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## Spirit and Language in Hegel's Philosophy of Absolute Spirit

Olga B. Panova<sup>a,\*</sup><sup>a</sup>*Tomsk State University, 36, Lenina Ave., Tomsk, 634050, Russia*

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### Abstract

The article examines Hegel's philosophy of language whose linguo-philosophical views were being formed in a general context of becoming of his philosophy of absolute spirit. The specificity of Hegel's understanding of a deeply spiritual language nature, at the root of which lies the key issues of the philosopher about the consubstantiality of Language and Spirit, is revealed. Particular attention is paid to the explanation of the significance of Hegel's "lessons" in current philosophical discourse and the need of their adoption for the development of human sciences in general.

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### 1. Introduction

Currently, philosophy, to a large extent, is developing under the influence of Language, and predominantly, bringing up to date and reflexing upon those problems, that were raised and intellectually scrutinized by the linguo-philosophical movement in the 20th Century that has recently passed (a "linguistic turnaround" in philosophy and humanitarian cognition in general). On the other hand, taking into account the enlargement of a problem field of linguistics and an openness of boundaries of linguistic cognition/knowledge, nowadays linguistic disciplines need the philosophical approach to Language and eliciting its fundamental basics, as happens with any other science in principle. Moreover, in the current era of communicative mobility of scientific space in general and intensive dynamics of cognitive processes and "energetic" nature of Language as it is demands a thorough crossdisciplinary investigation together with access to transdisciplinary projects. A successful accomplishment of these projects is

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\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +7-3822-529-695; +7-3822-544-308.

E-mail address: [olga\\_panova\\_1973\\_@mail.ru](mailto:olga_panova_1973_@mail.ru)

deemed possible only with the assumption of philosophical inquiry of this very nature: “*What is Language?*”, “*Due to what is its deep spiritual essence determined?*”, “*What is its creative potential and what are its creative abilities?*”.

H. G. Gadamer, whose life covers the whole century (1900-2002) at the turn of the XX-XXI centuries, was able to cover with his thought this problem in all of its global-historical scale. It is the problem that directly touched the moral basics of a human objective reality in the world. Moreover, he was able to designate a perspective of a philosophical view on Language for the next generations of scholars: “There is an actual correspondence to the notion of Spirit that goes beyond the subjectiveness of Ego. This is the notion of *Language*, which shifts more and more to the center of a modern philosophy for this very reason that a *Language phenomenon* compared with a Christian notion of Spirit derived by Hegel, gives its due to our completeness being eternal like Spirit and finite like any other event. To think that there is nothing to be learned from Hegel in our century of scientism, is a mistake. An end that Hegel puts to the global teaching of the world was not just our presumption: he is always something that science finds having in stock. And exactly, in not accepting any dogmatism including dogmatism of science me “*seems to me to be the most hidden and yet the most powerful foundation of our century*” (Gadamer, 1991: 26). Emphasizing the topicality of the idea of classical philosophy and mainly, *Hegel’s philosophy of absolute spirit*, that seriously influenced the formation of “sciences of language” in due time, and “sciences of culture and spirit” in general, Gadamer pointed out the future prospects of modern human sciences that had to develop in this exact way of universal spirituality that was emphasized by classicists. And nowadays the need to consider Language in these spiritual traditions set by philosophical thought and its emphasized global prospects that “lead us to the problem of Language in general, its apriority and transcendence” (Mikeshina, 2007: 326-327) is becoming apparent. Such a tendency to the reconstruction of understanding of the integral spiritual nature of Language has obviously teethered. Attention to the cultural-historical and mythopoetic memory of Language and its axiological dimension is being reinforced. The key problem of an interrelation of Language and Consciousness is considered differently, and more on the global-level. Attempts are undertaken to solve it, taking into account modern achievements of neoclassical epistemology and the emerging of new variants of an interpretation of Consciousness nature. Researchers of different academic fields talk about an interrelation of Language and other complex self-developing systems – Society, Culture, Science, Education. However, the primary focus is still predominantly on two functions of Language: cognitive and communicative. And the philosophical discourse unfolds around the consideration (and often this consideration is superficial) of several themes that are recognized today as prioritized, such as “Language and Consciousness”, “Language and Cognition” and “Language and Society”. But it leaves undeservedly aside *spiritual* origins of an interrelation of Language and Culture.

In the arisen situation, the demand to come back again to the legacy of classical philosophy, that fundamentally always remains invaluable, is felt more and more. In that context, it is worth referring exactly to the philosophical writings of H.W.F. Hegel who concentrated in himself all of the general achievements and ideas of the classical era and determined the future prospects of a formation of philosophical and linguo-philosophical thought. It is significant that a permanent reference to the linguo-philosophical views of Hegel is observed in global Hegel science, particularly at the current stage of its development (Vernon, 2007; Pinkard, 2012, 2009, 2002). Nowadays, it is also important for us to “read” with the most careful attention those pages of his writings which are devoted to his reflections on Language and show the specificity of Hegel’s philosophical reflection on Language *in the aspect of his “spirituality” exactly*, and in the context of “sciences of culture and spirit”.

## **2. The spiritual nature and spiritual origins of Language in the framework of G.W.F. Hegel philosophy**

Hegel has not left any works dedicated specifically to comprehensive conceptual judgement of the nature of Language (although his separate reflections on Language are scattered in his major works based on lectures he gave throughout his life), but his presence in the course of linguo-philosophical thought of his era is beyond any doubt. His reflection on Language develops in accordance with “*classical*” modern European philosophy. At the same time *Hegel’s own* understanding of Language is subject to his very own philosophical concept of *Absolute Spirit*, which is deservedly considered the crowning achievement of the pursuits of philosophy and the culmination of the philosophical thought of Modern history. Thus, belonging to the common philosophical discourse of the era, Hegel chases the *idea* of Language, trying to perceive it in its essence and, most importantly, in its metahistorical sense,

the consubstantiality of *Spirit* and *Language*, which according to Hegel are interrelated and inextricable. This is why in order to understand the spiritual nature of *Language*, which can only be done in the comprehensive philosophical context of the paramount *Spirit ↔ Language* interconnection, we need to consider the concept central to the entire system of Hegel's philosophy – *the Absolute Spirit*.

## 2.1. *Absolute Spirit – the central concept of Hegel's philosophy*

### 2.1.1. *Hegel's historical approach to philosophical knowledge*

Hegel's philosophy of Absolute Spirit was inspired by the entire spiritual culture of the world, it has incorporated the thousands year old Oriental Wisdom – Egyptian, Chinese, Indian (despite his critical treatment of the Orient, which, in his opinion, produced religious and ethical but not philosophical teachings, the philosopher paid homage to its role in the history of the Spirit), ancient Greek philosophical discoveries, Hebrew prophecies and Christian revelations; it was influenced by the medieval religion and philosophy and the medieval "Summa Theologica". Its emergence had been slowly and gradually prepared by the entire world philosophy, which it subsequently reflected. Hegel's approach to philosophical knowledge was *historical* in its principle. He considered the history of philosophy – not the one that superficially depicts the separate disconnected discoveries and achievements of the philosophical thought, but the one that reveals the inherent interconnection between ideological trends, shows the most important milestones in assuming by philosophy of itself and reflects the dialectical logic of the historical-philosophical process – to be *essentially* the field of philosophy, the fundamental basis of the entirety of philosophical knowledge (Hegel, 1993: 72-73). Hegel saw philosophy as a permanently developing comprehensive whole (Ibid: 91), which at every stage of its becoming comes as a result of a world-wide historical process aimed at the comprehension of *the Absolute* (which must not be confused with the acquiring of some absolute knowledge). This "*Absolute is the spirit...* The supreme definition of the absolute is not that it is spirit in general, but that it is the Spirit absolutely *manifests to itself, absolutely self-conscious, the infinitely creative Spirit.* – To find this definition and to comprehend its content was, it can be said, the absolute tendency of all education and philosophy. It was the point on which all religion and science turned, and World history is to be comprehended on the basis of this point alone" (Hegel, 1971). For this reason Hegel intended to base his philosophy upon this principle and present it as *the moment* of self-knowing of the Spirit through the development of the human knowledge, *the moment* of historical development of philosophy including all contradictions of this development, trying to embrace the dynamics of philosophical thought and demonstrate the dynamic and changeable character of the object of its cognition as a comprehensive whole. Now, when epistemology shifts its focus of interest from the unquestioning acceptance of "established" knowledge to the historical process of its establishment, Hegelian scholars pay special attention to Hegel's faculty – namely to his deep understanding of the historical dynamics of establishing philosophical knowledge and of the necessity of such dynamics at every stage of the development of philosophical thought (Motroshilova, 2010: 38, 46).

### 2.1.2. *Historical origins of the philosophy of the Absolute Spirit*

In terms of history of philosophy Hegel took particular interest in these periodically occurring exaltations of thought in its pursuit of the Absolute, in its approaching the Absolute, its ascension to the summit of Spirit wholeness. To such prominent philosophies – when philosophical thought follows the Sophian ideals, when it is guided not only by the love for the truth, but also for the Pre-wisdom of the Absolute (which is present always in everything and everywhere in its wholeness) and therefore becomes able to embrace it in its integrity, grasp it in its triune of the True, Good and Beauty, – he ascribed the Sophiological philosophies such as Platonism, Neoplatonism, which is the last ancient philosophy, and "summas" of medieval philosophers. From this standpoint he particularly singles out the golden age of *Alexandrian philosophy* – a long period of convergence of Neoplatonism and Christianity, when there has been a shift towards the universum of the spirit, the universal spiritual world view, when the spiritual potential of World Culture started to be realized as essential to the emergence and formation of philosophy, when philosophy is viewed as inseparable from the world's (and human's) spiritual experience and the

search for ethic, aesthetic, religious, creative and moral knowledge and rational cognition is seen as tightly bound to its spiritual origins, comprehensiveness of the Spirit and spiritual wholeness of human personality (Hegel, 1993: 150).

The Greek λόγος, taken in a sense of rationality, which, nevertheless, reflects the entire *Sophian* potential of ancient Greek culture and ancient world culture on the whole and which has imbibed and preserved forever the Greek “love for wisdom (Sophia)” (φιλο-σοφίη), love for the true, beautiful, right, just, good, permanent and rational, was incorporated into the Christian context and reinterpreted by Christian Sophiology and – as a result – rediscovered and reacquired its spiritual wholeness. *The spiritual nature of Logos*, arising from the Sophian “potentiality”, is a syncretic wholeness, integrating three principles – cognitive, ethic and aesthetic, which correspond to the intellectual values of Truth, Goodness and Beauty and have three spheres of realization – science, morals and art, tied into the unity by the creative power of Love. This Alexandrian convergence of Greek and Christian cultural traditions has significantly changed the course of philosophical thought on the whole and the very “logic” of philosophy: it has become obvious that one can ascend to the upper spiritual spheres not only through rational cognition, but also through faith, love, creative impulse, aesthetic contemplation, existential experience, and spiritual practices. In its search for new ways to approach Absolute philosophical thought, it is now guided not only by the rule of reason, but also by the truths of Love, Goodness, Beauty and Faith, employing all its resources – reason, feelings, will, intuition etc., bringing together science, art and fine arts, religious experience, ethic studies into a Single Whole. “The Spirit is subjective, it is self-knowing; it exists only when it knows its subject as *a whole*, - and its subject is itself, - and when it is *a whole* itself and for itself” (Ibid).

Hegel sees the contemporary epoch of inceptive European idealism as the successor of the epoch of Alexandrian philosophy (as if drawing a “historical vertical” between them), when philosophical thought is put into similar historical-cultural contexts (Ibid: 148). He points to the philosophical perspective opening in such times when the very “*moment*” and the possibility of *spiritual* maturation of philosophical logos are being inherited. This is why, devising the logic of his philosophy in the epoch of transcendental idealism and, accordingly, giving priority to Reason, Hegel proceeds from *the spiritual wholeness of Logos*. “*The idea that unites all the rest is beauty in its highest Platonic sense. I am now convinced that the highest act of reason, that in which it embraces all ideas is an aesthetic and that truth and goodness are siblings only in beauty.* The philosopher must possess just as much aesthetic power as a poet ... *The philosophy of Spirit is an aesthetic philosophy.* One can in no way be ingenious, one *can not even argue about history ingeniously* without aesthetic sense” (Hegel, 1956). This idea of Spirit wholeness, stated as early as in Hegel’s early fragments and philosophical essays, holds true for the philosopher years later: *art, religion and philosophy* are the necessary and equally important forms of the Absolute Spirit self-revelation, philosophy being the highest form and their speculative synthesis. It is *philosophical* reflection that is granted the supreme status – the *philosophy* of art (aesthetics), *philosophy* of religion and *philosophy* proper (philosophical reflection of the historical-philosophical process) comprise together *the philosophy of Absolute Spirit*, i.e. the highest creative act of philosophical self-reflecting knowing by the Absolute Spirit of itself as a harmonious *whole* existing in three states.

### 2.1.3. *The Absolute Spirit as a subject substance, an arche and origin of all*

Hegel’s Absolute Spirit is a “universe” philosopheme comprising and synthesizing practically all of the fundamental meta-categories elaborated by the world philosophical tradition. This philosopheme indicates on the absolute creating arche and origin that underlies in all and supposing the entire World’s diversity in its development, and some basic spiritual substance, which apprehend and express a major metaphysical supreme sense of manifestation of transcendental, eternal, and ideal in real, finite and temporal. Here are visible the Dao of eastern philosophy and Logos-fire of Heraclitus, the First One in the unity of Truth-Goodness-Beauty of Plato, the Prime Mover of Aristotle, Sophia-wisdom, God-Personality of Christianity, Gnoseological Subject of philosophers-classics, Life of life and many other. This is Absolute Totality that realizes itself, goes out from itself and comes back to itself, that surpasses everything and includes everything in itself at the same time. This is eternal, self-sufficient, unite and the only authentic metaphysical reality. It is Absolute Eternity that, however, is not limited just with “unearthly”, supernal existence in relation to the World, but is situated all over the World and along with that in the World itself as its secret truth. It covers and pierces the whole Universum. This is ultimate finite existing

Absolute Unity, which is universal and all-pervading – “*existence in and for itself and the unity of spirit as objectivity and of spirit as ideality and concept, which essentially and actually is and forever produces itself, spirit in its absolute truth, - this is Absolute Spirit*” (Hegel, 1971). Therefore, the Aspect of Substantiality should be emphasized primarily. Hegel’s Absolute is allotted with a deep ontological sense. This is precisely Absolute Spirit that is a substantial first principle that underlies in everything existing. But Absolute Spirit is not just a substance, but at the same time is a Subject, an absolute substance-subject, as far as it has an ability of self-actualization and self-cognition. This is self-sufficing Absolute subject, that realizes itself. This is Universal Dialectic Sense, Absolute self-actualization that has a deal only with itself. And only in this absolute subjectivity it can just be an absolute substantial first principle. Absolute Spirit is a self-realization as Absolute Spirit by the Absolute Spirit. For Hegel, this is truly absolute metaphysical reality. “Spirit is in everything that is in the sky and on earth. It cognizes itself. There is nothing different for Spirit” (Hegel, 1971).

#### *2.1.4. Historicity of Spirit. Absolute spirit as a creative evolution*

According to Hegel, Absolute spirit, being self-identical, shouldn’t be regarded as something stable, static, steady and permanent. Based on the fundamental metaphysical theses of Heraclitus (which stated the most important changes in metaphysics from existence to formation), Hegel regards it as historical, interpreting the Absolute itself as dialectical process. (Hegel, 1993: 286-287). The Absolute spirit is considered to be “absolute activity”, it is an active creative element, or, more precisely, creative activity. It permanently moves and develops, and in its self-development creates the whole Universe like the world of continuous formation. “Spirit is not quiescent, it is rather something absolutely restless, pure activity, denial or ideality of all firm determinations of mind. It’s not anything complete before its appearance, but it is real only due to definite forms of necessary self-disclosure” (Hegel, 1974-1977, Vol. 3: 9). Historicity, variability, process, formation, activity, creativity, evolution - these are fundamental characteristics of the Absolute Spirit as metaphysical reality, according to Hegel. Thus, Hegel’s Philosophy of Absolute Spirit is a dialectical philosophy. According to Hegel, the history of Spirit as a process of its creation and self-knowledge, its historical evolution includes not only its “forward” motion. This “forward” motion is a return to the origins, to “initial and true which determines the beginning and which in fact gives birth to the beginning (Hegel, 1970-1972: 127). True self-knowledge of Spirit, at the same time, is a process of its immersion in itself or deepening. It inevitably assumes the memory of origins. Aimed at self-realization, the Absolute Spirit simultaneously turns back inward, to innermost depth. Thus, it is a base of its own formation, of its own origin and result. And regarded as an absolute result, Spirit for Hegel is a first principle, fundamental metaphysical thesis. “The other side of its formation is history. As the completion of a spirit is to know perfectly what it is and its substance, this knowledge is its turning back inward where it leaves its present existence and passes its shaping to memory. Aim, absolute knowledge or Spirit, being aware of itself as a spirit, have to pass through spirit memories, how they exist in it and how they organize their kingdom “Only from the chalice of this realm of spirits foams forth for Him his own infinitude” (F. Schiller) (Hegel, 2000: 408-409). Due to its infinitude Hegel’s Absolute Spirit becomes ontologically initial, the only true metaphysical reality, “the highest truth of any existence”.

#### *2.1.5. The culture of mankind as a creation of the Absolute Spirit. Spiritual fundamentals of Culture*

In this wide spiritually philosophical context ontological fundamentals of culture understanding are deeply spiritual: ontology of culture – ontology of spirit. The Culture of Mankind is created by the Absolute Spirit, created infinitely and continuously, its beginnings and ends are primordially spiritual; Spirit is an inside constituent creative nuclear, its formative power, its idea, origin, aim and prospect, substance and sense of its existence.

Due to Hegel’s philosophical conception: firstly, Culture is a spiritual creation (building), Kultur – bildung (“bilden” – to form, to create, to organize; crucial concept of Hegel’s philosophy and all German classic) in its initial dialectical sense; secondly, in understanding of its all possible shades of meaning, the whole fullness and richness of its semantic potential. Culture is a creation of self-conscious and self-creative spirit; a process of its development and fulfillment is a process of spiritual World perfection and manifestation; growing in spiritual world, increasing in the level of spiritual potential of the world, forming of spiritual World Image. More precisely, Culture is a creation, organically including the birth process, which is the integral part of its universal, global spiritual

development, perfection, self-knowledge and self-consciousness of Human as spiritual being, becoming a Personality in this spiritual space. Culture is a process of spiritual and historical development of individual human personalities, societies, nations, Human and Human Race as a whole. Culture is a spiritually anthropological (theo-anthropological) formation, cumulative creation of Absolute/Spirit-World-Human.

## *2.2. Language as a possibility of self-expression of Absolute Spirit*

### *2.2.1. Language and Spirit consubstantiality. The Spirituality of Language*

In the light of the above characteristics of Absolute Spirit, indicating its self-sufficiency, Hegel's Absolute Spirit is not closed in itself, its main point is in self-revelation (Hegel, 1977, Vol. 3: 29-30). The self-knowing Absolute Spirit in the historical process of self-knowledge and self-creation as World-creation finds its self-expression and is capable of turning into another state – “this highest element is language – present existence, the being having self-consciousness”. As single self-consciousness exists in language, it also exists as a global infection; an absolute detachment of existence is simultaneously fluidity and unity; language is a soul existing as a soul. Thus, the Deity, that has language as an element of its shaping, is a complete piece of art in itself, having pure activity in its present existence, which resisted it, existing as a thing”. Thus, Hegel regards language as the manifestation of Spirit and its other state, the most important form of its creative activity, the way of its self-expression, that it needed for self-knowledge. By means of Language, the Spirit creates its own spiritual reality, where it finds itself, and, for the first time, corresponds to itself. Therefore, Language is deeply spiritual, because it possesses all properties of the Spirit and all the qualities inherent in the Spirit. Spirituality of Language is not one of its characteristics, but its essence and being. Language is a Spirit. Here is the first and crucial point that gives us Hegel's philosophical heritage concerning Language. It is a top of classical philosophy of Modern Time.

### *2.2.2. Language is a historical phenomenon. The way of self-revelation of the Absolute Spirit in the process of its evolution and creation of culture*

Language as well as Spirit is a historical phenomenon: it preserves the memory of Spirit, it captures the whole history of Spirit – spiritual evolution of the Universe and spiritual development of mankind. The forms of self-revelation of Absolute Spirit – art, religion, philosophy – are different ways of its verbal expression and different historical steps of maintaining maturity by the language in creative process of spiritual evolution. The historical process of evolution, a period of “maturation”, perfection of language, maintaining of maturity through expression of Spirit, - Hegel connects with increasing in its capability in abstraction; abstraction from concrete image to notion, the elevation above sensual things, from single to global either of individual or collective consciousness. The highest step of language maturity is maintaining a logically conceptual level. “Logical” should be regarded in Hegel's way, taking into account maturity, spiritual integrity and esthetical fullness of Logos and Spirituality of the Language as a whole. By this it is meant not just the level of formation by the Language of logically-strict forms to express thoughts more precisely and complex logically-grammatical constructions, abstract notions and categories, philosophical abstraction, but demonstration of its ability to express absolute, ideal, valuable, true beginning in a whole, to create spiritual space – “kingdom of names”, “to name the divinities” highlighting the name as its true. Now we have true existence of Spirit as of existence in general. .By means of the name a thing is born as “I am”. This is the first creative power of spirit. Adam named all the things. It is a right of the highest power and first possession of the whole nature or its creation inside of the spirit. Logos is mind, the essence of things and speech, thing and broadcasting and category. Man names things as his things and lives in spiritual nature, in his world. World and nature is not kingdom of images inwardly released, that don't have existence, - it is the kingdom of names...awakening is a kingdom of images...The Spirit acts as a consciousness. But now his image is true” (Hegel, 1956). “The words: eternal, sacred, absolute, infinite lift the person up. They are visible Greek gods, which are available to citizens of Northern countries like abstractions, like words in the ideal form...This knowledge gives the person back his “I” and his freedom...” (Ibid). The priority receives the logical, ideal, axiological, absolute and spiritual dimension of the Language, specifying the high level of the Culture of Mankind, organizing the Culture as World of Spirit and something that corresponds to the sphere of philosophy, testifying the possibility of the language

to inform about the truth by means of a verbal-conceptual form of philosophical abstraction. The Culture uses sublime language.

### 3. Conclusion

Therefore, the philosophical reflection of H.W.F. Hegel directed at the Language was carried out in the general epochal *classical* movement of the modern European philosophy of his time. His linguo-philosophical views are reflected in his main writings, which comprise together the “Encyclopedia of the philosophical sciences” that represent his philosophy of absolute spirit. The philosopher who initially set a task to elicit the Language *idea* itself, proved *consubstantiality of Language and Spirit* and showed the need and importance of Language in the process of self-cognition, self-creating and self-actualization of Spirit in main forms of its self-revelation (art, religion and philosophy), and its place in the spiritually-intellectual and cultural evolution of Mankind. Hegel prioritizes precisely the essential in Language – its “spirit”, “nature”, “logical basis”, «creative essence» and not its external formal manifestations. A deep understanding of *spiritual origins* and *spiritual nature* of Language is what should be adopted and taken over from the philosophical legacy of Hegel in the modern era keeping in mind that the “science of language” has always been an organic part of the “sciences of culture and spirit” and taking it into account in the prospect of establishing and developing modern human sciences.

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