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In Memoriam Hans Friedrich Fulda (1930–2023)

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Hans Friedrich Fulda was one of the most important Hegel scholars of post-war Germany. As early as 1965, with his ground-breaking book on the problem of an introduction to Hegel's *Science of Logic* (*Das Problem einer Einleitung in Hegels Wissenschaft der Logik*), Fulda effectively reshaped Hegel scholarship, not just by contributing to that specific field of enquiry but by redefining methodologically how to approach Hegel's philosophy as a whole. In his four monographs and over one hundred other works, he radicalized the immanent hermeneutics of philosophical texts, combatted various stereotypical 'Hegelianisms', and established the meticulous explication of Hegelian philosophy as a distinctive form of, and a genuine challenge to, systematic philosophy in general. In terms of the institutional academic context, Fulda assumed the position of full professor of philosophy in 1974 in Bielefeld and in 1981 in Heidelberg. Moreover, he served as the third President of the Internationale Hegel-Vereinigung from 1987 to 1996, succeeding Dieter Henrich, who had in turn succeeded the Vereinigung's founder, Hans-Georg Gadamer. Despite his many commitments and sometimes urgent health problems, he never tired of giving lectures and courses, supervising doctorates and generously supporting everyone who asked until the ripe age of 93. Throughout, he was highly respected and admired by colleagues, students, friends and family, not least as a person of impressive erudition, unstinting generosity and stimulating geniality.

Born in Hegel's hometown Stuttgart on 2 August 1930, Fulda's first contact with Hegelian philosophy came early. Already during his secondary education at a humanistically oriented seminary in Urach, near Tübingen (the town in which Hegel completed his own studies), his father recognized Fulda's philosophical inclination and presented him with his first complete edition of Hegel's works. However, philosophy was not destined to become Fulda's first choice of university subject. Instead, guided by his rational and down-to-earth nature and in view of the urgent needs of the time, he began studying law in Heidelberg in 1950.

Unfortunately, he soon contracted tuberculosis, which provoked an existential crisis and reorientation.

As a result, he switched to sociology in 1952 and moved on to Frankfurt in 1954 to continue his studies with Horkheimer and Adorno. There, however, he found himself attracted to Wolfgang Cramer, who, as Fulda would later note to his credit, was the one person in Frankfurt who embodied the ‘exemplary type of philosophical existence’ despite standing on the sidelines of the philosophical debates of the time. And yet, Adorno was to play a crucial role in Fulda’s career by decisively encouraging his shift of focus from sociology to philosophy. Adorno even offered to supervise his doctorate. Fulda was, nevertheless, anything but convinced by Adorno’s approach to philosophy—which he formally communicated to him in writing, in a ten-page letter, and verbally, in an hour-long conversation about this letter. ‘If you’re going to do it, do it properly’, Fulda thought at the time, as he would later report, and he returned to Heidelberg in 1957, this time following Cramer’s advice, to join Hans-Georg Gadamer.

Even so, Fulda was not entirely satisfied with Gadamer either. To him, Gadamer’s hermeneutics often remained ‘vague’, and there was still ‘too much’ Heidegger in Gadamer’s thought, as Fulda would later honestly admit. This time, however, Fulda found someone in Heidelberg who would profoundly fascinate him: Gadamer’s other brilliant student Dieter Henrich. It did not take long for a friendship based on mutual appreciation to develop between the two. Fulda emphasized this about half a century later in a speech on the occasion of his 80th birthday; in his even later philosophical autobiography, *Ins Denken ziehen*, Henrich, for his part, mentioned only one student by name and referred to him as a ‘friend’—Fulda. In 1960, he became Henrich’s inaugural academic assistant in Berlin.

Only a year later, Fulda successfully defended his doctoral thesis under the supervision of Gadamer and Henrich. However, it was not until 1965 that his thesis, thoroughly revised, emerged as the published book titled *Das Problem einer Einleitung in Hegels Wissenschaft der Logik*. To rework so thoroughly a doctoral thesis that had been given the highest mark by Gadamer, no less, was highly unconventional. Nevertheless, this was in line with Fulda’s work ethic and the academic standards he set for himself and would later set for his students. The result, moreover, seems to be exactly what Hegel scholarship had been waiting for at that time: a paradigm-shifting intervention into debates on ‘dialectics’ between left and right-wing ideologues, on Adorno’s critical approach, on Heidegger’s fundamental ontology and the supposed overcoming of metaphysics, on the mere historicization of Hegelian philosophy as promoted by the influential Heidelberg historian of philosophy Karl Löwith, as well as on Wilfrid Sellars’s opposing call for a systematic reconsideration of it. For Fulda not only explored a plethora of technical intricacies within Hegel’s philosophy in an unprecedented way but also undertook

profound philosophical inquiries into the philosophical and non-philosophical preconditions, the systematicity and the historicity of speculative truth as asserted in this philosophy. As a result, by skilfully striking at the heart of this metaphilosophical matter both within the domain of Hegel's philosophy and that of systematic philosophy in general, Fulda swiftly established himself as a global pioneer in Hegelian thought, garnering recognition within and beyond the community of Hegel scholarship.

In 1965, the year his first book was published, Fulda followed Henrich back to Heidelberg as his academic assistant, Henrich having been appointed as Löwith's successor. This was also the year in which the group informally known as the 'Heidelberg School' was founded by Henrich. At the time, Ernst Tugendhat was already working in Heidelberg, and Michael Theunissen was to be appointed Gadamer's successor shortly after. In this environment, and as the student movement became increasingly radical and violent in Heidelberg, Fulda's second monograph *Das Recht der Philosophie in Hegels Philosophie des Rechts* was published in 1968. In this concise text, Fulda argues against the notion of philosophical contemplation that defines philosophy exclusively as an end in itself and that disregards philosophy's practical significance for, and duty to, the context of civil society. Fulda points to the role that philosophy plays in support of a rational state; nonetheless, he emphasizes its counteractive role in times of political corruption as well.

Taken together, the first two monographs from 1965 and 1968 crystallize Fulda's understanding of philosophy, which had been formed before he began his philosophical studies and would not change for the rest of his life. For Fulda, philosophy is an intellectual activity, and it is indeed crucial that philosophy proceeds and justifies itself theoretically, but not just for the sake of pure theory. Instead, it has just as much practical significance and repercussions, which the philosopher must not lose sight of. Hegel called the unity of theoretical and practical cognition, which he thought ought to characterize his philosophy and all philosophy in general, 'speculative cognition' or 'absolute idea'—and Fulda would dedicate a great part of his work to this notion.

In 1969, Fulda obtained his *Habilitation* in Heidelberg with a thesis on the logical pragmatism of Charles Sanders Peirce. That it should have opened with 'Part I: Theoretical and Practical Behaviour' gives a glimpse of Fulda's philosophical perspective and how pragmatism was relevant for him. However, the work was never published. Its second part, dedicated to Peirce's theory of signs and logic, was never written. 'I quickly realized that there was much more to be gained from Hegel instead', Fulda once told me. Indeed, apart from a single essay, references to Peirce are rare in Fulda's published work. But the very act of condensing his extensive postdoctoral research into just a few brief mentions in his published

works speaks volumes about the great effort that went into every word and allusion in Fulda's writings.

One of Fulda's students from that time, Anton Friedrich Koch, who was also to become Fulda's distant successor in Heidelberg some decades later, still cannot hide his surprise that the celebrated Hegel scholar Fulda would follow Quine's textbook in teaching him logic and indeed make him not a Hegelian but a Kantian for life with courses on Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. And yet, this attitude was a natural fit with Fulda's overall honest and unpretentious manner, which students like Koch came to appreciate especially when dealing with other world-class philosophy professors and the pronounced bohemian atmosphere in Heidelberg at the time.

In 1974, Fulda became a full professor in Bielefeld. In 1981, however, he returned to Heidelberg as Theunissen's successor, and thus Gadamer's as well. Due to further changes in the Heidelberg Philosophy Department, academic commitments increased significantly, while Fulda's health deteriorated once more. Nevertheless, during this time he published further outstanding papers such as 'Ontologie nach Kant und Hegel' (1988) and, somewhat earlier, 'Hegels Dialektik als Begriffsbewegung und Darstellungsweise' (1978). During his presidency of the Internationale Hegel-Vereinigung (1987–96) and not without his involvement, the prestigious Hegel Prize of the City of Stuttgart was awarded to Niklas Luhmann, Donald Davidson and Jacques Le Goff. Fulda himself delivered the *laudatio* for Davidson and had it published in 1993 as a 40-page text together with two contributions by Davidson. The large Stuttgart Hegel Congress, for which Fulda was mainly responsible as President of the Hegel-Vereinigung, was dedicated to the topic of 'Concepts of Reason in Modernity'. The anthology accompanying that congress, containing over 50 contributions, was published in 1994.

Fulda was twice married, the second time to the physicist and philosopher Brigitte Falkenburg (full professor at the TU Dortmund 1997–2019), and was the father of three wonderful sons. His sons still admit to this day that they could never understand a word of their father's work. But, in turn, until the end of his life their father regarded them, and not his philosophical work, as his life's greatest achievement.

Fulda retired in 1995 but continued to live in Heidelberg. During this period, he taught courses almost continuously (until 2014), gave lectures and supervised numerous doctorates and postdoctoral projects. This was also Fulda's most productive phase, publishing essays such as 'Kants Postulat des öffentlichen Rechts (RL § 42)' (1997) and 'Krise und Untergang des südwestdeutschen Neukantianismus' (2009). His *magnum opus*, however, was his third monograph *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel*, published in 2003, eight years after his retirement and—remarkably—a full 22 years after it was commissioned by the publisher. This masterpiece of Hegelian scholarship incorporates numerous inquiries into

the core problems and central passages of Hegel's oeuvre, presenting a coherent overview of Hegel's philosophy. It illuminates how Hegel captured his time in thought by unifying logic, nature and spirit in terms of the 'proper' (*eigentlich*) metaphysics of the 'Idea', which is a metaphysics that in the aftermath of Kant does not fall back into pre-Kantian ontology although it provides methodologically sustainable responses to the theoretical and practical demands of reason.

After four decades in Heidelberg, Fulda moved to Berlin in 2021 to be closer to his wife and youngest son. There, he maintained vibrant connections with colleagues and graduate students, continuing to work on new and older essays until his death on 24 August 2023. There were still appointments scheduled for the months after his death. Fulda's fourth monograph, *Begriff und Begründung der Menschenrechte im Ausgang von Kant*, focusing on the notion and foundations of human rights from a Kantian perspective, to which he dedicated more than a decade, was published posthumously in March 2024.

Fulda's work covered almost all aspects of Hegel's philosophy. However, Fulda was far from a monolithic Hegelian. Apart from his pioneering texts on Kant's practical philosophy, to which he was profoundly committed, he authored notable studies on Rousseau, Jacobi, Marx, Rudolf Eucken, Peirce, Heinrich Rickert, Neo-Kantianism, Husserl, Pragmatism, Jaspers, Quine and Davidson. Fulda was no Hegel antiquarian who merely paraphrased Hegel's philosophy. Nor was he a Hegel apologist. He often posed objections to Hegel, questions to which Hegel would have no satisfactory answer or no answer at all. In one of his critiques, he notes that Hegel's entire philosophy of nature adopts a 'difficult to bear *ex cathedra* tone' and thus 'undoubtedly' falls short of its own systematic standards. Neither did Fulda try to reconstruct Hegel's philosophy by applying external means to make it sound more fashionable and attract a wider audience. Such attempts at modernization remained alien to him throughout his life.

Instead, Fulda was a systematic thinker well versed in the modern philosophical tradition who would use this foundation to thoughtfully address systematic questions posed by reason in the face of a perpetually changing reality. His dedication to the fundamental problems of systematic philosophy remained unstinting. (A further overview of such core problems of systematic philosophy according to Fulda is provided by three texts he contributed to prominent anthologies aiming to encapsulate Hegel's philosophy in the contemporary context: in 1973 at the behest of Joachim Ritter; in 2004 at the request of Christoph Halbig, Michael Quante and Ludwig Siep; and finally in 2023 at the invitation of Klaus Vieweg.) Accordingly, he approached Hegel's philosophy systematically as a challenge to itself and to us today. He did not merely take this philosophy to constitute Hegel's specific view but utilized it to concretely oppose an abstract philosophizing from an illusory 'view from nowhere'. This is also why Fulda was not interested in imposing his philosophical views and establishing his own school of 'Hegelianism'. The single

thing he was eager to pass on to his students was his passion for the meticulous examination of philosophical texts for the sake of truth and wisdom.

I came to meet Fulda as an undergraduate in 2006. He was already 76 years old at the time and was giving a class on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* together with Markus Gabriel, who was 26 years old and had obtained his doctorate just a year before. It was a sensational course where both lecturers energetically debated fascinating hidden subtleties in Hegel's text, all of them apparently crucial for the big picture of the *Phenomenology*. I think it was just after the third or fourth week of the semester that both lecturers agreed to add an additional weekly session so that they could more effectively articulate their views. I do not recall them achieving that fully though.

Fulda became the main examiner of my *Magister Artium*, and soon after the supervisor of my doctorate. During these years, three-hour advising sessions gradually became the norm. They always took place in the evenings in Fulda's penthouse flat at Albert-Ueberle-Straße 24. This is the parallel road to the famous *Philosophenweg* with a marvellous view of the Neckar River and Heidelberg's old town. Fulda was always very well-prepared and fully focused. One had to approach him with very precise questions, expecting to be drawn into a rigorous exploration of the ultimate consequences of one's ideas before he would (only partially) assent to them. I remember a very long conversation late in the evening with Fulda in his early 80s. He was in the midst of a characteristically never-ending, syntactically extremely complex sentence, when the telephone rang. He reluctantly interrupted his sentence, went with tunnel vision to the phone, came back two minutes later, repeated his last word, and simply continued as if he had never been interrupted. Sometimes, it was quite impressive to just watch Fulda doing philosophy. Later that evening, on my way home, my phone rang. It was Fulda. 'I've finally found the passage I was referring to earlier!' He had a few more brief comments to add.

I will never forget one of our last meetings a few years later, shortly before officially submitting my doctoral thesis. Fulda had already received and pored over my 400-page manuscript. The sheets were literally falling apart, and every single sentence was underlined and commented with three different coloured pens. Fulda began to talk just about the précis of the thesis, which was only about 5–6 pages long. The text was too 'technical' and 'exhausting to read' for someone who had gone through my thesis up to that point. The whole thesis resembled an 'arduous climb up a mountain'. That was 'fine'. But when one has been climbing for so long, one hopes for a rest, preferably in a place with a 'wonderful, wide view' that 'rewards' one for all the effort and 'motivates one to keep going'. 'And that's exactly the feeling you need to convey to your reader!'

That was Fulda: obsessed with the subject matter and enthusiastic about the details until the very end; strict and yet eminently sensible at the same time. Every encounter with him was an enrichment, an experience. Hegel's philosophy

served solely as the condition within which Fulda could facilitate this truly philosophical experience. And all fortunate enough to have engaged in it are endlessly grateful for the richness he shared with us.

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Nearly all of the writings of Hans Friedrich Fulda are available at the homepage of the Heidelberg University Library: <http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/volltextserver/view/schriftenreihen/sr-5.html>