings, why should one suppose that it expands to cover everything? There is, at least it would appear, a world out there of earth, air, fire, and water, which would exist even if no proto-language-users had ever evolved out of the primeval slime. Bencivenga's main argument in this case (pp. 40f.) is a version of Kant's argument in the Second Antinomy (and also, though Bencivenga does not refer to this, the argument of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, 2.02–2.0212). As best as I understand it, it goes as follows. Suppose that we analyse the meaning of a sentence. Its meaning depends on other meanings, and in particular, on that of its subject. This may depend, in turn, on other meanings (such as those of the subjects of which it, itself, may truly be predicated), and so on. If, in the end, this regress grounded out in semantic simples, then the meaning of the original sentence would be discrete and fixed, and semantic holism would be false. If it is not, the regress must therefore go on for ever. Now add the assumption that semantic simples are the language-independent objects of reality, and we have the anti-realist conclusion. (Bencivenga, as far as I can see, makes this assumption without explicit comment.) But it is precisely here that a realist will demur. The issue of whether there are semantic simples is quite independent of the nature of reality. If there are such things, then one possibility (though certainly not the only one) is to identify these with certain language-independent objects. But if there aren't, this tells us nothing about what objects do exist in reality.

Bencivenga's Hegel is therefore well-resistable, and, I think, for much more fundamental reasons than Bencivenga gives us. Nonetheless, his book provides a remarkably refreshing interpretation of Hegel, generating numerous novel insights into his philosophy. It is a book that will repay close and careful study for any philosopher interested in Hegel—and many who are not.

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