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A Philosophical Inquiry into the Ideas of the Forgotten German Self-Thinker August Ludwig Hülsen (1765-1809)

The purpose of my research is to discuss the works of the forgotten German philosopher August Ludwig Hülsen (1765-1809) within the context of their contemporary philosophical debate. I attempt to prove that Hülsen holds an innovative philosophical position that constitutes a historically relevant contribution to the understanding of early German Idealism.

In part one I analyze Hülsen's only book: *Prüfung der von der Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin aufgestellten Preisfrage: Was hat die Metaphysik seit Leibniz und Wolf für Progressen gemacht?* (Altona, 1796). The essay addresses the issue of the historical progress of metaphysics since Leibniz and Wolf. I however discuss it in the context of both Reinhold's approach to the history of philosophy, and Fichte's early idealism. My hypothesis is that the importance of Hülsen's essay for the history of German Idealism is this: (1) Hülsen is the first German idealist philosopher to articulate a systematic approach to the history of philosophy. Hülsen accomplishes his innovative project by developing and applying the main epistemic conclusions of Fichte's early idealism to the field of the history of philosophy. (2) Hülsen's system is an idealistic attempt to reformulate the basic premises of Reinhold's Kantian approach to the history of philosophy. Through the idealistic reformulation of Reinhold's thesis, Hülsen accomplishes the following two major tasks: (A) the scientific overcoming of Reinhold's Kantian concept of historical progress, and (B) a scientific solution to the problem of philosophical controversies. According to that, Hülsen's reformulation is an attempt at a scientific systematization of a new fraternal epoch of reason in which no philosophical disputes are possible. For this reason, I conclude that Hülsen's essay plays a significant

historical role in the consummation of the idealistic overcoming of Reinholdian philosophy. In part two, I discuss Hülsen's first contribution to Fichte and Niethammer's *Philosophisches Journal: Philosophische Briefe an Hrn. v. Briest in Nennhausen. Erster Brief. Ueber Popularität in der Philosophie* (1797). This essay, I argue, constitutes an appendix to Hülsen's book. In it, Hülsen offers us for the first time an example of the reconciling character of his philosophical approach by articulating a scientific subordination (or exhaustive completion) of two opposed philosophical systems.

Hülsen also develops a theory by which a rational being that is in possession of science, *Wissenschaft* for Hülsen --a philosophic-historical product grounded on practical conscious self-reflection-- can attain a higher moral perfectibility (self-harmony) in its natural social context. Hülsen's argument proves that all that remains for man after the discovery of science is the unending accomplishment of duty within his natural social context. Hülsen so offers us, I argue, a complement to the scientific theory of the *Prüfung*.

In part three, I analyze the second article that Hülsen publishes in Fichte and Niethammer's *Philosophisches Journal: Ueber den Bildungstrieb* (1798). I discuss Hülsen's article in the context of Fichte's drive theory from *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (1794-5). I argue that through the postulation of a production-drive Hülsen attempts to reformulate Fichte's drive theory (*Trieblehre*). I claim that Hülsen attempts an innovative scientific subsuming of nature under man's ethical power (freedom). I discuss this subsuming procedure as an attempt to harmonize man's existence through an overcoming of all possible outer determination (contradiction), that is, as an attempt to affirm man's free self-determination within the sphere of nature. Hülsen's reformulation, I conclude, constitutes an innovative attempt to overcome Fichte's concept of practical progression as an unending striving attempt to overcome the counter-striving force of a previously given *Not-I*.

In part four, I analyze Hülsen's first contribution to the romantic journal *Athenaeum*. The article I discuss is *Ueber die natürlche Gleichheit der Menschen* (1799). I analyze Hülsen's article in the context of Rousseau's discourse *On the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men* (1755). I discuss Hülsen's essay as an idealistic attempt to refute and overcome Rousseau's arguments for positive inequality. The main points I address are these: [1] I discuss the central role that both Hülsen and Rousseau attribute to human law in the institutionalization of inequality. I argue that both thinkers agree on the fact that state law subsumes the individual under an artificial and immoral context of heteronomous action. [2] I discuss Hülsen's solution for the above-mentioned problem. I claim that Hülsen holds an argument for the autonomous, social and

equalitarian nature of men, which constitutes in fact an idealistic (scientific) attempt to reformulate and refute Rousseau's argument for the heteronomous, self-interested and unequal character of socialized men. [3] I conclude that Hülsen's thesis is in fact an original attempt to deduce the necessary abolishment of all positive forms of right. I claim that Hülsen's argument has a significant historical importance. For Hülsen is the first German idealist philosopher to understand the state as based on natural right in the sense that the individual operates in a free context of action in which equality and fraternalism appear as necessary features.

In part five, I analyze Hülsen's second contribution to the romantic journal *Athenaeum: Natur-Betrachtungen auf einer Reise durch die Schweiz* (1800). I claim that in this essay Hülsen offers us a renewed version of one of his central topics of interest: the harmonic relation between man and nature. I argue that Hülsen's renewed approach is concerned with the following two major innovations: [1] in the previous three essays, the existing harmony between man and nature emerges after we reformulate their relation through scientific judgment. I argue that this situation changes in *Natur-Betrachtungen*. Harmony is now the result of an aesthetic feeling of our own freedom in its unending creation of nature. What distinguishes *Natur-Betrachtungen* from the previous essays is that man is not constantly required to grasp himself (through its faculty of judgment) as the unending creator of nature. After one liberates his eyes for the first time, harmony does not require the assistance of judgment, for it emerges in an immediate way. For this reason, I claim that in *Natur-Betrachtungen* Hülsen makes a definitive move from mediated to immediate harmony. [2] I claim that in this essay Hülsen offers us an innovative aesthetic theory. In it, the product of the free acting subject, namely, nature appears under a new form, that is, the form of beauty. I argue that Hülsen identifies his concept of beauty with the above-mentioned concept of immediate harmony, for he conceives beauty as an immediate feeling of harmonic identity between man's free/eternal productive activity and its appearance under the form of nature. I also focus on Hülsen's aesthetic theory from the angle of mystic/transcendent revelation. I claim that in *Natur-Betrachtungen* the harmonic feeling of nature's beauty reveals itself as the ultimate truth, for it emerges through us as a manifestation of God's eternal being. For this reason, I also argue the following two things: (1) the immediate (free) observation of beauty emerges here as a sort of mystic/transcendent experience; and (2) discursive thinking appears as an insufficient means for seeking true knowledge. According to that, written philosophy cannot have any other use than a propaedeutic one.