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Introduction: How Can We Think of Hegel as Emancipatory?

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Hegel never made any claim that he wanted to change the world. Hegelians since Hegel have been a different matter. This history is what makes the emancipatory project ascribed to Hegel by contemporary Hegelians such an interesting trajectory in continental theory and thought. For Hegel arguably did change something; a procedure for thinking and, perhaps even, action. A combination of thinking and thinking-in-action has seen Hegel resurrected in recent years and taken up by many who purport that Hegel silently, implicitly makes nudges towards emancipation and who is more than just the other-side to Kant.

Might such a reading of Hegel make Hegel less Hegelian? Or in our efforts to traverse Hegel, might an emancipatory reading offer another way into Hegel? One of the most admired sections in *Phenomenology* is his writing on the master and the slave as a way of establishing and entering into self-consciousness. Hegel asks an important question: what is it that I need from the other in order to receive recognition? Moreover, what is it by the existence of another which threatens this recognition that I crave? Hegel purports that such recognition is not one of mutual exchange but

combative, conflictual and unequal; a recognition which is purported on interdependence. How is it then that the slave can become free, one might ask? Hegel's suggestion is that it is not necessarily via the release from the Master, but rather when the slave retreats into her consciousness; a retreat which cannot be divorced from its historical condition. Thus, a slave is truly free when the slave remains in all consciousness, a slave. That is, being a slave is not the essential reality because of the chains which harness freedom, but rather, a slave is free simply because the chains no longer matter as one can find consolation in the mind. There is a contradiction at the core of such freedom, one which completely rejects external reality and instead attends to the propensity and detachment of thought rather than to recognition. This is where McGowan's thesis on Hegel's emancipation begins. The question McGowan raises is, as stated via the title of his book, of *Emancipation after Hegel*; that is, not only *can* emancipation be rethought after Hegel but even more pressing, *should* it?

The contributors to this special issue on *Reading Todd McGowan's 'Emancipation after Hegel'* respond in various ways and take up positions regarding not only Hegel and his thinking, but whether it has emancipatory potential, as McGowan purports it does.

We thank the contributors to this issue, all of whom were invited by the editors and as interlocutors to the possibility of an emancipatory Hegel.