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MILENKO A. PEROVIĆ AND THE COHERENCE OF HEGEL'S SYSTEM: REFLECTIONS ON *FIVE STUDIES ON HEGEL*

Abstract: Although the title of this paper refers to Milenko A. Perović's *Five Studies on Hegel*, the aim here is not to provide a review of the book, but rather to offer a philosophical reflection on the significance and far-reaching implications of this and Perović's other works on Hegel. This article mainly examines Perović's *Five Studies on Hegel* as both a contribution to Hegelian scholarship and a statement about the role of continental philosophy in contemporary thought. This Perović's work addresses five central themes: the systematic status of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*; the shift from „practical philosophy” to a „philosophy of praxis” as the rational life of objective spirit; the speculative psychogenesis and philogenesis of the will; the essence and contradictions of conscience; and the concept of personality in Kant and Hegel. Each study isolates a key problem in Hegel's system, but together they articulate a broader thesis: that freedom is not an abstract presupposition, but a dialectical process realized in language, institutions, recognition, and history. Beyond their exegetical value, these studies illustrate Perović's wider philosophical project. His writings demonstrate how speculative thought can remain vital outside the dominant analytic paradigm, and how regional traditions – in this case, former Yugoslav intellectual space – can speak with universal philosophical resonance. By clarifying the systematic coherence of Hegel's philosophy and situating it within the challenges of modernity, Perović reaffirms the necessity of continental philosophy as a mode of self-understanding that resists

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fragmentation and reduction. The article argues that translating and disseminating Perović's works into English is not only a scholarly task but a philosophical responsibility, ensuring that his interpretation of Hegel contributes to global debates on freedom, subjectivity, and the future of philosophy.

Keywords: continental philosophy, dialectic, freedom, Hegel, Milenko A. Perović, praxis

INTRODUCTION

Milenko A. Perović (1950-2023) occupies a singular place in the contemporary intellectual landscape of the former Yugoslav region. His philosophical opus, spanning more than twenty books and hundreds of articles, demonstrates a rare consistency in its commitment to the fundamental questions of philosophy, and above all to Hegel's thought, which remained his lifelong preoccupation. As professor and founder of the Study Group and later the Department of Philosophy at the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad, as co-founder of the journal *Arhe* and initiator of master's and doctoral studies in philosophy in Serbia, Perović shaped entire generations of scholars. His influence, however, goes far beyond academic institutions. Through his role in ethical and bioethical debates, his involvement in the standardization of the Montenegrin language, and his constant presence in the broader cultural and political sphere, he became one of the most important regional intellectuals whose voice defined the tone of philosophical discourse in Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia and beyond.

*Five Studies on Hegel*² occupies a special place within his work. While Perović's earlier books ranged across ethics, political philosophy, and the philosophy of language, this volume represents a concentrated return to what he himself considered the inexhaustible source of philosophical reflection: Hegel's speculative system. In these five interconnected studies, Perović does not treat Hegel as a closed chapter in the history of philosophy, but as a living thinker whose questions and categories remain decisive for understanding the present. The book confronts central issues of Hegelian scholarship: the status of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*³, the dialectic of consciousness, the distinction between *phenomenology of consciousness* and *phenomenology of spirit*, the notion of the total world of spirit, and the relation between phenomenology and philosophy of spirit, always with the conviction that

² Perović, M. A., *Pet studija o Hegelu*, Stylos, Novi Sad, 2012.

³ Hegel, G. W. F., *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1973.

Hegel's thought is not merely of historical value, but continues to illuminate the structure of philosophical reason itself. In this sense, *Five Studies on Hegel* testifies to Perović's broader significance in the intellectual region to which he belonged. He exemplified a model of philosophy that resists provincialization: deeply rooted in the local academic and cultural context, yet uncompromisingly engaged with the highest demands of speculative thought. His work demonstrates how regional philosophy can stand in dialogue with the great traditions of European thought, not by imitation, but by rigorous and consequential questioning and often through confrontation. This is why his interpretations of Hegel are not only contributions to scholarship, but also interventions in the philosophical self-understanding of a region that has often been caught between cultural peripherality and universal aspiration.

Taken together, the five studies show the breadth of Perović's engagement with Hegel. Each study isolates a crucial theme – consciousness, praxis, will, conscience, personality – yet always in relation to the systematic whole. The recurring thread is the insistence that freedom is not a given, but a dialectical process, realized through negation, mediation, and recognition. Perović's readings affirm the coherence of Hegel's system against fragmentary interpretations and underline its continuing relevance for contemporary debates on subjectivity, ethics, politics, and culture. In presenting these studies, Perović not only interprets Hegel, but also affirms the enduring vitality of continental philosophy in an age dominated by analytic paradigms. His work demonstrates that speculative thought remains indispensable for grasping the complexities of human freedom, both in the individual and in history.

Seen in this light, the importance of *Five Studies on Hegel* is twofold. On the one hand, it offers original insights into the speculative architecture of Hegel's system, clarifying interpretive dilemmas and reaffirming the systematic unity of his philosophy. On the other, it marks a philosophical act of cultural positioning: by engaging with Hegel at the highest conceptual level, Perović demonstrates that critical and creative philosophy from the former Yugoslav region can address universal questions without relinquishing its regional specificity. His legacy is therefore not only that of a Hegelian scholar but also of a philosopher who affirmed the dignity of thought in a region often marked by political and cultural turbulence.

THE PROBLEM OF ESTABLISHING THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF SPIRIT

Milenko A. Perović opens *Five Studies on Hegel* with an inquiry that has occupied generations of Hegel scholars: the systematic status of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. From the moment of its publication, the book has resisted easy categorization. Is it a youthful work, a prelude to the *Science of Logic*⁴, or the very foundation of the Hegelian system – Perović insists that to grasp its role one must move beyond narrow textual comparison and situate the *Phenomenology of Spirit* within the broader architecture of Hegel's philosophical project, including his lectures and unpublished notes. The first study therefore undertakes not only a reconstruction of Hegel's intentions but also a polemic with interpretations that threaten to split the Hegelian system into irreconcilable halves.

Perović begins by revisiting the classical disputes on the relation between the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the *Science of Logic*, and the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*⁵. He stresses that the issue cannot be confined to these canonical works alone. To fully understand the position of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, one must also consider Hegel's Jena writings and, crucially, his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*⁶. These lectures, he argues, provide a vantage point from which the logic of the system becomes clearer: they reveal how Hegel conceived the transition from immediate forms of consciousness to the speculative standpoint of philosophy. Perović argues that the themes of religion – representation, mediation, and reconciliation – are condensed expressions of the broader dialectic of spirit.

The central interlocutor in this debate is Otto Pöggeler, whose influential reading suggested that Hegel's work contains *two paths of the Absolute*⁷: a phenomenological path, exemplified by the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and a systematic path, represented by the *Science of Logic* and the *Encyclopaedia*. According to this thesis, the Hegelian project never truly resolves the tension between these two routes, but is marked by an enduring structural bifurcation. For Pöggeler, the *Phenomenology of Spirit* does not fit seamlessly into

⁴ Hegel, G. W. F., *Znanost logike I*, Demetra, Zagreb 2003.

⁵ Hegel, G. W. F., *Enciklopedija filozofijskih znanosti*, preveo Viktor D. Sonnenfeld, Veselelin Masleša, Sarajevo, 1987.

⁶ Especially the relation between religion and the state, both grounded in the same foundation: Hegel, G. W. F., *Predavanja o filozofiji religije I*, transl. by Kiril Miladinov, Naklada Breza, Zagreb 2009., p. 190.

⁷ Pöggeler, O., *Zur Deutung der Phanomenologie des Geistes*, Bd. 1., Hegel-Studien, 1961.

the circularity of the system, but remains a parallel trajectory that complicates the architectonic unity Hegel proclaimed. Perović takes this challenge seriously, but ultimately resists it. To grant that Hegel's thought is permanently fractured would mean abandoning the very principle of systematicity that defines it. Instead, Perović contends that the *phenomenology* is not an *alternative road* but a *necessary stage* in spirit's becoming. What may appear as duality is, upon closer inspection, the dialectical unfolding of one and the same movement: spirit attaining knowledge of itself! These trajectories *only appear parallel*, raising the suspicion that Hegel's system never fully reconciles them. What looks like divergence, he argues, is in fact the dialectical movement of one and the same process. The *Phenomenology* and the *Logic* are not competing projects but complementary moments: one narrates the lived experience of consciousness, the other presents its conceptual truth.

Central to the essay is Hegel's conception of consciousness as inherently divided. Consciousness is always both immediate relation to an object and reflection upon that relation. This inner split gives rise to contradiction, and contradiction propels consciousness forward. The *Phenomenology* documents this progression: sense-certainty, perception, and understanding collapse under their own tensions, compelling movement toward self-consciousness and eventually toward spirit. Perović emphasizes that this trajectory is not external to Hegel's system but is the very life of spirit becoming aware of itself. To exclude the *Phenomenology* from the system would be to amputate the process by which spirit discovers its own truth.

A further theme in Perović's analysis is Hegel's speculative redefinition of truth. In ordinary terms, truth means correspondence between a judgment and reality. For Hegel, truth is a threefold reconciliation: the agreement of consciousness with itself, the agreement of the object with its concept, and the concordance of these two agreements in a higher unity⁸. The *Phenomenology* embodies this process. Each shape of consciousness fails to achieve full reconciliation, but through failure opens the path to a higher stage. Absolute knowing is the point at which the threefold concordance is realized, and spirit recognizes itself in the world it has created. Perović highlights this conception as the key to understanding why the *Phenomenology* is indispensable to

⁸ For example, in *Science of Logic* Hegel claims: „If we want to speak about things, then their nature or essence we call their concept, and that concept exists only for thought; but of the concepts of things we can even less say that we rule over them or that the determinations of thought, of which they are a complex, serve us; on the contrary, our thinking must be limited in relation to them, and our arbitrariness or freedom should not wish to organize them according to itself”. – Hegel, G. W. F., *Znanost logike* I, p. 14.

the system: it shows truth not as a static possession but as a lived process of reconciliation.

One of the most striking aspects of the study is Perović's focus on language⁹. In the famous analysis of sense-certainty, Hegel shows that when consciousness tries to express the singular – „this,” „now,” „I” – it is forced by language to utter the universal. The act of speech betrays the illusion of immediacy and reveals the presence of universality even in the simplest experience. Perović interprets this as a crucial moment: *language is the medium in which spirit first appears*. Human beings are not merely animals capable of sound but beings whose very self-awareness is bound to universality expressed in language. The *Phenomenology* therefore demonstrates that consciousness is always *already spirit*, because speech transforms the singular into the universal.

Perović also underscores the function of negativity. Each stage of consciousness disintegrates under the pressure of its contradictions. Far from being destructive, this negativity is creative: it is the labor through which consciousness transcends its limitations. The *Phenomenology* is thus not a series of accidents but a necessary unfolding. Spirit realizes itself by negating inadequate forms and subsuming them into higher ones. This dynamic of negativity explains why the *Phenomenology* cannot be reduced to a preface or introduction. It is the very enactment of spirit's dialectical life.

In order to sharpen this point, Perović turns to Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. Here Hegel thematizes the necessity of the religious standpoint as a bridge between finite consciousness and absolute spirit. Religion is not a secondary domain, but a privileged sphere in which the fundamental tensions of Hegel's philosophy – finitude and infinity, representation and concept, immediacy and mediation – are dramatized. For Perović, the lectures confirm that the *Phenomenology* cannot be seen as a detachable prelude. Its themes – consciousness, truth, language, negativity – are recapitulated in religion and philosophy, proving its integral role within the system.

What, then, is the significance of establishing the *Phenomenology of Spirit*? Perović's answer is twofold. On the one hand, it dispels the view that Hegel's system is fractured into incompatible paths. On the other, it demonstrates that philosophy must begin not with abstract logic, but with the lived experience of consciousness. The *Phenomenology* shows how finite knowing educates itself into speculative philosophy.

⁹ More in: Perović, M. A., *Studije iz filozofije jezika*, FCJK, Cetinje, 2018.

PHILOSOPHY OF PRAXIS VERSUS PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY

The second study in Perović's *Five Studies on Hegel* addresses a problem at once historical and systematic: why does Hegel reject the traditional label of „practical philosophy,” inherited from Aristotle and dominant in the history of ethics and political thought, and instead introduce the notion of a „philosophy of praxis”? The difference may appear terminological, but Perović shows it is deeply substantive. Behind the shift lies a transformation of modernity itself: the forms of law, morality, politics, and ethical life no longer align with the old Aristotelian divisions, and their conceptual unity requires a new foundation.

Traditionally, philosophy was divided into theoretical, practical, and poietic disciplines. Practical philosophy covered ethics, politics, and related fields, concerned with human action oriented toward the good. This division remained influential from Aristotle through Kant. Hegel, however, disrupts the schema. He does not deny the importance of the practical, but he insists that the forms of modern social life cannot be captured by a simple subdivision of philosophy. The term „practical philosophy” suggests a compartment, one branch among others. Hegel, by contrast, sees praxis as the very element in which freedom objectifies itself, and thus as a domain requiring its own speculative grounding.

Perović emphasizes that for Hegel, philosophy is not a loose collection of disciplines but a „circle of circles,” a system in which each part is both autonomous and integrated. Where, then, does praxis enter this circle? Hegel's answer is that praxis belongs to the domain of spirit, specifically *objective spirit*. Law, morality, and ethical life are not external applications of theory; they are constitutive moments of spirit's reality. Philosophy of praxis, therefore, is not a marginal subdivision but a central exposition of how freedom becomes actual. Perović interprets this as Hegel's decisive step beyond both Aristotelian ethics and Kantian moral philosophy: freedom is not only subjective capacity but institutional reality.

A central difficulty arises: if philosophy of praxis is a circle within the system, how should it begin? Every science must have a point of entry¹⁰, but in a system conceived as circular, the beginning cannot be arbitrary. Perović shows how Hegel wrestled with this issue, examining logical, historical, and phenomenological possibilities for the starting point. Logically, the beginning must connect to the concept of freedom developed in the *Science of*

¹⁰ More in: Perović, M., *Početak u filozofiji. Uvođenje u Hegelovu filozofiju*, Novi Sad, 1994.

*Logic*¹¹. Historically, it must situate itself in the modern world of institutions. Phenomenologically, it must emerge from the lived experience of self-consciousness. Philosophy of praxis thus requires a beginning that mediates between logic, history, and experience.

Perović then examines how Hegel identifies praxis with the life of *objective spirit*. Spirit does not exist merely in subjective consciousness, but takes form in laws, customs, and institutions. These forms are not external constraints, but embodiments of freedom itself. To obey the law, when rightly understood, is not to surrender freedom, but to participate in its universal expression. The „practical” is thus redefined: it is not individual action guided by prudence or morality alone, but the objective structures through which spirit realizes itself. This conception dissolves the opposition between individual and society by showing that each finds its truth in the other.

Hegel describes praxis not as arbitrary activity, but as governed by a logic of its own. Perović highlights this point: praxis is rational, structured by the idea of the good. Its movement is dialectical, guided by the reconciliation of subjective intention and objective order. The philosophy of praxis is therefore speculative: it uncovers the necessity by which freedom takes shape in ethical life. Perović contrasts this with Kant’s moral philosophy, which grounds action in the categorical imperative, but leaves a gap between moral law and social institutions. Hegel closes this gap by showing that ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) is the truth of morality, and that praxis reaches fulfillment not in abstract duty, but in concrete community.

An important element in Perović’s account is the relation between phenomenology and praxis. The *Phenomenology of Spirit* narrates the journey of consciousness toward self-recognition; the philosophy of praxis shows how this recognition is embodied in institutions. The phenomenological drama of recognition – famously exemplified in the struggle for recognition – finds its objective resolution in law and ethical life¹². Thus phenomenology prepares

¹¹ It is important to point out that Hegel thought that these insights are unfinished: „At the beginning of the last fragment of his final work, Hegel recalled that Plato reworked his *Republic* seven times, and he lamented that he himself did not manage to rework his *Science of Logic* seventy-seven times; yet he knew that, due to external necessity, this could not come to pass. Somewhat resigned, he asked whether the loud daily clamor and the deafening chatter of conceit, which arrogantly confines itself to such matters, still leaves any open space for participation in the passion-free silence of purely thoughtful cognition”. – Hegel, G. W. F., *Znanost logike I*, Demetra, Zagreb 2003., p. 21.

¹² More on this concept: ‘The master struggles as a man (for recognition), yet consumes as an animal (without working). This is the essence of his inhumanity. He cannot go beyond this stage because he is idle. He can die as a man, but he can only live as an animal.’ – Kojève, A., *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*. Leçons sur la Phénoménologie de l’Esprit professées de

the ground for the philosophy of praxis, while praxis confirms the truth of phenomenology. The two are distinct moments, but dialectically united.

Perović also raises the methodological question: how can there be a philosophy of praxis if praxis is itself *action*, not *reflection*? Hegel's answer, as reconstructed by Perović, is that philosophy does not prescribe action, but comprehends its rationality. Philosophy of praxis is descriptive and speculative, not prescriptive in the narrow sense. It shows that behind the multiplicity of actions and institutions lies a logic of freedom. To grasp this logic is to understand how spirit realizes itself in history. Philosophy of praxis is thus neither moralizing nor technical – it is the reflection of freedom in its objective forms.

Perović concludes the study by stressing the contemporary significance of Hegel's philosophy of praxis. In a world where ethics and politics are often treated as pragmatic, relative, or fragmented, Hegel's insistence on the rationality of praxis offers a counterpoint. Law, morality, and ethical life are not arbitrary conventions but moments of freedom's unfolding. To think them speculatively is to resist both relativism and authoritarianism, showing that true freedom is achieved only in institutions that embody rational universality. Perović suggests that this Hegelian perspective remains vital today, reminding us that praxis is not a private matter, but the shared realization of human freedom.

SPECULATIVE PSYCHOGENESIS AND PHILOGENESIS OF THE WILL

The third study turns to the question of the will, a theme at the center of practical philosophy, yet one often obscured by narrow interpretations. The title – *Speculative Psychogenesis and Philogenesis of the Will* – already signals a double approach¹³. Perović seeks to reconstruct the genesis of will both in the interior life of the subject (*psychogenesis*) and in the historical and social development of humanity (*philogenesis*). The essay argues that the concept of will can be understood properly only through this speculative dual perspective, which overcomes the reduction of will to either psychological capacity or empirical historical phenomenon.

1933 à 1939 à l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes, Raymond Queneau, Gallimard, 1947. (Re-ed TEL, 1979), p. 55.

¹³ Also in: Perović, M.A.. „Hegelova fenomenologija volje i stav pluralizma”, in: *Filozofska istraživanja*, 26 (1), 23-26., 2006., Preuzeto s <https://hrcak.srce.hr/4591>

Perović begins by situating the problem within the history of philosophy. A standard claim in the secondary literature is that Aristotle „had no concept of will”. This assertion rests on the fact that the Greek tradition lacked a single term equivalent to the modern *voluntas*. Perović contests this view. He shows that Aristotle does in fact treat the will, albeit implicitly, within his account of the principle of praxis. For Aristotle, action is not reducible to desire but is guided by *boulesis* (deliberation) and oriented by the good¹⁴. The speculative structure of the will is thus present, though not thematized as a separate faculty. Later philosophy often misread Aristotle in non-speculative terms, thereby generating the illusion that the concept of will emerged only in late antiquity or in medieval theology. This historical correction is important, for it demonstrates that the will has always been bound to the speculative problem of praxis. By retrieving Aristotle’s implicit notion, Perović shows that the development of the concept of will cannot be told as a linear story of discovery, but as a dialectical process in which speculative insights are lost and regained.

Against both empiricist and voluntarist reductions, Perović insists that the will is not a mere psychological faculty of choice, nor is it simply an indeterminate capacity for arbitrariness. In Hegel’s speculative framework, the will is the unity of universality and individuality, concept and existence. To will is to actualize the universal in the particular, to embody rational freedom in concrete acts. This means that the will cannot be understood apart from its dialectical movement: it is neither abstract freedom nor mechanical determination, but the living reconciliation of both.

Perović stresses that speculative philosophy is required precisely because the will resists one-sided definitions. Any attempt to reduce it to desire, instinct, or rational calculation fails to capture its dialectical structure. Only by following its genesis – both psychogenetic and philogenetic – can we comprehend its essence.

The first register of Perović’s analysis is the psychogenetic. Here the will appears as it develops within the life of the individual. The will does not emerge fully formed but evolves through stages, paralleling the dialectic of consciousness. At first, the will is immediate, tied to natural impulses. Gradually it internalizes reflection, learns to mediate between desire and universality, and comes to recognize itself as free. The highest stage is the rational

¹⁴ The concept of *boulesis* (*boulema*) means willing, that which has been willed, intention, ground, and finally, from the Stoics onward – will. The concept of *boulé* means counsel, plan, agreement, deliberation, reflection, decision, etc. – Perović, M. A., *Pet studija o Hegelu*, p. 152.

will, which no longer identifies freedom with arbitrariness but understands it as acting in accordance with the universal.

This psychogenesis is not merely descriptive psychology but speculative reconstruction. Each stage is necessary, arising from the contradictions of the previous one. Impulse collapses into conflict; reflection arises to mediate; arbitrariness reveals its emptiness, giving way to rational willing. The individual's inner development thus mirrors the dialectical logic of spirit.

Parallel to the psychogenesis is the philogenesis, the historical development of will in human communities. Just as individuals begin with impulse and advance toward rational freedom, so societies pass through stages in which freedom is progressively actualized. Ancient despotisms embody the immediate will of the ruler; classical Greece reveals the ethical community but limits freedom to citizens; Christianity introduces the infinite worth of the individual; modernity institutionalizes subjective rights and constitutional law.

Perović interprets this history as the objective unfolding of the will's concept. The freedom that appears in subjective consciousness must also take form in social institutions. Law, morality, and ethical life are thus not external to will but are its realization. The philogenesis of the will is the story of how humanity has come to recognize itself as free and to build institutions that embody that recognition.

In both psychogenesis and philogenesis, the key is the dialectic of freedom¹⁵. Freedom is not given once and for all, but emerges through contradiction and negation. Immediate impulse must be negated to give rise to reflective willing; arbitrary choice must be overcome in order for rational universality to appear. Similarly, historical forms of unfreedom must be negated in order for modern institutions of rights and ethical life to arise. Negativity is therefore not destructive but constitutive of the will. It is through conflict and overcoming that freedom is realized. Perović contrasts this speculative account with non-speculative theories of will. In empiricist psychology, will is reduced to a sequence of desires and aversions. In theological voluntarism, will is exalted as absolute caprice, detached from reason. Both miss the unity of universality and individuality. The speculative approach refuses to separate will from reason or to reduce it to instinct. Instead, it shows that willing is the process of reason becoming real in the world. This is why Hegel can describe the will as „thinking translating itself into existence”.

Finally, Perović situates the analysis within Hegel's system. The will belongs to the philosophy of spirit, bridging subjective and objective dimen-

¹⁵ More on the dialectic on freedom: *ibidem*, p. 257.

sions. Psychogenesis belongs to the domain of subjective spirit, while philogenesis belongs to objective spirit. Together they show that the will is the hinge between individual subjectivity and communal life. The will is where freedom ceases to be mere thought and becomes actuality. In this sense, the study of the will is central not only to ethics and politics, but to the entire system of philosophy.

A DISCUSSION ON THE ESSENCE AND APORIAS OF CONSCIENCE

The fourth study in Perović's *Five Studies on Hegel* undertakes one of the most delicate and controversial themes in Hegel's philosophy of spirit: the problem of conscience (*Gewissen*)¹⁶. Hegel's treatment of conscience has often been read as ambivalent, oscillating between affirmation and critique. On the one hand, conscience seems to embody the highest form of moral subjectivity; on the other, it risks collapsing into arbitrariness and hypocrisy. Perović's analysis carefully reconstructs this duality, showing how Hegel identifies both the essence and the aporias of conscience, and why this tension is unavoidable within modern ethical life.

Perović situates Hegel's reflections within the broader context of post-Kantian debates. In the wake of Kant, conscience was celebrated as the immediate voice of moral law within the subject. At the same time, figures like Jacobi¹⁷ defended the philosophy of feeling and faith, opposing speculative mediation with appeals to immediacy. Hegel confronted both strands: Jacobi's critique of reason on the one side, Kant's exaltation of the moral subject on the other. Perović shows how Hegel's discussion of conscience integrates these contexts. Conscience cannot be reduced to mere feeling, but neither can it be secured by abstract universality alone.

One chapter Perović examines closely is Hegel's polemic against what he calls the „naïve metaphysics” of immediate knowledge. Philosophers like Jacobi claimed that truth is grasped in an unmediated act of faith or feeling. Hegel criticizes this stance as self-contradictory: to articulate immediate

¹⁶ The manner of constructing the concept in numerous languages derives from the Hellenic compound *syneidēsis* (συνείδησις). In spirit and in form of construction, it is repeated in the Latin *conscientia*, and from there further as: Italian *coscienza*, English *conscience*, French *conscience*, German *Gewissen* ('Mit-Wissen'), etc. In all these languages, the root of the word signifies knowledge, while the prefix 'with' points to the shared nature of that knowledge. Literally, conscience is *common moral knowledge*. – ibidem, pp. 302-303.

¹⁷ Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, 1743-1819.

knowledge already involves mediation. In relation to conscience, this means that the inner certainty of the subject cannot by itself guarantee truth. Without mediation through universality, conscience risks becoming subjective caprice. Perović stresses this point: Hegel affirms conscience as necessary but rejects its absolutization in the form of immediate, unexamined conviction. Hegel also considers what he calls „pure moral conscience,” the form in which the subject takes itself to be the ultimate source of moral authority. At first glance, this seems to be the pinnacle of autonomy. Yet Perović highlights Hegel’s warning: pure moral conscience can easily turn into formalism¹⁸. If the subject insists that whatever it wills in its innermost heart is good simply because it is willed sincerely, conscience becomes indistinguishable from arbitrariness. The very immediacy that gives conscience its dignity also threatens to undermine its claim to universality.

From here, Perović unfolds Hegel’s analysis of the aporias of conscience. Conscience promises certainty, but its certainty is inward and subjective. How can such certainty be validated and distinguished from delusion or self-interest? If conscience appeals only to itself, it cannot provide the universality required for moral validity. If it appeals to external authorities, it ceases to be conscience. This double bind is what Hegel means by the aporetic character of conscience: it is indispensable as the form of modern moral subjectivity, yet it is riddled with contradictions.

The problem of conscience deepens when one considers the issue of content. Conscience claims to speak with authority, but what does it actually say? Without rational content, conscience is empty. Its voice may command one thing today, another tomorrow. Hegel therefore insists that conscience must be recognized, both by the subject and by others, within the framework of ethical life. Recognition is crucial: if conscience remains merely inner certainty, it cannot sustain validity. Only when conscience is mediated through institutions and shared practices does it avoid collapsing into subjectivism. Perović interprets this as Hegel’s way of reconciling the dignity of conscience with the universality of ethical life.

Perhaps the most striking part of Hegel’s discussion is his analysis of evil. Conscience, in its aporetic form, can be twisted into justification for wrongdoing. If the individual insists that whatever conscience dictates is good, then even destructive or immoral acts can be rationalized. This is the danger of what Hegel calls the „evil conscience,” a perversion in which inward conviction is used to sanctify selfishness. Perović underscores the contemporary relevance of this insight: appeals to conscience are often used

¹⁸ More on formal/hollow duty: *ibidem*, p. 331.

to shield actions from critique, whether in personal life, politics, or religion. Hegel's warning is that conscience without mediation is prone to corruption.

Yet Hegel does not reject conscience altogether. Perović is careful to emphasize that Hegel affirms conscience as an essential moment of modern spirit. It embodies the principle that moral responsibility cannot be outsourced: the subject must answer to itself. Conscience is the site where individuality and universality meet, even if the meeting is fraught with tension. Its essence lies in this dialectical position: it is both necessary and unstable, both empowering and dangerous.

Perović situates the discussion of conscience within the larger system. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, conscience appears as the culmination of morality and the transition to ethical life. In the *Philosophy of Right*¹⁹, conscience is both affirmed and limited: affirmed as the individual's right to self-determination, limited by the necessity of recognition in institutions. Thus conscience is a hinge concept: it marks the height of subjectivity but also the threshold of community. Without conscience, there is no moral autonomy; without mediation, there is no ethical universality.

The aporias of conscience remain timely. In a pluralistic world, appeals to conscience are widespread, from debates on bioethics to civil disobedience. Perović suggests that Hegel's analysis provides a framework for assessing such appeals. We must respect conscience as the voice of individual responsibility, but we must also question it, demanding rational content and recognition. Conscience alone cannot secure moral truth; it requires mediation through dialogue, law, and ethical institutions.

THE CONCEPT OF PERSONALITY IN KANT AND HEGEL

The final study takes up a theme that is at once central and elusive in modern philosophy: *the concept of personality*. Kant and Hegel both made personality foundational for their respective systems of ethics and law, yet they did so in strikingly different ways. Perović's study compares and contrasts their approaches, demonstrating how the divergence illuminates the broader transition from critical to speculative philosophy. By exploring the multiplicity of meanings carried by the concept of personality, the study concludes the book by showing how philosophy negotiates the relation between individuality, universality, and freedom.

¹⁹ Hegel, G. W. F., *Osnovne crte filozofije prava*, transl. by Danko Grlić, Viktor D. Sonnenfeld, Sulejman Bosto, Veselin Masleša, Sarajevo 1989.

Perović begins with Kant, who distinguishes between *Person* and *Persönlichkeit*. For Kant, a person is a rational being capable of acting according to the moral law. Personality, in the strict sense, is the dignity of such a being as subject to moral legislation. This distinction grounds Kant's ethics: to be a person is to possess rational autonomy, to legislate the moral law for oneself. Personality thus designates not empirical traits but the noumenal status of the subject as bearer of duty.

Kant's emphasis on the universality of moral law, however, produces a certain abstraction. The person is defined negatively, by independence from inclination, rather than positively, by concrete participation in ethical life. Personality, in this framework, risks being reduced to the formal capacity for duty, detached from the historical and social context in which individuals live. Perović highlights this limitation: Kant secures the dignity of the moral subject, but at the price of isolating personality from the fullness of spirit.

Hegel takes a different route. For him, personality is not an abstract noumenal status but the living reality of spirit embodied in the individual. To call someone a person is to recognize them as bearer of rights, as participant in ethical life, and as member of absolute spirit. Personality thus has multiple dimensions: legal, moral, ethical, and speculative. Perović emphasizes that Hegel insists on this multiplicity precisely because personality cannot be reduced to a single definition. It is a dialectical concept, unfolding across levels of spirit.

In the sphere of *abstract right*, personality appears as the minimal recognition of the individual as owner of property and subject of law. This is the thin, formal aspect of personality: each human being is acknowledged as a legal person. In the sphere of *morality*, personality deepens, as the individual takes responsibility for intention and conscience. In *ethical life*, personality is realized concretely through family, civil society, and state. Finally, in *absolute spirit*, personality achieves its fullest expression in art, religion, and philosophy²⁰. Thus, Hegel's conception multiplies the layers of personality, integrating the individual into the totality of spirit.

Perović contrasts Kant's formal universalism with Hegel's concrete universality. As mentioned before, Kant protects the autonomy of the individual by insulating it from empirical conditions, but thereby leaves personality abstract. Hegel, by contrast, situates personality within institutions and cultural practices, showing how freedom becomes actual only in community. This

²⁰ According to Hegel, philosophical insight is philosophical insofar as it is prepared to recognize that religion and the state „do not stand in opposition in respect to the content of truth and rationality”. – *ibidem*, p. 392.

move transforms the concept: personality is not merely capacity for duty but participation in the rational life of spirit.

At the same time, Hegel does not dissolve individuality into universality. Personality retains its irreducible dignity, but this dignity is mediated and recognized in ethical relations. Perović stresses that for Hegel, recognition is the key: one becomes a person not simply by willing but by being acknowledged as such by others and by institutions. Personality is therefore *relational, not merely internal*.

A recurring theme in Perović's essay is the *multiplicity* of the Hegelian concept. Rather than seeking a single, univocal definition, Hegel embraces the layered nature of personality. This multiplicity is not a weakness but a strength, reflecting the dialectical structure of spirit. Personality is at once legal status, moral responsibility, ethical membership, and speculative dignity. To grasp it in its fullness is to recognize that freedom manifests in diverse yet interconnected forms.

Why does the difference between Kant and Hegel matter? Perović argues that it touches *the very essence of modernity*. Kant inaugurates the modern emphasis on autonomy, but risks detaching the subject from history and society. Hegel retrieves this autonomy but embeds it in the total world of spirit, showing that freedom is real only when actualized in community. The concept of personality thus becomes a lens through which to understand the transition from critical to speculative philosophy: from formal law to living freedom, from abstract subjectivity to concrete universality.

Perović closes by reflecting on the relevance of this debate for contemporary thought. In a world where questions of rights, identity, and recognition dominate public discourse, the concept of personality remains decisive. Kant reminds us of the dignity of the individual as rational subject; Hegel reminds us that such dignity must be realized in social and cultural institutions. Together, their legacies challenge us to think personality not as isolated essence but as dynamic participation in shared life. Perović suggests that without such a speculative understanding, discussions of rights and recognition risk remaining formal or fragmented.

CONCLUSION

In an era of global interrelation, the translation and presentation of Milenko A. Perović's works into English is not only desirable, but necessary. The intellectual map of contemporary philosophy is too often drawn along Anglo-American lines, where the dominance of analytical philosophy has

narrowed the perception of what counts as rigorous thought. Yet the survival and renewal of continental philosophy is essential, not merely as a matter of academic balance, but as the preservation of a tradition that insists on the inseparability of thought, history, culture, and life. Without it, philosophy risks reducing itself to technical problem-solving, losing sight of its vocation as the critical self-understanding of humanity.

Perović's writings, of which *Five Studies on Hegel* is a paradigmatic example, demonstrate why continental philosophy cannot be marginalized. His engagement with Hegel is not scholastic repetition, but a living confrontation with questions of consciousness, spirit, and history that remain urgent today. In clarifying Hegel's speculative system, Perović shows how contradiction, reconciliation, and totality are not abstract categories, but dimensions of human existence. His work embodies precisely the kind of speculative thinking that analytic philosophy, for all its virtues, often struggles to accommodate.

To present Perović's work in English is therefore to insert a distinctive regional voice into global philosophical conversations. It is to show that critical, systematic, and imaginative thought flourishes not only in traditional centers of intellectual power but also in contexts marked by political upheaval, cultural hybridity, and the challenge of peripheral positioning. Perović's place in this is significant: he demonstrates that philosophy from Southeastern Europe can not only interpret, but also contribute to the ongoing fate of continental thought.

In this sense, translating and disseminating Perović is more than an academic task; it is an act of philosophical responsibility. It affirms that the future of philosophy depends on plurality, on the dialogue between traditions, and on the refusal to let any single paradigm dictate the boundaries of thought. Perović's legacy, especially as a Hegelian thinker, belongs within this global conversation – not as a local curiosity, but as a vital voice in the struggle to preserve and renew the speculative dimension of philosophy in our time.

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MILENKO A. PEROVIĆ I KOHERENTNOST HEGELOVOG SISTEMA: REFLEKSIJE O *PET STUDIJA* O *HEGELU*

Sažetak: Iako naslov ovog rada upućuje na *Pet studija o Hegelu* Milenka A. Perovića, namera ovde nije da se ta knjiga prikaže, nego da se ponudi filozofska refleksija značaja i dalekosežnih implikacija ovog i drugih Perovićevih radova o Hegelu. Ovaj članak prvenstveno ispituje Perovićevih *Pet studija o Hegelu* kao doprinos proučavanjima Hegelove filozofije i kao svedočanstvo o ulozi kontinentalne filozofije u savremenoj misli. Ovo Perovićevo delo obrađuje pet središnjih tema: sistemski status *Fenomenologije duha*; prelaz od „praktičke filozofije” ka „filozofiji praksisa” kao umski život objektivnog duha; spekulativnu psihogenezu i filogenezu volje; suštinu i protivrečnosti savesti; kao i pojam ličnosti kod Kanta i Hegela. Svaka od ovih studija izdvaja jedan od ključnih problema u Hegelovom sistemu, ali zajedno one artikuliraju obuhvatniju tezu: da sloboda nije apstraktna pretpostavka, nego dijalektički proces ozbiljen u jeziku, institucijama, priznanju i povesi. Povrh svoje egzegetske vrednosti, te studije predstavljaju Perovićev širi filozofski projekat. Njegovi spisi pokazuju kako spekulativna misao može ostati živom izvan dominantne analitičke paradigme, i kako govor regionalnih tradicija – u ovom slučaju, intelektualnog prostora bivše Jugoslavije – može imati univerzalni odjek. Razjašnjavajući sistemsku koherentnost Hegelove filozofije i smeštajući je u kontekst izazova modernosti, Perović ponovo potvrđuje nužnost kontinentalne filozofije kao jednog oblika samorazumevanja koji se opire fragmentaciji i redukciji. U članku se tvrdi da prevođenje i širenje Perovićevih dela na engleski jezik nije samo naučni zadatak, nego i filozofska odgovornost, kako bi njegova interpretacija Hegela doprinela globalnim debatama o slobodi, subjektivnosti i budućnosti filozofije.

Ključne reči: kontinentalna filozofija, dijalektika, sloboda, Hegel, Milenko A. Perović, praksis

MILENKO A. PEROVIĆ UND DIE KOHÄRENZ DES HEGEL'SCHEN SYSTEMS: REFLEXIONEN ÜBER *FÜNF STUDIEN ZU HEGEL*

Abstract: Obwohl der Titel dieses Aufsatzes auf Milenko A. Perovićs *Fünf Studien zu Hegel* verweist, besteht das Ziel hier nicht darin, eine Rezension des Buches zu liefern, sondern vielmehr eine philosophische Reflexion über die Bedeutung und weitreichenden Implikationen dieses und anderer Perovićs Arbeiten zu Hegel zu bieten. Der Beitrag untersucht hauptsächlich Perovićs *Fünf Studien zu Hegel* sowohl als Beitrag zur Hegelforschung als auch als Stellungnahme zur Rolle der kontinentalen Philosophie im zeitgenössischen Denken. Dieses Werk von Perović

behandelt fünf zentrale Themen: den systematischen Status der *Phänomenologie des Geistes*; den Übergang von der „praktischen Philosophie“ zu einer „Philosophie der Praxis“ als das vernünftige Leben des objektiven Geistes; die spekulative Psychogenese und Philogenese des Willens; das Wesen und die Widersprüche des Gewissens; sowie den Begriff der Persönlichkeit bei Kant und Hegel. Jede Studie isoliert ein Schlüsselproblem im Hegel'schen System, doch zusammen artikulieren sie eine breitere These: dass Freiheit keine abstrakte Voraussetzung ist, sondern ein dialektischer Prozess, der sich in Sprache, Institutionen, Anerkennung und Geschichte verwirklicht. Über ihren exegetischen Wert hinaus illustrieren diese Studien Perovićs umfassenderes philosophisches Projekt. Seine Schriften zeigen, wie spekulatives Denken auch außerhalb des dominanten analytischen Paradigmas lebendig bleiben kann und wie regionale Traditionen - in diesem Fall der ehemals jugoslawische intellektuelle Raum – mit universeller philosophischer Resonanz sprechen können. Indem er die systematische Kohärenz von Hegels Philosophie verdeutlicht und sie in den Herausforderungen der Moderne verortet, bekräftigt Perović die Notwendigkeit der kontinentalen Philosophie als einer Form des Selbstverständnisses, die sich Fragmentierung und Reduktion widersetzt. Der Artikel argumentiert, dass die Übersetzung und Verbreitung von Perovićs Arbeiten ins Englische nicht nur eine wissenschaftliche Aufgabe, sondern auch eine philosophische Verantwortung ist, um sicherzustellen, dass seine Interpretation Hegels zu den globalen Debatten über Freiheit, Subjektivität und die Zukunft der Philosophie beiträgt.

Schlüsselwörter: Dialektik, Freiheit, Hegel, Kontinentale Philosophie, Milenko A. Perović, Praxis

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