The Trap and the Unavoidable. Nietzsche and Hegel on the Politics of History

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Abstract

This article explores Nietzsche and Hegel’s philosophies of history, aiming to defend the latter from the powerful and challenging critiques of the first. It does so by analyzing the strengths and also the weaknesses of both positions, and concludes that Nietzsche’s rebuke of Hegelianism is, despite some interesting and fertile insights, hasty and, up to a certain point, even shallow.

Keywords: becoming, dialectic, burden, mask, truth.

Introduction

Both declared admirers of ancient Greek philosophy, Friedrich Nietzsche and G.W.F. Hegel produced philosophies as different as possible, both in relation to one another and to the epistemological model they claim to have been inspired by. But, if Hegel starts with the Greeks in order to consolidate a type of philosophizing that is invariably modern, Nietzsche proposes a re-actualization of the Greek cultural tragic in the attempt to marginalize and ultimately overcome modernity, understood by him as a humanist dissolution of authenticity, as a hypocrite and partisan inversion of Greek axiology in which weakness, cowardice and

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pathology become benchmarks in the detriment of power, courage and the ludic-bellicose health of the ancients, warriors and philosophers alike.

A disciple of Schopenhauer, whom he did not imitate, but continued in new and fertile directions, Nietzsche borrows from him the philosophy of will, but renounces the elements of Kantianism that it contained in order to reinvent it as will to power. Although he admires and assimilates Schopenhauer’s pathos, intransigency and nonconformism, Nietzsche criticizes his master on the grounds that he is too much influenced by Kantian morality, on its turn a product of Christian morality (Nietzsche 1989; Nietzsche 2016). As far as Hegel is concerned, I consider that the author of the Untimely meditations referred to him especially through Schopenhauer’s interpretation grid, without seriously and systematically reading Hegel himself, and thus without being properly introduced to the richness and subtlety of nuances that his works contain. Taking into account this shortcoming, Nietzsche still manages to advance important and lively critics to Hegel’s philosophy of history, and even to Hegel’s ontology on the whole, despite the metaphoric and aphoristic shape of the arguments he makes use of, arguments that resemble to a certain point the involuntary lyricism produced by the excessive abstractness that characterizes Hegel’s texts.

Did Nietzsche contribute to the dissolution of Hegelianism in late 19th century Germany and also in the 20th century? Definitely, but we have to take into account, in the first case, that we are taking into consideration a reified Hegelianism, extrapolated in the cult of institutions and nationalism, while in the second case Hegel is either distortedly included in Soviet Marxism, as a simple and not fully rational anticipator of Marx, or mired in the existentialism of Martin Heidegger, Jean Paul-Sartre, respectively marginalized by post-structuralists such as Michel Foucault or Alain Badiou. Hegel’s re-actualization in the works of Alexandre Kojève or Jean Hyppolite in 1950-1960’s France represents an important moment in the continental philosophy of the 20th century, but it lacked, however, notable results.

In this article, I propose an analysis of Nietzsche’s critiques to Hegel’s philosophy of history, which underlines the entire Hegelian philosophical system. I will advance the hypothesis according to which Hegel’s philosophy of history is placed in a delicate position due to the
accuracy and the abrasiveness of Nietzsche’s own philosophy of history, but it is capable eventually to withstand this challenge, although only up to a certain point. We must not forget that Nietzsche is criticizing a Hegelianism that would have been probably repudiated by Hegel himself; in the last instance, Nietzschean philosophy can be understood as a fertile contradiction of Hegelianism and also as a possibility to reinvent the latter in a more dynamic and actual form. Hegel’s maturity and Nietzsche’s rebellion are not at all incompatible; moreover, they must be approached speculatively, as a pair of moments within a process of becoming that enriches both of them, despite Nietzsche’s categorical rejection of dialectic. As Hegel coerced theology to become more and more rational within the parameters of the philosophy of history, Nietzsche’s nihilism can also be considered an esthetical moment indispensable to a plenary re-actualization of Hegelianism within contexts and challenges that are entirely new. Old and dusty, the Hegelian truth must be taught once again to adopt a more assertive stance in order to fit the new Zeitgeist. After all, the autocracy and the unilaterality of truth can become boring and even unbearable (Nietzsche 1989). A truth without enemies is for Nietzsche what a truth without contradictions is for Hegel: something dead, incapable of going beyond itself, isolated abstractedness destined to wither and disappear in the absence of spirit: “contradiction is the root of all movement and life; it is only in so far as something has a contradiction within it that it moves, is possessed of instinct and activity” (Hegel 2010a, 382).

**Freedom from history: Nietzsche**

Nietzsche’s conception on history is to be found in a compact way in one of his most important works with sociological influences. I am referring of course to his *Untimely meditations*. Here, he advances the hypothesis of history as a plenary manifestation of life, as a critical instrument inadequately perceived as a science centered on the study of the past. History is thus called to position itself in favor of life, not in favor of death, respectively to reinvent itself as an ahistorical creative force; any history that stagnates in the past will confront itself, even if it elucidates
important problems and discovers unsuspected truths, with a depletion, an exhaustion of its vital capacities oriented rather towards transforming than understanding the world.

History become pure, sovereign science would be for mankind a sort of conclusion of life and a settling of accounts with it. The study of history is something salutary and fruitful for the future only as the attendant of a mighty new current of life, of an evolving culture for example, that is to say only when it is dominated and directed by a higher force and does not itself dominate and direct. Insofar as it stands in the service of life, history stands in the service of an unhistorical power, and, thus subordinate, it can and should never become a pure science such as, for instance, mathematics is. The question of the degree to which life requires the service of history at all, however, is one of the supreme questions and concerns in regard to the health of a man, a people or a culture. For when it attains a certain degree of excess, life crumbles and degenerates, and through this degeneration history itself finally degenerates too. (Nietzsche 2007, 67)

Next, Nietzsche advances a tripartite typology of history, according to its political utility. Consequently, we are discussing about a ‘monumentalist’, an ‘antiquarian’ and a ‘critical’ history. The first one is necessary when the leaders of a certain state need to inoculate the necessity of some consistent transformative efforts, which they legitimize through a heroic symbolistic. The second form of history is specific to a conservative way of life: calm, comfortable, lacking creative vitality and finding its refugee in identifying the particular, insignificant but eager of glory, of immortality, with the general. Finally, ‘critical’ history stems from the will to expose events, processes and personalities that generate abuses, injustices and shortcomings of all kinds. Each type of historical approach, Nietzsche warns us, is specific in general to a certain people; to try to reverse or at least replace them would amount to a catastrophe (Nietzsche 2007, 67-72). How and why this would happen, we are not told.

History represents the undesirable truth to the extent that is hostile to life itself. The supra-representation of truth is only obstructing the plenary affirmation of instinctiveness, of the passions unleashed from the trap of morality that lurks in the background of history, passions that are indispensable for reconfiguring the society on new and courageous coordinates, as an impenitent celebration of itself with the price of sacrificing others. The Greeks were this kind of people,
Nietzsche tells us, and it is for this precise reason they have managed to create a magnificent and durable culture: they have forgotten everything that could pull them back and did not hesitate to be violent, arbitrary and entirely without empathy in relation to other peoples when they considered it necessary (Nietzsche 2007; Nietzsche 2006). This puerile and assertive behavior basically saved them from the history that threatened to engulf them and eventually managed to do so in the form of Christianity.

It follows that the excess of history through the 19th century – a denouement for which Nietzsche holds Hegel responsible – induces a process of dissolution specific to modernity, which paralyzes mankind’s capacity to reinvent itself under creative auspices, renouncing once and for all Christianity (the glorification of weakness) and history (guilty consciousness). Eventually, Christian morality represented the sole spiritual-intellectual soil on which the weed of history could later take root. Only by ousting it can we progress, only by forgetting and freeing ourselves from the burden of consciousness we will once again become innocent and good (Nietzsche 1989). A dangerously simple and seductive solution, like evil would exclusively depend on individual morality. But evil is way more than that, and it certainly cannot be reduced to particularity. For Hegel,

Evil is nothing but the inadequacy of being to the ought. This ought has many meanings and, since contingent purposes likewise have the form of the ought, infinitely many. In regard to contingent purposes, evil is only the justice that is imposed on the vanity and nullity of their devising. They themselves are already what is evil. The finitude of life and mind falls into their judgement, in which they have the Other that is separated from them at the same time within them as their negative, and thus they are the contradiction called evil. (Hegel 2010b, 209)

Evil is thus the dissociation between being and its concept, the persistence in the illusion of the separation from the whole, the latter one amounting to the only verisimilar reality (Hegel 1977).

But illusion is way more important for becoming than truth, Nietzsche counteracts. And the Hegelian truth is something to be dismissed as soon as possible: it is too much impregnated by history and by the legitimacy of everyone to exist, to have rights, and to have those
rights respected. Progress, if it exists, is only possible on the basis of an aristocracy of spirit that would unappealably enslave mankind in order to fulfill its own creative-warlike purposes (Nietzsche 1988, 511-898; Nietzsche 1999). The elite cannot accomplish its potential unless it separates itself from the social whole and channels its resources in directions it previously establishes; by listening to the moral poison of Christianity and welcoming everyone in the boat of history we will only end up sinking in an embarrassing and disgraceful way. Finally, the elite must prevent the ‘excess of history’ (Nietzsche 2007). As a substitute for the unbearable truth, Nietzsche proposes, according to Jacob Taubes, honesty (Taubes 2003). But to what extent this honesty would be honest with reference to those it excludes, to the majority? And to what extent something that is in the exclusive possession of a group of initiates can still be considered honest?

Nietzsche is far from ending his tirade against history. Once unchained, history can only be borne by strong personalities. Even so, its rationality is fake and resembles art more than objectivity and/or emancipation.

To think of history objectively in this fashion is the silent work of the dramatist; that is to say, to think of all things in relation to all others and to weave the isolated event into the whole: always with the presupposition that if a unity of plan does not already reside in things it must be implanted into them. Thus man spins his web over the past and subdues it, thus he gives expression to his artistic drive but not to his drive towards truth or justice. (Nietzsche 2007, 91)

But it is precisely to this artistic way of thinking history, coercing it to produce social and philosophical effects that are less and less dynamic – that Nietzsche opposes simple art as the remedy against history: unconditioned love that leaves intact the oppressions, injustices and lies of the past. Life must be protected even with the price of truth; if not so, it will wither under the weight of confusion, disappointment and doubt.

When the historical sense reigns without restraint, and all its consequences are realized, it uproots the future because it destroys illusions and robs the things that exist of the atmosphere in which alone they can live. Historical justice, even when it is genuine and practiced with the purest of intentions, is therefore a dreadful virtue because it always undermines the living thing and brings it down: its judgment is always annihilating. If the historical drive does not also contain a
drive to construct, if the purpose of destroying and clearing is not to allow a future already alive in anticipation to raise its house on the ground thus liberated, if justice alone prevails, then the instinct for creation will be enfeebled and discouraged. A religion, for example, which is intended to be transformed into historical knowledge under the hegemony of pure historical justice, a religion which is intended to be understood through and through as an object of science and learning, will when this process is at an end also be found to have been destroyed. The reason is that historical verification always brings to light so much that is false, crude, inhuman, absurd, violent that the mood of pious illusion in which alone anything that wants to live can live necessarily crumbles away: for it is only in love, only when shaded by the illusion produced by love, that is to say in the unconditional faith in right and perfection, that man is creative. Anything that constrains a man to love less than unconditionally has severed the roots of his strength: he will wither away, that is to say become dishonest. In producing this effect, history is the antithesis of art: and only if history can endure to be transformed into a work of art will it perhaps be able to preserve instincts or even evoke them. (Nietzsche 2007, 95-96)

Resorting to love as a form of prophylaxis against the ethical and moral nudity in which history throws us, Nietzsche seems to offer a solution that is entirely Christian, despite his vehement anti-Christian stances that pervade his entire philosophy. Last but not least, approaching history as art, and thus maintaining its shortcomings for the sake of an esthetical effect that Nietzsche is convinced that it is effective, but he does not problematize at all – one unavoidable arrives to the conclusion that the existing social order, which excludes and oppresses the majority of its protagonists, must be protected.

Furthermore, Nietzsche considers that a premature knowledge of history will result in wearing out our intellectual strength just as factories prematurely wear out the physical power of workers. Capitalist selfishness, that Nietzsche loathes, is thus intertwined with scientific selfishness. But this acceleration of scientific truth, which contradicts, for Nietzsche, the truth of life, ends up in producing only a chronical fatigue that anticipates death: “if you want to push science forward as quickly as possible you will succeed in destroying it as quickly as possible; just as a hen perishes if it is compelled to lay eggs too quickly” (Nietzsche 2007, 99). Popular science thus entails the end of science. For Hegel, as I will argue further, it is precisely the opening of science to the world that
ensures its perpetuation and the renewal it needs in order to overcome itself into something better.

Understood in Hegelian terms, Nietzsche argues, history becomes a glorification of necessity in the detriment of liberty, even if the latter is affirmed as the driving force of Hegelian philosophy. Everything can be cynically subjected to the ‘cunning of reason’ and to the shameful compromises with an undesirable present. There is also a psychological explanation for this attitude: old age inherent to Hegelian philosophy. Nietzsche prefers however creative nonconformity, the critical spirit which is much more useful to truth than history (Nietzsche 2007; Nietzsche 1989; Nietzsche 2006).

Determined individuals, not ‘masses’, put the world into motion. Their egoism would however be an ‘intelligent’ one, while the egoism of simple people is considered ‘unintelligent’. In order to ensure a proper historical dynamic, only the first type of egoism must be nurtured. For Nietzsche, the vast majority of members of a given society is liable to be sacrificed for the purpose of obtaining the best conditions for the creative minority (Nietzsche 1988; Nietzsche 1999; Taubes 2003). The stake of this position is not about progress – Nietzsche is explicitly arguing against the illusion that the world is becoming better in time (Nietzsche 2008; Nietzsche 1968; Nietzsche 2009) – but about a certain creative destruction aimed at maintaining the cultural vitality of a society with the simultaneous price of sacrificing it.

In summa, Nietzsche brings Hegel very pertinent critiques: the excess of history affects the motivation to produce it; at the judgement of history, life begins to decline, the history of the world is not equivalent to its progressive emancipation. Because of Hegel, philosophy has fallen into the trap of history (Nietzsche 2008). Much more important than all this critiques seems to be the one referring to nonconformity: every philosopher, every authentic thinker must be critical with reference to the political power of his times, not to place itself at its disposal; as chancellor of the Berlin university (1818-1831), Hegel seemed to directly confirm this critique, leading Nietzsche to the conclusion that necessity is more important within Hegelian philosophy than liberty.
Freedom through history: Hegel

How would Hegel respond to this sheer philosophical assault? On one hand, he would agree with Nietzsche regarding the fatigue occasionally induced by and through history under the form of routine:

Habit is no longer alive; it is where purposes are no longer at work because they have been achieved. A necessity or need did arise, but it is no longer felt because it was satisfied by some arrangement or other. Although they once had a sound basis, such earlier arrangements are now of little interest and are discontinued as unnecessary; a present without need ensue. (Hegel 2011, 160)

But this incapacitating historical fatigue is identifiable only in the case of peoples whose assertiveness is not based on anything spiritual or universal; in case of the simple fight for power, profits and opportunities of all kinds justify the historical ascension of a certain civilization, and this civilization is condemned from the start to demise and irrelevance (Hegel 2011). Nietzsche is less interested about the motives that determine the rise of a people; for him, pure action creates afterwards a proper cultural and material shell. Moreover, he does not believe in universalism, but in nihilism, understood as a radical critique against modernity, but not a passive, fatalist critique, but a constructive-ontological one (Nietzsche 1968).

As for the excess of history, or, in other words, postulating the history of the world as court of the world, as Hegel does in his *Principles of the philosophy of right* (2003), Nietzsche, just like his master, Arthur Schopenhauer, is in a hurry to distort the Hegelian philosophy of history. After a whole millennium in which knowledge was in the possession of a small number of initiates who have used it as they saw fit, and not at all in a democratic manner, the modern epoch started to inverse this trend, transforming knowledge into a common good. In this process, the historical, contextual implications of knowledge, as well as its political underpinning, become more visible than ever, thanks to Hegel, Kant, Rousseau or Marx. I find it hard to believe that after not even a century of Hegelianism, of approaching knowledge and politics in the ethical light of history, Nietzsche could offer, at the end of the
19th century, such a clear verdict regarding the dissolutive role of history for the cultural evolution of peoples.

Furthermore, Hegel is not at all the admirer of authority as Nietzsche maliciously presents him. If we take the cases of religion and of the divine right monarchy, where the king needed only God’s consent to govern, without that of society – Hegel is explicitly criticizing such unfounded pretentions. Starting from the principle that God and reason are the same thing and act in the same direction, the first one from the sphere of the spiritual, of the simple thought as self-reflection, and the second one from the sphere of the telluric, as concept of reality, Hegel considers the state to have a divine essence, in the sense that it expresses, political and juridical, the will of that particular community as free, consensual and integrative as it can be. Divinity is and acts in the world, not outside of it; from this point of view Hegel is wrongly accused by Marx and Marxists of having a predilection for metaphysics; but what interests Hegel is the edification of a new ontology through the philosophical appropriation of theology on the coordinates of emancipatory modernity (see Hegel 1988a).

Moreover, from a strict political point of view, Hegel considers that society has the right to oppose political power, to question and hold it responsible every time the situation calls for it and on the basis of serious arguments.

What makes humans morally dissatisfied (and they may take a certain pride in this dissatisfaction) is that they find a discrepancy between the present and their conceptions, principles, and opinion concerning ends of a more universal content, what they consider to be right and good (nowadays ideals of political institutions in particular); they find a discrepancy between the present and their predilection for devising ideals on which to lavish enthusiasm. They contrast [present] existence with their view of how things rightly ought to be. In this case it is not particular interests and passions that demand satisfaction but reason-justice, and freedom; under this banner, such demands assert themselves and not only are readily dissatisfied with the condition and events of the world but rebel against them. (Hegel 2011, 98; emphasis in original)

Even if the state must mediate between social classes and try to maintain a functional equilibrium between them without disadvantaging one class on the expense of others, this does not mean that Hegel prefers
authoritarianism or tyranny as a price of political stability. For him, any governance that is not based on the individual liberties of the political subjects is null and void (Hegel 2003; Hegel 1988a).

Maybe this whole misunderstanding which places Hegel in the ingrate posture of an apologist of the real, of political necessity oriented against political liberty – comes from the famous maxim enunciated in the foreword of the Principles of the philosophy of right: “What is rational is actual, and what is actual is rational” (Hegel 2003, 20). But this affirmation must not be extracted from its context and interpreted in itself, as Nietzsche, Schopenhauer and many others have done – but must be integrated in the unity of Hegelian philosophy. One will ascertain, then, the equivalence of present rationality not with reality in itself, with the inconstancy of the diverse sensible on the surface of which particular accidents, passions and interests represent the norm, but with reality in the process of becoming, that is spiritual reality. As every Hegelian concept, reality must be understood in its historical dynamics, not absolutized in a form or another. Hegel is very explicit in this regard in his Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences, where he is puzzled and disappointed by the rushed and inadequate interpretation offered to this proposition, in total contrast with what his philosophy suggested until then (Hegel 1991).

Hegel is not therefore the political opportunist described with so much vivaciousness by Nietzsche. Nor is he the incurable naïve historical optimist presented in We philologists.

Germany has become the breeding-place of this historical optimism; Hegel is perhaps to blame for this. Nothing, however, is more responsible for the fatal influence of German culture. Everything that has been kept down by success gradually rears itself up: history as the scorn of the conqueror; a servile sentiment and a kneeling down before the actual fact- ‘a sense for the State’ they now call it, as if that had still to be propagated! He who does not understand how brutal and unintelligent history is will never understand the stimulus to make it intelligent. (Nietzsche 2006, 54)

Hegel responds:

World history is not a soil of happiness; history the periods of happiness are blank pages, for the object of history is, at least, change. In history there may be satisfaction –
the satisfaction of universal purposes that transcend individual desires – but not happiness, at least not for world-historical individuals. (Hegel 2011, 26)

The progressive rationalization of history from a Hegelian perspective must not be confounded with the Kantian project of perpetual peace, which Hegel explicitly rejects. Not because he necessarily disagrees with it, but because he considers that, in the abstract and individualist shape Kant had exposed it, it stands no chance of becoming reality. The project of perpetual peace can be put in practice only partially, because dialectical contradictions are insurmountable – by involving everyone or as many as possible in the realization of such political community; the act of writing in the comfortable solitude of one’s desk will definitely not suffice in the pursuit of such a task (Hegel 1975).

If history is without sense, without rationality, the reign of arbitrariness, to what extent can it be considered history at all? Would not this kind of ‘history’ contribute more to the political passivity and cultural fatigue those Nietzsche complaints about than the ‘historical sense’ progressively infiltrating all domains of knowledge with the help of Hegelian philosophy? Would not this history consist in the lack of fertile contradictions that could allow it to reinvent itself on coordinates that are always new, always rational? And if history does not have a sense, what could be more human, more political, fuller of the ‘will to power’ but the attempt to impose it this kind of sense in order to tame it and subject it to man’s creative forces? This kind of approach is more radical, more militant than the entire Nietzschean philosophy. In the last instance, being disbranches itself from the non-being that contains it through this act of pure will, that of possessing, systematizing and interiorizing the non-being, first as nature, then as reality and finally as spirit. Being inhabits at first the non-being, then transforms it in its indispensable alterity, on which it does no longer directly depend, violently and chaotically. Hegelian history is neither that optimist, nor that rational as Nietzsche tries to convince us. It advances through the negative in order to place in the light of consciousness and afterwards in political practice a rational scaffolding dialectically edified through the prism of passions, interests and selfishness; once obtained, the conquests of reason are not at all definitive; they can be lost, but their experience
and memory, combined with the necessity of each epoch to resolve the contradiction between spirit and its phenomenal, social-political shapes, permanently constitutes itself into a possibility of progress. This is a possibility that only we, together, can transform it into a promise. Consequently, Hegelian history is nothing more than the rather unconscious than conscious attempt to transform the surrounding world and the opportunities it provides into a home that is not perfect but is nevertheless recognizable and improvable. But the world is nothing but a jungle filled with dangers, not a home, Nietzsche keeps claiming. Why should we delude ourselves with the possibility of transforming it according to our aims when something like this is impossible? It is not impossible, Hegel counteracts. Even if this cannot be done integrally, this does not mean that it would be impossible. Even Nietzsche recognizes that the main motivations of people to act is that of possessing (Nietzsche 1989). Thus, how can we refrain from taking our history into possession and, through it, ourselves? In the same time, using our greed, selfishness, instincts and passions, history takes us on its turn into possession (Hegel 2011).

Beside routine, Hegel was perfectly aware that the unfolding of history as progress contributes, paradoxically, to the ‘blunting’ of the intellect, of individual intelligence incapable of seeing beyond the horizon of its own prejudices and interests (Hegel 2011). But he did not consider, like Nietzsche did, that this amounts to the reign of mediocrity and institutionalized charity. This temporary shortcoming, about to be as much as possible overcome by prospective contradictions, resides more in the self-sufficiency, in the burdening of society under its own success, not necessarily in its failure to produce the much-needed cultural revitalization that Nietzsche craves for.

Finally, the most grounded reproach Nietzsche brings to Hegel is that he writes and acts from a privileged position, that of a supporter of Prussian politics. But any intellectual that deserves his name does not allow himself to be encroached by the temptations of power and always maintains a critical distance towards it.

For it does happen that the state is afraid of philosophy as such, and when this is the case it will try all the more to draw to it philosophers who will give it the
appearance of having philosophy on its side – because it has on its side those men who bear the name of philosopher and yet are patently nothing to inspire fear. If, however, a man should arise who really gave the impression of intending to apply the scalpel of truth to all things, including the body of the state, then the state would, since it affirms its own existence before all else, be justified in expelling such a man and treating him as an enemy: just as it expels and treats as an enemy a religion which sets itself above the state and desires to be its judge. So if anyone is to tolerate being a philosopher in the employ of the state, he will also have to tolerate being regarded as having abandoned any attempt to pursue truth into all its hideouts. At the very least he is obliged, so long as he is the recipient of favors and offices, to recognize something as being higher than truth, namely the state. And not merely the state but at the same time everything the state considers necessary for its wellbeing; a certain form of religion, for example, or of social order, or of army regulations – a noli me tangere is inscribed upon everything of this sort. (Nietzsche 2007, 184-185; emphasis in original)

Indeed, Hegel seems vulnerable in this matter. And, to a certain extent, he is. Surely, the position of chancellor of the most prestigious university from Prussia, which needed powerful political connections, led Nietzsche and many others to the conclusion that Hegel was nothing more than an obedient executant of Prussian absolutism, and the dialectical artifices through which he justifies his position (rational as actual, actual as rational) are not credible. Two elements must be taken into account here. The first is a veritable compromise to obtain a university position, especially one of such importance. At the beginning of the 19th century, the universities depended directly on the benevolence of the princes on the territories of which they administered their activities. Consequently, any political positioning had to be as discrete and as cautious as possible. Even so, Hegel was accused almost over his entire career of atheism and political subversiveness (Pinkard 2000). The second is, in the context of Napoleonic wars, the newly importance, acquired through the filiation of national emancipation, of the concept of state. The political consciousness of Germany was created by Napoleon; it was common in that period for the state to be perceived, in the perspective of the unification of Germany and of shaking the ground of the old autocratic empires – as an institutional vehicle of the progress of reason, more visible then than ever. And since Hegel was a patriot in the republican, Greek sense of the term, not in a nationalist-romantic sense
(Hegel 1988b, Moland 2011) – it was somehow understandable to be attached to and to support such apolitical project, despite its important shortcomings. The epoch of the statist excesses of the 20th century was still far ahead. Furthermore, and this aspect is frequently overlooked, Hegel accepted to occupy the position of chancellor of the Berlin university at the invitation of a new Prussian political leadership, which tried to do away with the conservative inertia specific to this state and was very favorable to Enlightenment and Napoleonic reforms (Hegel 1984, 377).

In conclusion, Nietzsche proposes freedom from history, while Hegel proposes freedom through history. If the moral exam of history was so unbearable for Nietzsche after only several decades of its Hegelian institution, what can we say about the millennial moral silence of history: for how many billions of people it was and forever remained unbearable? Freedom from history is a myth. We can understand the political vitality of that myth, but it is still a myth. But isn’t it more vital and more political to revolt against history by taking history into possession and obtaining freedom through it, against it?

Conclusions

The old modern world of Hegel, Nietzsche argues, in which the owl of Minerva flies at dusk, is debilitated; its intellectual abundance and generous empathy reflects only its decrepitude, the beginning of the end which has engulfed it. If he would have taken more interest in political economy, or at least in political geography, Nietzsche would have find out that the modern world, the world of colonialism, slavery and capitalism, is not at all the peaceful and calmly-self destructing world he perceived it to be.

With reference to becoming, Nietzsche understands it in a circular and immanent way, as becoming of the same demiurgical tragic, the source of cultural impulses towards self-improvement, respectively as plurality of forces and tendencies within a zero-sum game (Bondor 2008, 271-278). Hegel perceives it also immanentely, but as advancement, as a positive sum game, as progress of spirit, as continuous and permanently imperfect reconciliation between peoples, societies and their own
intellectual-spiritual projections. But Nietzsche disavows the idea of progress, considering it a dangerous homogenizing force (Nietzsche 1968; Nietzsche 2008; Nietzsche 1999). However, if we take a general look at the contemporary world, at its social, scientific and cultural earnings, imperfect of course and threatened more and more by the recrudescence of nationalist populism – the reality of progress becomes obvious.

Another impediment identified by Nietzsche on the path of the cultural rebirth of mankind is represented by words and their dissuasive-punitive capacity (Nietzsche 1989). But word is spirit, Hegel claims; as concept, word expresses thinking, the first vehicle of spirit, and thinking is a terrible force because it treats everything dialectically and reality is compelled, in a way or another, to subject to it (Hegel 1995). In the same time, the thought universalizes, contributing once again to the cause of spirit (Hegel 2007).

Finally, Nietzsche believes that everything that exists does so under a certain mask. History is therefore only a history of masks, of inauthenticity that aims but cannot ultimately discover itself (Nietzsche 1997). For Hegel, history renounces its masks progressively, but it will not do so completely, giving up representation, politics; however, these masks will become more transparent, allowing themselves to be discovered as masks of the same. Hegelian masks are nothing more than exteriority that requests the interior to take it into possession, revealing itself to it as alienated interiorities searching for synthetizing and superior negations.

Maybe if he had read Nietzsche, Hegel would have considered him a philosopher of the intellect that strives against reason. At best he would have considered him a ‘beautiful soul’, incapable of understanding to the end the mediations that sum up the whole, but only inferring them and in the same time rejecting them as unreliable (Hegel 1977). In the same time, Nietzsche’s ardent consciousness and his undiverted fidelity towards the ancient could have probably relent Hegel to be more concessive towards the eccentricities of the young philosopher. Still, Nietzschean philosophy being essentially a philosophy opposed to spirit, Hegel would have certainly considered it, on the whole, disreputable. On his turn, after fiercely criticizing Hegel whenever he had the chance, Nietzsche finally admits that he was one of the most
important and audacious German thinkers, even if his philosophy is covered in a thick layer of moral boredom (Nietzsche 1989).

Radical innovation, which claims to leave history behind, according to the popular dictum that exults the virtues of ignorance, can have, in a first phase, a prophylactic benefit, but eventually leads to harsh failures. Not knowing one’s history can amount, as we already know, to its repetition, although in new contexts. What Nietzsche perceives as an excess of history is nothing more than the self-consolidation of spirit, the lucid and intransigent consciousness of the world that places into motion the necessity of its change as mundane redemption available from now on for everyone. To an elitist, this ambitious démarche may seem to be a ridiculous, maybe even suicidal effort. Although the ironic and stinging bite of the Nietzschean philosophy often places Hegelianism into difficulty, especially the reified Hegelianism from the second half of the 19th century already mentioned in the introductory section, it does not push it into irrelevance, but it accentuates, in the last instance, its capacity to comprise, reconcile and integrate the vivaciousness of the Nietzschean principles into its own emancipatory project.

REFERENCES


