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## The Self-Winding Circle: A Study of Hegel's System (Book Review)

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Aboulafia, M. *The Self-Winding Circle: A Study of Hegel's System*. St. Louis: Warren H. Green, Inc., 1982. xvi + 107 pp. n.p.

The author says that the purpose of this book is "to provide a compact overview of the whole of Hegel's system, for those who have some familiarity with Hegel's thought" (p. vii). The work succeeds in being compact and it certainly requires an extensive preliminary knowledge of Hegel, since Aboulafia begins immediately to use Hegelian terminology and makes only cursory references to other philosophers or schools of thought. As the title suggests, the book's focus is on the systematic structure of Hegel's philosophy, following generally the structure of the *Encyclopedia*, although there are generous references to Hegel's other writings and to his lectures. While supposing a knowledge of Hegel, Aboulafia has deliberately omitted any discussion or mention of the literature on Hegel or the major tendencies that have developed in the interpretation of Hegel; he also says that while he has some reservations about the system he has bracketed his own criticisms because they too would detract from his primary purpose of providing a short book "to bring into focus the system as a whole" (p. x). From a Hegelian point of view, such claims begin to sound like blanket denials of the necessity of mediation in intellectual matters, and one wonders for just whom the book is intended. Could it be for those who have learned the system but forgotten it? There would be a Kierkegaardian irony in this, since the system is itself a supreme act of *Erinnerung* (recollection) which if it is really learned could not be forgotten. Perhaps such concerns should be postponed until after a review of the contents and structure of this book. Aboulafia begins with a general chapter on method which briefly explains negation, the negation of the negation, and tells us that speculative thought is the ability to grasp the positive in the negative; method is illustrated by the dialectic of determinate being (*Dasein*) from Hegel's *Logic*. He correctly observes that there is no formal (let alone formalizable) method of dialectic but that "method is merely the abstract statement of logical development" (p. 16). This chapter will be mystifying to Hegelian beginners and superfluous for advanced students. The remainder of the book advances toward a presentation of the idea of Hegel's system by summary accounts of the logic of finite and infinite, natural time, and finite spirit. In each case Aboulafia gives brief and relatively uncontroversial accounts of Hegel's views (with copious quotations). Despite his determination to make no explicit contact with the many varieties of philosophical and scholarly work on Hegel, Hegel emerges here as the systematic philosopher of the *Encyclopedia* and the *Logic*, for whom the *Phenomenology* is one among many possible introductions to absolute knowledge, having already become somewhat dated by the period of the *Encyclopedia*. In other words, this book is not simply an unmediated "study of Hegel's system" but a study of that system from a perspective which takes the system to be primary. Other views of the system, like those that emphasize Hegel's affinities with Marxism, existentialism or pragmatism, are not simply explorations of special parts of Hegel's system but different views altogether of what Hegel's philosophical project was and whether it fits into the system or the system fits into it. Aboulafia takes only indirect notice of such approaches to Hegel in a division of his fourth chapter, "Finite Spirit," which deals with the *Phenomenology of Spirit* both as a text and as a part of the system; he offers an account of *phenomenology* as one stage of finite spirit and of the *Phenomenology* as having been incorporated into the system. In a brief handbook for the initiated, such as this one, everything depends upon the choice of topics and their sequence. Aboulafia wants to show us that Hegel's thought always develops from the abstract to the concrete and he illustrates this by isolating the topics of development and of the finite and infinite, exploring them at the levels of logic (ch. II,

"Finite and Infinite-In Abstract Form"), nature (ch. III, "Time as Abstract Externality"), "Finite Spirit" (ch. IV) and in his concluding discussion of "The Idea of Philosophy" ( ch. V). Aboulafia's last theme is "The Syllogism of the System" in which he gives a plausible paraphrase of the three interconnected "syllogisms" of logic, nature, and spirit which Hegel expounds at the end of the Encyclopedia. But one notices a tension between Aboulafia's development to triadic systematicity and the quaternary style of his exposition. For he has structured his presentation of Hegel's system by following his themes through four distinct stages: logic, nature, finite spirit, and absolute spirit. Might the adoption of this form be an expression of some of those criticisms of Hegel which the author says he has bracketed? In any case, the very plausibility of expounding Hegel's thought in this way will lead to questions about the ultimacy of the system which is the book's explicit theme. Aboulafia's Hegel may be the true one; in any case, he is one of the many engaging Hegels whom one encounters in the history of philosophy. Those with an inclination toward this Hegel may find this book useful as a breviary. For a fuller and philosophically sophisticated account of a "right Hegelian" Hegel they will turn to Stanley Rosen's G. W.F. Hegel and thence to the older literature.

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