
I. BOOK REVIEWS

Kurtul Gülenç et al., *Alacakaranlıkta Hegel'i Düşünmek (To Think about Hegel at Dawn: Criticism, Freedom, Social Ontology)*, Istanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları, 2021, 336 pp., ₺ (TL) 42.85 ISBN: 9786053145127

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The book begins with Seyla Benhabib stating that there has been a Hegelian Renaissance since the 1960s. For Benhabib, the continuing legacy of Hegelian thought in contemporary German philosophy results from the as-yet unresolved relationship between Kant, Hegel, and Marx. Benhabib indicates the essential points of the articles and states that the republic is a project, not a property, as inspired by Habermas.

In the foreword, editors Kurtul Gülenç and Özgür Emrah Gürel define the purpose of the book as contributing to the efforts of re-reading and interpreting Hegel in the twenty-first century, based on the question of whether there is sufficient need or reason to. They state that this aim has two axes: first, to present in detail the connection between social ontology and political thought, shaped within the framework of Hegel's philosophy; second, to propose a new philosophical framework that would be an alternative to the agnostic stance derived from Carl Schmitt and Martin Heidegger.

They state that the book aims to present a comprehensive view of Hegel's understanding of freedom and autonomy, based on a review of the metaphysical dimension of Hegel's political theory. This would allow readers to reconceive Hegelian thought in the context of contemporary issues. In addition, such a framework addresses the progressive phase, which Hegel describes as ethical life, as a historical structure constructed within language, and as the non-discursive ontological construction of this structure. Kurtul and Gürel state that it also provides an illuminating set of concepts to analyze social institutions along with their sources and the pathologies they generate. In this context, re-

reading and re-establishing Hegel's thought with Hegel himself provides crucial insight into understanding how his concepts of freedom, power, law and sociability were developed within later philosophical movements such as Critical Theory.

The editors also propose three periods concerning the development of the Hegelian framework in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The first was the attempt to re-read Hegelian ontology and dialectical understanding inaugurated in the 1960s and developed within Critical Theory and the hermeneutic tradition especially. The second period started in the 1970s and extended into the second half of the 1990s, moving beyond the borders of Continental Europe, largely through Habermas whose works built a bridge between Critical Theory and American pragmatism. For the editors, the first quarter of the twenty-first century can be interpreted as the continuation of the Hegelian Renaissance when we begin to see American interpretation come to the fore.

Regarding the peculiarities of these three periods, Kurtul and Gürel mention that the attitude of the first-period Hegel commentators was characterized by a Western Marxist perspective, one directed against Soviet Marxism's determinist, rigidly materialist, and communication-denying approach. Hegel commentators of the second period focused instead on the critique of neoliberal societies that use power and the state to completely hinder the creative activities of the modern subject through power. In our contemporary period, studies of Hegel have been remarkable for exploiting the critical possibilities of both previous generations and for offering a holistic interpretation of Hegel.

In "A Pre-Preparation on the Possibility of Understanding the Hegelian Ontology of Social Being," Güçlü Ateşoğlu states that if ontology is given priority in Hegel's philosophy, we should look at what kind of priority this is and whether this leads us to a conceptualization of being independent of and prior to all singular things. We should also ascertain whether conceptualizations such as Spirit, Idea and Absolute, which can have different meanings in philosophy, take on an a priori, transcendent, and/or timeless quality with respect to all singular beings. The second issue is the treatment of nature and society, i.e. the external world, either according to a mechanistic idea or in terms of constitutive understanding. One of the main issues is whether a mechanical or organic understanding of nature and society is more satisfactory. For Ateşoğlu, one of the biggest problems of Hegel's privileging of the second conception as

more holistic and satisfactory is the problem of teleology. This is what Ateşoğlu aims to address in his article. Third, epistemological distinctions between the theoretical and the practical, the private and the public, the ideal and the real, obstruct philosophy's effort to establish the ontology of social existence. He argues that such distinctions reveal a schizophrenic human nature, which detracts from the unity of man with himself, nature, and society. Therefore, he follows a path that describes these dualisms and then overcomes them.

Ateşoğlu claims that the most suitable title for Hegel's work would be "contradiction and totality," with subtitles like negation, determination, mediation, relation, reason and actuality. These conceptualizations, which manifest themselves in different elements of his thought, pave the way for a philosophical science in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, where "philosophical knowledge" manifests itself. Ateşoğlu maintains that the basic idea in this work is to process knowledge in such a way that it oscillates between the subjective and the objective, between seeing ordinary or natural knowledge as a tool and seeing it as an environment. The meaning of Hegel's famous phrase "to grasp [*aufzufassen*] and tell the truth, not as Substance but also as Subject"¹ is that the truth, which is one of the basic conceptual pairs of ontology or the absolute of metaphysics, both on objective grounds, prioritizing the medium, and on a subjective basis, i.e. on the basis of treating knowledge as a tool. Lenin's *Philosophy Notebooks*, Lukacs's *History and Class Consciousness* and *The Ontology of Social Being*, Marcuse's *Hegel's Ontology and Theory of Historicity* and *Reason and Revolution*, and before all of them Marx: Ateşoğlu claims that all returned to Hegel due to this ontological essence and unity of the subject and object.

In his essay on Herbert Marcuse, Gülenç states that Marcuse differs from both Dilthey and Heidegger in important points in terms of Hegel's theory of historicity. For him, Dilthey goes a few steps beyond Heidegger because he considers the sociality of life and erects a philosophy of life that puts this sociality at its center. For Dilthey, the establishment and assimilation of the constructed world by living beings is central to the historicity of this world. Heidegger, on the other hand,

¹ Kurtul Gülenç et al., *Alacakaranlıkta Hegel'i Düşünmek* (İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları, 2021), 27.

does not believe that historicity expresses a world-historical process but rather exists as an individual temporal horizon. In addition, while Dilthey has notions of social praxis and intersubjectivity, individual Dasein as a “being-toward-death” always has priority in the human-world relationship in the Heideggerian framework.

Gülenç maintains that, in both Hegel and Dilthey, continuity is established between individual temporality and historicity in such a way that there is a dialectical relationship between the singular I and the plural We: I am at the same time as We do. There is no such continuity in Heidegger. The only way for Dasein to establish a genuine relationship with “worldliness” is through the authentic moments that signify (or depict) interruption. For Heidegger, these moments are not mediations in the Hegelian sense, but a radical rupture from the context in which they occur. For all these reasons, Gülenç says, Hegel is the name that Marcuse turns to, but through the construction of a new theory of praxis.

Hegel's social ontology is the ground of a normative intersubjectivity that constantly maintains its internal contradiction and dynamic tension. In the Hegelian sense, autonomy is based on being able to stay with oneself in relation to others, and there is an understanding of mutual recognition that implies positive liberation in the social field, and of the practical interventions of radical action. This enables us to avoid evaluating concrete individual action as introverted private action, and paves the way for establishing an ontological unity between individual and collective action. This creates the structure for new practices of social struggle, both at the theoretical and practical level.

For Gülenç, Hegel claims that freedom, taken at the social level, can only be realized within society and through relations of mutual recognition; indeed, according to Hegel, the condition of my freedom is that others are also free, just as in the Marxist framework. Gülenç argues that these are the reasons that Marcuse found the answer he had been seeking since his student days: the possibility of a revolutionary praxis that is found in Hegel's freedom-centered social ontology.

In “Theodor W. Adorno's Negative Dialectics: The Exit Door Out of Totality,” Önder Kulak states that society, according to Adorno, is a totality formed by individuals in which the universal places the individual under its yoke. In this totality, society subjugates the individual and forces him to obey it. He argues that this manifests itself most clearly in our capitalist society. The universal, which is the first element in the re-

lation of the universal, singular, and particular under the Concept Doctrine in Hegel's *Logic*, constitutes a uniform and identical unity in-itself. Singulars do not differ in this universality. In the next case, the universal encounters an element separate from and opposed to itself. This element is a particular that has universality in itself but contrasts with another universal; their relation is one of opposition. After these determinations, Kulak refers to the example of the Roman Empire in Hegel's lectures. He mentions that the dominant subjects of the state include other particular and universal elements in themselves and subjugate them. As such, universals become integrated with and within the prevailing universal. Indicating that denial should be denied for the sake of such concrete integrity, Kulak states that every learner can create a whole by overcoming their own universality, and yet this is singularity.

Thus, at the moment now reached in the Hegelian framework, the singular is added to the relationship between the universal and the particular. The singular is also the universal; but what it contains is the coexistence of particulars in their similarities and differences. When the individual is alone, their individuality has no meaning; it is necessary to reveal its particularity in social relations. This socialization and its particular-universal relations imply a process that starts from the family and extends to civil society. The next stage is the state, where these interpersonal relations can be seen as a whole, and the universal will be completed.

Kulak states that Adorno sought an alternative to Hegel. Against Hegel's dialectic, based on affirmation, the content must be based on negation. In this context, Adorno criticizes the character of Hegel's concept of negation of negation. Adorno attributes the reason for this to Hegel's establishment of a system dependent on the abstract, even though it is a system connected to the concrete. Practice, which constitutes the basis of the concrete, has been handed over to the Absolute from the very beginning. As such, the existence of humanity continues to be based on contradiction, falsifying Hegel's claim that this contradiction has been overcome.

Adorno, like Lukács, argues that labor power is transformed into a commodity in accordance with the idea of objectification. Indicating that objectification does not have a negative content in Marx, Kulak states that it is given a negative content due to capitalist alienation. Herein lies Adorno's distinct intellectual dimension, which differentiates him from Marx; he argues that human labor enables direct objectification. This is

not just a technical detail, as Adorno will argue, contrary to Marx, that the primary process is consumption rather than production. By doing so, Adorno dismisses the role of the productive forces that cause reification.

For Kulak, the barriers that Adorno places around the individual sphere expose his framework as a significantly weak stance. To overcome this, the individual needs to be enabled to continue their path. This requires an immanent critique. Adorno's suggestion to go out of history is solid. This suggestion can be read as a crucial commentary regarding ideas that depend on historical accumulation, if a detailed perspective is considered. In this way, emphasizing anti-totalitarian experience as the exercise of resistance, along with Adorno's proposed "preventing the problem before it arises,"² provides important possibilities for evaluation in terms of a historical account. Nevertheless, Adorno's escape from class and lack of focus on the autonomy of communities renders his framework too weak for such a construction and fails to support it in terms of universal experience.

In "Trying to Stand Still in the River: On Hans-Georg Gadamer's Conservative Historicism," Albayrak claims that considering the historical course of the Subject and its relationship with Hegel, the issue goes beyond academic boundaries and extends to the social and political nature and function of philosophy. Albayrak argues that the work of philosophy in Hegel, metaphysically, is not less transformative than it is destructive. While Spirit is the substance of accumulated historicity, the human action that creates it is based on real people who both interpret that substance and create and transform it with their cultural inheritance, experience, and action. So, Gadamer and Hegel separate according to the attitude they take in the substance-subject opposition, making their positions relative to each other evident.

Albayrak argues that in the twentieth century, the human and social sciences, based, unlike the natural sciences, on understanding rather than explanation, began to be generally accepted in European thought. For Albayrak, Gadamer's approach, shaped around the concept of "history of influences,"³ fits into this context. Albayrak maintains that Gadamer's attempt to use all of Hegel's basic concepts and arguments to

² Ibid., 152.

³ Ibid., 160.

justify an opposite assumption voided all of humanity's gains, especially criticism, against the pressures of authority, and this attempt constitutes neither a literary nor a philosophical effort. Albayrak thinks that the issue lies beyond Hegel and concerns the struggle-filled history of humanity. The implications of Gadamer's use of critique and critical thought, removed from all concrete historical contexts, rather entails the consolidation of politics instead of mounting any kind of challenge to it. It is, therefore, possible to say that Albayrak criticizes Gadamer for being too conservative and preserving a stance that is uncritical of the political mechanisms that impede social transformation for the better. For Albayrak, history demonstrates that criticism must be essential and challenging and a tool against authoritarian structures that degrade the essence of people who suffer alienation.

In "The Relationship between Constitution and Revolution in Habermas's Philosophy of Law: Defending the Democratic Republic as an Embarrassed Hegelian?" Gürel argues that Habermas's assessment of the Cold War, as a conflict between Natural Law (the West) and Revolution (the Eastern Bloc), gains special importance when the internal relationship between the rule of law and popular sovereignty, or between constitutionalism and revolution, is properly understood and grasped. Habermas argued that Marxism went too far when it doubted the idea of legality. In this respect, Gürel argues that, for Habermas, the essential and historical link connecting the natural law tradition and the ideal of revolution, established in Hegel's political philosophy, was severed in the Marxist framework. Caught between Marxist and liberal theories, the young Habermas was torn between legality and revolutionary violence. On the eve of 1968, when socialist/communist parties gained strength in Europe and student demonstrations erupted in the streets of Paris, Berlin and Rome, Habermas was forced to choose between these two political positions.

Gürel explores which issues Habermas sought to open for discussion when he returned to the historical connection between revolution and natural law, which Hegel discussed in depth in his *Philosophy of Law*. He also asks why the "tense relationship"⁴ between legality and legitimacy should be maintained so as to allow the rule of law

⁴ Ibid., 181.

(*Rechtsstaat*) to preserve an open and evolving character from the vantage point of our contemporary time. Gürel's contribution aims to provide an answer to such questions through the transformative processes of the constitutional state (*Verfassungsstaat*), and to outline a radical reform project able to combine the legitimacy of revolutionary understanding and the principle of legality of the rule of law, by rethinking the dialogue between Hegel and Habermas. Gürel addresses the alleged contradiction between liberalism and democracy in Hegel's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* and Habermas's *Between Facts and Norms*, attempting to offer a solution by describing them as "internally related" and "mutually supporting"⁵ concepts. Gürel concedes that Habermas embraced the normative horizon of the Hegelian philosophy of right, but in a reticent manner. He argues that Max Weber's thesis that instrumental rationality, the distinguishing feature of modernity, creates an "iron cage" in bureaucratic capitalist societies lies at the heart of the Critical Theory tradition, and also affected Habermas. Nevertheless, and contrary to this pessimistic claim, Habermas sought to reintroduce the "essential" features of rationality; primarily as the capacity for political deliberation and practical reasoning power.

For Gürel, Habermas underlined that the Western Marxist tradition overlooked and even ignored the essential and inexhaustible dimension of rationality due to the influence of Weber and his follower Lukács. On the contrary, Habermas, as he endeavors to reconstruct the relationship between reason and revolution, will turn to Hegel's pioneering and normative theory of politics. Gürel states that Habermas then tried to overcome his initial hesitations and confusion regarding Western rationality by linking Europe to an ideal West that did not actually exist. This non-existent West is a utopia, an idealized depiction of Enlightenment Europe as a space of public deliberation and the rule of law. In conclusion, Gürel claims that the philosophical roots of the utopian understanding implicit in Habermas's philosophy of law and politics stems from the immanent critical framework of Hegel's philosophy.

In his article "(Left-)Hegelian Revision of Critical Theory: Axel Honneth and the Concept of Recognition," Volkan Çıdam examines how Honneth redefined and developed immanent critique, along with

⁵ Ibid., 182.

his theory of recognition. For Çıdam, the concept of recognition, which determines the content of criticism, represents a significant change in Honneth's critical theory, while immanent critique plays a decisive role in methodological terms. Honneth explored the problem of recognition in social contradictions in his book *The Struggle for Recognition*, where the concept first appeared as the basis of his critical theory. Honneth sought to grasp the dynamics of the transformation of institutional structures in his other major work, *The Law of Freedom*.

Çıdam maintains that in this later work Honneth successfully put into practice the continuation of the left-Hegelian tradition. Social struggles and areas of conflict, which were central issues in *The Struggle for Recognition*, became only important to the extent that they contributed to the analysis of social institutions, while the analysis of social freedom only allowed for an internal critique. This critique seeks an answer to the question of how appropriately the principles and ideals inherent in institutions are reflected in reality. Therefore, the horizon provided is reformist only, whereas the most important element of the left-Hegelian vision, whose beginnings lay mainly in Marx, was that the immanent critique of existing social institutions and practices allowed for a radical transformation. Such radical transformation does not emerge in Honneth's work.

In "Normativity, Recognition and Freedom in Contemporary American Hegelianism," Alper Türken outlines the main philosophical dynamics that motivated the "Hegelian turn" in the tradition of analytic philosophy and the new American Hegelians. He concentrates on the concepts of "normativity" and "recognition," which he believes form the central points of contemporary interest in Hegel.

Türken argues that two main tendencies are pivotal in the recent interpretations of Hegel: 1) taking Hegel's metaphysical stance wholly and reading him as more of a traditional-conservative thinker; 2) a selective adoption of Hegel's emphasis on concepts such as recognition, sociability, and freedom. Türken states that the second line of interpretation presents Hegel as a thinker conducive to certain contemporary ways of thinking. According to this line, freedom is generally thought of as respecting identities and preferences determined by relations of social recognition, and this opens the way for the realization of the demands of these identities and the ability of successful mutual recognition to achieve desired statuses. Türken argues that this type of interpretation is

not compatible with the historical Hegel, and it misses opportunities to adequately construct the concepts of subjectivity and freedom. In this respect, Türken explains and criticizes the Brandom-Pippin interpretation of Hegel and presents the basic tenets of a third line of interpretation, one he believes gives the historical Hegel his actual importance in contemporary frameworks.

For Türken, freedom and recognition are concepts that remain abstract and contentless unless they are based on an ontological framework. He interprets Hegel's ontology as based on the concept of true infinity and on remaining-oneself in the other. Türken claims that the founding elements of autonomy, freedom, and self emerge in this concept. He argues that Hegel's ontology is not a metaphysical understanding of the other side of the historical, i.e., the social. It is, instead, a reflection on the character of our existence. Türken states that we should start by asking who we are and what we want. Freedom, for Türken, depends on our answer to this question. Recognition of our answer to this question by other subjects is necessary for the realization of our freedom at the social level. If our answer is determined by social relations, then freedom does not exist. For Türken, Hegelian thought is libertarian, an ontology of freedom, not despite its metaphysical tendencies, but because of them. This understanding of freedom, which is based on the concept of "remaining-oneself" in the other, preserves its prevalence even today.

In the final piece, "Philosophy on Earth: Ethical Life and Cosmopolitanism in Şeyla Benhabib," Zeynep Savaşçın argues that Benhabib's philosophy problematizes the mutual demands and claims of the fields of law, politics, and ethics in today's societies and in contemporary thinking, bringing Kant's legacy of cosmopolitanism back to actuality from within a Hegelian tradition focused on the concept of ethical life. Benhabib explores the possibilities of the understanding by emphasizing the intersection between the three separate areas in Kant: a) the moral actions of individuals in the private sphere; b) the actions of citizens in their political and legal organizations; c) the actions of world citizens regarding their cosmopolitical existence.

For Savaşçın, Benhabib embraces the understanding of cosmopolitanism on a ground that saves the metaphysical duality in which it is embedded and allows thinking and making sense of the universal by returning it to the history in which it is embedded. She does this while keeping the inseparable link connecting individual freedom with the in-

stitutional structures of action and the world of meaning created in social interaction. For Savaşçın, Benhabib's embrace of these elements revives the understanding of ethical life in Hegel. It reveals hegemony; however, it does not sacrifice the reconciliation between Spirit and the history of Spirit.

As a concluding remark, I wish to note that this book is a distinguished work that helps readers to assess Critical Theory from a Hegelian perspective, and vice-versa, through well-conceptualized arguments and discussions about the political perspectives that influence our societies today. As such, it provides insights into the Hegelian movement in contemporary analytical philosophy and into American Neo-Hegelianism.