

## Review

**Caterina Maurer, *La razionalità del sentire. Gefühl e Vernunft nella Filosofia dello spirito soggettivo di Hegel*. Padua: Pubblicazioni di Verifiche 58, 2021. ISBN 978-88-88286-59-4. Pp. 321. 28€.**

Caterina Maurer's book is a valuable and original contribution not only to Hegel studies, but also to contemporary psychological studies in the field of human emotions and the philosophy of mind. It has, indeed, two considerable merits. First of all, Maurer presents the reader with a Hegel who cannot simply be contrasted with the romantic philosophers when it comes to the topic of feelings (*Gefühle*) (although Hegel was notoriously critical of Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi's *Gefühlphilosophie* and of Friedrich Schleiermacher's *Gefühlstheologie*); against such a simplistic picture, this book shows the importance of *Gefühle* and *Empfindungen* in Hegel's philosophy of subjective spirit in a clear way and is argued with philosophical accuracy. Specifically, Maurer shows how in Hegel's thought, the emotional and the rational side of the human being are deeply intertwined in a relationship of continuity. This is based on the fact that the emotional sphere is already permeated by rational thought, and is at the same time crucial for enabling the subject to navigate the world and to plan her actions in it. Second, this book offers a valuable contribution to, and has the potential to generate a new impetus in, contemporary studies in the fields of philosophy of mind, neuroscience and human emotions—areas in which Hegel is normally not taken into account: in fact, the book makes frequent reference to contemporary debates and concepts. On the one hand, this helps to clarify Hegel's reflections for the present-day reader by bringing his language closer to ours; on the other hand, it shows the potential value of Hegel's thought itself, without succumbing to anachronisms or mistaken analogues.

For these reasons, Maurer's book contributes to the recently awakened interest in Hegel's philosophy of subjective spirit, a part of Hegel's philosophy of spirit long neglected by critics (at least until the nineties, when Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit* were finally published which include the sections on Psychology and Anthropology). At the same time, however, Maurer takes a well-defined and original interpretative line, in that her interpretation focusses, for the first time in a systematic way, on the particular role played by the *Gefühlssphäre* in Hegel's Anthropology and Psychology. Maurer's aim is to show 'the importance attributed by the philosopher to that set of *Empfindungen* (sensations), *Gefühle* (feelings), *praktische Gefühle* (practical feelings), *Trieb*

(impulses), *Neigungen* (inclinations) and *Leidenschaften* (passions) which together constitute what today would be called the “emotional” dimension of the human subject’ (23—all translations into English are mine—G.B.). This project develops over the course of six chapters, dealing respectively with the topics of antidualism, *Empfindungen*, the soul-body problem, habits, feelings and passions, and mental derangement.

In the *Introduction*, Maurer claims that Hegel’s anthropological and psychological reflections are grounded in an understanding of human beings as embodied subjects, in which soul and body, spiritual and biological dimensions, cannot be separated from one another. A brief overview of recent studies on Hegel’s philosophy of the subjective spirit (with a focus on emotions, the human soul and sensations) makes the reader understand—at least retrospectively, after the complete reading of the book—that her contribution systematically develops Andreas Arndt’s significant but initially undeveloped intuition (*Zur Rolle des Gefühls in Hegels Theorie des subjektiven Geistes*, 2017) of Hegel’s insistence on the ‘rationality of feelings’, representing an important landmark for contemporary studies on emotions.

The *Encyclopaedia’s* Anthropology and Psychology represent, for Maurer, the ‘systematic places’ in which the *Gefühlsphäre* emerges in its complexity, and thus is the source of her main textual references. Her analysis does not overlook, however, Ludwig Boumann’s additions to the encyclopaedic paragraphs, as well as the student notes of Hegel’s *Lectures*: these ‘secondary sources’ are rightly valued by Maurer as essential for better understanding the development of Hegel’s philosophy of subjective spirit. Finally, Hegel’s *Fragment zur Philosophie des subjektiven Geistes* (1822–1825)—likely a preparatory text for a compendium on the philosophy of subjective spirit—turns out to be a key source, too.

From a methodological point of view, Maurer’s interpretation is founded on what she calls the ‘anticipation device’, explained in *Chapter One*. To fully understand Hegel’s Anthropology, as dealing with a preconscious form of subjectivity—the soul (*Seele*)—as conditioned by its bodily dimension and characterized by internal and external sensations (*Empfindungen*), one has to *anticipate* the dimension of the fully formed rational subject. According to this interpretation, the three levels of subjective spirit (Anthropology, Phenomenology and Psychology) should be understood as synchronic moments, against a gradualist interpretation. In Maurer’s view, Hegel’s contrast of abstraction and concreteness plays a crucial interpretative role, too: if isolated from spirit’s further developments, the soul’s activities and determinations are ‘abstract’. Higher spiritual determinations are ‘concrete’ in that they develop through previous determinations, overcoming their unilaterality. And concerning the soul-body relationship, Hegel’s understanding of the organism in his *Naturphilosophie* shows that he partly embraces the Kantian teleology but dissolves the supposed problems through an anti-dualist Anthropology by using

Aristotelian tools, in which spirit and nature do not count as autonomous terms: the human being is thus understood as an embodied subjectivity.

Sensations (*Empfindungen*), as determinations *found* by the soul, and their immediate, involuntary traces on human physicality, are the topics of *Chapter Two*. As Maurer highlights, *Empfindungen* are, according to Hegel, not only *found* but also *appropriated* by the soul. Sensations—in particular, human sensations—should therefore be understood as both the spirit’s ‘sleep’ (a kind of passivity), and as the starting point for an active free process. Sensations are divided into external sensations, which are produced by an exterior object, and internal sensations, whose content comes from the subjects’ interiority. Internal sensations—which are particularly important in this book—are treated both in the Psychology and in the Anthropology: in the Anthropology, insofar as they affect the body. Internal sensations are embodied (consider shame and anger, and the connected bodily phenomena like blushing), showing an intimate correspondence between spiritual and physiological processes. However, there is not, for Hegel, a biunivocal causal nexus between sensations and physiological arousal, as many contemporary studies, which Maurer appropriately cites, have confirmed. Moreover, sensations do not represent a first kind of knowledge for Hegel, as it were in an evolutionary step from a living species to another. In this—Maurer claims—Hegel is critical of evolutionism.

*Chapter Three* goes on to investigate the difference between human and animal sensations and feelings. Animals’ emotional components have to do with immediate, instinctual behavioural responses to environmental stimuli, which help animals to orient themselves in the world. Their sensations and feelings do not have a cognitive component, whereas human sensations and feelings are permeated by thought. In this chapter, Maurer focuses in particular on the feeling of lack typical of the animal organism, as analysed in the *Naturphilosophie*. This feeling belongs to living beings as such, characterizing both animal and human subjectivity; it brings the self-moving, free subject towards the surrounding external environment in order to satisfy its needs. As a consequence, this feeling is at the base of the assimilation of inorganic nature through the action of the living being, playing a crucial role in the organism’s survival and in its relationship to the environment. However, while an animal’s sensations occupy it entirely and remain a behavioural response, human beings as thinking spirit can free themselves from natural determinations.

This results from habit, a spiritual activity in which the soul takes possession of its corporality, in a process of liberation from immediate sensations (the theme of *Chapter Four*). That the soul becomes indifferent against the satisfaction of certain desires and impulses, does not mean, however, that they are eliminated, but only educated. Through habit, the soul connects *Gefühle* and *Empfindungen* with bodily traits by which involuntary gestures emerge as an expressive capability of the body. Thus habit, too, is an indication for the psychophysical unity of the

subject. Thanks to the automatic behaviour produced by habit, awareness and reflection in action are not necessary: in contemporary language, habit has an exonerating function, making a dual tasking possible (137). Habituation is a spiritual and at the same time a natural process, a kind of mechanism which therefore is distinct from the fully self-determining will, although it emancipates the soul from the immediacy of sensations. The chapter concludes by discussing Hegel's interest in the empirical psychological sciences of his time, aimed as they were at penetrating interiority via a descriptive study of physical traits, and his critique of physiognomy and craniology (154f.).

*Chapter Five* discusses the *Encyclopaedia's* Psychology, and accomplishes one of the main merits of the book: demonstrating that the *Gefühlsphäre* can be harmonized with the rational dimension of the individual. What emerges here is the claim that emotional components can only be understood correctly at the level of a fully developed subjectivity (that is, exactly at the level of Psychology): 'Hegel's intent is therefore to reconceptualize the *Gefühl* itself at different systematic heights' (174). Based on this, internal sensations analysed in the Anthropology are now reconceptualized as *practical feelings*. Although Maurer recognizes the priority of the rational dimension for Hegel, she rightly underlines that this does not entail a suppression of feelings. On the contrary, feelings turn out to be crucial motives of human action. This shows Aristotle's influence on Hegel, which is also visible in Hegel's understanding of *choice* as deriving from both desire and rationality. As Maurer recognizes, it is, however, only in the ethical dimension that impulses and passions gain their real content and can be morally evaluated. This opens up an essential perspective, in my view, showing the limits and merits of the subjective spirit. Happiness cannot, at this level, be objectively defined.

Lastly, *Chapter Six* focuses on mental derangement, as analysed by Hegel in the Anthropology, showing the crucial role of emotions and feelings in this field, too. While this could be seen as a jump backwards, since the former chapter had already discussed the Psychology, it has quite to the contrary a methodological value, since Hegel's treatment of mental derangement can only be understood by *anticipating* fully developed subjectivity. Maurer's interpretation is not only that Hegel's understanding of *Verrücktheit* mirrors his anti-dualistic Anthropology such that illnesses in general affect the entire subject; she also argues that Hegel's study of this topic—together with animal magnetism—strengthened his understanding of the individual as an embodied subject. Since for Hegel the mentally deranged person still retains a *residuum* of reason, mental derangement helps revealing the continuity between rational consciousness and *Gefühlsphäre*. As a consequence, this last part of the book is of crucial importance for Maurer's interpretation.

To conclude, this book clearly defends its thesis of the continuity between rational thought and *Gefühlsphäre* in Hegel. Maurer presents an anti-dualistic

Hegel, for whom reason permeates—without eliminating—feelings, passions and inclinations, by making them ‘human’, and different from animal ones. She places Hegel’s views in the context of the psychological sciences of his time and—what is even more valuable—she establishes a long-distance dialogue between Hegel and contemporary neuroscience and the philosophy of mind and emotion.

I do wish to raise a couple of considerations, which are not critiques but *desiderata* for further studies in this interpretative line. First, Maurer’s references to contemporary psychological and neuroscientific debates are mostly found in footnotes which have the explanatory purpose of connecting Hegel’s thought to the contemporary language of these sciences. By taking this approach, Maurer stops short of claiming that Hegel might be considered as a possible source for contemporary issues. Perhaps the book might have dared a little bit more in this sense; but at least, it paves the way for new studies in this direction. Another point is that the book does not make the move to the objective spirit, although Maurer recognizes several times the relevance of the components of the *Gefühlsphäre* for human action. She still, however, considers them at a ‘formal level’. This is of course not a demerit, but it leaves the reader wanting a ‘sequel’ of this study, in this sense, to work out what implications the status of passions, inclinations and feelings as motives of human action has for the attribution of responsibility and for the question of moral and juridical imputation.

Last, but not least, this book has the significant merit that it contributes to a more comprehensive interpretation of the relationship between Hegel and Romanticism, as far as the topic of *Gefühl* is concerned. Given Hegel’s well-known criticism of Romantic natural philosophers, Maurer shows that they also were an important source for Hegel’s work (e.g., in case of animal magnetism, for which Gotthilf Heinrich von Schubert and Christoph Wilhelm Hufeland were his main references).

The book will provide an important reference point for understanding how Hegel’s speculative Psychology and Anthropology result in a theory of the embodied subject, in which thought and the emotional dimension are intertwined. This is exactly what makes Hegel’s thought in this field still of interest, not only for the *Hegel-Forschung*, but also for the contemporary psychology of emotions.

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