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(*Geisteswissenschaften*)
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Hegel and the Sciences of Spirit
(Geisteswissenschaften)

Madalin Onu

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HEGEL AND THE SCIENCES OF
SPIRIT
(*GEISTESWISSENSCHAFTEN*)

MĂDĂLIN ONU

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The present book is based on his PhD thesis titled “Culture and Dialectics. Hegel’s Influence on the Formation of the Sciences of Spirit”.

In memory of my father, Ștefan
May God bless his good soul!

To my mother, Maria

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INTRODUCTION

The term *Geisteswissenschaften* has a long tradition in German culture. Its general meaning refers to a set of most varied social sciences, including ethics, economics, law, etc. The Hegelian concept *Geist* designates both these domains belonging to *objective spirit* and those subsumed by *subjective spirit* (psychology, anthropology, etc.). In a remarkable article, Otto Pöggeler points out the difficulties of translating it, for, in fact, we are not dealing with a set of technical social sciences. The humanistic scientist (*Geisteswissenschaftler*), he explains, “does not only want to know how poetry in East Asia, in the Mediterranean, and in the various European epochs and other countries existed; he also theoretically asks what structure poetry as such (or law, religion) has. He is not only concerned with structural theories, but also with philosophical questions, why, for example, man surrounds himself with works of art”¹.

The first fact that comes to mind when thinking about the sciences of spirit is the difference between them and *Naturwissenschaften* (the sciences of nature). Their long process of formation started from here. However, this dichotomy involves a difficult task: as

¹ Otto Pöggeler, “Is There Research Policy Making vis-à-vis the Geisteswissenschaften?” *Zeitschrift für allgemeine Wissenschaftstheorie* 11 (1980): 171.

their targeted objects radically differ from one another, it is imperiously necessary for them also to separate in terms of methods of approach.

Problems such as the nature of these objects and the relationship they maintain with the thinking subject are present throughout the entire history of metaphysics. Therefore, it is necessary rigorously to elucidate the specific character of these objects, so that the phenomenon we intend to “pull it out from its hiding state” no longer be subjected to some borrowed technical schemas that only reify and utilise it. The comprehension of a historical phenomenon, for example, cannot be achieved by resorting to the mathematical model imposed by modernity.

In the late 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, the neo-Kantian thinkers of the Baden School, such as Rickert or Windelband, tried to solve a similar dilemma, arose during the famous *Conflict of Methods* (known in Germany as *Methodenstreit*). The debate began in the 1880s due to some controversies from the field of economics, but it was soon expanded to clarify the separation between the theoretical and practical side of the social sciences. By focusing on the connection the cultural sciences should maintain with universal history, Heinrich Ricker made major contributions in this regard.

The present book aim to show how G. W. F. Hegel influenced the evolution of *Geisteswissenschaften*. However, given the complexity of such a task, we are

compelled to conceive, from the outset, an adequate method able to guide our research.

The easiest option would be the historical approach. It would involve identifying Hegelian elements in the various writings on this subject and tracking their evolution throughout the history of philosophy. This method is insufficient for at least two reasons. Firstly, Hegel's philosophy, due to its size, diversity of domains included in the system and, undoubtedly, the obscure language, was the subject of many misinterpretations, some of them detracted, others erroneously accusing the author of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* of advocating precisely those aspects that he tried, with all his efforts, to combat. Secondly, most of the authors who resorted to speculative idealism artificially extracted from the system concepts or arguments and used them to develop their own topics. These loans are varied: from the principles of the theory of knowledge to elements of logic, ethics, theology or history.

These many inconveniences rather suggest a systematic approach. For this purpose, we should select a small amount of key concepts, including the logical or gnoseological ones, those regarding the ontological structure of the subject as well as their derivatives, meant to explain problems such as the possibility of human free action, the organic structure of universal history or the role of culture and formation (*Bildung*) in a civilisation. Then, taking their true Hegelian meaning as a reference, we should pursue the developments and transformations they have undergone, in those authors

who made substantial contributions to the evolution of the sciences of spirit.

This second strategy also faces a serious difficulty: any philosopher, in order critically to retrieve or reject a borrowed notion, interprets the source that originated it. This action, Gadamer teaches us, is driven, to a lesser or greater extent, by his concerns and interrogations, but also by his prejudices (more or less active and visible). In the case of Hegel's philosophy, interpretations are of the most varied. Let us think of the concept of *Geist* (*spirit*), understood in its theological substrate by the thinkers of the right Hegelian wing, and as a purely human phenomenon by a left-wing Hegelian as Ludwig Feuerbach, in the mid-19th century, or, after a hundred years, by Alexandre Kojève. Let us also consider the relationship between the individual and the universal, whose incorrect comprehension was imputed to Hegel, by Schleiermacher. However, we should ask ourselves whether the reasons that made the renowned initiator of modern hermeneutics regard the works of his colleague through a distorted lens were not perhaps his preconception against the speculative and the vanity conflicts from the University of Berlin.

Finally, we cannot ignore the fact that a systematic approach would fail to trace the course of Hegel's thoughts, as they faced *historismus* initiated by Leopold von Ranke, the development of philosophical hermeneutics stimulated by Schleiermacher or Dilthey, the empirical and rational-critical temptation of the neo-Kantian School of Baden or Marx's dialectical

materialism. All these authors led critical debates with Hegel, borrowed ground concepts or their derivatives, adapted and tried to solve what they believed to be wrong in the system of absolute idealism.

In the following chapters, we will show that Hegel's influence can be felt in three different stages. The first: his direct influence during his lifetime and a short period after his death, within the Hegelian circles. As concerns the sciences of spirit, it had quite a few and weak echoes.

The second stage is a *negative* one. The neo-Kantian School of Baden, unwaveringly opposed to speculative philosophy, was born and developed near it and always made its presence felt. The answers its representatives had to provide regarding *Geisteswissenschaften* should have been able to overcome idealism. But that implied understanding and taking it as a reference.

The third is the resumption of Hegel's philosophy, caused by the inability of this second current to overcome some fundamental interrogations and dilemmas. Let us think, for example, of the problem of subjectivity, as implied by the act of deriving the particular from the general. Rickert directed his criticism against the Romantic sentimentalism. Hegel had a similar view on this subject, but Rickert could not accept the speculative idealistic approach. According to him, the Hegelian universal and its movement of externalisation are only abstract and artificial constructions, generating the error of panlogism. The solution meant to solve this impasse had to leave

idealism behind. But his axiological gnoseology, aiming at a particular type of objectivity in the sciences of spirit, is not exempt from errors. As Gadamer rightly points out, things happened the same in the case of Dilthey's hermeneutics (guided by the same desire to overcome Hegel's philosophy).

If Schleiermacher initiated the march against Hegel, Karl Marx announced his return. Then, dialectical philosophy began to be capitalised in many other directions and domains. Among the authors who adopted this orientation, let us think of Oswald Spengler, Nicolai Hartmann or H.-G. Gadamer.

Since both the historical and the systematic approach leave behind unsolved important questions, we chose to adopt the solution suggested by the author of *Truth and Method*.

He made us aware of two essential facts. The first: any act of comprehension is initiated due to the personal questions of the interpreter. For comprehension to be improved, they must be compared, subsequently, to those to which the author himself tried to respond during his lifetime. That means that any attempt of analysing Hegel's influence is guided by our contemporary interrogations and must provide answers to them.

The second: even before beginning the process of understanding and re-understanding, we possess, as Gadamer demonstrates, an already-made interpretation.

If we had historically approached our proposed

theme, we would have clogged ourselves when we had to critically investigate the way in which some authors adopted or denounced Hegel's concepts. Such an action would have required that we had possessed, in advance, a conceptual apparatus able to portray the Hegelian doctrine related to *Geisteswissenschaften*. That is not possible. The comprehension of the Hegelian *corpus* develops precisely by dealing with the problems raised by these thinkers. The act of understanding must either provide a response to their objections or critically accept their proposed ideas. Dialectical hermeneutics comes to save us of this vicious circle.

Since we are facing a large number of authors, we will choose to study only those who strongly influenced speculative idealism or in whose writings its direct influence can be felt, and not those who only took over some solidified Hegelian ideas. Hegel speaks of the historical character of spirit. We will not consider as influenced by him, for instance, a sociological theory that only affirms that the essence of man resides in society. The strongest argument in favour of this exclusion is that such an idea is not, in Hegel's view, a conclusion obtained through definitions and demonstrations, but only a singular moment of a long progression.

Under such requirements, we will review, in the first section, the ideational context in which Hegel developed his system.

The second is dedicated to the separation of the cultural sciences from Hegel's speculative idealism.

Dialectics, the soil on which Gadamer grounds his hermeneutical theory, will provide us with a new perspective of understanding the Hegelian philosophy. We will circumscribe, in the third section, the possibility of existence and the particular nature of that hermeneutical region that includes texts transmitted through tradition or historical events. We also intend to answer the following question: if consciousness' experiences (or logic) begin from zero, which should be the initial moment of hermeneutics so that it does not involve an artificially chosen *positum*?

Then, we will examine the way in which Gadamer redefines subjectivity based on both Heidegger's phenomenology of *Dasein* and Hegel's dialectics. We intend to show what the subjectness of the hermeneutic subject is and prove that Gadamer's theory of truth hides a series of important speculative elements.

The information acquired in the chapters devoted to Marx, Hartmann and Gadamer will help us explore how Hegel's philosophy can further contribute to the advancement of the social sciences. In the last section, we aim at reconstructing a speculative model that supports them, based on Hegel's notion of *absolute knowledge* (considered by many exegetes as unreal and exaggerated).

SECTION I

THE GENESIS OF THE SCIENCES OF SPIRIT

CHAPTER ONE

THE PRECURSORS OF HEGEL'S PHILOSOPHY

1. A New Science of History. Giambattista Vico

The theory of *historical cycles* is deeply rooted in philosophical thinking. Greek and Roman antiquity², but also the Renaissance, considered it as an important tool for understanding the past. Giambattista Vico recuperates and develops it. He identifies, in *Scienza Nuova*, three development stages of universal history³:

1. *The Age of Gods*—the ancestral era when the weak and persecuted men fled beside the strong ones, uniting with them and giving birth to the first states.
2. *The Age of Heroes*—of fierce struggles between nobles (the descendants of strong, but dishonest, men) and plebeians.
3. *The Age of Peoples*—of the victory of plebeians and the first establishment of a popular and legal government.

To each of them corresponds a particular type of thinking, a form of authority, and each has its language, laws and customs. Moreover, Vico observes a similar triadic pattern in every particular

² Emil Angehrn, *Geschichtsphilosophie* (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1991), 25–27.

³ Mircea Florian, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History* (Bucharest: Garamond, 1996), 201.

civilisation—*corsi e ricorsi*: a nation is born, grows and once it reaches its peak, decays. Then, the cycle repeats.

Unlike the pictures of historical recurrences provided by his forerunners, the Italian philosopher tries to clarify the very act of understanding the past. His originality resides both in drawing the attention to the different ways of thinking that dominated each moment of the cycle and in the detailed description of the mechanisms that produced the changes⁴. Even though he does not explicitly seek to explain our relationship with *otherness* (by resorting, for instance, to feeling (as the Romantics did) or promoting a particular type of empathy, like Dilthey), Vico claims that it is possible for us to understand what our ancestors have done by virtue of the human mind, which is common to all individuals. “He rests his case on his conviction that what men have made, other men, because their minds are those of men, can always, in principle, ‘enter into’”⁵.

All historical events, as products of human action, reflect the providential will⁶. However, this statement

⁴ Peter Burke, *Vico. Philosoph, Historiker, Denker einer neuen Wissenschaft* (Berlin: Verlag Klaus Wagenbach, 1987), 70.

⁵ Isaiah Berlin, *Vico and Herder* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1976), 27.

⁶ “The central idea at the heart of Vico’s thought is that, in the individual and society alike, phase follows phase not haphazardly (as the Epicureans thought), nor in a sequence of mechanical causes or effects (as the Stoics taught), but as stages in the pursuit

should not be understood by means of sense or imagination (Vico thus anticipating Hegel's conception of *the cunning of reason*) but in its metaphysical meaning, which can be grasped only by reason: "through the power of reason, historical science gives us a vision of the secrets of time in their occurrences and recurrences"⁷.

2. History: The Individual in Organic Development. Johann Gottfried von Herder

Herder too provided a panel of society's organic development stages, which Hegel⁸ borrowed and turned it into the following sequence (detailed in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* or at the end of the *Philosophy of Right*): 1. Oriental antiquity—the age of childhood; 2. ancient Greek—the age of youth; 3. the Roman World—adulthood; 4. the Germanic World—the age of wisdom, the time of formation of the true state.

Regarding history, the Herderian moment of the

of an intelligible purpose—man's effort to understand himself and his world, and to realize his capacities in it." Berlin, *Vico and Herder*, 35.

⁷ Dominique Janicaud, "Critique du concept de l'époque," in *Die Idee der Historischen Epoche*, ed. Domenico Losurdo (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2004), 42.

⁸ For more details, see Karl Rosenkranz, "Hegel's Philosophy of History," *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 6.4 (1872): 342.

Sturm und Drang movement resumes the discussions about Providence, explaining its influence without cancelling the role of human free action. For Herder, the comprehension of a historical event must rely on individuality. In other words, we must search and circumscribe the exceptionality of all singular instances. Hence the consideration he shows (and calls for from the part of any researcher) for the originality and uniqueness of each epoch and nation. He opposes this requirement to the *Aufklärung*'s endeavour to judge the past by contemporary moral principles. Regarding European culture, his patriotism, his tireless efforts, as a man of letters, to vindicate the German Middle Age and diminish the effects of French rationalism of the 18th century cannot go unnoticed⁹.

Moreover, Herder promotes the idea that all human societies develop in successive stages. "The whole existence of man is nothing but change", he writes in *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*. All epochs are episodes of this universal transformation. The whole genre is continuously morphing. World history, as the theatre of these transformations, can be understood only by those who animate it, who enjoy and recognise themselves in it¹⁰.

⁹ Max Rouché, *La philosophie de l'histoire de Herder* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1940), 132.

¹⁰ Johann Gottfried von Herder, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (Leipzig: Johann Freidrich Hartknoch, 1828), 244–245.

In the first books of *Ideen...*, he lists an impressive series of natural elements, emphasising their connection with human history¹¹: the system of planets, the vegetal organism, the mental and psychical nature of man in comparison with the species of animals, etc. All these phenomena define his concept of spirit. But its metaphysical and logical connotations are restricted to an organic, natural power. However, this entity should not be regarded as a derivative of a materialist philosophy but rather as a unitary organism. Spirit is not a conglomerate of empirical elements. It is something human, conditioned by the organic whole. That is why the German author resorts, within the limits of the historiographical method, to philosophy. It is useful, he says, “when philosophy is led by history and history is enlivened by philosophy”¹².

Unfortunately, Herder fails to understand spirit as a social force, having its own necessary development. He also passes too easily over the mechanism of dependence between nature, history and the individual (although he considers the problem of individuality as one of prime importance). By processing the rich

¹¹ That is why we can say: “Herder is a collective personality (*eine kollektive Persönlichkeit*), in the meaning given by Goethe to this term.” Herbert Cysarz, *Erfahrung und Idee. Probleme und Lebensformen in der deutschen Literatur von Hamann bis Hegel* (Wien: Wilhelm Braumüller, 1921), 56.

¹² Johann Gottfried von Herder, “On the Change of Taste,” in *Philosophical Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 255.

collection of data, thoroughly exposed, he does not explain how exactly this complex system of interconnections allows us to affirm the possibility of human progress and freedom. Herder “does not show how a force substantially identical to those of nature and entirely incorporated in this organism is capable of free determinations”¹³. He foresees it when he expresses his belief in the continuous formation of our race but does not illustrate its concrete functionality.

As concerns the methodology of history, Karl Rosenkranz rightly observes that Hegel borrows from Herder the imperative of not isolating this discipline, but, on the contrary, of developing it starting from the physical determinants that support spirit’s becoming. After Herder’s death, many thinkers proposed different philosophical ways to study universal history. According to his biographer, only Hegel succeeded to bring something new, his work enduring time by virtue of the particular middle path he drew between those who neglected the empirical material and those who subordinated the entire spiritual life to physical conditions¹⁴.

By understanding culture in terms of internal coherence, Herder “anticipates the neutral sense of the concept that emerges in anthropology”¹⁵, as required

¹³ Robert Flint, *La philosophie de l'histoire en Allemagne* (Paris: Librairie Germer Bailliere, 1878), 74.

¹⁴ Rosenkranz, “Hegel’s Philosophy of History,” 345.

¹⁵ Elliot L. Jurist, *Beyond Hegel and Nietzsche* (Cambridge: MIT Press,

for correctly solving the issues of intercultural differences. Hegel deepens this idea, devoting an entire chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* to *culture*, understood as *Bildung* (education/formation), as *spirit estranged from itself*.

3. History within the Limits of Reason. Immanuel Kant

The philosopher from Königsberg promotes a fundamental paradigm shift regarding the thinking subject. He emphasises the active role of the human mind in the process of knowledge, advocating against perceiving it as a white sheet (*tabula rasa*) meant only to record the effects of an external, independent object. He insists that our mind possesses, as inherent elements, a series of *a priori* categories and intuitions that confer meaning to phenomena. That is to say, external reality can be no longer considered as independent of the human mind: “There are two conditions under which alone the cognition of an object is possible: first, intuition, through which it is given, but only as appearance; second, concept, through which an object is thought that corresponds to this intuition”¹⁶.

2000), 43.

¹⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 224.

Thus conceived (and we will insist on this issue in the next chapters), the Kantian doctrine implies a gnoseological limitation whose resolution brought together the efforts of some great thinkers such as Fichte or Schelling, for being reduced by Hegel, in the end, to an apparent opposition whose unity has not yet been discerned¹⁷. Consequently, the author of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* extends the domain of possible knowledge by including the *noumenon*. In his opinion, Kant's criticism is incomplete because it dogmatically assumes the *subject–object* dualism, a fact that limits the ability of man to grasp reality.

Immanuel Kant resumes the idea of freedom in the light of the already established human possibilities of knowledge¹⁸. Then, taking it as a reference, he proceeds

¹⁷ “The Kantian philosophy remains entirely within the antithesis. It makes the identity of the opposites into the absolute terminus of philosophy, the pure boundary which is nothing but the negation of philosophy. We must not, by contrast, regard it as the problem of the true philosophy to resolve at the terminus the antitheses (...). On the contrary, the sole Idea that has reality and true objectivity for philosophy is the absolute suspendedness of the antithesis.” G. W. F. Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1977), 67–68. Hegel emphasises the substantial role of reason for overcoming antitheses such as “sensibility–understanding” or “subject–object” (both being considered as formal).

¹⁸ Hegel does not agree to circumscribe freedom by making use of the transcendental critical method. He believes that Kant's conception of moral freedom is formal: it does not allow formulating concrete and substantial political principles. Alan

to clarify the correct way in which we can talk (without enunciating unsubstantiated metaphysical sentences) about an ultimate goal of history. Unlike Herder, who believed that the process of universal development resembles the organic one, Kant affirms the existence of a moral purpose.

The science of history, a discipline still new after the attempts of Machiavelli, Montesquieu, even of Vico and Herder, had to undergo a rigorous exam. Kant draws his conclusions in *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht*¹⁹. It is worth briefly to note the basic principles exposed in this short, but very important work.

From the outset, the author points out the continuous change and development of man throughout history. All natural capacities of a creature, he explains, are meant entirely to evolve toward their natural end²⁰. That is because the world cannot be conceived as being subject to chance. Reason develops

Patten calls this critique *the objection of empty formalism*. For further discussions on this problem, see Alan Patten, *Hegel's Idea of Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 85–87.

¹⁹ Immanuel Kant, "Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht," *Berlinische Monatsschrift*, November (1784): 385–411.

²⁰ "Alle Naturanlagen eines Geschöpfes sind bestimmt, sich einmal vollständig und zweckmäßig auszuwickeln" (*ibid.*, 386); (Immanuel Kant, "Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View," in *Kant on History*, trans. Lewis White Beck, (Indianapolis/New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1963)).

gradually, through numerous trials, with practice and training. However, it cannot achieve its full accomplishment in one individual (since his life is limited to a relatively short period). It progresses from generation to generation until it reaches its complete development prescribed by nature itself.

Furthermore, Kant recognises the struggle of antagonistic passions as a decisive historical force. The way in which they must be controlled depends on the existing social order. Therefore, he asserts: “the greatest problem for the human race, to the solution of which nature drives man, is the achievement of a universal civic society which administers the law among men”²¹ and makes possible, by law, the reconciliation between freedom of each and freedom of all²². An international association must secure the civil constitution. Just as the state oversees and solves the conflicts between individuals, this association should solve those between nations.

This topical issue is also approached in *Zum ewigen Frieden. Ein philosophischer Entwurf* (*Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch*). Kant conceives, in this book, a series of specific norms to regulate international

²¹ “Das größte Problem für die Menschengattung, zu dessen Auflösung die Natur ihn zwingt, ist die Erreichung einer allgemein das Recht verwaltenden bürgerlichen Gesellschaft” (ibid., 394).

²² This requirement is necessary not only for the attempt to institute a political constitution but for any attempt to establish a social law. Alexis Philonenko, *La théorie kantienne de l'histoire* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1986), 95.

relations, so that peace to be preserved (the abolition of regular armies, freedom and independence for all states as concern their internal problems, etc.). In their absence, peace remains unstable even if nations are not involved in visible conflicts: "The state of nature (*status naturalis*) is not a state of peace among human beings who live next to one another, but a state of war, that is, if not always an outbreak of hostilities, then at least the constant threat of such hostilities. Hence the state of peace must be *established*"²³. For this purpose, it should be established a set of international laws to regulate a federal system of free states, led by a league of nations²⁴.

On the other hand, Immanuel Kant stresses (in *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht*) the importance of drawing up a universal history, philosophically treated. The possibility of such a project lies in the fact that nature's plan tends toward a perfect form of human society²⁵. Moreover, the very act of conceiving it is necessary for the advancement of this plan.

²³ Immanuel Kant, *'Toward Perpetual Peace' and Other Writings on Politics, Peace, and History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 72–73.

²⁴ Kant, "Toward Perpetual Peace," 80.

²⁵ Heiner F. Klemme, *Kant* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2004), 145.

4. Schelling and *Historismus*

The writings of F. W. J. Schelling provide the sciences of spirit with a new direction of development. *Historismus* sprouted on their ground²⁶. Before him, Fichte already engrafted into philosophy, in the footsteps of Kant, the idea that freedom is the core of human becoming. Furthermore, he proposed the periodization of history depending on the relationship between freedom and reason, the ultimate goal being their return into unity. According to him, reason reigns in the beginning, but it lacks self-consciousness and freedom. Then the era of liberty follows and, as Nicolai Hartmann points out, of incipient guilt²⁷. This succession is a corollary of the thesis (adopted and fructified by Hegel) that our world is the externalised existence of the Divine Idea.

Schelling adopts this orientation. His philosophy of history is rooted in the system of identity—whose first moment is the immediate self. The process of

²⁶ “Schelling’s system of identity and Hegel’s dialectics of Absolute Spirit are speculative theories of totality which claim to grasp not only the present being but also its genesis, its history.” Peter Koslowski, “History as the Control of Speculation: Schelling’s Discovery of History and Baader’s Critique of Absolute Historicity,” in *The Discovery of Historicity in German Idealism and Historism*, ed. Peter Koslowski (Berlin: Springer, 2010), 23.

²⁷ Nicolai Hartmann, *Das Problem des geistigen Seins* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1949), 5.

becoming involves a series of successive steps that cover the ages, as moments whereby consciousness develops itself until it acquires proper self-understanding²⁸: “history as a whole is progressive, gradually self-disclosing revelation of the absolute”²⁹.

His system defends two major ideas³⁰: 1. history is the development of an absolute substratum, from which all temporal historical beings derive; 2. the evolution of the individual is headed toward the Absolute. The first provokes us to understand the general laws that govern the advancement of humankind. History, as Schelling indicates, “ends with the reign of reason, that is, with the Golden Age of law, when all choice shall have vanished from the earth, and man shall have returned through freedom to the same point at which nature originally placed him, and which he forsook when history began”³¹. Therefore, neither absolute lawfulness nor absolute freedom defines history. On the contrary, history exists “only where a

²⁸ This thesis resides in the following: for Schelling, philosophy is “a history of self-consciousness, having various epochs, and by means of it that one absolute synthesis is successively put together.” F. W. J. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001), 50.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 211.

³⁰ Peter Koslowski, “Absolute Historicity, Theory of the Becoming Absolute, and the Affect for the Particular in German Idealism and Historism,” in *The Discovery of Historicity in German Idealism and Historism*, ed. Peter Koslowski (Berlin: Springer, 2010), 2.

³¹ Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 200.

single ideal is realised under an infinity of deviations, in such a way that, not the particular detail indeed, but assuredly the whole, is in conformity thereto”³². The second idea directs philosophy toward the individual and the uniqueness of the event. It guided the promoters of *historismus* in their efforts to understand the particular and grasp the originality of each spiritual instance, that is to say, of each epoch and culture.

Immanuel Kant used the concept of freedom to conceive the teleology of history. Friedrich Schelling retrieves this direction, transforming it into a central problem. He strives to clarify the relationship between freedom and necessity³³ for, he says, “freedom is to be necessity and necessity freedom”³⁴. Moreover, in the works published after Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, he criticises absolute idealism, claiming that Hegelian dialectics leads to determinism³⁵. Despite Hegel's objections, he grounds his theory on the ability of art³⁶

³² Ibid., 199.

³³ The true nature of history “is constituted only by freedom and lawfulness in conjugation, or by the gradual realization, on the part of a whole species of being, of an ideal that they have never wholly lost” (ibid., 200). The primary characteristic of history is that “it should exhibit a union of freedom and necessity, and be possible through this union alone” (ibid., 203).

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Schelling turned against Hegel's philosophy, accusing it of being “only a system of thought, not a system about reality” Timothy C. Luther, *Hegel's Critique of Modernity* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009), 254.

³⁶ “The fact is that what Schelling needs in order to grasp the

to reveal, by intuition, the absolute identity between subjectivity and objectivity³⁷.

The thinkers of *historismus* fructified also this idea. They “followed Schelling in the emphasis that the historically singular cannot be derived from the general”³⁸. Thus initiated, *historismus* grew by developing the following tasks³⁹: to grasp the phenomena of the sciences of spirit in their historical character; to find diachronic laws of history; to accept that all ages and places are important and have, each of them, a specific meaning, irrespective of the relationship they maintain with the historical centre; finally, to consider, with the utmost care, the empirical data of history, its written and unwritten sources, in order to reach genuine knowledge.

Even so, *historismus* was soon criticised because of its still preserved bounds with idealist metaphysics. “The next generation of thinkers therefore quickly set about redefining the intellectual agenda. They rejected both Hegel’s a priori ontology and Schelling’s religious dogmatism in favour of a variety of empirical

Absolute must be an object of experience which is not just an object, but is also not just dependent upon the conscious theoretical subject. He sees this as a work of art.” Andrew Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1993), 51.

³⁷ For further details, see Will Dudley, *Understanding German Idealism* (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2007), 185.

³⁸ Koslowski, “Absolute Historicity,” 3.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

investigations that would be, they believed, both truer to the facts and more valuable to the goal of human liberation”⁴⁰.

⁴⁰ Will Dudley, *Understanding German Idealism*, 192.

CHAPTER TWO

GOETHE AND HEGEL

1. Agency in History. The “Napoleon” Case

a) The *Daemonic* Napoleon (Goethe)

The admiration of both great men of culture (Goethe and Hegel) for Napoleon Bonaparte and their common consent regarding his decisive role played on the stage of universal history are well-known. This subject did not generate a direct debate between them. Nevertheless, the answers they gave regarding the specific way in which the French Emperor exercised his role could help us solve the question concerning the possibility of individual agency. When asked if the actions of a free individual can directly influence the course of history, Goethe responds affirmatively. In his eyes, Napoleon is the best example in this regard. An opposed theory resonates, however, from Eastern Europe, with a similarly powerful echo. It belongs to the Russian writer Leo Tolstoy.

The general issue announced in the title of this chapter is present throughout the entire evolution of the sciences of spirit. Its resolution, we consider, rests on the way in which the contradiction between the standpoint of Goethe and that of the author of *War and*

Peace can be overcome. We will prove below that the solution is to be found in Hegel's philosophy. The famous phrase “Napoleon—the world-soul on horseback” indicates, when understood in its deeper meaning, how this dilemma can be elucidated.

Let us begin with Goethe. His fascination for Napoleon is often asserted. In the conversation with Eckermann from January 17, 1827, the German poet said that, if someone would like to decorate his room with paintings depicting the great deeds of the Emperor, he should possess a huge room to exhibit them all⁴¹. On March 11, 1828, Goethe compared Bonaparte's life with that of a demigod: dynamic, tireless, lived from battle to battle and from victory to victory⁴².

What should draw our attention is, at this moment, the way in which Goethe explains the possibility of individual action. The core of his vision is to be sought in his discussion with Eckermann one year before his death. Here is what he said in March 1831:

[Napoleon] has been fully [a *daemonic* nature]. And that to the highest degree, so that it is hard to compare anyone else with him (...). Such daemonic creatures reckoned the Greeks amongst demigods.⁴³

⁴¹ J. W. Goethe, *Gespräche*, Band 6 (Leipzig: Biedermann, 1889–1896), 15.

⁴² Goethe, *Gespräche*, Band 6, 273.

⁴³ “Napoleon, sagte ich [Eckermann], scheint dämonischer Art gewesen zu sein. Er war es durchaus, sagte Goethe, im höchsten

Just before the above-quoted statement, Goethe indicated us how the key-concept of the *daemonic* should be understood, namely as eluding from all rational explanations. After assigning the *daemonic* character to the French Emperor, he offers an important clarification: the *daemonic* does not designate a supernatural being, as Mephistopheles:

The daemonic (...) is that which cannot be triggered by reason and the understanding. (...) It does not reside in my nature, but I am the subject of it. (...) Mephistopheles is a far too negative creature. The daemonic manifests itself in a very positive force. Regarding the artists, (...) it can be found more amongst musicians, less amongst painters. It can be noticed in its highest degree at Paganini (...).⁴⁴

Moreover, the *daemon* must not be understood in a theological sense, *i.e.* as a fallen angel. Its true meaning is rather that conferred by the ancient Greeks, especially by Plato. The *daemon* facilitates the mysterious disclosure (which arise rarely and in a different way than

Grade, sodaß kaum ein anderer ihm zu vergleichen ist. (...) Dämonische Wesen solcher Art rechneten die Griechen unter die Halbgötter." Goethe, *Gespräche*, Band 8, 36.

⁴⁴ "Das Dämonische (...) ist dasjenige, was durch Verstand und Vernunft nicht auszulösen ist. In meiner Natur liegt es nicht, aber ich bin ihm unterworfen. (...) Mephistopheles ist ein viel zu negatives Wesen, das Dämonische aber äußert sich in einer durchaus positiven Thatkraft. Unter den Künstlern (...) findet es sich mehr bei Musikern, weniger bei Malern. Bei Paganini zeigt es sich im hohen Grade (...)" (*ibid.*, 37–38).

the discursive one) of divine ideas and wishes. More precisely, because of it, a bridge of a transcendent nature (perceived sometimes by great artists or geniuses) between the sensible and the intelligible world emerges⁴⁵.

This particular meaning was brought into German culture during the *Sturm und Drang* movement. Hamann, for instance, talked about the *daemon* of Socrates and insisted on its anti-rational nature. The *daemon* arises similar to a religious event, interrupting the logical-dialectical course of thinking. Herder, in his turn, view it as a hidden force of nature. “For Herder, the *Dämon* represents that aspect of humanity through which the pantheistic *Kräfte* of nature come to expression”⁴⁶. Nevertheless, man has the possibility to balance the scale. Through the labour of formation (*Bildung*), the tension between nature and the historical individual can be overcome.

Both connotations are to be found in the meaning that Johann Wolfgang von Goethe gives to this concept. However, we should observe, from the outset, its ambivalent employment⁴⁷. On the one hand, it designates, in *Poetry and Truth*, the capability of the artist to mediate between the historical individual and the forces of nature. But it is the same irrational *daemon* that,

⁴⁵ Angus Nicholls, *Goethe's Concept of the Daemonic* (New York: Camden House, 2006), 37.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 228.

some other time, obstructs his aspirations and projects, hiding from him the mystery of the world. It blocks the synthesis of knowledge by revealing contradictions that exceed all rational explanations. In the domain of artistic creation, the *daemon* guides the accomplishment of the true work of art—in the Hegelian sense (a genuine work of art that embodies its concept). Thanks to it, the poet produces images (*Bilden*) capable of depicting what cannot be explained rationally⁴⁸. The myth is a particular case, its existence being influenced, from one end to the other, by the *daemon's* breath. As for the relationship between man and the Absolute, Goethe speaks about a particular type of contemplation, triggered by it. The domain of erotic reveals another connotation of this concept. The irrational *daemon*, which governs Werther's love story, pushes him to suicide. On the other hand, even the scientist, the rational man *par excellence*, interferes with the mysterious *daemon* when he strives to grasp and explain nature. The *daemon* instils into him both heuristic intuition and brilliant inspiration, thus making him discover what, for ordinary minds, remains hidden. But, some other time, it refuses to reveal to him the secrets of nature. Faust has fully felt this obstruction during his research.

Finally, Goethe translates the concept of the *daemonic* into the domain of politics. *Daemonic* is that extraordinary ability of action of a leader. Its

⁴⁸ Ibid., 234.

embodiment is Napoleon Bonaparte, whose decisions and deeds have made history.

The Emperor, in the eyes of the German poet, is a free agent of history because of his extraordinary and *daemonic* personality. This non-rational force allows him to act, guides his decisions, but it also endows him with wisdom and moderation⁴⁹. Thanks to his political genius, he can control the destiny by producing a historical work of art, just as the artist produces his masterpiece. Hence Goethe's attraction to his strong personality, to his unlimited energy, but also to the way he embodies an "unabashed (...) autocratic power at a time when the authority of monarchs was becoming unhinged"⁵⁰. Here is how he characterised him in a conversation with Eckermann from March 11, 1828:

[Napoleon was] always enlightened, always clear and decided, and endowed at every hour with sufficient energy to carry into effect whatever he considered as advantageous and necessary. His life was like the stride of a demigod, carried from battle to battle and from victory to victory. It might well be said of him that he was in a state of continuous enlightenment. On this account, his

⁴⁹ In a discussion with Eckermann from December 6, 1829, Goethe stated: Napoleon Bonaparte was moderate for he did not go to Rome, just as the Russians did not go to Constantinople. Goethe, *Gespräche*, Band 7, 163.

⁵⁰ W. Daniel Wilson, "Goethe and the Political World," in *The Cambridge Companion to Goethe*, ed. Lesley Sharpe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 215.

destiny was more brilliant than any the world had seen before him, or perhaps will ever see.⁵¹

His force does not derive from ethics. It resembles the forces of nature and manifests itself in action. Therefore, it should be judged only by its effects, and not according to the social norms of common sense. Just as the *daemon* drove Socrates' thoughts, so were the actions of Bonaparte.

b) Napoleon—*A Pawn of Universal Fate* (Tolstoy)

Opposed to Goethe's historical-philosophical conception abides "Napoleon—the Emperor subjected to the will of destiny", from the novel *War and Peace*. Tolstoy's theses are the following. 1. There are no strictly negative or positive characters in history. These attributes could characterise at most some steps of their formation. 2. Life, this soil from which history rises, is different from those irruptions of extraordinary heroes.

⁵¹ "Immer erleuchtet, immer klar und entschieden, und zu jeder Stunde mit der hinreichenden Energie begabt, um das, was er als vortheilhaft und nothwendig erkannt hatte, sogleich ins Werk zu setzen. Sein Leben war das Schreiten eines Halbgottes von Schlacht zu Schlacht und von Sieg zu Sieg. Von ihm könnte man sehr wohl sagen, daß er sich in dem Zustande einer fortwährenden Erleuchtung befunden; weshalb auch sein Geschick ein so glänzendes war, wie es die Welt vor ihm nicht sah und vielleicht auch nach ihm nicht sehen wird." Goethe, *Gespräche*, Band 4, 273.

3. History is made by actors driven by forces, others than those of nature or that *daemonic* power embodied in a single agent:

(...) we need only penetrate to the essence of any historic event—which lies in the activity of the general mass of men who take part in it—to be convinced that the will of the historic hero does not control the actions of the mass but is itself continually controlled.⁵²

The history of the early 19th century has its course, which is not a result of Bonaparte's will⁵³. His deeds are, in fact, the effects of society's forces and passions⁵⁴. The words *chance* and *genius*, Tolstoy says, “do not denote any really existing thing and therefore cannot be defined. Those words only denote a certain stage of understanding of phenomena. I do not know why a certain event occurs; I think that I cannot know it; so I

⁵² Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, book 13, chap. 10 (Project Gutenberg EBook, 2006), 861. For this reason, he adds: “The discovery of these laws is only possible when we have quite abandoned the attempt to find the cause in the will of some one man”.

⁵³ “Providence compelled all these men, striving to attain personal aims, to further the accomplishment of a stupendous result no one of them at all expected—neither Napoleon, nor Alexander, nor still less any of those who did the actual fighting.” Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, book 10, chap. 1, 596.

⁵⁴ “The facts clearly show that Napoleon did not foresee the danger of the advance on Moscow, nor did Alexander and the Russian commanders then think of luring Napoleon on, but quite the contrary” (ibid., 597).

do not try to know it, and I talk about chance. I see a force producing effects beyond the scope of ordinary human agencies; I do not understand why this occurs and I talk of genius”⁵⁵. As a result, when these forces turn against Bonaparte, the Emperor is defeated.

In Tolstoy’s conception, the man who understood all these things was General Kutuzov. He did not save Russia through tumultuous actions, but by waiting and acting only after the course of destiny has changed. His wisdom made him disobey his generals (who did not understand that radical military decisions cannot alter the course of events), and that saved the people from the fight. Tolstoy forgets to mention that the French Emperor also did it in certain circumstances. However, this fact does not refute his thesis but rather supports it.

For the Russian writer, history is far from being the objectification of a plan made by a great man, just as a general cannot entirely guide a battle. This fact is evidenced by his momentous description of the battle of Borodino, which entailed the occupation of Moscow and, later on, the retreat of the French without any further great clash⁵⁶. Any military science or strategy is far from being *a natural one*, in other words, one that could admit accurate conclusions and predictability. Consequently, Tolstoy affirms that the real force that governs in history is not the reason of a particular

⁵⁵ Ibid., first epilogue, chap. 2, 992.

⁵⁶ Ibid., book 14, chap. 1, 901.

individual. What leads the evolution of humankind is not the will of a great man who acts according to an ingenious plan, but the collective will and its complex psychological forces. After 1800, they generated a movement from West to East, followed later by one in the opposite direction⁵⁷. The explanation is to be found, according to the Russian author, in a statement of Pascal: unhappiness is caused by the fact that people cannot rest quietly in their rooms.

The above considerations lead Leo Tolstoy to the following conclusion: history should be described as having both a vertical and a horizontal side. We encounter an infinite sum of events, causally connected, on the vertical axis. Their multitude and complexity make impossible any prediction.

It is natural that these and a countless and infinite quantity of other reasons, the number depending on the endless diversity of points of view, presented themselves to the men of that day; but to us, to posterity who view the thing that happened in all its magnitude and perceive its plain and terrible meaning, these causes seem insufficient. To us, it is incomprehensible that millions of Christian men killed and tortured each other either because Napoleon was ambitious or Alexander was firm, or because England's policy was astute or the Duke of Oldenburg wronged.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, second epilogue, chap. 1, 1035.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, book 9, chap. 1, 529.

The strict chaining of these forces minimises the role of the agent. He acts being subject to his historical era, to the environment and the collective unconscious. *Destiny*, for Tolstoy, is a concept that subsumes this triple influence.

The horizontal side incorporates those mysterious forces that act in a particular moment and change the course of the event, as happened during the battle of Austerlitz, in 1805, when the army with more soldiers and with much better chances of success lost the battle (a fact caused by the morale of troops and other similar elements)⁵⁹. Tolstoy insists on this issue speaking about those free social forces that cannot logically be grasped. Among them, the author includes values, moods non-verbally transmitted, etc. The individual who makes history is that who understands and submits himself to their providential course. From this point of view, Kutuzov is not subject to history but to the Absolute. Napoleon, in turn, is not free. He depends on them and, consequently, is rather a victim than a leader of universal history.

⁵⁹ “To study the laws of history we must completely change the subject of our observation, must leave aside kings, ministers, and generals, and to observe the common, infinitesimally small elements by which the masses are moved” (ibid., book 11, chap. 1, 717).

c) Napoleon—*The World-Soul on Horseback* (Hegel)

We are dealing, at this moment, with the following contradiction: on the one hand, for Goethe, Napoleon embodies the agent who, by acting freely, changes the course of history. His actions are possible due to his *daemonic* personality. On the other hand, the Emperor, in Tolstoy's view, cannot change it as his free will dictates. He acts being subjected to *destiny*.

We intend to prove below that Hegel provides the resolution of this radical difference of viewpoints. At first glance, he seems to support Goethe's conception. Napoleon, according to his well-known phrase, is *the world-soul on horseback*. This is, in fact, a paraphrase of the following excerpt from a letter written on October 13, 1806 (the day Jena—the city where he lived at that time—was occupied by the French troops), and addressed to his former colleague and theologian Friedrich Niethammer:

I saw the Emperor—this world-soul—riding out of the city on reconnaissance. It is indeed a wonderful sensation to see such an individual, who, concentrated here at a single point, astride a horse, reaches out over the world and masters it.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel: The Letters* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 114. “Den Kaiser—diese Weltseele—sah ich durch die Stadt zum Rekognoszieren hinausreiten;—es ist in der Tat eine wunderbare Empfindung, ein solches Individuum zu sehen, das hier auf einen Punkt konzentriert, auf einem Pferde sitzend,

We should notice that Hegel does not use the word *Weltgeist* but *Weltseele*. The latter, surprisingly, does not appear even once in the pages of his *Lectures on The Philosophy of History* or in the *Philosophy of Right*. It can be encountered, instead, in the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*:

1. In a fragment about the philosophy of nature, wherein Hegel employs the word *Weltseele* with the meaning of the Greek *ψυχή κόσμου*, respectively the Latin *anima mundi*. He does so to differentiate it from the universal soul⁶¹, and to distance himself from Spinoza's pantheism⁶².

2. For explaining the connection between the individual soul and the mundane. The first, because of its inherent multiple connections with the second, is considered, at this particular dialectical moment, as the *world-soul*⁶³. Hegel also employs this concept at the beginning of his Nuremberg writing *Religionslehre für die Mittel- und Oberklasse*, wherein he explains that the *Weltseele* of nature is a variable truth, unlike God who is the real truth which embodies the first⁶⁴.

über die Welt übergreift und sie beherrscht." G. W. F. Hegel, *Briefe von und an Hegel: 1785 bis 1812* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1952), 120.

⁶¹ Hegel, *Enzyklopädie*, 51.

⁶² G. W. F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse*, in *Werke in 20 Bänden*, Band 10 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970), 46.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁶⁴ G. W. F. Hegel, "Religionslehre für die Mittel- und Oberklasse," in *Werke*, Band 9, *Nürnberg und Heidelberger Schriften* (Frankfurt am

3. In the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, he places the *Weltseele* in the proximity of the Greek λόγος, for it gives rationality to nature. But he insists that the *Weltseele* is different from *spirit* (*Geist*), due precisely to this kind of natural vitality. The *Weltseele* is to be found in organics, although it does not produce them⁶⁵.

In the case of the French Emperor, we notice the translation of this concept in the field of political action. Bonaparte embodies the *Weltseele* and not the *Weltgeist*—a fact that should not be neglected, as it often happens. Here is the key that solves what we have called the “Napoleon” Case.

Bonaparte changes the course of history due to his extraordinary personality. Hegel agrees with Goethe on this issue. But the possibility of his actions does not reside in some mysterious and almost mystical demonic traits but in a powerful force just like those of nature. Moreover, his actions are not unhampered (as Goethe seems to suggest) but part of the logical-dialectical path of history.

We already saw that Tolstoy vehemently insists on the importance of social forces. According to him, these forces, together with the other elements subsumed under the notion of *destiny*, are those that change the

Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970), 277–279.

⁶⁵ G. W. F. Hegel, “Ausführung des teleologischen Beweises in den Vorlesungen über Religionsphilosophie vom Sommer 1831,” in *Werke*, Band 17 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970), 514.

course of the world⁶⁶. Due to the multitude of vertical and horizontal connections involved, the science of history cannot adopt a causal approach of events. Consequently, the actors or the contemporaries of an event cannot formulate predictable conclusions regarding its course. They can only act, but *destiny* will manage the effects.

Hegel's theory, although it supports the existence of the free agent, embodied in the person of Napoleon, does not contradict the observations of the Russian writer. The philosopher agrees that we are unable to formulate causal explanations and predictable conclusions for a historical event. But, for him, this kind of comprehension represents nothing more than a partial one. The understanding—as a faculty of knowledge used for comprehending history—cannot disclose the course of events, its statements being cancelled by history's contingency and its illogical character. Understanding must be undertaken by the instrumentality of a higher faculty of knowledge, whose possibility Tolstoy overlooked, *i.e.* speculative reason. It gives birth to the concept of *Weltgeist* (the *world-spirit*), which is neither a mystical spirit nor a type of destiny

⁶⁶ Goethe does not neglect the role of tradition. In a conversation with Eckermann from May 2, 1824, he stated: in order to act for history, two conditions are required: a strong heart and a good heritage. In the case of Napoleon, the heritage was that of the French Revolution. Goethe, *Gespräche*, Band 5, 74. However, Goethe understands historical tradition as the soil that gives birth to the agent, not as a condition that predetermines his actions.

subjecting the agent (forcing him to lose his freedom). Moreover, it is not an abstract, fictive schema by which history should be interpreted. On the contrary, it arises from the incessant confrontation between consciousness and the real world and includes, as inherent elements, the legacy of tradition, the religious ground of humankind, the forces of society and its laws. It is a concept that describes a deeper logic, *i.e.* the logic of the illogical itself.

For spirit to reach its accomplishment, it must become aware of its spirituality. For this reason, *absolute knowledge* is precisely that knowledge which has recollected and internalised the already completed stages and can re-understand them, from this new, superior, gnoseological moment. At this level, consciousness knows that all the elements it has internalised through its experiences are nothing else than externalisations of the absolute Idea. By knowing this fact, it becomes free: by possessing this kind of self-awareness, consciousness' free will cannot dictate anything else than to act according to the true and real meaning of its action, and not superficially. Here is what Hegel writes in the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*:

Spirit is real only in what it knows itself to be. The State, which is the nation's spirit, is the law which permeates all its relations, ethical observances, and the consciousness of its individuals. Hence the constitution of a people depends mainly on the kind and character of its self-

consciousness. In it are found both its subjective freedom and the actuality of the constitution.⁶⁷

As an example of this superior type of understanding, let us think about the stages which consciousness passes in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. If, for instance, the moment of self-consciousness had not been overcome, we would have known and perceived only untrue forms of it such as the master who thinks he is free (but, in reality, he is not) or the unhappy consciousness who seeks the proximity of the Absolute but does not know that the Absolute is always near us (*Bei uns sein*). How could we understand what self-consciousness means without knowing that it is, in fact, spirit (whose freedom lies in the state and society)? Or, how could we understand it without considering the religious substratum which enfolds it?

If Napoleon embodies a historical agent, what happens to General Kutuzov? Tolstoy claims that he is not subject to destiny but to the Absolute, thanks to his ability of understanding, which is superior to that of Napoleon. We believe that even this last remark does not conflict with Hegel's conception. That is because Hegel did not claim that Napoleon embodied the *Weltgeist*. If he had done so, that would have meant that Napoleon possessed a superior capability of understanding history and he explicitly knew that he was acting in the context of the contradictions

⁶⁷ G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right* (Kitchener: Batoche Books, 2001), 222.

generated by the last moments of the French Revolution. In that case, he could have explained why such actions lead the advancement of history and how their effects lift spirit toward a superior stage of objectification of freedom. But he would have also seen the internal contradictions of his actions.

In fact, Napoleon was not aware of all this but acted (without knowing it explicitly) in the right direction of the *Weltgeist*. He decided freely, but his actions followed its logical path. Their effects influenced universal history because most of them coincided with the direction toward which the world-spirit was heading. Of course, there were situations when his decisions were against it (a proof which sustains the free character of his decisions), but their effects were quickly cancelled. Hegel well notices that this happened when Bonaparte tried to impose, from the outside, a new constitution in Spain:

To think of giving to a people a constitution a priori is a whim, overlooking precisely that element which renders a constitution something more than a product of thought. (...) The State must in its constitution penetrate all its aspects. Napoleon insisted upon giving to the Spanish a constitution a priori, but the project failed. A constitution is not a mere manufacture, but the work of centuries. It is the idea and the consciousness of what is reasonable, in so far as it is developed in a people.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 22. In *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, he completes: “it was superficially induced an a priori constitution

The astonishing nature of his personality made him see the right direction of society's advancement. That is because he embodies the *Weltseele*—the world-soul in its great natural strength. His dynamism, his energy and vitality, resembling those forces of nature, made him a real man of action. On the other hand, Kutuzov understands, but, as Tolstoy narrates, he does not act. Due to his higher ability of comprehension, he could embody the *Weltgeist*. But that does not happen precisely because the *Weltgeist* implies, as a constitutive element, man's action. As an agent, the Russian general does not change the course of history, but history is changing through him due to the contradictions of the particular historical moment. History is carried forward, on the contrary, by the man of action, whose concrete acts reveal his creative possibilities. He does not change its course because he knows, but knows because he acts in accordance with the world-spirit. Unlike Kutuzov, he is subject neither to history nor to destiny.

like that which Napoleon gave to Spain, and which disappeared with the physical power that sustained." G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1914), 383; "Material superiority in power can achieve no enduring results: Napoleon could not coerce Spain into freedom any more than Philip II could force Holland into slavery" (*ibid.*, 473).

2. Overcoming the Separation between Understanding and Feeling

Both Hegel and Goethe assumed to dynamite this opposition. This is one of the main topics of Hegel's youth essay *Glauben und Wissen (Faith and Knowledge)*, wherein it is recognised only as a moment of spirit's self-movement. Hegel points out Kant's misconception regarding the faculty of understanding, emphasising that it does not limit our knowledge because it is human understanding, so it functions exclusively by relating concepts to intuitions. It is limited as a faculty of cognition in general. The understanding cannot grasp the originator unity, just as the Absolute cannot be surprised only by feeling. Therefore, he criticises all the philosophers who promoted the artistic feeling as a means of comprehension, or who thought, just as Schleiermacher did it, that a religious type of sentiment could fully accomplish the relationship of man with the Absolute. For Hegel, only speculative reason can achieve this goal. This conclusion made him react against both the *Aufklärung* and the Romantic sentimentalism. In the *Preface* of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, he suggests that neither Immanuel Kant's rationalism nor Schelling's philosophy can grasp this superior synthesis.

We observe an analogous perspective in Goethe. The great poet embodies this antagonism in his

characters. Let us remember the disputes between Werther (ardent and passionate) and Albert, the rational husband of Lotte. As for the monumental *Faust*, Schiller notices that Mephistopheles, in the first part, symbolises the understanding and Faust the heart⁶⁹. But Goethe is also suggested their union: each of them possesses what the other lacks⁷⁰.

Among the philosophers who inspired his efforts to surpass this antagonism, Spinoza and Herder played an important role. In Spinoza, “feeling, far from being the opposite of thought, develops along it, is inherent in it and both are inseparable”⁷¹. In the footsteps of Herder, Goethe gains a broader vision of man’s cultural life⁷². As we already saw, Herder emphasized the opposition

⁶⁹ René Berthelot, “Goethe et Hegel,” *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 38.3 (1931): 391.

⁷⁰ “Goethe completed *Faust I* at a time when he often discussed literature and philosophy with the active Romantic circle in Jena, which included, among others, Hegel (shortly before he wrote his *Phenomenology of Mind*). It is not surprising, therefore, to find innumerable contrasting principles at work in *Faust* that are brought into relationship with one another in various fashions, often dialectically.” Jane K. Brown, “Faust,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Goethe*, ed. Lesley Sharpe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 86. H. R. W. Hinrichs (a former student of Hegel, to whom the latter wrote the *Preface* of his book *Religionsphilosophie*) claimed that he could identify Hegelian concepts in *Faust*. For more details, see Rüdiger Bubner, *The Innovations of Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 255.

⁷¹ Berthelot, “Goethe et Hegel,” 392.

⁷² Edward L. Schaub, “Goethe and Philosophy,” *The Monist* 42.3 (1932): 460.

between the spontaneity of life and mechanical laws. Life, instinctive and irrational (manifesting itself, for example, in folk poetry), cannot be grasped using the methods promoted by the Enlightenment.

Inspired by Spinoza, Hegel argues, in *Faith and Knowledge*, that the dissolution of oppositions is a necessary moment of spirit's self-development. Through this movement, the abstractions are overcome, and the individuality (as an external form) is embedded in the concrete universality.

In Goethe's eyes, spirit may be apprehended by pursuing its external manifestations, development and concrete activities. Like Hegel, the German poet perceives the actions of the great historical figures as expressions of the Idea and spirit. Therefore, history must consider their deeds and personalities⁷³. They confer a meaning to it, and only based on them, true knowledge becomes possible. Goethe's reflections concerning the genius and its *daemonic* nature come to explain both the process of artistic creation and political action. He reinforces his theory by adopting and developing the manner in which Herder differentiated between real thinking and its mere social utility.

Like Hegel, but using a different method (whereas the speculative discourse contrasts with his poetical thinking⁷⁴), Goethe strives to go beyond Romanticism

⁷³ Berthelot, "Goethe et Hegel," 397.

⁷⁴ "Goethe could never be happy with Hegel's systematic doctrine that the content of all areas of experience, including art and

and reveal, by distancing himself from its sentimentality⁷⁵, the spiritual world in its unity and consistency. For this purpose, he affirms the role of the understanding, albeit without reducing everything to it, as the Enlighteners did. Accordingly, the German poet does not admit, for example, that real life could find its resolution in poetry and poetry in music, as Ludwig Tieck and Novalis suggested⁷⁶. For Tieck, the purely instrumental music, which separates itself from the influence of discursive thinking or concepts, represents the genuine path toward the revelation of the Absolute. For him (as for Arthur Schopenhauer), it embodies *par excellence* the idea of art. On the contrary, the poet from Weimar requires an efficient, methodical labour, like Faust's or Wilhelm Meister's, from the last part of the novel⁷⁷. This way Goethe overcomes the Romanticism

religion, can be fully articulated in rational discourse." H. B. Nisbet, "Religion and Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Goethe*, ed. Lesley Sharpe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 229.

⁷⁵ Regarding religion, Hegel could not admit a series of ideas from *Faust* such as "Gefühl ist alles". Nicolai von Bubnoff, "Goethe und die Philosophie seiner Zeit," *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 1.4 (1947): 556.

⁷⁶ Berthelot, "Goethe et Hegel," 400.

⁷⁷ The romantic nature of Wilhelm Meister is overcome through formation (*Bildung*). "If Wilhelm Meister had persisted in this sublime naivety, certainly he would have always pleased the romantics. But he becomes wise because of his lived experiences, and sees things as they are, not as they should be." Nicolae Râmbu, *Valoarea sentimentului și sentimentul valorii* (Cluj-Napoca: Grinta,

(but also preserves it, in the Hegelian meaning of the term *Aufhebung*)⁷⁸. The pure music, both for him and for Hegel, cannot reveal the Absolute. Indeed, it embodies a higher level of artistic creation. In the *Lectures on Aesthetics*, it follows painting and sculpture, and it is regarded as an expression of subjectivity: “music is a spirit, a soul that resonates immediately for itself and feels satisfied when it can hear itself”⁷⁹. But it cannot function as a special type of superior intuition, able to unify consciousness with the Absolute.

Goethe is fascinated by the way in which the *daemonic* dominates in art⁸⁰. Nevertheless, the *daemonic* alone is sufficient neither in the historical world nor in art. It must also “have a counterweight for not to deviate in

2010), 102.

⁷⁸ “Goethe’s hero is, from now on, a completely different character. However, the former idealist did not completely vanish. He was suppressed but, at the same time, preserved, in the Hegelian meaning of the term *Aufhebung*, in the new being” (ibid., 103).

⁷⁹ “Musik ist Geist, Seele, die unmittelbar für sich selbst erklingt und sich in ihrem Sichvernehmen befriedigt fühlt.” G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, in *Werke*, Band 15 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970), 197.

⁸⁰ In poetry, Goethe said in a conversation with Eckermann from March 8, 1831, “especially in what is unconscious of it, in front of which reason and the understanding fall, and which produces an effect that goes beyond all conceptions, there is always something demonic. There is also in music, in the highest degree, for it raises so highly that no [intellectual] understanding can reach it.” Goethe, *Gespräche*, 41.

wrong ways”⁸¹, *i.e.* wisdom (*die Weisheit*). Alone, it cannot govern in politics or perform works of art.

Consequently, both thinkers agree that the ultimate form of art should be sought in something more complex, namely it poetry, understood as a superior synthesis of music and painting, and whose total expression is to be found in lyricism. The pure poetry is not the musical one, as Tieck—the inventor of this term—suggested. Its true form resides in the synthesis of lyricism and the *epopee*. Goethe recognises it in the Greek tragedy and Shakespeare’s dramas⁸².

In *Faith and Knowledge*, Hegel addresses the problem of capturing the Absolute in the framework of confrontations with Kant’s, Jacobi’s and Schelling’s idealism. He repeatedly insists that it is impossible for those philosophers who keep unsolved the *sensibility–understanding* dichotomy and, therefore, exploit only one of the two terms, to recognise the absolute unity. For him, Schleiermacher’s theology, centred on feeling and intuition, or Jacobi’s (which promotes emotion, as a path toward the Absolute) are only moments of the true understanding, as it is, for example, the *unhappy consciousness*. Goethe sees these things in an almost similar manner. Although they seduced his youth, the sentimental Christianity of Lavater or the beautiful soul of Wilhelm Meister (corresponding to the stage of

⁸¹ Nicolae Râmbu, “The Demonism of Creation in Goethe’s Philosophy,” *Trans/Form/Ação* 35.3 (2012): 78.

⁸² Berthelot, “Goethe et Hegel,” 400.

morality (*Moralität*) from the *Phenomenology of Spirit* – so before the *ethical world* (*Sittlichkeit*), are considered as insufficient⁸³.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 401.

SECTION II

BREAKING-UP WITH HEGEL

CHAPTER THREE
HISTORISMUS AND HERMENEUTICS WITHOUT
SPECULATIVE THINKING

1. Understanding and Feeling. The Conflict between
Hegel and Schleiermacher

Both German thinkers instilled in Berlin, at the University, the breath of the new century. In this regard, they shared broadly the same common beliefs⁸⁴, although each of them proposed a very different path toward their achievement. Both agree that the University, besides its important role as an institution of education and formation (*Bildung*), must become a major force in the process of consolidation of modern culture. The traditional way of teaching theology must intertwine with the new scientific thinking and, as it concerns the theory of knowledge, that Kant's efforts to reconcile man with the external world should be enhanced.

The confrontation between them happened in 1818, when Hegel came to Berlin as Fichte's successor. The academic circle considered him for the vacant teaching position since 1814, when he was the Rector of the

⁸⁴ Richard Crouter, "Hegel and Schleiermacher at Berlin: A Many-Side Debate," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 48.1 (1980): 22.

Gymnasium of Nuremberg. Although the possible transfer sparked some controversies between those who believed that theoretical philosophy should be taught in an idealist manner and the adepts of Schleiermacher, the last of them accepted the author of the *Phenomenology* in the spirit of diversity. In their opinion, even if the speculative philosophy does not provide the expected answers, it cannot be removed from the philosophical disciplines.

The historical background of their conflict was the following: Heinrich Paulus announced Hegel about the possibility to succeed Fichte's chair. Of those who opposed, Wilhelm de Wette, a close friend of Schleiermacher, who taught Biblical exegesis and historical theology, proposed for this vacancy his former teacher, Jakob Friedrich Fries. August Twisten, the associate and possible successor of Schleiermacher, a supporter of de Wette's option, wrote him for complaining about the unintelligibility of Hegel's *Objective Logic*. Schleiermacher agreed, saying that, although he did not read it entirely, he made himself a similar opinion because of the reviews. In his response, he qualified the Hegelian writing as being a play made by a conjurer (*Taschenspieler*)⁸⁵.

Regarding the function supposed to be occupied by Hegel, Schleiermacher was optimistic. In accordance with his open-minded spirit, he perceived the confrontation within the same institution as a challenge

⁸⁵ Ibid., 27.

for both his way of thinking and the reform of theological education. Thus, in 1818, when Hegel became titular, he gladly declared: now we have among us Hegel, and it is possible to join him also A. W. Schlegel⁸⁶.

However, the quarrels of the years that followed made them separate, especially because of their political differences. Schleiermacher believed that religious life and the Church should be independent of the state, while Hegel vehemently insisted on the importance of the latter, even on this issue. The second reason for their separation was the disagreement on the proposed reforms of Baron von Stein. A group of students, supported by academics close to Schleiermacher, protested. As a result, de Wetted was forced to leave the University, and Schleiermacher remained without an important ally. Hegel, active in the student circles from Berlin as it was in Heidelberg, opposed them. In accordance with his philosophy, he stated that their radical Romantic policy does not have objective grounds.

At that time, Hegel just had finished editing the book *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. Consequently, he took the attitude, in its preface, against the way of thinking promoted by the two close collaborators of Schleiermacher: Fries and de Wette. At the same time, he publicly stated that both did nothing else than to feed the extremist students, promoting a series of

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

Romantic and relative ethical principles.

Schleiermacher was affected. Primarily because of to his association with de Wette. Secondly, because of a text in which he defended Friedrich Schlegel's *Lucinde*, a novel considered to be, due to the ideal of Romantic love it promotes, against the healthy moral order⁸⁷. De Wette reacted by writing him that he should be sorry for having facilitated the appointment of Hegel at the University⁸⁸.

In the following period, Friedrich Schleiermacher significantly contributed to Hegel's exclusion from the *Academy of Sciences*. He justified his option by denying the validity of the speculative philosophy, even this fact contradicted with his ideas of diversity and free university. In the meantime, Hegel already made a large circle of supporters. They founded together a new society (which published *The Journal of the Society for Scientific Criticism*), more active than the *Academy* and subordinate to the Ministry of Culture, not to the University. Alexander von Humboldt, A. W. Schlegel and Goethe were part of it. The proposal to accept Schleiermacher was rejected by Hegel, who threatened to resign⁸⁹.

Of course, besides these conflicts of personal egos, it was also a confrontation of ideas, important for the advancement of *Geisteswissenschaften*. In Hegel's works,

⁸⁷ Ibid., 31.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 33.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 34.

both published during his lifetime and posthumously, the name of Schleiermacher is mentioned only three times⁹⁰. Yet, without specifically appointing him, Hegel criticises his manner of thinking in many places. At the end of *Faith and Knowledge*, the author writes against understanding the individuality of the subject by the instrumentality of intuition⁹¹. He considers this option as a weakness because, by choosing it, we deny from the outset the possibility of disclosing the Absolute. He also

⁹⁰ First, in a footnote about Friedrich Schlegel's *Lucinde*, in §164 from the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (G. W. F. Hegel, *Werke*, Band 7 (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970), 317). Second, in the Preface of *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy* (*Differenz des Fichteschen und Schellingschen Systems der Philosophie*), where he mentions his writing *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* (*Über die Religion: reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern*): "A phenomenon such as the *Speeches on Religion* may not immediately concern the speculative need. Yet they and their reception—and even more so the dignity that is beginning to be accorded, more or less clearly or obscurely, to poetry and art in general in all their true scope—indicate the need for a philosophy that will recompense nature for the mishandling that it suffered in Kant and Fichte's systems, and set Reason itself in harmony with nature, not by having Reason renounce itself or become an insipid imitator of nature, but by Reason recasting itself into nature out of its own inner strength." G. W. F. Hegel, *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977), 83 (Hegel, *Werke*, Band 2, 13). Finally, Schleiermacher's name appears in *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, in the chapter devoted to Heraclitus (G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, in *Werke*, Band 18, 332).

⁹¹ Crouter, "Hegel and Schleiermacher," 24.

rejects the analogy with art, used by Schleiermacher for explaining the connection between the religious individual and the Supreme Being. In 1822, before the first printing of the second volume of Schleiermacher's *Dogmatic* (when the author of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* prepared his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, work meant to blow up the "theology from Berlin"⁹²), Hegel criticised, in the *Preface* wrote for H. Fr. W. Hinrichs' *Philosophy of Religion*, the definition of religion as *the feeling of absolute dependence of man on the Absolute*. His argument: this type of attitude is not specific to humans but to those beings without reason, precisely to animals⁹³. This assertion bothered the supporters of Schleiermacher. Indeed, religion, for Schleiermacher, is not a domain subject to metaphysical thinking, but one assisted by intuition and feeling (namely, a particular feeling of the universal). That means experiencing the world in the same manner as during the religious service, inside the community of believers. The religious sentiment can be thought by analogy with the aesthetic one, but without confusing them: "the feeling on which fate relies is distinct from that of aesthetic creation, particularly regarding its object. The religious feeling is one of obedience and dependence"⁹⁴.

Schleiermacher employs the concept of *divinatory*

⁹² Ibid., 35.

⁹³ G. W. F. Hegel, "Vorrede zu Hinrichs Religionsphilosophie," in *Werke*, Band 11, 58.

⁹⁴ N. Râmbu, *Romantismul filosofic german* (Iași: Polirom, 2001), 63.

understanding for explaining the art of hermeneutics: “The art [of interpretation] can only develop its rules from a positive formula, and this is the historical and divinatory (prophetic) objective and subjective reconstruction of the given utterance”⁹⁵. Hegel, although he relies the possibility of comprehending spirit and the world on consciousness’ historicity, contests, however, the appeal to history as a modality for rejecting the metaphysical arguments and counter arguments. Religion should not be *historicized* and turned into a collection of data. History cannot value as a method for comprehending the transcendent. The uncritical use of historical data does not lead elsewhere than to relativism. Religion, Hegel argues, is not, primarily, a historical experience but involves a sense of truth located on a (superior) position, from which history receives its true image. Philosophy and religion do not work in parallel. On the contrary, they intertwine, though not in coexistence, but in a relationship of mutual influence within a unitary whole. In Schleiermacher, we encounter the reverse. Theology may employ a philosophical language to improve the explanations, but its subject is different⁹⁶. The conceptual tools of philosophy cannot surprise the

⁹⁵ F. D. E. Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism and Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 23.

⁹⁶ Andrew Bowie, “The Philosophical Significance of Schleiermacher’s Hermeneutics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Schleiermacher*, ed. Jacqueline Mariña (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 79.

Absolute. It can be glimpsed only through religious practice, by a consciousness aware of man's dependence on God. The identity of thinking and being is not given to us. Therefore, we can only approximate it. As for dialectics, Schleiermacher conceives it in the Platonic meaning of this term, as employed by the Romantic tradition. He does not accept a system supposed to provide a unitary ground for theoretical and practical knowledge. For the German theologian, “one criterion of truth is consensus; another is the coherence of our beliefs”⁹⁷.

Hegel's dialectics entails a distinction between thought and the will. For Schleiermacher, there is a qualitative identity between them. “This identity is the final and highest identity, which is ‘represented’ in and from feeling”⁹⁸. In Hegel's opinion, Schleiermacher accepts the Kantian limitation of knowledge, but only as concerns the finite objects. When he tries to approach the Absolute by feeling and intuition, he exceeds it—a fact that makes him (given the basic structure adopted) fall into the arbitrary.

The author of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* had, at that time, in Berlin, three categories of opponents⁹⁹. The first: the followers of dogmatic metaphysics, who

⁹⁷ Manfred Frank, “Metaphysical Foundations: A Look at Schleiermacher's ‘Dialectic’,” in Mariña, *Cambridge Companion to Schleiermacher*, 79.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁹⁹ Crouter, “Hegel and Schleiermacher,” 36.

claimed that concepts and things are identical. The second: the supporters of Kantianism, who adopted the limitations implied by the interdependency between sense and the understanding. They accepted the existence of *things-in-themselves*, therefore the fact that knowledge cannot go beyond their phenomenal manifestations. The third category includes those thinkers who felt it necessary to overcome the limitations imposed by Kant and promoted (mystical) intuition and feeling, as modalities to approach the Absolute.

The last two groups continued the break-up from speculative idealism, announced by Schleiermacher. “Schleiermacher is thus the initial harbinger and herald of the revolt against Hegel, whether it is done by Kierkegaard in the name of an existential religiousness or by Marx as a quest for a just social order”¹⁰⁰. They laid the foundation for the next stage of sedimentation of the sciences of spirit.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 40.

2. Understanding the Historic Individual outside the Boundaries of Idealism. Leopold von Ranke

Ranke shifted the evolution of the sciences of culture, paving the path toward a scientific methodology of studying history. Yet, that inferred, for him, to reject the idealist-dialectical method.

Ranke was one of the most vehement critics of Hegel. Due to his great influence among academics, he deepened the separation of *Geisteswissenschaften* from his philosophy, transmitting the hostility to the next generations.

History, according to his well-known imperative, must reveal the events of the past as they really were (*wie es eigentlich gewesen*¹⁰¹); and that by highlighting (as Herder already requested) their individual character. In his eyes, dialectics subjects the individual to the universal because of the manner in which the first is deduced from the second. That is why he states that Hegel's philosophy of history cannot claim the status of science¹⁰². "Ranke's extraordinarily complex relationship with Hegel was governed by the historian's aversion to the philosopher's speculative and systematic process of 'deriving' the particular from the universal

¹⁰¹ Leopold von Ranke, *Geschichten der romanischen und germanischen Völker von 1494–1514* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1885), VII.

¹⁰² Frederick Beiser, "Hegel and Ranke: A Re-Examination," in *A Companion to Hegel*, ed. Stephen Houlgate and Michael Baur (Oxford: Blackwell, 2011), 332.

by means of the dialectical method”¹⁰³.

However, even though he regarded the speculative method as a model for “how *not* to pursue history as a science”¹⁰⁴, many of his methodological principles are to be found in Hegel’s works. Moreover, his criticism, although very influential, was often inaccurate, accusing the author of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* of advocating a series of ideas against which the latter wrote on many occasions. This attitude is rooted in a quite precarious knowledge of his system. Ranke strengthened his methodology of research between 1820 and 1830, while *Hegel’s Lectures on the Philosophy of History* were edited (based on a series of course notes) and published only after 1837¹⁰⁵. By entering contact with them, his radical opposition attenuated to some extent.

Leopold von Ranke, in the footsteps of Fichte (to whom he carried a special consideration since his studentship at the University of Leipzig), Schelling, Goethe and Hegel, subscribes to the Platonic and neo-Platonic conception that the world is a phenomenon derived from the Divine Idea¹⁰⁶. He agrees that all

¹⁰³ Helmut Berding, “Leopold von Ranke,” in *The Discovery of Historicity in German Idealism and Historicism*, ed. Peter Koslowski (Berlin: Springer, 2010), 44.

¹⁰⁴ Beiser, “Hegel and Ranke,” 333.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 341.

¹⁰⁶ Berding, “Leopold von Ranke,” 43. The same idea is expressed in Beiser, “Hegel and Ranke,” 338; Otto Flügel, *Idealismus und Materialismus der Geschichte* (Langensalza: Verlag von Hermann Bayer & Söhne, 1898), 61–63.

historical epochs are its manifestations. Therefore, it can be found a universal relationship between them. We must understand that history is not an amount of contingent events, but it implies internal necessity. On the other hand, he claims that every culture and era worth to be understood from itself, and not only as a part of the total process of history¹⁰⁷.

The fundamental laws of history remain, however, hidden from us. In fact, we do not deceive ourselves if we state that they reflect the will of Providence. All nations, he says, referring to their development since the ancient times, “cannot be regarded otherwise than in their mutual actions and reactions implied by their successive occurrences on the stage of history, and in their mixture in a progressive community”¹⁰⁸. That is why we can draw an overall picture of them. “The history of each nation illuminates the history of humanity in general (...). It acquires its being from the conflicts between different groups of people while, at the same time, the sense of nationality is awakened; the nations do not give themselves the impulse to develop”¹⁰⁹. Although Ranke was fascinated by the project of writing a universal history, he could not exceed the limitations imposed by Kant’s critical

¹⁰⁷ Thomas Gil, “Leopold Ranke,” in *A Companion to the Philosophy of History and Historiography*, ed. Aviezer Tucker (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), 385.

¹⁰⁸ Leopold von Ranke, *Weltgeschichte*, Band. I (Lepizig: Duncker & Humblot, 1921), 4.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

philosophy. Writing a universal history can be regarded only as a regulative ideal. It should be considered as a goal for our research, which can be only approached, but never achieved¹¹⁰: “the perfection cannot be attained, but that does not make it less necessary the attempt (...)”¹¹¹.

As for the historical process of becoming, Ranke shared a theological vision born from his Lutheran faith: religion is the formative power of history. “Ranke’s piety led him to believe that European history was the theatre for the realisation of religious truth over time”¹¹². We can (and must) seek to comprehend the real individual, but only by taking into account that it maintains a privileged relationship with the divine.

The available empirical sources, although they are not sufficient, are necessary to provide a true image of the event¹¹³. Even so, this relationship will always remain very difficult to be understood. That is why Leopold von Ranke refuses the Hegelian concept of *spirit*. The unity of the world, believes him, cannot be

¹¹⁰ Beiser, “Hegel and Ranke,” 339.

¹¹¹ Ranke, *Weltgeschichte*, 5.

¹¹² Harry Liebersohn, “German Historical Writing from Ranke to Weber: The Primacy of Politics,” in *A Companion to Western Historical Thought*, ed. Lloyd Kramer and Sarah Maza (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2006), 170.

¹¹³ Here is, in fact, the main imperative of his critical method: “the laws of historical criticism (...) cannot be neglected for only the results of critical investigations deserve to be named history.” Ranke, *Weltgeschichte*, 5.

derived from it, by means of speculative reason. On the contrary, it will always remain concealed in a providential mystery. This thesis distinguishes him, on the other hand, from the supporters of the historical school, who considered that clarifying the liaison between the individual and the Absolute does not enter the research area of a genuine science about the past.

Given the complex nature of the event, an empirical investigation meant only to record the facts is not a real option. We must find, therefore, a middle path between the radical empiricism and speculative idealism. Ranke's substantial merit is that he suggested a hermeneutical approach. The process of understanding (*Verstehen*) must not be, however, a logical-conceptual one, as Hegel claimed in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, but one that could allow us to perceive the relationship between the empirical and the Idea. This task can be accomplished only by a consciousness capable of a special type of sympathy. Understanding "cannot be methodologically acquired. The main problems of historical knowledge come from its methodology. The latter remains formally restricted critically to examine the facts"¹¹⁴. Instead, Ranke's theory relies on a special type of experience: the intuition of the individual¹¹⁵. This

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 47.

¹¹⁵ "Ranke is convinced that behind the particular events or facts there are transcendent ideas, reflecting the great forces operating in history, which reveal themselves 'intuitively' through immersion into the sources." Georg G. Iggers, "The Intellectual Foundations of Nineteen-Century 'Scientific' History: The German Model," in

intuition resembles the aesthetic one, as far as history can be considered something that should be contemplated in order to be understood.

Summing-up, the principles that Ranke imposes to historiography are the following: criticism and impartiality, the imperative of disclosing the individuality and the primacy of induction over deduction¹¹⁶. He regards them as opposites of Hegel's philosophy, although the author of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* has also promoted them: "Ranke shared many of the basic metaphysical doctrines of the idealist tradition"¹¹⁷. The first principle, Hegel repeated it many times, saying that philosophy should not start from a given arbitrary. Consciousness must experience the object without adding any external data to it. As for history, Hegel never claimed that it must be *a priori* researched. Besides, understanding the individuality of the phenomena is an essential requirement of dialectical philosophy. Hegel sought the deeper meaning of particular eras, thus developing the complex concept of *spirit*. The same for the last principle: Hegel never agreed arbitrarily to deduce the individual from an unreal and rigid logical unity.

According to the historian, the process of extracting the particular from the universal destroys the idea of

The Oxford History of Historical Writing, vol. 4, ed. Stuart Macintyre et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 47.

¹¹⁶ Beiser, "Hegel and Ranke," 335.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 338.

freedom. “Ranke feared that if every individual were nothing but a product of its relations within a whole, its actions would be a function of the laws governing it. There would be no space for what all freedom requires: the power to do otherwise”¹¹⁸. But, as we already saw, the agent—as described by Hegel—has always the possibility to act against the logical course of the world-spirit. So does Napoleon when tries to impose, from the outside, a constitution to Spain. The effects of his attempt, however, are cancelled soon due to the contradiction with the spirit of this nation, in which they enter. This fact proves the existence of individual free actions, although they do not always have lasting effects.

This ideational dispute with Hegel had important echoes in the academic circles from Berlin. However, in the next period, the path followed by the sciences of spirit was that imposed by *historismus*. Among the causes of this development were both the interpretations, sometimes superficial, of Hegel’s philosophy and the conflicts of egos. Excluded from the *Academy of Science* by Schleiermacher, Hegel opposed to the acceptance of both him and Ranke in his new founded society. He explained his decision by saying that Ranke is nothing more than a mediocre historian¹¹⁹. His historiography was criticised together with that of his mentor, Barthold Georg Niebuhr. In the chapter devoted to ancient

¹¹⁸ *Ibis.*, 340.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 343.

Rome, from his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, Hegel rejects Niebuhr's methodological approach from *Römische Geschichte*. "Niebuhr has prefaced his *Roman History* by a profoundly erudite treatise on the people of Italy, but from which no connection between them and the Roman history is visible. In fact, Niebuhr's *History* can only be regarded as a *criticism* of Roman history, for it consists of a series of treatises which by no means possess the unity of history"¹²⁰. Ranke's research is regarded the same, although his name is mentioned only one time, in a parenthetical note about the possible ways of studying the past. The German philosopher suggests that Ranke's writings belong to an incipient form of reflective history (located on a lower level than philosophical history) because they only recount, in a personal manner, the events and, consequently, they cannot receive the status of science¹²¹. In Hegel's eyes, Ranke, just like Niebuhr, does not achieve his proposed goal. Their works, as they were designed, fail to reveal the unity history.

Leopold von Ranke hoped to develop the science of history independent of philosophy and theology, fighting, at the same time, against the positivist tendencies. He remained, however, much more than he

¹²⁰ G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (London: C. Bell and Sons, 1914), 292.

¹²¹ G. W. F. Hegel, "Erster Entwurf der Einleitung: Die Behandlungsarten der Geschichte (1822/1828)," in *Werke*, Band 12 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970), 553.

thought, in the proximity of idealist-speculative tradition.

His ideas had a strong echo, being retrieved by Dilthey and Droysen. Influential was also his theory about the proper use of empirical sources. Yet, his general method received complaints due to the intuitive character imprinted to the act of comprehension, a fact that makes the researcher's ability to understand impossible to be systematically trained.

3. Understanding and *Erlebnis*. Wilhelm Dilthey

a) The Methodology of the Sciences of Spirit between Hegel and Dilthey

From the first pages of *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, Dilthey points out their acute need for a theoretical-methodological foundation, the same as natural science received beginning with Francis Bacon¹²². That is the only way to clarify their practical side and the relationship they maintain with *Naturwissenschaften*. The new methodology should be able to overcome the Kantian limitations and reveal the spiritual object in its fundamental unity with immediate experience. Nevertheless, for Dilthey, this unity is not a

¹²² Wilhelm Dilthey, "Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Band I (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1922), 3.

metaphysical one. Not *eine Einheit*, but *ein Zusammenhang*. “Kant's unity of consciousness is found in thought, Dilthey's in experience, in *Erlebnis*”¹²³.

The accomplishment of such a requirement rests on *intellectual intuition* (*intellektuale Anschauung*), extracted from the Kantian philosophy. Hegel also considered it, in *Glauben und Wissen*, as the still undeveloped core of critical idealism (although neither in *Phenomenology* nor in the *Science of Logic* does he employ it). However, Immanuel Kant did not dwell upon it, not by negligence, but because he conceived of it, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, only as a hypothesis. Or, more accurately, as a negative example of how we would perceive reality if our minds had other a priori structures besides space and time and the twelve categories of the understanding or some other particular mechanisms able to unite them. In short, if our human mind had been completely different.

If by a noumenon we understand a thing insofar as it is not an object of our sensible intuition, because we abstract from the manner of our intuition of it, then this is a noumenon in the negative sense. But if we understand by that an object of a non-sensible intuition, then we assume a special kind of intuition, namely intellectual intuition, which, however, is not our own, and the possibility of which we cannot understand, and this would be the noumenon in a positive sense.¹²⁴

¹²³ Bonno Tapper, “Dilthey's Methodology of the *Geisteswissenschaften*,” *The Philosophical Review* 34.4 (1925): 337.

¹²⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge

A few paragraphs after the above-quoted fragment, Kant completes:

Now, since such an intuition, namely intellectual intuition, lies absolutely outside our faculty of cognition, the use of the categories can by no means reach beyond the boundaries of the objects of experience (...).¹²⁵

Even so, the problem of intellectual intuition came to the attention of thinkers like Fichte (who refers to it when considers the unity of the pure “I”), Schelling (who identifies it in the writings of Goethe, as a possibility of apprehending the relationship between the whole and its parts), Schleiermacher or Hölderlin.

The last two inspired Dilthey. “As Schleiermacher had replaced the word *Anschauung* with the word *Gefuehl*, so Dilthey replaced *Anschauung* with *Erlebnis*”¹²⁶. Schleiermacher had as a model the religious experience; Hölderlin emphasised the importance of the artistic feeling.

[Hölderlin saw] that the poetic intuition of the universe was the only basis for an objective understanding of the world as a coherent whole. The affinity with Schleiermacher resides, among others, in this. For Schleiermacher, intuition was given in religion, for Hölderlin in poetry.¹²⁷

University Press, 1998), 360–361.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 361.

¹²⁶ Tapper, “Dilthey’s Methodology,” 338.

¹²⁷ Wilhelm Dilthey, *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung* (Leipzig: B. G.

However, none of them spoke of sensible intuition, as Kant did, but of an intuition belonging to the understanding and meant to capture something more. Schleiermacher believed that this intuition (complemented by the feeling of absolute dependence on God¹²⁸) could reveal the fundamental unity of the world, *i.e.* the unity of thought and Being. To reach this unity, Dilthey conceives a psychological method, different from the empirical psychology, but close to Novalis' *Realpsychologie*. This science, together with anthropology, ought to be able to grasp the interconnections between the human individual and the historical world in which he lives. For this purpose, it is obvious that the logical understanding is not sufficient. "The *Erlebnis* of the poet and of the religious genius is actual; it is life"¹²⁹. Dilthey insists in this direction and sets, as a central concept, the inner perception of the connections (*Strukturzusammenhang*) of that organic unity which is our spiritual life. "To understand the *Strukturzusammenhang* of the individual and social life is the object of all thought"¹³⁰.

The method employed by the sciences of spirit should pursue this connection (unable to be grasped by

Teubner, 1906), 309–310.

¹²⁸ "[Schleiermacher's intuition] was the unity of thought and being in the feeling of *schlehtbinniger Abhängigkeit*, the feeling of absolute dependence on God as the real ground of the world." Tapper, "Dilthey's Methodology," 339.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 340.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 341.

means of formal metaphysics). It can be revealed, instead, by experience, more precisely by an inner experience (*Innere Erfahrung*), which differs from that of the external world (as assumed by *Naturwissenschaften*)¹³¹. Consciousness is thereby transformed and enriched. The psychological method facilitates the act of re-understanding¹³². According to Dilthey, this type of re-understanding (*Nachverstaendnis*) can be objectively accomplished. In this respect, he adds: “only by re-creating that something available to our senses we can complete this inner experience”¹³³.

To achieve objectivity, Dilthey requires that experience and the concept (*Begriff*) work together. We must observe, however, that he refuses to use the word *concept* in the Hegelian speculative meaning and does not pursue its special connection with the notion of spirit. For him, the concept is neither a general notion that could be reached by abstraction nor has the character of a universal genre enclosing the individuals. To represent the historical diversity in its uniqueness, it must envelop the particular individual. For this reason, Dilthey does not relate understanding (*Verstehen*) with

¹³¹ Hans-Ulrich Lessing, “Das Wahrheitsproblem im Historismus: Droysen und Dilthey,” in *Die Geschichte des philosophischen Begriffs der Wahrheit*, ed. Markus Enders and Jan Szaif (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), 282.

¹³² Tapper, “Dilthey’s Methodology,” 345.

¹³³ Wilhelm Dilthey, “Die entstehung der Hermeneutik,” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Band V (Stuttgart: B. G. Teubner, 1990), 318.

conceptual comprehension (as Hegel did), but with *Erlebnis*.

Understanding a text transmitted through tradition means, first of all, understanding the way in which it was produced¹³⁴; in other words, understanding that specific structure which cannot be captured by concepts, but only experienced (in the special psychological meaning implied by this requirement): “(...) the interpreter re-creates in himself the original process of creation in the author”¹³⁵.

That is the only way to meet the requirement of comprehending the whole from its parts. However, as Gadamer rightly notices¹³⁶, this special mode of re-experimentation and re-creation that the interpreter performs when places himself in the historical environment cannot escape from the aporia of subjectivity (just like Schleiermacher’s hermeneutics). Dilthey’s model of comprehension is not universally and objectively valid, for it requires from the part of the

¹³⁴ “The key to understanding poetry must be found in the lived experience (*in dem Erlebnis*). What I already met in Hölderlin’s life (...) can be, from now on, integrated, considering his lyrical poetry in which his immortal achievements can be encountered. In our study of his life, we found those lived experiences (*die Erlebnisse*) that his poems narrate. The varied periods in the development of his attitudes about life also determined the development of his poetic forms,” Dilthey, *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung*, 372.

¹³⁵ Tapper, “Dilthey’s Methodology,” 347.

¹³⁶ H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Continuum, 2004), 242.

interpreter to possess a deep consciousness, as was his own. The German philosopher discusses the role of the individual without seizing the connotations implied by Hegel's concept of spirit with respect to the problem of intersubjectivity. People do not live in isolation but within society and depend on a religious order. In accordance with their social relations, *culture* (*Kultur*) receives a particular meaning in each epoch. Dilthey observes this fact, but he fails to provide a complete explanation for it.

Besides, we cannot overlook that the line of separation between the psychological and the speculative, although it is often declared, turns out to be, at a closer look, pretty weak. Dilthey's hermeneutics preserve a speculative kernel. Precisely for this reason, his psychological approach drew criticism from the part of Heinrich Rickert, who decided to name it *geisteswissenschaftliche Psychologie*¹³⁷.

b) Hegel in Dilthey's Hermeneutical Interpretation

In the beginning, Dilthey was against speculative idealism. After he discovers Hegel's youth writings and publishes *Die Jugendgeschichte Hegels* (*The Young Hegel*), his attitude changes. He observes in Hegel's papers the identity of historical knowledge and memory. On the other hand, he also considers that "by the identification of reality with the rational mind, Hegel had totally

¹³⁷ Tapper, "Dilthey's Methodology," 348–349.

missed the fullness of historical existence as lived by man. Dilthey substituted, therefore, his concept of spontaneous nonrational life for Hegel's notion of rational mind"¹³⁸. The non-rational may be surprised only if we consider the relationship between social life and autobiography.

The German philosopher applies his hermeneutical principles on Hegel's works. He pursues, with utmost attention, his youth writings, valuing them at the expense of his maturity system. He hopes to capture, this way, the irrational lived experience (*Erlebnis*) that generated them, in order to reach, then, a deeper insight of speculative idealism. Unfortunately, his interpretation misses the true Hegelian spirit. For this reason, Georg Lukács, without denying its importance, says about *Die Jugendgeschichte Hegels*: "Dilthey is not only unable to perceive Hegel in the true historical context of social development; he does not even attain to an understanding of the dialectical method"¹³⁹.

In *Die Jugendgeschichte Hegels*, Dilthey tries to explain Hegel's maturity philosophy by means of a particular type of intuition, able to reveal the meaning of life and love¹⁴⁰. Indeed, Hegel included both in the domains of

¹³⁸ Ilse. N. Bulhof, *Wilhelm Dilthey: A Hermeneutic Approach to the Study of History and Culture* (Haga: Martinus Nijhoff Philosophy Library, 1980), 34.

¹³⁹ Georg Lukács, "The History of Hegel's Youth: Review of Wilhelm Dilthey's 'Collected writings, Vol. IV,'" in *Reviews and Articles from Die rote Fabne* (London: The Merlin Press, 1983), 52.

¹⁴⁰ Jean-François Suter, *Philosophie et histoire chez Wilhelm Dilthey*

morality and religion, but he never considered them as sufficient by themselves. Moreover, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, he renounces at these early reflections born from the soil of the Romanticism, given that they alone cannot ground the philosophical science. They are rather moments of a superior synthesis, much meaningful and closer to the true understanding of the world in its spirituality.

Influenced by Nietzsche and Schleiermacher (to whom he dedicated an extensive biographical study), Dilthey regards this synthesis as an abstract one, formally incorporating the diversity of existence. In the footsteps of Schleiermacher, he accepts only the first of the three possibilities of knowledge exposed by Hegel in the *Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences*, namely intuition.¹⁴¹ In his opinion, the other two—representation and conceptual thinking—cannot disclose, in a proper manner, that unity sought by religion.

From Nietzsche and some contemporaneous thinkers, defenders of *positivism*, Dilthey borrows another series of arguments against the speculative. “If Hegel believed in the variety of totality, for which the

(Basel: Verlag für Recht und Gesellschaft, 1960), 158.

¹⁴¹ “It was not in Hegel that he found his philosophical guide, but in another thinker of the post-Kantian generation. It was in F. D. Schleiermacher, the theologian-philosopher, Hegel’s colleague at Berlin, that the various tendencies of Dilthey’s thought were able to find a focus of unity.” H. A. Hodges, *The Philosophy of Wilhelm Dilthey* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1952), 9.

particular and finite existences are only parts, abstractions of this unity, the opponents of Hegelianism deny the possibility of this type of knowledge and propose themselves to establish any knowledge starting from the intuition of singular existences and the experience of particular facts¹⁴². By renouncing to guide his efforts toward this unity, Dilthey remains stuck on the unstable ground of subjectivity and plurality. He denies the possibility of objective comprehension, whose fulfilment Hegel glimpsed it in the unity of intuition and representation (achieved on the higher level of conceptual understanding). On the contrary, he confers to the faculties of intuition, representation and thinking only a psychological value, seeing them as mere tools for understanding an individual subject, and not in their ontological connection with the world, so as externalisations of the Absolute. According to him, because of their personal character, they cannot be organised into unity. “Rather than designating the particular aspects of an overall process through which spirit would objectively know reality, they describe only the mental acts whereby the individual knows himself and understands the others. Despite his efforts to prove that the objectivity of historical knowledge is possible, Dilthey fails, in reality, to exceed the stage of psychological comprehension¹⁴³.”

¹⁴² Suter, *Philosophie et histoire chez Dilthey*, 161.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 162.

He borrows and adapts Hegel's notions of *memory*, *meaning* and *objective spirit* but reaches an opposite conception. *Memory*, for him, does not reunite the exceeded and internalised stages of the dialectical journey but only justifies the possibility of historical knowledge. By referring to spirit in general, he aims at that intellectual capability by means of which the logical act of conceptualization becomes possible. *Objective spirit*, on the other hand, designates social objectifications such as languages and laws. It plays an important role, although Dilthey considers that it cannot describe other entities than those that can be known through *experience* (term used in an almost Kantian meaning). For him, all these objectifications are observable by means of our senses, in the same manner in which we observe the natural objects¹⁴⁴.

These three concepts remain at the subjective level of psychological categories. They allow grasping the relationships between the Ego and other individuals or past events but cannot be merged into unity. Dilthey rather assigns the following task to historical knowledge: "to evoke the soul of dead and absent individuals and to make their epochs be relived, instead of revealing the universal and durable value of our political and social conquests"¹⁴⁵.

When Hegel transposed them in the philosophy of

¹⁴⁴ H. P. Rickman, *Wilhelm Dilthey. Pioneer of the Human Studies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 61.

¹⁴⁵ Suter, *Philosophie et histoire chez Dilthey*, 171.

history, they generated three ways of approaching the events of the past. Intuition corresponds to *unreflected history*; representation is to be found in *reflective history* (as was, in Hegel's eyes, Ranke's); finally, the possibility of a *philosophical approach* derives from conceptual understanding. The first two are located on a lower level than the third. They are exceeded and, at the same time, preserved in it.

Dilthey also conceives a triadic structure, by counting: 1. self-understanding, to which corresponds the *autobiography*; 2. the comprehension of otherness achieved through *biographical research*; 3. knowledge about *objective spirit*, which should support the effort of writing a *universal history*. He fails, however, to explain the last of them, for he cannot find a method able to capture its unity. All these gnoseological possibilities are autonomous moments, important by themselves. "Hegel's influence made him add a third form, *i.e.* universal history, to his theory of historiography, but no new method came to correspond it. If Hegel conceived different ways of knowledge for each type of historical object, Dilthey never exceeded the level of intuition and psychological explanations"¹⁴⁶. Moreover, the march toward the universal is interrupted because the German author does not believe in the objectivity of (speculative) reason. For the same reason, he also refuses the teleological approach: "What concerns us is an objective apprehension of the value of individual

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 167.

processes for the historical life of humanity. Every historian, jurist, and religious scholar achieves this insofar as he does not corrupt this understanding by means of concepts of metaphysics or natural science brought in from outside¹⁴⁷. Unfortunately, even if he tries to avoid the abstract and formal, he cannot exceed the level of personal comprehension. His hermeneutics loses the possibility of grasping the evolution of history in its unity, promoting, in its stead, only a causal theory located at the level of personal psychological actions. The significance of historical epochs is constructed using this method. Therefore, their spirit is understood merely as a collective breath common to all members. They design and transform society because of their irrational creative forces. That is why Dilthey understands history as “a heterogeneous multiplicity of civilisations, in which each of them possesses an original style and differs from its neighbour by a specific quality”¹⁴⁸. For Hegel, historical eras are not entities contingently connected, but they logically succeed one after the other. Their internal changes and the transition toward the next historical moment follow a necessary direction, given the inevitable aggravation, in time, of their internal contradictions. Consequently, their significance should be comprehended from the higher position of universal spirit. They are moments of spirit’s

¹⁴⁷ Wilhelm Dilthey, *Introduction to the Human Sciences* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 440.

¹⁴⁸ Suter, *Philosophie et histoire chez Dilthey*, 167.

inherent and natural tendency to objectify freedom and, thereby, to become true.

CHAPTER FOUR

OBJECTIVITY IN THE SCIENCES OF SPIRIT

1. Hermann Lotze. The Aesthetic Foundation of Axiology

a) From Aesthetic *Beauty* to *Beauty* as an Axiological Model

Lotze's goal was to conceive a new theory of knowledge without resorting to dialectics, outside the boundaries of a system and closer to the new positivist paradigm. The rejection of absolute idealism was the first step toward a *philosophy of values* that influenced the neo-Kantian School of Baden, especially the axiology of Windelband and Rickert.

At that time, Hegel's philosophy was criticised by all sides, including the left neo-Hegelian wing. It was re-interpreted as a colossal, abstract and artificial structure from which there is no possibility of coming out. If something was fructified, it was the general idea of historical progress (also expressed by his precursors), and not the dialectal guidance nor its ontological ground. In this context, Lotze played the role of a forerunner of axiology and a promoter of the idea of *Geisteswissenschaften* without speculative thinking or absolute knowledge.

His vehement opposition to Hegel was not the result of an explicit rejection of his theses. It was rather a refusal to accept the system as a whole. In fact, Lotze's philosophy was born from the idealist soil. Therefore, his conception does not radically differ when topics such as human nature, its relationship with the external world or God are discussed. "It would not be strictly true to say that Lotze adopts each of the main tenets of Hegel while rejecting the *whole*, but such a statement would be a fair summary of his general attitude"¹⁴⁹.

Lotze says he does not agree to reduce all human and spiritual elements to a superior unity, as well as to deduce them by using a logical-dialectical method, as Hegel did. "Hegel requires from us to admit, as a metaphysical assumption (...) that the entire world is the development of a restless unity, all the events being its stages or side effects, and things-in-themselves mere appearances, transitory or born, again, at any time, and whose entire being resides in the movement of this unity"¹⁵⁰.

Lotze's theory of values separates itself from the Romantic vitalism and follows Kant's model of the judgement of taste. Consequently, it is aesthetically conceived and is aimed at the ultimate level of the metaphysical structure of reality, more precisely, at the last of the three powers (*Mächte*) of the universe (powers

¹⁴⁹ Henry Jones, *A Critical Account of the Philosophy of Hermann Lotze* (New York: Macmillan, 1895), 9.

¹⁵⁰ Hermann Lotze, *Logik* (Leipzig: Felix Meiner, 1912), 244.

understood as irreducible beginnings (*Anfänge*)).

The German philosopher distinguishes between the universal and the necessary laws of becoming. Then, he identifies a series of efficient causes, namely the mechanical laws. The third power (Lotze's idealist nucleus) acts outside the limitations of the first two, governs the values of beauty, goodness, truth, etc. and guides the evolution of the universe. "The domain of values is to be found in the register of ideality, at the edge of reality. At most, we can hope to progress toward the achievement of these values"¹⁵¹. In order to highlight his separation from Hegel, Lotze names this type of idealism (that differentiates values from the unity of becoming) *teleological idealism*.

Besides the dissociation of values from the domain of concrete existence, of Being (*Sein*), the author operates substantial changes on the concepts of *spirit* and *Idea*. For him, the latter is something formally given, not a concept of reality. We are not allowed to identify them. The real world is, for both him and Christian Hermann Weisse, much more that Hegel's logic can encompass.

That something that Hegel considered as true Being, he [Weisse] view it only as a simple sum of conditions in the absence of which Being would be unthinkable and, thus, could not be at all. But these conditions do not possess

¹⁵¹ Claude Piché, "Hermann Lotze et la genèse de la philosophie des valeurs," *Les études philosophiques* 4 (1997): 499.

themselves Being”¹⁵². The Idea is that which “corresponds to the ontological status of beauty”¹⁵³.

A concept, in its abstract form, is unable to capture the uniqueness of the object. For Lotze, “that it is a general concept, an Idea or, even more, a necessary law of nature, their universal status is the same: any instance of a law confirms only the mere *a priori* validity of the abstract universal”¹⁵⁴. Which is insufficient. For this reason, they cannot be approached by pursuing their mere connections with real existence, with Being (*Sein*). Their status is *validity* (*Geltung*)¹⁵⁵. And they belong to the third region.

Next to the notion of *value*, Lotze places, as a second term, *beauty*. It is a universal paradigmatic value, to the extent that it determines the various instances of the object that supports it. In the absence of the object, beauty is remains abstract. Only the object can be called beautiful, and that by virtue of the value that it embodies. Values allows us to consider the object in its particular character and grasp its unique meaning.

It should be observed, at this juncture, the profound Kantian influence. Values are not considered as already present. Moreover, beauty equates with a predicate that, as in the case of the judgement of taste, indicates that a

¹⁵² Hermann Lotze, *Metaphisik* (Leipzig: Verlag von S. Hirzel, 1879), 171.

¹⁵³ Piché, “Hermann Lotze,” 500.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 503.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

subject is affected. Our feelings—and not the theory of knowledge or conceptual understanding (as for Hegel)—facilitate the perception of beauty. Its actuality is the sentiment of pleasure. Its criterion is the associated feeling. The latter, no matter how it is related to sensibility, is self-sufficient and grounds the judgement of taste. That is why Lotze does not require an additional transcendental deduction.

On the other hand, he considers Kant's theory from the *Critique of Judgement* too restrictive. He decides, therefore, to distance himself from his strict demarcation between the faculties of knowledge. For Lotze, besides the sentiments of pleasure and displeasure, desire also has a role in recognising the value of beauty.

History reveals its particular character in accordance with the ontology of this third level of reality. Universal history is the movement of gradual achievement of these particular types of ideas or, as Lotze calls them, of these *thoughts*. “The advancement of the world presents no interest in itself, as long as it is governed only by necessity and universal laws (...). The course of the universe is worthy of attention only if we conceive it as being governed by some superior values”¹⁵⁶. These values possess the status of events and lead to harmony. The process of becoming is the process of their saturation (*Erfüllwerden*) on the scene of history¹⁵⁷.

¹⁵⁶ Piché, “Hermann Lotze,” 506.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

b) The Relationship between Absolute and Teleological Idealism

In order to build a metaphysics able to capture the individuality, Hermann Lotze decides to follow Herbart's psychological method, much more attentive to empirical data than Hegel's idealism. The core of his criticism against Hegel resides in the following two theses: 1. knowledge does not equate with reality; 2. our concepts are only methodological elements¹⁵⁸. In his eyes, the author of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* considered reason not only as a general principle of reality but as the world itself:

Hegel's system is based (...) on the conviction that the entire content of the universe, the whole intelligible world and both natural and spiritual entities are only stages in the development of the same absolute unity (...), and that everything that is real presents itself to us if we understand it as a large series whose periods (...) have, each of them, a specific meaning of their content.¹⁵⁹

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant said that we cannot know the *thing-in-itself* but only its phenomenon. Lotze tries to reconsider this problem. He claims that moral consciousness can provide a much wider picture of reality. By making use of our faculty of judgement, we

¹⁵⁸ For more details, see Edwin Proctor, *Some Problems of Lotze's Theory of Knowledge* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1900), 55.

¹⁵⁹ Hermann Lotze, *Logik*, 246.

could grasp even deeper. However, the German philosopher cannot accept that reality and our knowledge of it are identical (as, in his view, Hegel asserted)¹⁶⁰. For this reason, he tries to find a synthesis between the Hegelian idealism and its opposite, the Herbartian Realism, “a synthesis, however, which in most points stands nearer the thesis than the antithesis”¹⁶¹. After all, both Kant’s criticism and Hegel’s idealist-speculative theory are, for him, problematical. “From Lotze’s point of view, both these theories express a truth partially, and both are one-sided. Kant is right when he upholds the doctrine that appearance is a mental construction, but is not reality. He errs, however, when he concludes that reality is therefore unknowable. On the other hand, Hegelians are justified in maintaining that appearance is an intellectual synthesis, and that reality is known. But it is too much to affirm that human cognition is reality or even an absolute knowledge of reality”¹⁶². Lotze considers the identity between knowledge and reality, as well as the deduction of the latter from concepts, as

¹⁶⁰ Hermann Lotze’s philosophy is rooted in the idealist tradition, but, “if his positive attitude [toward it] was determined for him by Kant, his negative attitude was determined for him by Hegel, as is evident whether we have regard to his logical, metaphysical, psychological, moral, or even some of his religious views.” Jones, *Philosophy of Hermann Lotze*, 32.

¹⁶¹ Thomas E., *Lotze’s Theory of Reality* (London: Longmans Green & Co., 1921), XXVI.

¹⁶² Proctor, *Lotze’s Theory of Knowledge*, 43.

formal schemas. “The word *concept* does not seem to express (...) that exalted meaning which is given to it by Hegel’s school and which pretend to be knowledge of the essential nature of the object”¹⁶³. Yet, the author of this fragment forgets that Hegel was cautious regarding the concrete development of concepts, and always related them to the real world.

The neo-Kantians from Baden were receptive to Lotze’s theory regarding the role that values play in the act of understanding. The meaning that he conferred to history, *i.e.* the theatre of the progressive achievement of cultural values, was also attractive¹⁶⁴. However, they entirely rejected the aesthetic model that generated them.

2. From Windelband to Rickert

a) The *Nomothetic–Idiographic* Dichotomy

The methodological problems of economics and the social sciences generated, after 1880, a broad dispute, known in Germany as *Methodenstreit* (*The Conflict of Methods*). It started as a debate between the members of the Historical School of Economics, led by Gustav von Schmoller and both the advocates of utilitarianism and the economists from Vienne (represented by Carl

¹⁶³ Lotze, *Logik*, 45.

¹⁶⁴ Piché, “Hermann Lotze,” 517.

Menger). Soon, the choice between a social theory based on the general laws of history and the concrete presentation of society's cultural development, aiming at the individuality, became a central theme of discussion¹⁶⁵. Questions about the purpose of social and political sciences and the connection that should exist between their theoretical and practical side were also raised. Thus, the problem of objectivity came to the forefront.

Heinrich Rickert substantially contributed to clarifying this topic. In *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung*, he tried to set up a rigorous theoretical basis, so that the historical science properly reveals the phenomena of the past. Then, he expanded his research in order to establish whether the sciences of culture can provide objective results. Consequently, he shifted the discussion about their appropriate methodology toward a theory of concepts' formation. This critical approach, which recapitalised Immanuel Kant's philosophy, deepened the separation between the sciences of spirit and Hegel.

Rickert's research developed on the philosophical soil of his teacher, Wilhelm Windelband. We should dwell, therefore, a few moments upon his doctrine.

¹⁶⁵ For further discussions on this problem, see Guy Oakes, "Value Theory and the Foundations of the Cultural Sciences. Remarks on Rickert," in *Methodology of the Social Sciences, Ethics and Economics in the Newer Historical School*, ed. Peter Koslowski (Berlin: Springer, 1997), 59.

Windelband opposed, from the position of neo-Kantianism, the new positivist direction for which only empirical data are true, and the only valid methodology is that employed by natural science. However, unlike his successors, he was very attentive to Hegel's philosophical indications. He assigned philosophy the task to reveal the evolution of human thought in its necessary and logical character. Moreover, he explained the process through which the incipient naive ideas about life and reality are exceeded—namely after consciousness perceives their internal contradictions—almost in the same way as Hegel, but without resorting to the “mysterious explanation by which he [Hegel] envelops this change”¹⁶⁶. As for the concrete evolution of history, he agreed that behind all individual actions it exists a universal order:

All the great actions of great historical figures, as excellently Hegel said, are based on the fact that the passionate energy of their desires is directed to the same purpose as the driving energies of collective life.¹⁶⁷

This process is directed, just as in Hegel, toward the objectification of freedom:

Since the self-formation of humanity is, for us, the ultimate goal of history's progress, and this self-

¹⁶⁶ Wilhelm Windelband, *Einleitung in die Philosophie* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1920), 16–17.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 334.

formation also means self-determination, we can adopt Hegel's idea that the history of this progress resides in *the progress in the consciousness of freedom*. In the absence of this Idea—which describes the end of history—it is impossible to speak about progress.¹⁶⁸

In a paper written on the occasion of his election as the Rector of the University of Strasbourg and entitled *History and Natural Science*, he explicitly adopted Hegel's thesis that truth is not *adaequatio rei et intellectus*. However, he defined it as a value, thus shifting logic toward axiology: "because truth is a value, logic itself is subordinated to the theory of values"¹⁶⁹. From this position, he resumed the problem of individuality, a problem that, in his opinion, was not properly treated in the system of absolute idealism. Since we are dealing with values, the objects that support them should be regarded in their uniqueness. Each value is carried by an individual object. All our feelings caused by values, he said, are rooted in the uniqueness, in the incomparable character of the object¹⁷⁰. If we consider a recurring event instead of these objects, we will not be able to assign an axiological meaning to it.

According to Windelband, natural science cannot provide a genuine path toward the particularities and the uniqueness of the event. It seeks only the common

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 352.

¹⁶⁹ Guy Oakes, "Value Theory," 64.

¹⁷⁰ Wilhelm Windelband, "Histoire et sciences de la nature," in *Les Études philosophiques* 1 (2000): 13.

properties of classes of objects, while we need a method able to disclose their individual character.

To clarify this issue, the German philosopher differentiates between the *nomothetic* and the *idiographic* sciences. The goal of the first is to develop a system of abstract principles and rules, based on which to deduce the properties of the object. In the case of the idiographic sciences, essential is not to discover a unifying general law but to perceive the singularity of the phenomenon. History, because it belongs to them, must always pursue this goal.

Knowledge obtained through nomothetic thinking allows producing the tools by which the domination of man over nature is expanding more and more. But it matters not to a lesser extent that any activity directed toward a goal, in a human community, depends on the experiences of historical knowledge.¹⁷¹

History must investigate those elements that cannot be deduced from general laws, but which, in their individual character, are linked to values. This task, however, cannot be entirely accomplished. Windelband admits that from the experience of any historical event will always remain a residue of incomprehensible facts, in other words, something that is “inexpressible and indefinable”¹⁷².

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 11.

¹⁷² Ibid., 16.

b) Gnoseological Axiology and History. Heinrich Rickert

Rickert, just like his teacher Windelband, is closer to Lotze's metaphysics (which states the *ideal validity*) than to Nietzsche's philosophy (and his relativism) or Franz Brentano's (to whom the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl owns the task to extract objective values from immediate reality).

Having critical idealism as a central pillar, he develops, in *The Object of Knowledge*, a theory meant to overcome those elements of Kant's doctrine deemed as marks of subjectivity. He observes that knowledge is not a purely intellectual activity. It cannot be separated from judgement. This fact attests the presence of other auxiliary human activities like the excitability of feelings or the will. If, before him, values were regarded only as belonging to the intellectual acts related to practical actions, from now on we can no longer overlook the fact that they also shape our knowledge. Any judgement is intentional; in other words, it is a subjective activity of recognising truth as a value¹⁷³. This conception is

¹⁷³ “[In Rickert's philosophy] we can find, paradoxically, the characteristic of truth as a value, along with the fact that any judgement of reality is constituted by the recognition of values (...). But this paradox disappears if we notice that any knowledge is judgement and any type of judgement, as Descartes already demonstrated, reveals the human will, an active attitude: the act of recognizing (*Anerkennen*) the value of truth.” Georges Gurvitch, “La théorie des valeurs de Heinrich Rickert,” *Revue Philosophique de*

based on Windelband's theory that objectively valid values support the objective validity of judgements, including those related to the topic of Being. Truth must not be understood as *adaequatio* but as a value located on a different level.

Values are independent of physical reality, which constitutes their support. Moreover, we cannot identify them with purposes, nor are they synonyms of validity (as for Lotze). They may or may not be valid, but continue to exist even if they are not recognised. The criterion that differentiates them from the domain of existence is *the negation*. The opposite of an existent is a non-existent; the opposite of a value may be nothingness, but also a negative value. The negation of an existential concept has only one meaning, the negation of a value-concept has two.

Therefore, it is necessary to set, from the beginning, an operational distinction, *i.e.* between the theoretical and non-theoretical values, the last of them including the moral, religious or aesthetic ones. We already saw that Lotze reduced all values to *beauty*. He regarded all other judgements in terms of it. Rickert rejects this thesis. Judgements are related to the first category of values. The second produces only subjective acts, such as those related to the will or emotions. "Theoretical values can be logically demonstrated and rationally founded (*rational begründet*)"¹⁷⁴, the others only observed.

la France et de l'Étranger 124.9/10 (1937): 81.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 81.

The first of them are general and possess a monistic tendency. The last belong to the domain of singularity, have a pluralistic tendency and are in a state of continuous change and transformation. This particular character obliges us to begin our research with empirical data. In the case of the cultural sciences, these data do not come from elsewhere than from history. “The philosophy of non-theoretical values cannot operate, consequently, otherwise than empirically; the system of values, now differentiated and established through a philosophical analysis, remains open”¹⁷⁵.

This open system (*offenes System*)—even though its starting point is empirical and values occur on the side of subjectivity—allows for some of them to claim objective validity. This category includes: 1. values possessing an individual subjective character (in other words, those attached to the preferences of an individual); 2. ideal values (ethical, aesthetic and religious), *i.e.* those of a particular community, recognised by all its members as objectively valid; 3. economic and vital values (whose character is of “generalised subjectivity”).

Rickert observes a series of binomial contraries in the sciences of culture and seeks to understand them in their mutual influence. Each of them defines itself according to its opposite (heterology)¹⁷⁶: the

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 82.

¹⁷⁶ For more details, see Anton C. Zijderveld, *Rickert's Relevance. The Ontological Nature and Epistemological Functions of Values* (Leiden: Brill,

transcendental self-experimental reality; *subject-object*; sensitive-intelligible; general-individual; value-non-value; natural-cultural. They resemble Hegel's, but only formally. That is because, in Hegel, the resolution of opposites occurs in a superior synthesis, having itself, in its turn, a negative moment and another superior unity that overcome the previous and, at the same time, preserves it. Rickert does not propose such a resolution but, on the contrary, the preservation of dichotomies.

The natural and cultural sciences differ because of their objects. Therefore, each of them should make use of a different methodology to exploit the sensitive data. The purpose of the first is to find general laws. They become more relevant as they rise above the various empirical facts, the ultimate goal being to find a unique, universal principle. This direction, if adopted by the sciences of culture, makes the individuality of the phenomenon, as well as its multitude of particular qualities, be lost. Therefore, we must abandon the quest for general laws. Sensible infinity cannot be surmounted otherwise than by organising it as a unitary process of becoming and selecting the facts according to their connections with values¹⁷⁷. "The real problem is not to build a science that brings together all singular data or neglects physical elements, but to make the scientist conserve from reality, with the aid of general

2006), 39.

¹⁷⁷ Raymond Aron, *La philosophie critique de l'histoire* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1950), 117.

instruments, something more than natural science could find”¹⁷⁸. For this reason, Rickert decides not to use the term *Geisteswissenschaften* anymore, replacing it with *Kulturwissenschaft*. He justifies his choice in the *Preface of Kulturwissenschaft und Naturwissenschaft*: we must seek to reveal the individual aspects of society for being able to obtain, afterwards, a proper comprehension of it. Because of the particularities of its objects, society’s cultural life must be portrayed in an individualising manner, an act for which the term *spirit* (*Geist*) is inadequate¹⁷⁹.

c) *Begriffsbildung* and the Critical Philosophy of History

For an object to be included in the domain of possible knowledge, it must possess a concept able to represent it. Windelband already addressed this topic. In his opinion, our concepts should be able to express the individuality of the phenomena targeted by the idiographic sciences, and not to reveal only a general property, common to a set of objects. However, he considers that between concepts and reality will always remain a *hiatus irrationalis*¹⁸⁰. To grasp the individual character of reality, the act of conceptualization must

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 119.

¹⁷⁹ Heinrich Rickert, *Kulturwissenschaft und Naturwissenschaft* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1926), XI.

¹⁸⁰ Guy Oakes, “Value Theory,” 67.

continuously relate its targeted elements to values; in other words, to establish their *value relevance*. Values help us reveal the individuality of phenomena. *Historic centres* are those individuals who possess *value relevance*, i.e. those who pass their values to the entire plurality of phenomena of their epoch.

Rickert has a critical attitude (in the Kantian meaning) regarding the philosophy of history. He tries to explain how the past can be scientifically understood (in other words, without resorting to a metaphysical dogmatic system, whose conclusions are not rigorously validated). That is why he conceives, in the beginning, a *logic* meant to explain the process of conceptualization (*Begriffsbildung*). Only this way, he explains, history can be reconstructed. “History studies particular phenomena and selects its material by reporting them to values”¹⁸¹.

For this purpose, two conditions are required to be fulfilled¹⁸²: 1. to research the historical phenomenon based on its characteristic notes (its actors, period, etc.); 2. to relate it to a value (*Wertbeziehung*). Such an object should not be evaluated or judged but only perceived as a historical fact, thus gaining the status of a phenomenon of the cultural sciences (given that the objects of natural science are axiologically neutral–*Wertfrei*). Although values are general elements, they,

¹⁸¹ Aron, *La philosophie critique de l'histoire*, 120.

¹⁸² Mircea Florian, *Introducere în filosofia istoriei* (Bucharest: Garamond, 1996), 48.

unlike the concepts of *Naturwissenschaften*, are able to individualise the object that carries them, by highlighting its particularities and not the common properties of the class to which it belongs. They also help us not lose ourselves in the multitude of qualities, people and objects involved in history.

A study based on values is not concerned with the moral aspects of society, nor aims at finding a metaphysical unity supposed to explain the process of becoming. On the contrary, its purpose is to locate the individual moment in the course of history and gradually to reveal it. The selection of what really matters from the many connotations that an event involves is governed by the imperative of relating the object to values. In other words, if we are concerned, for instance, about the unity of the German nations (understood as a value), we should search, first of all, those events that contributed to its realisation. Then, we should study their causes and observe the historic centres that lived this value. The researcher must transpose himself into that era in order to understand its way of thinking and values (even if, in the present, they were replaced by others). If these elements are not supported by empirical data, they prove to be arbitrary.

Rickert rejects the psychological way of understanding history. Moreover, he does not agree with Dilthey's special psychology, supposed to facilitate comprehension. That is because comprehension

involves two steps¹⁸³: understanding the singular and reconstructing (using all the data we possess) its state of mind. The goal is not artificially to construct values but to observe how they emerged in previous cultures and how they came to be accepted by all their members. For this reason, we do not need an external principle meant to explain or unify them. Rickert remains close to Hegel's doctrine when he decides to follow Windelband's idea that the advancement of history involves a gradual achievement of human freedom.

On the other hand, the system of values is limited to a particular human society, namely, a particular historical moment. For this reason, history can only partially achieve the ideal of objectivity. In order to obtain an accurate picture of the past, the historian should identify the values of the community that he studies. But he cannot appeal to a universally valid system of values.

Unfortunately, all of this neither fully elucidate the problem of objectivity nor clarify how the essential data on which it depends should be selected. Raymond Aron considers that Rickert's approach is incomplete¹⁸⁴. It does not provide concrete indications for understanding the mechanisms of history, nor clarifies on which objects his theory should be applied.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 130.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 121. The author also affirms: "Rickert's theory is not false and could be always defended. But it is ambiguous and therefore questionable" (ibid., 46).

3. Max Weber. The Problem of Objectivity

The solution proposed by Max Weber for solving the problem of methodological objectivity rests on Rickert's theory of values, as well as on his research about the logic of science. He begins by examining the way in which empirical reality determines the formation of concepts. Then, taking the results as a reference, he approaches problems such as the objective character of concepts or the link between them and subjective values. He also asks how should we decide which historical phenomena are important and significant and deserve to be studied.

His answer has as a nucleus the term *Wertbeziehung* (*value-relation*). "Both Weber and Rickert repeatedly and emphatically distinguish *value-relation* (*Wertbeziehung*) from practical *value-judgement* or *valuation* (*Werturteil*, *Wertung*)"¹⁸⁵. The objects of the sciences of culture (as opposed to natural phenomena, which are subject to general laws), must be understood in terms of values. "The acts of relating reality to values and organising the detached fragments by means of their cultural significance constitute a rational way to proceed, even though rationality, in this case, does not reach the rigour to which the natural sciences got us used"¹⁸⁶. We should

¹⁸⁵ Jay A. Ciaffa, *Max Weber and the Problem of Value-Free Social Science* (London: Associated University Press, 1998), 64.

¹⁸⁶ Nicolae Râmbu, *Tirania valorilor. Studii de filosofia culturii și axiologie* (Bucharest: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, 2006), 390.

consider precisely those phenomena that can be defined by the instrumentally of *value-relation*.

The way in which *Kulturwissenschaften* capitalise values is rather descriptive and comprehensive than evaluative. “The domain of values is rationalised through the process of depersonalisation and intellectualisation by which values are articulated, clarified, and detached from their volitional and emotional origins”¹⁸⁷. *Ideal types* are constructs meant to facilitate the judgements of attribution. They help the researcher organise the reality and clarify its empirical content but do not produce evaluative judgements. “An *ideal type*, as conceived by Max Weber, is, unlike any interpretation and evaluation of reality, an instance of control totally neutral in axiological terms”¹⁸⁸. As a result, the “personal commitment is replaced by impersonal contemplation, and the passionate attitude of partisanship is replaced by the dispassionate attitude of science”¹⁸⁹.

The cultural sciences are *Wirklichkeitswissenschaften* (sciences about concrete reality)¹⁹⁰, having as a central object the individual. At this point, Weber retrieves the idea (issued by Hegel, but transformed and adapted by

¹⁸⁷ Guy Oakes, “Rickert’s Value Theory and the Foundations of Weber’s Methodology,” *Sociological Theory* 6.1 (1988): 40.

¹⁸⁸ Râmbu, *Tirania valorilor*, 395.

¹⁸⁹ Oakes, “Rickert’s Value Theory,” 40.

¹⁹⁰ “The sciences of culture are (...) sciences of reality, in the particular meaning that they have as an object the actuality of life surrounding us, the world of history, of culture and civilisation, infinite in its manifestations,” Râmbu, *Tirania valorilor*, 389.

Rickert) that values are not constants of history. They are affected and transformed throughout its development. Consequently, the scientist must always take into account their variability and plurality. Changes should be perceived in accordance with the inherent axiological constitution of the cultural domain. However, their subjective character produces, besides what Weber calls “their eternal youth”, an uninterrupted identity crisis. Given their changing nature, we will never succeed to establish a rigorous hierarchy among them. Moreover, we cannot draw a strict demarcation line between the subjective and the objective values from which the first should be deduced. The conflict between them will always remain open. For this reason, we have to accept the character almost irrational of their domain. “The value spheres of religion, politics, commerce, art, erotic, and science become increasingly autonomous and function according to their own immanent imperatives. (...) As a result, conflicts between value spheres become inevitable, and the incommensurable principles that govern each sphere make a resolution of these conflicts impossible”¹⁹¹.

To find a solution to this problem, Weber relies on Rickert’s philosophy. *Wertbeziehung* can be established only based on some variable criteria. Rickert already tried to clarify what makes a value valid, in order to establish which historical phenomena we should study.

¹⁹¹ Oakes, “Rickert’s Value Theory,” 41.

In his footsteps, Weber assigns philosophy the task of finding a principle, independent of the two classes of values, able to confer cultural meaning to the phenomenon. We already saw that, in Rickert's opinion, the concept of truth refers precisely to what a community claims and accepts in a particular historical moment. The significance of a cultural phenomenon, Weber says in his turn, "cannot be derived and rendered intelligible by a system of analytical laws (*Gesetzesbegriffen*), however perfect it may be, since the significance of cultural events presupposes a *value-orientation* towards these events"¹⁹². When he tries to explain what understanding the meaning of a cultural phenomenon means, he uses, precisely for this reason, the adjective "objectified" (*objektiviert*) and not "objective" (*objektiv*). *Kulturbedeutung* (*cultural significance*) objectifies itself in the world of culture and undergoes changes and conversions through time¹⁹³.

This type of truth is bordered, on one side, by axiological neutrality and, on the other, by *value-relation* (by *Wertfreiheit* and *Wertbeziehung*)¹⁹⁴. Weber borrows the concept of *value-relation* and limits himself to the explanations given by his precursor. However, he does not accept Rickert's project to build a scientific system

¹⁹² Max Weber, *The Methodology of Social Sciences* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1946), 76.

¹⁹³ Carl Friedrich Geyer, *Einführung in die Philosophie der Kultur* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1994), 62.

¹⁹⁴ H. H., Bruun, "Weber on Rickert: From Value Relation to Ideal Type," *Max Weber Studies* 1.2 (2001): 138–160.

of values. This methodological ideal does not attract Weber. On the contrary, he establishes, as the basis for his axiology, the thesis that there are different spheres of values, which cannot be unified and, thus, are destined to remain irreconcilable¹⁹⁵. Objectivity (in the meaning used by the sciences of nature) does not belong to the cultural sciences. “There is no absolutely ‘objective’ scientific analysis of culture—or put perhaps more narrowly, but certainly not essentially differently for our purposes—of ‘social phenomena’ independent of special and ‘one-sided’ viewpoints according to which—expressly or tacitly, consciously or unconsciously—they are selected, analysed and organised for expository purposes”¹⁹⁶. Knowledge is conditioned by the system of values the researcher possesses.

Weber admits (just as Hegel did) that the development of society depends on a series of interrelated principles. Individual structures develop in parallel with thinking. “These interrelated processes are the *process of rationalisation*. Both his conception of the objective structures and their dynamics of development were importantly derived from Hegel”¹⁹⁷. By analysing Hegel’s influence on Weber’s sociology, Peter Knapp lists¹⁹⁸, among others, the structures of domination that

¹⁹⁵ Bruun, “Weber on Rickert,” 145.

¹⁹⁶ Weber, *Methodology of Social Sciences*, 72.

¹⁹⁷ Peter Knapp, “Hegel’s Universal in Marx, Durkheim and Weber: The Role of Hegelian Ideas in the Origin of Sociology,” *Sociological Forum* I.4 (1986): 602–603.

¹⁹⁸ For a complete list, see Knapp, “Hegel’s Universal,” 601.

generate rules derived from individual structures or the fact that the charismatic leaders of universal history transform all traditional structures. Speaking about Napoleon, *the world-soul on horseback*, Hegel reconciled both Goethe (for whom history is led by great men) and Tolstoy (who claimed that the Emperor was only a pawn of history, a product of it). Napoleon lost the fight due to a series of objective factors that he did not take into account. Similarly, Weber agrees that universal becoming is possible only because of the actions performed by particular individuals. Finally, both authors admit the importance of religion for the development of society¹⁹⁹: Christianity for the birth of Western rationality and Protestantism for its advancement.

¹⁹⁹ “The modern man is in general, even with the best will, unable to give religious ideas a significance for culture and national character which they deserve.” Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Routledge, 2003), 125.

CHAPTER FIVE

HEGELIAN ECHOES IN THE LATE 19TH CENTURY

1. The Concept of *Spirit* and the Formation of Sociology. Émile Durkheim

It is quite difficult to detach many Hegelian elements from Durkheim's sociology. But, as few as they are, they supported his remarkable efforts to found the new science of sociology under the influence of the neo-Kantian School of Baden²⁰⁰ and outside the boundaries of Auguste Comte's sociological positivism. Durkheim did not use the dialectical method or borrowed the main Hegelian ontological structures. But he picked up some essential ideas from his philosophy of right and history.

The development of human culture is controlled by a series of historical (*supra-individual*) processes, of which languages, laws, the various moral norms and political systems are part. They form a unitary whole to which he refers by using the concept of *spirit* (*Geist*), derived from Hegel's philosophy. Even though many of

²⁰⁰ The French sociologist differentiates between *judgements of reality* and *judgements of value*, the last being possible because of their connection with an Ideal (accepted by a community). Values, he says in the paper *Value Judgements and Judgements of Reality*, come from the act of relating an object to different aspects of the Ideal.

its connotations were removed, including the fact that spirit develops itself until it becomes aware of its own spiritually, this notion still indicates the continuous change that defines man and society.

Freedom and the state necessarily depend on each other. Durkheim emphasises the role of the state in strengthening each society and the fact that freedom can exist only being limited by objectively developed laws. However, he rejects its idealist meaning.

A political system cannot function in the absence of reason, for only reason makes an individual live its life in accordance with the requirements of the genuine concept of *man*. Durkheim understands it in terms of desire, appetite or socialised personality. “Hegel believed that humans only become human by being part of the system of objective spirit (...). Both Durkheim's view of the social nature of humanity (*homo duplex*) and his theory of religion are indebted to Hegelian analyses”²⁰¹. Moreover, both authors consider “that values, especially religious values, form the core of social structure and the basis of moral life and the state”²⁰².

2. Ernst Cassirer. The Dialectics of Symbolic Forms

Cassirer, just like the neo-Kantians from Baden, prefers to use the term *Kulturwissenschaften* instead of

²⁰¹ Knapp, “Hegel’s Universal,” 597.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 598.

Geisteswissenschaften, although his philosophical conception differs from theirs. In fact, when he considers this topic, he also distances himself from the general direction of Marburg School. The German author explicitly states his adherence to the Hegelian principle *Das Wahre ist das Ganze*²⁰³. Philosophy must grasp, in a gradual progression, the domain of culture as a whole, covering the totality of its symbolic forms. For this reason, he dialectically conceives its development stages as well as the connections between them. In addition, in the *Preface* to the third volume of his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Cassirer explains that he uses the notion of *phenomenology* in the Hegelian meaning, and not in the modern sense conferred by Edmund Husserl²⁰⁴.

When I speak about a *phenomenology of knowledge*, I do not use the term in its modern meaning, but I go to the basic meaning of *phenomenology*, as observed and systematically justified by Hegel.²⁰⁵

²⁰³ Ernst Cassirer, *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, Dritter Teil, *Phänomenologie der Erkenntnis* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2010), VIII.

²⁰⁴ “Cassirer was never a Hegelian, and he wanted to be neither a Husserlian phenomenologist.” Christian Möckel, “Hegels ‘Phänomenologie des Geistes’ als Vorbild für Cassirers ‘Philosophie des symbolischen Formen,’” in *Hegels ‘Phänomenologie des Geistes’ heute*, ed. Andreas Arndt and Ernst Müller (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2004), 266.

²⁰⁵ “Wenn ich von einer *Phänomenologie der Erkenntnis* spreche, so knüpfe ich hierin nicht an den modernen Sprachgebrauch an,

However, he does so by separating from what he considers being the abstract reduction, operated by Hegel, of all forms of experience to logic. “A more correct approach is to regard Cassirer in his doctrine of symbolic forms to have moved from Kant toward Hegel. Cassirer, in his own thought, follows the path idealism itself took from Kant to Hegel, although Cassirer never abandons the Kantian form of criticism, nor does he ever fully absorb Hegel’s speculative mentality”²⁰⁶. Even if he confers to philosophy a dialectic character, he does not conceive it as a system. The connections between the symbolic forms are not explained by using the term *Aufhebung*, nor does he seek a superior logic that could grasp reality in its totality. Instead, Cassirer hopes to open a place “from which to allow philosophy to speak”²⁰⁷.

His phenomenology of knowledge distinguishes (in the footsteps of the Hegelian triad *consciousness-self-consciousness-spirit*) three functions of the human mind: expression (*Ausdruck*), representation (*Darstellung*) and pure meaning (*reine Bedeutung*). To each of them

sondern ich gehe auf jene Grundbedeutung der *Phänomenologie* zurück, wie Hegel sie festgestellt und wie er sie systematisch begründet und gerechtfertigt hat.” Cassirer, *Phänomenologie der Erkenntnis*, VIII.

²⁰⁶ Donald Phillip Verene, “Cassirer’s Concept of a Philosophy of Human Culture,” in *Symbolic Forms and Cultural Studies. Ernst Cassirer’s Theory of Culture*, ed. Cyrus Hamlin and John Michael Krois (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 21.

²⁰⁷ Verene, “Cassirer’s Concept,” 25.

corresponds a cultural symbolic form: the myth, language and scientific knowledge.

The first implies an immediate relationship with the object. “The expressive function is a stage of the simple unity of symbol and object”²⁰⁸. The symbol is located on the same level as the contents to which it sends. “In the world of mythic expression all exist on the same plane of reality; the only fundamental division made is that between sacred and profane”²⁰⁹. In the *Foreword* to the second volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, the author admits that this idea is a derivative of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Myths, he writes, “are to be found in an inner and necessary relationship with the universal task of this phenomenology which arises, indirectly, from Hegel’s definition and conception of the concept”²¹⁰. Consequently, for its true nature to be revealed, the myth must be placed inside the phenomenological unity of culture, where it owns a necessary place due to its particular internal structure.

The next function, the *representation*, assumes the link between the subject and the object as mediated. The symbol sends us to the object, but this time it is separated from the latter. Language is its corresponding cultural form. It individualises the objects, for it is

²⁰⁸ Donald Phillip Verene, “Hegel, Kant and Cassirer: The Origins of The ‘Philosophy of Symbolic Forms,’” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 30.1 (1969): 38.

²⁰⁹ Verene, “Cassirer’s Concept,” 21.

²¹⁰ Ernst Cassirer, *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, Zweiter Teil, *Das mythische Denken* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2010), XII.

“dominated by its metaphysical power to join entities and to apprehend metaphors”²¹¹. A philosophy of language is a philosophy of symbolism, because, “in language, the real is composed of objects; reality is formed in the act of naming. (...) As a symbolic form, language is not merely a method of thinking; it is thinking itself”²¹². It confers to culture the possibility to actualize itself.

The true symbolic meaning of the object is revealed by the *significative function* (*Bedeutungsfunktion*) of consciousness.

All three functions are interconnected. Symbolic forms should be understood as their products, rather than as simple forms of being. A *symbolic form* designates the energy that links a significant content to a sensible character²¹³. Their number is not limited, and they do not possess an equal status. Cassirer says that man is an *animal simbolicum*, precisely because of his ability to understand them.

Therefore, his cultural life should be conceived in terms of myths, languages and science (in *Essay on Man*, he also adds art and religion), by “showing how the general categories of thought, such as space, time,

²¹¹ Verene, “Cassirer’s Concept,” 21.

²¹² Thora Ilin Bayer, *Cassirer’s Metaphysics of Symbolic Forms* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 66.

²¹³ Gerd Wolandt, “Cassirers Symbolbegriff und die Grundlegungsproblematik der Geisteswissenschaften,” *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 18.4 (1964): 615.

cause, substance, and number acquire content differently in each”²¹⁴.

Although he does not adhere to the idea of the neo-Kantian School of Baden that the methods of the sciences of spirit must radically differ from those of natural science, Ernst Cassirer admits the existence of a philosophical discourse specific to them. That is because of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, wherein this particular discourse is moved from the field of empirical entities in the domain of meaning²¹⁵. The author of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* also agrees that these sciences involve a stepwise development. But the way in which he decides to understand this stages differs from the speculative approach. Cassirer does not accept the existence of a final moment, *i.e.* absolute knowledge, which should encompass all of them. On the contrary, he tries to understand them in their inherent mutual connection. “For Cassirer, in a manner analogous to Hegel, all symbolic forms are potentially present in each stage of consciousness”²¹⁶. His philosophy is “an attempt not only to join in principle the categories of thought with their appearances; it is an attempt actually to present each through the other”²¹⁷. Each function is,

²¹⁴ Verene, “Hegel, Kant and Cassirer,” 41.

²¹⁵ Wilbur M. Urban, “Cassirer’s Philosophy of Language,” in *The philosophy of Ernst Cassirer*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (Evanston: The Library of Living Philosophers, 1949), 435.

²¹⁶ Verene, “Hegel, Kant and Cassirer,” 44.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.

in his conception, independent, so not only an intermediary stage, as it is for Hegel.

The author separates himself from speculative idealism also regarding the science of history. He speaks, indeed, about life, calling it the *world of objective spirit*, and conceives the phenomenology of culture as a way of exploring the cultural phenomena of history²¹⁸. However, his method is a new one. History, in his eyes, merges science with art: it starts, just as the first, from a series of empirical data to which it confers, in time, a complete picture. Of course, this picture should not be understood as a mere description of disparate events but as a structure of synthesis endowed with meaning. However, the philosophical approach of these forms can be undertaken only through “a discourse that employs images and metaphors, referential words, and modes of expression”²¹⁹. They ground our present culture and, for this reason, they constitute the foundation of the cultural sciences.

Cassirer rejects what he considers as “the Hegelian teleological determinism of history”, *i.e.* the metaphysical connotation of spirit as an agent that subjects the individual²²⁰. He admits that Hegel, in his *Philosophy of Right*, did not intend to justify the Prussian

²¹⁸ Elizabeth Suzanne Kassab, “Phenomenologies of Culture and Ethics: Ernst Cassirer, Alfred Schutz and the Tasks of a Philosophy of Culture,” *Human Studies* 25 (2002): 61.

²¹⁹ Verene, “Cassirer’s Concept,” 24.

²²⁰ Kassab, “Phenomenologies of Culture and Ethics,” 61.

State. However, he continues to believe that “along with the culmination of the idea of freedom in the idea of the State, he [Hegel] ignored the task or ethical responsibility of the individual”²²¹. The author disagrees that history is directed toward the Absolute (considering this idea a hegemonic position of philosophy²²²). Consequently, he opposes the Hegelian way of understanding freedom as a metaphysical entity operating throughout history. Such a speculative conception cannot support, in his opinion, a genuine philosophy of culture. Hegel's conception of reason is metaphysical and minimises the role of the individual. “For Cassirer, the preservation of those creative powers is linked to the preservation of the freedom of the individual and this is why Hegel's view of history and culture cannot be acceptable to him”²²³. On the contrary, he considers reason as a functional concept that contributes to the renewal of spirit²²⁴.

²²¹ Deniz Coskun, *Law as Symbolic Form* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007), 53.

²²² Reto Luzius Fetz, “Cassirers Transformation von Hegels ‘Phänomenologie des Geistes’,” in *Philosophie der Kultur–Kultur des Philosophierens. Ernst Cassirer im 20. und 21. Jahrhundert*, ed. Birgit Recki (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2012), 138.

²²³ Kassab, “Phenomenologies of Culture and Ethics,” 73.

²²⁴ Coskun, *Law as Symbolic Form*, 129.

SECTION III

BACK TO HEGEL

CHAPTER SIX
GENERAL DIALECTICS—REGIONAL
DIALECTICS. KARL MARX

1. Continuities and Discontinuities between Marx and Hegel

The relationship of the two authors is more complex than it seems at first glance. Marx claims, indeed, that his theory overturns Hegel's doctrine. However, at a closer look, and we will argue this thesis below, Marx is more Hegelian than he thought himself. Unlike the neo-Kantians from Baden, who refused, from the beginning, Hegel's idealism, Marx tries to conceive a dialectical economic theory. Authors like Windelband or, more radically, Rickert attempted to solve the cultural issues born from the soil of German classical philosophy by promoting a new method meant to eliminate what they considered as formalism. On the contrary, dialectical materialism exploits and fructifies a series of Hegelian methodological and ontological structures. And it does so by continuing the thread of thought of young Hegelians, thus bringing back Hegel's philosophical system to the forefront of European culture.

The influence of an author may be experienced in various ways, even in a negative form. His ideas can be interpreted and reformulated according to the new philosophical apparatus. Wilhelm Windelband, for instance, advised us to capitalise Hegel's philosophy, even if we do not accept the validity of the whole system. He expressed the hope that “the as yet untouched treasures of the Hegelian philosophy may speedily be explored. And the explorer will be wise if he doesn't merely follow the continuous march of the main argument, but makes it his special business to examine those pregnant germs of thought which he will there find scattered in such abundant measure”²²⁵. In the case of Marx, Hegel's influence is much stronger. Although he renounces, from the outset, at the project of a unitary system, he is not content to adopt only some few isolated results but grounds his critical apparatus by including substantial speculative methodological elements. We intend to elucidate what kind of relationship there is between the two dialectical models: opposition, complementarity or inclusion.

We can easily observe a series of continuities like those suggested by Windelband. The dialectics of class struggle resembles the *master-slave* confrontation. Karl Marx translates it from the domain of self-consciousness into political economy in order to describe the inevitable conflict between employees and

²²⁵ Wilhelm Windelband, *Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences*, vol. I, *Logic* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1913), 215.

the capitalist. Here also, the first are trying to regain their lost freedom while the second one searches to enjoy of their objectified labour.

We also encounter ideational imports as concerns Marx's general vision about the development of history²²⁶. Its dialectical structure is preserved, the author recognising Hegel as the father of the philosophical comprehension of the past²²⁷. A significant impact had the notion of *spirit*. Collective consciousness, as Hegel teaches us, must be understood in its historical character, based on the universal rationality that determines it and whose significance can be disclosed only by a self-aware consciousness. The author of *Capital* insists that the economic phenomena are inseparable from their historical background. However, his philosophy aims at the finite.

Marx developed his gnoseological principles in his youth, after serious studies followed by a fierce confrontation with Hegel. The relationship between theory and praxis was the main reason for their divergence. The so-called rigidity of the speculative system and the refusal of the final, absolute reconciliation aggravated the separation.

²²⁶ For a detailed list of common elements shared by Marx and Hegel on history, see Howard Williams, "The End of History in Hegel and Marx," *The Hegel–Marx Connection*, ed. Tony Burns and Ian Fraser (London: Macmillan, 2000), 198.

²²⁷ Norman Levine, *Marx's Discourse with Hegel* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 201.

The difference between philosophy in itself and its concrete implementation does not invalidate, however, the importance of the first. Its role as concerns the correct employment of our mental faculties or for organising our practical actions is, of course, acknowledged. But practice must be the primary task (a fact which derives from Marx's criticisms against Hegel). That is why Marx said that the Germans lived their present in thought²²⁸, or, in the 11th thesis on Feuerbach: "Philosophers have hitherto only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it"²²⁹. Philosophy fails when the concrete development of the individual is intended. "In Marx, the end of philosophy was not reconciliation, but rather the exposure of a fracture. The purpose of philosophy, in Marx, was the revelation of how philosophy failed reality or the disjunction between reality and human emancipation"²³⁰.

By discussing Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, Marx refers to consciousness' effort to accomplish the unity of the Idea and concrete reality, considering it as a proof of how the latter is subjected to an abstract logical system²³¹. He rejects, therefore, the system as a whole

²²⁸ Levine, *Marx's Discourse with Hegel*, 184.

²²⁹ "Die Philosophen haben die Welt nur verschieden *interpretiert*; es kommt aber darauf an, sie zu *verändern*," Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Werke*, Band 3 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1969), 534.

²³⁰ Levine, *Marx's Discourse with Hegel*, 184.

²³¹ Marx considers that Hegel, in the *Philosophy of Right*, artificially justifies the Prussian state. Jean Hyppolite, *Studies on Marx and Hegel*

(as a tool meant to facilitate the comprehension of the world). In a hypothetical dialogue, Hegel would deny, with strong arguments, the accusation that he promotes a formal method of comprehension that neglects the actions of the real human. Furthermore, he would criticise Marx for remaining trapped in an intermediate moment of consciousness' formation, thus missing the fundamental connection between theory and praxis. Instead, Hegel takes both into account but does not expressly choose one or the other. When consciousness becomes spirit, such a dichotomy proves to be only an apparent one (just as *sensibility-understanding* or *subject-object*). The notion of *absolute knowledge*, as it emerges at the end of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, has a gnoseological-theoretical connotation, since it designates, first of all, a superior way of understanding. Practice is a necessary condition of it, given the fact that any concept requires its concrete act of objectification. Moreover, Marx does not take into account that the revolutionary social movement that he promotes is, in fact, only a moment of the speculative movement of reconciliation. He requires man to act without knowing that, when his actions are directed against the logic of the world-spirit, their effects are quickly cancelled, as it happened (a fact well observed by Hegel) when Napoleon failed to impose, from the outside, a new constitution to the Spaniards.

Marx requires us to change the society we live in if

theoretical, philosophical understanding reveals it as a contradictory entity. In this regard, he distances himself also from Feuerbach, who, while denying the Hegelian gnoseological-speculative approach, continues to regard materialism as a theoretical attitude. The author of *Capital* prefers to follow the young Hegelian Arnold Ruge, who stated about Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* that a philosophical understanding of politics is inadequate, precisely because it does not have the power to change reality²³². However, in Marx's eyes, he does not manage to provide a solution to this problem because he promotes, instead of overthrowing the state, only a reformation of its present form. Marx borrows from Ruge the imperative to understand freedom in its real character. Theoretical justifications or some mere predictions are not sufficient to achieve it. It is well-known that Marx proposes a total dissolution of the state. But this requirement must be carefully understood since the philosopher does not struggle against any form of authority. By speaking about the abolition of the state, he refers only to that type of state that encourages the capitalist form of production: by doing so, the state becomes an institution subordinated to the interests of capitalists.

Hegel was not the advocate of an irrational social authority. But Marx vehemently criticises his conception, for he considers that it praises the Prussian State and its constitutional monarchy. For him, this type

²³² Levine, *Marx's Discourse with Hegel*, 188.

of government remains at the stage of despotism, because its economic system neglects the welfare of the many and facilitates the monopoly of industry and lands.

The state must reflect civil society. For Hegel, both are elements of objective spirit, meant to overlap in a higher unity, which is the *ethical world*. Marx perceives only their separation and the domination of the first over the second. That is why he (wrongfully) accuses Hegel that he adhered to the economic liberalism of Adam Smith and David Ricardo, promoting, thus, individualism and a spurious type of private property.

It is not wrong to say, by adhering to Norman Levine's explanations, that Marx borrows from Hegel only the form of the concept of civil society but changes its content²³³. And he does so—we would like to add—by leaving aside precisely its potential to develop itself, in parallel with the state, toward a unity which would bring them together, in accordance with their concepts.

In Hegel, the concept of *civil society* implies both property and the will (as the essence of the personal self). However, the first must not be understood in its incomplete meaning, from the first (abstract) moments, but in the light of intersubjectivity, as supposed by the concept of spirit. In this superior moment, consciousness is no longer driven by the basic desire to “consume” the environment and no longer needs a fierce battle with its otherness for being able to

²³³ Ibid., 195.

recognise its own individuality. Based on laws, it can determine itself in order to accede to its true form, which includes both opposites: the isolated (and, therefore, abstract) individual and his negative (another consciousness). Civil society, now understood as spirit (or, more correctly, having reached the level at which it actualizes its potential spirituality, inherent to its concept), is no longer a crowd of separate individuals, but a community which gradually develops the connections between them. Individuals become a family, then a community of families that recognise one another. Afterwards, consciousness exceeds the moment of morality (when the units are separated and only *for-themselves*) and moves toward *Sittlichkeit* (in which they are unified, their *in-self* being thus achieved). All this prove that the reconfiguration, undertaken by Marx, of the notion of civil society cannot be considered as a valid criticism of Hegel's philosophy. However, both theories may be simultaneously used, as homonym notions based on other principles and pursuing different goals.

In Marx's eyes, private property is the soil from which the antagonism of social classes rises (thus understood, it corresponds, in fact, to an incipient form of property, as Hegel describes it at the beginning of the *Philosophy of Right*). Therefore, the way in which it is regulated must be changed. Private property should be replaced by common property in order for the needs of everyone to be satisfied and the domination of the individuals' selfish will to be avoided. Such a task, Marx

notices, is far from being achieved in the capitalist regime.

We should observe, at this moment, that the author of *Capital* is not against any form of propriety, but only against the property of the forms of production, as promoted by the liberal regime.

[Capitalist private property] is the first negation of individual private property, as founded on the labour of the proprietor. But capitalist production begets, with the inexorability of a law of Nature, its own negation. It is the negation of the negation. This does not re-establish the private property for the producer but gives him individual property based on the acquisitions of the capitalist era (...). The transformation of scattered private property, arising from individual labour, into the capitalist property is, naturally, a process incomparably more protracted, violent and difficult, than the transformation of capitalistic private property, already practically resting on socialised production, into socialised property.²³⁴

All stated above are, however, only surface influences of Hegel's philosophy: ideas extracted from the speculative system (which, in fact, institutes and gives them a meaning) or formal conceptual loans (homonymy).

Major imports come to light if we take into account the dialectical method employed by Marx, in *Capital*, for

²³⁴ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (New York: The Modern Library, 1906), 837.

establishing the ground structures of political economy²³⁵. His work is a critical one, in the Kantian meaning, because it puts the capitalist economic system to a rigorous exam. Thus, the true social structures that sustain it are revealed and its appearances (involuntary or cleverly hidden behind mathematical formulae or propagandist speeches, covering both life and the concrete work of the individual in favour of a sophistic regime) are disclosed. A good example in this sense is the next excerpt:

In slave-labour, even the part of the working-day in which the slave is only replacing the value of his own means of existence, in which, therefore, in fact, he works for himself alone, appears as labour for his master. All the slave's labour appears as unpaid labour. In the wage-labour, on the contrary, even surplus labour, or unpaid labour, appears as paid. There the property-relation conceals the labour of the slave for himself; here the money-relation conceals the unrequited labour of the wage-labourer. (...) This phenomenal form, which makes the actual relation invisible, and, indeed, shows the direct opposite of that relation, forms the basis of all the juridical notions of both labourers and capitalist, of all mystifications of the capitalistic mode of production, of

²³⁵ "The vocabulary of the dialectic—'moment', 'movement', 'contradiction', 'mediation', 'determination', etc.—was Marx's preferred mode of expression," Bertell Ollman, *Alienation. Marx's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 52.

all its illusions as to liberty, of all apologetic shifts of the vulgar economists.²³⁶

Marx repeatedly insists on this issue, revealing a disturbing observation:

In the midst of our West European society, where the labourer purchases the right to work for his own livelihood only by paying for it in surplus-labour, the idea easily takes root that it is an inherent quality of human labour to furnish surplus-product.²³⁷

He proceeds the same way as Hegel in his *Phenomenology*: the full exhaustion of a concept until it becomes contradictory and cancels itself. Marx understood that an external critique of the social phenomena could not be sufficient—they must be approached from the inside; the method cannot be other than dialectics. The author of *Capital* retrieves it from absolute idealism and translates it into a philosophy centred on materialist economic principles²³⁸. Then, he shifts it, due to this new perspective, against Hegel himself. However, his initial starting point remains unexplained. On the contrary, in Hegel, the series of dialectical experiences begins from zero (from mere Being, which equates, in

²³⁶ Marx, *Capital*, 591–592.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 565.

²³⁸ For a study regarding the way in which Hegel's *Logic* supports Marx's theory of the value-form of commodities, see Christopher J. Arthur, *The New Dialectic and Marx's 'Capital'* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 79–111.

fact, with nothingness) and receive a meaning only through this process.

The general Marxist conception of history also hides Hegelian structural elements. Karl Marx accepts the notion of *objective spirit*, as long as it is understood as dependent on the necessary and inevitable transformations of the production system, namely, of its forms of economic organisation. Engels clarifies this issue by defending Marx's theory against the objection that he would promote a univocal point of view²³⁹. He points out that the individual must be conceived in its historical and social framework, in which—as Heidegger likes to say—he was *thrown away*, and whose influences he always feels, along with that of his past. “For Hegel, humankind is a social product. Marx started from the idea that humankind is a collective essence or species being, an ensemble of social relations. Marx always recognised Hegel as the major source for this insight”²⁴⁰.

²³⁹ Mircea Florian, *Introducere în filosofia istoriei* (Bucharest: Garamond, 1996), 180–181. According to Engels, Mircea Florian explains, Marx is incorrectly understood if we claim that only the economic factor is active, while the other spiritual elements are subject to it.

²⁴⁰ Peter Knapp, “Hegel’s Universal in Marx, Durkheim and Weber: The Role of Hegelian Ideas in the Origin of Sociology,” *Sociological Forum* 1.4 (1986): 590. Peter Knapp insists on this aspect by stating: “History, law, politics, language, custom, morals, economics, technology and other structures intersect in such a way as to determine the characters of particular individuals and the bounds within which they operate” (ibid., 591).

Another ground element that the author of *Capital* decides to adopt from Hegel's Philosophy of History is the recognition of those social forces whose presence is quite rarely acknowledged by the individual, but which substantially influence his actions. Marx's theory is, from this point of view, similar to that of the world-spirit (*Weltgeist*) which, by what Hegel metaphorically calls *the cunning of reason* (*Die List der Vernunft*), makes history pursue its logical-necessary course, despite the (often irrational) passions of individuals. Marx removes its logical-speculative content but does not renounce to stress the importance of the involuntary consequences of men's action. A good example is the dialectic of class struggle and the triumph of the proletarians, the latter equating with the objectification of the idea of freedom, which marks, according to absolute idealism, the end of history. Therefore, he concludes: the capitalist system will be suppressed due to its internal contradictions, despite the aspirations of its supporters. "The historical development of the antagonisms, immanent in a given form of production, is the only way in which that form of production can be dissolved and a new form established"²⁴¹. The revolution, therefore, should no longer be understood as something forced, but as an inevitable fact of history, in the absence of which it would stagnate.

Classical liberalism claimed that, if each individual seeks to satisfy its own interests, economic society is

²⁴¹ Marx, *Capital*, 534–535.

stabilising. Marx incorrectly attributes this theory to Hegel. The author of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* does not adhere, in reality, to the position of liberalism. For him, the private interests present in any social organisation constitute, in their character of irrational elements, the material of *becoming*. But they cannot determine its direction if they contradict the guiding force of spirit (understood in its logical connotation, closer to that covered by Marx's theory about the role of the forces of production, than to liberal economics). Consciousness satisfies its own passions, but the progress depends on the presence of its internal contradictions. We are dealing with such a movement, for example, in the case of the transition from the Roman to the German world (in Hegel's *Philosophy of History*). But it would not be wrong also to put on its account the overcoming of capitalism, followed by the establishment of a socialist regime of common means of production.

Marx extends his theory of private interests upon the concept of the *state* (which becomes self-contradictory when it is subjected to them). The state will embody its real concept (and, thus, will allow freedom to exist) only after the personal interests of individuals will turn into collective interest. That is why the German economist vehemently criticises the idea of the state, *i.e.* of that particular state (1) which supports the interests of some small groups of industrialists, (2) which mediates the expropriations or loans only in their favour, (3) under whose protection are exploited its citizens or

individuals from other nations (*the theory of modern colonialism*²⁴²).

Finally, Marx develops and reformulates the concept of *labour*, borrowed from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and raises it to the rank of substance. For Hegel, only the Idea is *substance*. Beginning with the young Hegelians, its attributes, as well as those of the Absolute, were interpreted in strictly human terms. Labour is a subjective activity *par excellence*. For Hegel, it is objectified as a result of the interactions between the Idea and reality. Marx understands labour by deriving it from his doctrine of the process of production. Labour is no longer the labour of self-consciousness but social labour²⁴³.

In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, it is regarded as a modality through which history actualizes itself. Marx adopts this conception and reformulates it in accordance with his theoretical principles: “It is not the articles made, but how they are made, and by what instruments, that enable us to distinguish different economic epochs”²⁴⁴.

Self-consciousness, divided between master and servant, begins to develop the concept of labour. As a consequence, the first becomes aware of himself. He

²⁴² Marx observes that “in ancient civilized countries the labourer, though free, is by law of nature dependent on capitalist; in colonies, this dependence must be created by artificial means,” Marx, *Capital*, 844.

²⁴³ Levine, *Marx’s Discourse with Hegel*, 193.

²⁴⁴ Marx, *Capital*, 200.

takes his own self as an object, as a result of the failed confrontation with the exterior world (carried out by means of sensibility and the understanding). The direction of this path resides in the *subject-object* dialectical relationship: by experiencing the object, consciousness changes itself, a fact that makes possible a more thorough approach of the new object. At a global scale, the human race objectifies itself through labour. By considering these elements, consciousness expands its possibilities of knowledge. Labour also involves *free will*, which is a necessary step toward freedom.

The concept of *labour* has, in *Capital*, a leading role. *Product-value* is measured by the amount of necessary labour. The profit of the capitalist (*surplus-value*) represents the unpaid labour of the employee. Finally, the level of spiritual development of the worker undergoes changes along with the transformation of the forms of production. Unlike the period when he worked and enjoyed the product of his labour, now he sells his *force of labour* to the capitalist. Initially free, he alienates himself, getting to be forced to work in conditions imposed from the outside. Labour not only generates a product but also produces the producer—a fact carried to the extreme in the case of the *pauper employee*²⁴⁵. That is why Marx wants to change its actual form.

²⁴⁵ Marx reports an amazing case: “The labourers in the mines of South America, whose daily task (the heaviest perhaps in the

It is precisely under these conditions that private property (regarded as a product of history) is criticised. We encounter, in *Capital*, both its concept in the pre-capitalist form and its negative one, embodied in the capitalist regime. But the author also indicates the superior form of development which would resolve the dichotomy, namely, *social property*. In his opinion, freedom will be attained when we will adopt a common and public control of the process of production.

Both philosophers consider the idea of property as the foundation of the state. But Karl Marx refuses the Hegelian conception, interpreting his *Philosophy of Right* as a historical stage that must be overcome (just like the Prussian State's regulations). He fails to observe that Hegel does not stop at this first (abstract) form of property but indicates a further direction of development. Moreover, he points out the shortcomings of the capitalist regime, as well as its repercussions on the population. Here is a good example:

When the standard of living of a large mass of people falls below a certain subsistence level—a level regulated automatically as the one necessary for a member of the

world) consist in bringing to the surface on their shoulders a load of metal weighing from 180 to 200 pounds, from a depth of 450 feet, live on bread and beans only; they themselves would prefer the bread alone for food, but their masters, who have found out that men cannot work so hard on bread, treat them like horses, and compel them to eat beans" (*ibid.*, 627).

society—and when there is a consequent loss of the sense of right and wrong, of integrity and of honour in maintaining oneself by one's own activity and work, the result is the creation of a rabble of paupers [*Pöbe*]. At the same time, this brings with it, at the other end of the social scale, conditions which greatly facilitate the concentration of disproportionate wealth in a few hands.²⁴⁶

Hegel suggests a possible resolution (which Marx ignores) but, given the unity and the purpose of his work, he does not extend it with further explanations. In fact, the incipient position that the notion of private property occupies is suggestive. It is approached at the beginning of the *Abstract Right*²⁴⁷, in the chapters devoted to *personality, property, contract* and *mistake*. It is followed, later on in the dialectical succession, by morality and the various forms of the ethical world (*Sittlichkeit*)—family, civil society, the state and its relations with the other nations. Only in the end, when all these moments are understood in their deep significance, the true form of the state can be reached. In conclusion: 1. The form of private property discussed by Hegel in the beginning is only an

²⁴⁶ G. W. F. Hegel, *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 221.

²⁴⁷ “Marx was not quite right. Hegel did not begin his ‘Philosophy of Right’ with the idea of possession but with abstract right.” Robert Fine, “The Marx–Hegel Relationship: Revisionist Interpretations,” *Capital & Class* 25.71 (2001): 75.

intermediary form of it. 2. The concept of property should be understood otherwise than in such an embryonic form (just as we cannot say that Hegel claims, for instance, that sensibility is the most suitable possibility to know an object, as the first pages of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* indicate), namely from the perspective of spirit, which confers it its true meaning.

When Marx criticises private property, he only considers the property of the means of production (“the distinguishing feature of Communism is not the abolition of property generally, but the abolition of bourgeois property”²⁴⁸). This form of property generates the evil of capitalism and the alienation of the worker. Such individual properties were acquired through expropriation. For this reason, their owners should be expropriated in their turn, for no longer only a few separate individuals to own it²⁴⁹. Let us think about the early-stage of capitalism, about that time of primitive accumulations obtained through the illegitimate appropriation of communal lands by some landlords from the Parliament or by robbing the church property. In all these actions, the state helped the bourgeoisie.

²⁴⁸ Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (New York: International Publisher, 2007), 23.

²⁴⁹ “The so-called primitive accumulation is therefore nothing else than the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production. (...) the free exploitation of man by man.” Marx, *Capital*, 786–787.

By criticising Hegel's conception and replacing it with his own, Karl Marx does not operate a reversal, but rather a development, in a similar direction, of a particular historical moment. None of them promotes a univocal approach (a purely spiritual (Hegel) or a strictly material one (Marx)). What differs is the basis from which they begin. We can include the dialectics of capitalism (of its means of production and its related social forms) in the development of universal history. By virtue of this fact, Marx's theory should be considered as the dialectics of a particular region (*i.e.* a regional dialectics), which is part of the general dialectical path of consciousness' formation (whose direction was traced by Hegel). We will bring additional arguments hereinafter.

2. The (Critical) Concept of *Alienation*

The theory of alienation occupies an ambiguous position in the philosophy of Karl Marx. Its importance is widely recognised. The concrete modality in which it affects the critique of political economy remains, however, shrouded by presuppositions. Undoubtedly, as influential as Marx's writings were from a historical-ideational point of view, as much they were propagated, especially in Eastern Europe, through the filter of a flawed hermeneutics. Their transformation into slogans (by separating some bunch of ideas from both their

argumentative context and explanatory annexes) and their ideological employment are two of the most common errors of interpretation. “Understanding Marx better than he understood himself”—this incorrect derivative (by omission) of Schleiermacher’s thesis—could be the motto of the so-called Marxist doctrine. For this reason, the French phenomenologist Michel Henry or other contemporary Anglo-Saxons interpreters prefer to use the term *Marxianism* when they consider the writings of the German philosopher. “But *Marxian* needs to be distinguished from *Marxist*. A *Marxian* belief is one that can safely be attributed to Marx himself. A *Marxist* belief may also be a *Marxian* one, but not necessarily”²⁵⁰. In other words, not everything that is *Marxism* is also *Marxianism* (let us think about the many sequels “in the spirit of Marx”, “in the spirit of his ideas”) and not everything that is *Marxianism* is *Marxist*, “for the good and simple reason that when Marxism developed, knowledge of what Marx wrote was inadequate”²⁵¹.

Marxism can rightfully be considered as an ideology because of the veil that intentionally hides the hermeneutical approach. In Eastern Europe, Marxist ideology did not *use* the theory of Marx (as Gadamer defines this possibility of understanding). Many leaders

²⁵⁰ Paul Thomas, “Critical Reception: Marx Then and Now,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Marx*, ed. Terrell Carver (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 25.

²⁵¹ Thomas, “Marx Then and Now,” 26.

have used it as a more or less explicit justification of their political actions; and it happened so under the umbrella of the “official” correctness, at the mere interpretative level of common sense.

The ambiguity we have in mind when we speak about the concept of alienation does not result, however, from its reduction to the level of slogans or political motivations. It rather refers to its transformation in a petrified doctrine, in an immobile element of Karl Marx’s system²⁵². If we regard the evolution of his philosophical thinking, the facts are far from being as such.

The concept of alienation was theorized for the first time in his writings from 1843, published in *Deutsch–Französische Jahrbücher*, including the *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*. In the footsteps of Feuerbach (and, thus, of his criticism against Hegel’s idealism), Marx formulates a pre-concept of *alienation*, derived from the theory of *religious alienation* and headed toward the political and social alienation. “Feuerbach’s criticism of religion is implemented in the domain of politics, in the framework of the conceptual couple *alienation–emancipation*”²⁵³. *Alienation*, as Emmanuel Renault

²⁵² Without minimising the role of the theory of alienation, Allen Wood notes: “The theory presented two decades later in ‘Capital’ is undoubtedly a ‘system’, even one possessing a certain degree of ‘rigor’. But it certainly cannot be accurately described as a ‘system of alienation’.” Allen Wood, *Karl Marx* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 5.

²⁵³ E. Renault, *Le vocabulaire de Marx* (Paris: Ellipses, 2001), 8.

indicates, sends to the French Revolution, expressing the insufficient and only “abstract” emancipation it promoted. In his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, it is translated into the field of political economy. Finally, in the papers written after *German Ideology* (work drafted together with Friedrich Engels between 1845 and 1846), especially in *Capital* (whose first volume was published in 1867), this notion disappears from the foreground (its resonance being felt, for example, in the concept of *fetishism of commodities*). That is why we cannot talk about a firmly maintained thesis. We should rather observe the continuous evolution of his philosophical ideas. Besides, we should not forget that the *Manuscripts*, a text in which emerged the idea of political economy, was not intended for publication.

It should be noted, from the outset, that the so-called *theory of alienation* involves, in fact, three concepts closely related in meaning (*Entfremdung*, *Entäußerung* and *Veräußerung*) which translate the Latin *alienatio* and the Greek *αλλοτριώσις* (present along with *alienare*, *abalienare*, *abalienatio*, respectively *αλλοτριουν* *απαλλοτριουν* *απαλλοτριώσις*)²⁵⁴. They have a juridical significance: the transfer of propriety to another owner. The concept of *alienation* may imply a metaphorical meaning, *i.e.* spiritual alienation—as used in ancient Rome and adopted, afterwards, by the Christian theological terminology. It is also known the medical meaning of

²⁵⁴ J. Ritter and K. Gründer, *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Bd. 2 (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 1971–2007), 504, 508–509.

this term: *alienatio mentis* (mental alienation). However, the modern philosophy adopted its economic and legal connotation²⁵⁵.

This fact is easily visible in Marx. Less visible is the difference between the already mentioned German terms. In the *Manuscripts of 1844*, *Veräußerung* occurs quite rarely and has a neutral meaning: the mere act of selling a product. In other words, it designates the action through which a product is transferred to the purchaser. *Entäußerung*, translated as alienation, indicates the action of the seller, to the extent that, as a result of the exchange, the product no longer belongs to him. Capitalism distorts this process. That is why the meaning of *Entäußerung* slides toward the idea of dispossession. The alienation of the labourer in his product involves, besides the objectification of his labour in an independent existence that no longer belongs to him, also the negative action that turns the product against him²⁵⁶. The hostile nature of this

²⁵⁵ “The philosophical concept of alienation (*Entfremdung*) is formed not in the continuity of the theological tradition but from economic and legal *alienation*” (ibid., 512).

²⁵⁶ “Die Entäußerung des Arbeiters in seinem Produkt hat die Bedeutung, nicht nur, daß seine Arbeit zu einem Gegenstand, zu einer äußern Existenz wird, sondern daß sie außer ihm, unabhängig, fremd von ihm existiert und eine selbständige Macht ihm gegenüber wird, daß das Leben, was er dem Gegenstand verleiht hat, ihm feindlich und fremd gegenübertritt.” Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Werke*, Teil 1 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1968), 512 (“The alienation of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, an *external* existence, but that it

process is indicated by the term *Entfremdung* (estrangement—from *fremd*—alien, foreign). Moreover, *Entfremdung*, when it is not used as a synonym for *Entäußerung*, deepens the consequences of the capitalist means of production: man is alienated (estranged) from himself because he no longer corresponds to his human essence.

In the writings from 1844, Marx operates a double innovation. After seizing the deficiency of classical political economy regarding the problem of the subject, he decides to shift the discussion from the technical register of profit toward the concrete actor of this process. The subject, in the capitalist system, is not the entrepreneur who invests to increase the funds that he already owns it, as is commonly believed. On the contrary, the true subject is the person who makes this action possible: the owner of labour, *i.e.* of that unique object which, when placed on the market, produces real value. For this reason, economics can no longer remain at the level of abstract advice and technical methods. It must consider the real, concrete human being.

Classical economy neglects the subjective instance of the labourer, using and developing the concept of capital without understanding its real engine. For clearly

exists *outside him*, independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power on its own confronting him. It means that the life which he has conferred on the object confronts him as something hostile and alien.” Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (New York: Prometheus Book, 1988), 72).

to grasp the capitalist forms of production, we must, first of all, disclose this concept. Its inherent implications must be brought to light and comprehended starting from the living human being, from that individual affected and able, in its turn, to affect. However, the reassessment of the subjective instance and its implications (for example, the means of production, which, instead of facilitating real human interactions²⁵⁷, impose social liaisons dominated by commodity (as an abstract entity), money and capital accumulation), is only sketched in the *Manuscripts*. It will receive a thorough justification in *Capital*.

In his youth writing, Marx discusses the following four possible relationships maintained by an individual: 1. the relationship with his product, 2. with his work, 3. with himself and 4. with the other producers. Each of them develops an alienated form. All these forms are not contingent consequences generated in practice but necessary implications of the modern concept of capitalism.

The author adopts a critical attitude. That means, he does not construct an opposite theory but examines the concepts and ideas of political economy, revealing their internal contradictions. When Marx talks about the labourer reduced to a mere commodity or understood as a machine or as an annexe of the production machine, he does not express an idea empirically

²⁵⁷ That is why Michel Henry—a theologian-philosopher—admits the importance of Marx's contribution.

instituted and arbitrarily justified but one of those hidden substrates of the capitalist regime. Private property, considered by all economists as an inherent element of human society, is studied in the same manner. They did not rigorously analyse it, Marx claims, but made use of it as a fundament (in reality, unstable) for their economic laws²⁵⁸. On the contrary, the correct comprehension of it leads to a paradox: the labourer, considered as a commodity, loses his value as he produces more. He becomes poorer, in contrast to the continuously increasing financial strength of his owner.

The first form of alienation, as manifests in the relationship between the labourer and his product, resides in the following. The labourer becomes (by the so-called free sale) the property of the capitalist; the product no longer belongs to him. It is only an estranged object, which turns against the labourer himself²⁵⁹: “In the conditions dealt with by political economy this realisation of labour appears as *loss of*

²⁵⁸ “Political economy proceeds from the fact of private property, but it does not explain it to us. It expresses in general, abstract formulae the material process through which private property actually passes, and these formulae are then taken as laws. It does not comprehend these laws, *i.e.* it does not demonstrate how they arise from the very nature of private property.” Marx, *Manuscripts of 1844*, 69–70.

²⁵⁹ “(...) a person is alienated when something that is their product or activity takes a form which is independent of them and working against them.” Sean Sayers, “Alienation as a Critical Concept,” *International Critical Thought* 3.1 (2011): 288.

realization for the workers; objectification as loss of *the object* and *object–bondage*; appropriation as *estrangement*, as *alienation*”²⁶⁰. In *Capital*, these consequences are much clearer illustrated. Marx writes about the *pauper labourer* (the labourer sentenced to hunger) and exposes a series of downright shattering examples. The labourer is alienated from his object because he is obliged both to receive it (he “receives” a job) and to receive (from the part of the capitalist) the means of subsistence. This fact radically modifies both his existence and his future spiritual development. The more advanced and important is his product, the more he loses himself as a human being and becomes a machine (“the better formed his product, the more deformed becomes the worker; (...) the more ingenious labour becomes, the duller becomes the worker, and the more he becomes nature's bondsman”²⁶¹):

Political economy conceals the estrangement inherent in the nature of labour by not considering the direct relationship between the worker (labour) and production. It is true that labour produces for the rich wonderful things—but for the worker it produces privation. It produces palaces—but for the worker, hovels. It produces

²⁶⁰ Karl Marx, *Manuscripts of 1844*, 71 (“Diese Verwirklichung der Arbeit erscheint in dem nationalökonomischen Zustand als Entwirklichung des Arbeiters, die Vergegenständlichung als Verlust und Knechtschaft des Gegenstandes, die Aneignung als Entfremdung, als Entäußerung.” Marx and Engels, *Werke*, Teil 1, 512).

²⁶¹ Marx, *Manuscripts of 1844*, 73.

beauty—but for the worker, deformity. It replaces labour by machines—but some of the workers it throws back to a barbarous type of labour, and the other workers it turns into machines. It produces intelligence—but for the worker idiocy, cretinism.²⁶²

The second form of alienation characterises the act of labour. The labourer does not work for himself; he does not affirm himself through labour. On the contrary, he “denies” himself. He “mortifies his body and destroys his spirit”. His workforce no longer belongs to him. It is the property of the capitalist. Labour, as conceived by capitalism, functions as an act of estrangement. It becomes painful and, at the limit, a forced activity. The worker sold it, in the beginning, by a free decision, but now he is forced not only to work but also to put his whole family to work, including children. Marx agrees that work differentiates us from animals, but “in conditions of alienation, our work is reduced to its ‘animal’ character—it becomes a mere means to satisfy our purely material needs”²⁶³.

Consequently, the labourer’s relationship with himself deteriorates. In the *Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx explains this fact by distinguishing *generic life* from *individual life*. Instead of a free and living relationship with his own person, the worker alienates from himself, from the “human race”, lives the estrangement of *generic life* and makes *individual life* in “its abstraction” the goal

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Sayers, “Alienation as a Critical Concept,” 290.

of the first. The purpose of his existence is reduced to the most precarious forms of subsistence. To obtain them, he must give all his efforts and almost all the time of his day. Life, explains the author, no longer produces life. It is nothing but survival. What else remains, for example, for an English labourer of the first half of the 19th century who, after working in a workshop until exhaustion, manages to satisfy his vital instincts only with a poor diet, in a tight living space, unhealthy and, in winter, almost without heating? Unlike the labourer who worked for himself, the employee of the capitalist factory no longer lives because of his work.

The last consequence of the capitalist form of production (the fourth type of alienation) is *the alienation of man from another man*. On the one hand, the worker is alienated from the others, just as everyone is alienated from human nature. On the other hand, we are dealing with an improper relationship with the owner of the produced object. We saw that the product no longer belongs to the producer, but turns against him. Who owns it? Another man. And, if the object is hostile and alien, the new owner is alike. The relation of production is reversed. An individual who does not produce dominates both the products and the process of production. When Marx contests, in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, property, he refers precisely to this form of private property, insofar as it represents the goal of the process of production.

For Marx, alienation is not a subjective phenomenon, nor an error or a malady of the singular

individual. It is a product of history, generated because of the objective changes of the means of production. As an objective phenomenon, it can be overcome only with the transition to the next historical moment.

The concept of alienation functions, in Marx, as an auxiliary term for labour. Its roots are pinned in the Hegelian philosophical soil. For Hegel, labour has not only a physical connotation. It is also an activity through which consciousness objectifies itself and rises above its natural state, thus achieving deeper knowledge about itself. The object is not only consumed through immediate action. It is transformed. This act allows consciousness to reconfigure its relationship with the world and to improve its capability of comprehension. Furthermore, taking into account the objectification of other people's labour, it gains thorough knowledge not only about itself but also about otherness. Work, which implies self-knowledge, makes consciousness' actions exceed their instinctive character, thus consciousness transforming itself into a real, free agent of history. "[Through work] we come to recognise our powers and capacities as real and objective, and thus we develop as self-conscious agents"²⁶⁴. Let us remember the relationship between master and slave. In the case of the first, his being is mediated by the slave, thus coming to light his contradictory character. And this happens for two reasons. Firstly, the purpose of the struggle was that the winner to be recognised by another self-

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 288.

consciousness. Now, in the end, he is indeed recognised, but not by someone of the same rank. Secondly, he depends on the servant's services. The master has lost the independence supposed by his concept. Neither the slave is free, but he possesses the consciousness of freedom because he knows that he is not. Therefore, he focuses his efforts to overcome this state and deny his character of non-free consciousness. He succeeds by working. This way he also gains additional knowledge about his own self. By transforming the natural object, he recognises his own personality and subjectivity in the products. That is why Hegel states that work makes us feel *at home* in the outside world (humanised by our own forces). The same happens on a historical scale. We can recognise the level of development of primitive societies by observing their immediate relationship with nature (which they only consume, without understanding and transforming it). But they also develop themselves, just as it happens with the servant. They reformulate their relationship with the natural world and, therefore, manage to exceed this incipient stage.

Classical political economy usually conceives labour as an unpleasant, but necessary, mean of subsistence. Marx extends this very restrictive conception by borrowing from Hegel the idea that an individual objectifies himself, through work, in the object he creates. He also separates this reification (*Vergegenständlichung*) from alienation. The latter describes the particular form that work receives in a

capitalist society, a form that makes it turn against the individual. Instead of facilitating for the individual to discover his human nature, it transforms and reduces him to the condition of a simple tool.

Secondly, work is considered as an individual task. In the footsteps of Hegel's philosophy, Karl Marx brings strong arguments against this type of approach. Man, explains him, is a social being who does not work in an isolated environment but together with other people, under specific historically determined conditions. "In work, we create not only a material product, but at the same time we also produce and reproduce our social relationships"²⁶⁵. In its alienated form, we no longer recognise ourselves in our abilities. The product, the means of production as well as the other individuals involved in this process separate from the worker and turn against him.

Marx develops a solid critique of the labour process, directed against those economic systems that regard it only from a univocal and superficial point of view. The concept of alienation implied by the philosophical structure of *Capital* cannot be overlooked, for it constitutes the negative condition that blocks the evolution of humankind. It describes how the act of labour, which would facilitate the development of the individual, turns against him. His criticism is not a moral type one, carried out, for instance, based on

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 291.

man's natural rights²⁶⁶. It is a structural one, centred on the individual, who is not understood as an invariable entity but as a continuously changing one, determined by the historical process of becoming. The concept of alienation in a negative concept, in the Hegelian meaning. Alienated labour is neither a particular form of work nor an immobile one, preserving its structure from the beginning to the end of the social evolution. It is a stage that must be exceeded because of its internal contradictions involved. Moreover, the dialectical triad does not return to the initial point. The negation of alienated labour (itself negative) determines the transition to a new form of society, closer to the idea of freedom. For Marx, the true society saves the worker from exploitation. It makes him gain the control over his product and excludes those persons who live from surplus-value, therefore, from work which the proletarian is forced to provide.

This fact makes us consider the regional character of materialist dialectics. Its importance should not be negated. On the contrary, understood as a detailed development of a particular moment, it makes possible for the intermediate and contradictory historical stage that it describes to be overcome. "Reading Hegel and Marx together, as a unity rather than as an opposition of idealism to materialism, enables us to understand

²⁶⁶ "Like Hegel and others in the post-Kantian philosophical tradition, Marx insists that his primary aim is theoretical understanding rather than moral condemnation" (ibid.).

better both of these writers and their respective contributions to the critique of bourgeois society”²⁶⁷. By studying their relationship, Robert Fine places both doctrines on the same level of reality²⁶⁸. He considers that Hegel is concerned with the forms of law, a fact that initiates political modernity, while Karl Marx, in parallel, initiates economic modernity, by analysing the forms of value. The first expresses the ideal form of modernity, by identifying it with the ideal forms of legal and political life, while the second its material form, given the identification with the economic world. Therefore, they complement each other.

Marx accuses Hegel of subjecting the concrete historical development to the concept. However, for Hegel, *becoming toward the Idea of freedom* is not a logical-formal construction. He stated, on numerous occasions, that the mere concept is not enough, for it remains abstract as long as it is not transposed into reality, which is its actualization. This process also has a gnoseological connotation: the contradictions of every development stage are acknowledged, a fact that makes possible the advancement of society.

²⁶⁷ Fine, “Marx–Hegel Relationship,” 73.

²⁶⁸ “Read together [Marx’s *Capital* and Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*], they offer a more ‘rounded’ image of modernity as a whole than each can offer in isolation” (ibid., 78).

CHAPTER SEVEN
THE CATEGORIES OF SPIRITUAL BEING.
NICOLAI HARTMANN

At the beginning of *Das Problem des geistigen Seins*, Hartmann identifies three groups of problems that the philosophy of history should solve. 1. Those related to the metaphysics of history, involving questions such as: How can be grasped the connection between the whole and its parts? How can we conceive history as a whole since we take our information from empirical sources, thus obtaining only fragments of the past? Is history the work of hazard or there is a purpose toward which it heads? 2. Those of the methodology of history, aiming at establishing a research manner able to provide scientifically valid results. 3. The dilemmas of *Historismus*. The questions are: To what extent does man develops itself under the influence of history? What is the ontological structure of the subject's historicity? Is it possible for the researcher to exceed his historical conditions?

The deficiencies of all these approaches derive from the incorrect comprehension of the spiritual universe, namely as implying a single level of reality. "The progress of mankind, even interpreted in a teleological-idealist manner, cannot be understood from a single

principle”²⁶⁹, Hartmann says. This unique level generates the deficiencies of both idealism and materialism. Marx considered that history must be understood based on the economic relations of production. In Marx, “it is not spirit that determines the historical being, but (...) economy determines spirit”²⁷⁰. Hegel, on the other hand, did not agree that the mundane and economic factors function as autonomous engines. Both theories, Hartmann says, are limited to explaining the advancement of history as a univocal relationship of dependency between non-spiritual and spiritual being. Both “seek to understand historical being from a single group of phenomena”²⁷¹.

A complete theory would imply, on the contrary, the acceptance of multi-layered reality and, consequently, a different approach for each class of categories. The process of becoming does not imply a single principle but a series of interconnected principles. Hartmann explains that reality involves four ontological levels: the inorganic, the organic, the psychic and the spiritual. The philosophy of nature, for instance, covers the classes of categories corresponding to the first two levels (physical and organic), *i.e.* dimensional, cosmological and organic categories. It is wrong to conceive the remaining levels by the instrumentality of such a set of

²⁶⁹ Nicolai Hartmann, *Das Problem des geistigen Seins* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co, 1949), 6.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

categories because they cannot lead to a correct understanding of their dynamics. From the outset, the German author differentiates between organic life and spiritual being. The upper level has a high degree of autonomy, but, Hartmann explains, its autonomy is of a special type since it implies a certain dependency on the others. Three laws come to clarify this issue²⁷²: 1. “Each level has its own principles, laws and categories”; 2 “The lower levels support the highest ones”; 3. “This dependency brings no harm to the autonomy of the highest level”. Thus, the organic develops on a material ground, but “the richness of its forms and the miracle of life does not come out of it [of the material], but adjoins to it, as something new”²⁷³. According to the law that governs the relationship between the force and the autonomy of categories, the lower are stronger but poorer in content while the highest are freer (although freedom exists at each level). Their dependency is directed downwards and not vice versa. Accordingly, the fundamental ontological principle of these interconnections may be summarised in two sentences: 1. The lower principles are stronger, “but poorer and elementary”²⁷⁴. They support the higher ones and cannot be exceeded by them. 2. The higher principles are weaker but possess autonomy and a larger development space.

²⁷² Ibid., 17–18.

²⁷³ Ibid., 18.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 19.

Nicolai Hartmann uses this new ontological-*categorical* theory for grasping the development of universal history. In this new light, the latter turns out to be a process as much spiritual as economic, “as much biological life, as cultural life”²⁷⁵. That is why he accuses Hegel of maintaining a monistic prejudgement: he does not observe the multi-stratification of historical being.

Hartmann radicalises the principle according to which the methodology of the sciences of spirit should be specifically conceived for its targeted phenomena, therefore, not artificially imported from outside, from the physical or technical sciences. For him, each level of reality requires its own particular method: “strictly speaking, it can be no generalisation or transfer of method from a group of objects to another”²⁷⁶. In order to apply this imperative, the German philosopher appeals to Hegel’s phenomenology. Such a method, he suggests, cannot be theoretically constructed from the outset, as a law of understanding. On the contrary, “the method secretly matures itself by working with the object. (...) It knows nothing about itself, because it creates itself, and does not need to know about itself as long as it creates itself”²⁷⁷. In other words, it gradually develops itself until, in the end, the consciousness of the method emerges (just as, for Hegel, spirit, after numerous experiences, becomes aware of its spiritual

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 30.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 31.

being). Both the subject and the object undergo major transformations: “knowledge determines new types of efficient actions, which also cause a transformation in the structure of the object”²⁷⁸.

Besides this ontological interdependency, history also involves the interdependency of its temporal instances. Nicolai Hartmann deepens the mechanism through which the stages of historical becoming are overcome (and, at the same time, preserved) in the present. But he prefers to use, instead of the Hegelian *Aufhebung*, the term *Hineinragen*²⁷⁹: any historical event involves a series of connected phenomena, which are not exceeded (through conservation) but extended or continued. *Hineinragen* indicates the fact that the past does not absolutely disappear, but remains in the present. This process is neither a simple causal succession (which would imply the passage and the disappearance of the cause in its effect) nor a mere iteration or analogy, but a “remaining in the present”, despite the withdrawal of the physical being of the object. It has two forms. 1. *The tacit extension (das “stillschweigende” Hineinragen*²⁸⁰), involving a living presence of the past, even it is not felt or acknowledged. So is the case of morals or other social forms of behaviour, whose original meaning was forgotten. We

²⁷⁸ Alexandru Boboc, *Nicolai Hartmann și realismul contemporan* (Bucharest: Editura Științifică, 1973), 26.

²⁷⁹ Hartmann, *Das Problem des geistigen Seins*, 35.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

can also observe *a tacit extension* in the case of language because it hides unconscious elements of the past. 2. *The explicit extension* (*das "vernehmliche" Hineinragen*), different from the first, even sometimes they cover each other (language, for example, is mediated by signs). Hartmann expresses this fact as follows: *the explicit extension* represents "the presence of the past in the present consciousness of the past"²⁸¹. Of course, there are eras faithful to tradition and eras that refuse it, but this fact does not contradict this theory.

The German author borrows Hegel's concept of *objective spirit*²⁸² but without adopting its teleological meaning. It is wrong, he says, that "Hegel's philosophy of history formulated *objective-individual spirit* relationship as a logical-ontological one, like *substance-accident*, this way the individuality of the *Weltgeist*, as well as its primary active role as the bearer of history, being lost"²⁸³.

Spiritual being is *objective spirit*: "in a strict sense, only what is spiritual has history". In other words, history is carried by this spiritual unity (and not by some isolated individuals). An isolated individual, Hartmann explains,

²⁸¹ Ibid., 36.

²⁸² Hartmann identifies three spiritual forms, *i.e.* personal spirit (*personale Geist*), objective spirit (*objektive Geist*) and objectified spirit (*objektivierte Geist*), different from the Hegelian triad (*objective spirit, subjective spirit, absolute spirit*).

²⁸³ Guiseppa D'Anna, "Der objektive Geist als Formgebung der Gemeinschaft," in *Moderne und Historizität*, ed. Stefan Wilke (Weimar: Verlag der Bauhaus Universität, 2011), 168.

considered as independent of objective spirit (in which, in reality, it is located and in whose forms he moves) is an abstraction. Objective spirit is carried by society, without being, however, something collective. As Hegel indicated us, it should be understood as common to all people, without being fully embodied in a single person. It shapes itself through a circular movement, just like the *subject–object* relationship. Objective spirit drives the individual, but, at the same time, the latter makes possible for it to become. Moreover, objective spirit should not be understood as a universal, but as something substantially organic and temporal (having its own birth, maturity and decline). It has individual existence and life, as long as individuality means historical uniqueness and singularity. Its movement is not subject to physical or mental laws but has its own spiritual and historical principles (which are independent of the lower levels of reality). However, it is not aware of its own spirituality. “Whereas spirit is a level of reality, it is clear that it cannot be identified with consciousness”²⁸⁴. If there is knowledge about it, it is not its knowledge, but ours.

²⁸⁴ Boboc, *Nicolai Hartmann*, 95.

CHAPTER EIGHT

EXPERIENCE AND TRUTH. H.-G. GADAMER

1. The Ontology of the Hermeneutic Object

a) Physical Phenomenon–Hermeneutic Phenomenon

The main task that H.-G. Gadamer assigns to hermeneutics is a methodological one: to find a valid possibility of understanding the phenomena that exceed the research field of the modern sciences. In other words, he demands us renouncing to apply, at a universal scale, a methodology borrowed from natural science. This requirement is summarised in the first paragraphs of *Truth and Method*: “[The following investigations] are concerned to seek the experience of truth that transcends the domain of scientific method wherever that experience is to be found and to inquire into its legitimacy”²⁸⁵.

Hegel gave strong impulses to hermeneutics, by criticising the employment of external schemas in philosophy and systematically advocating the necessity of a specific method for its objects. He accused Kant of

²⁸⁵ H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Continuum, 2006), XXI. The experiences of art and history, for example, are “modes of experience in which a truth is communicated that cannot be verified by the methodological means proper to science” (ibid.).

trying to determine the faculties of knowledge before being “in the possession” of knowledge. For Hegel, the Kantian approach is ineffective. In the *Introduction* to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*²⁸⁶, he contests that knowledge is a medium or instrument that could bring man closer to the Absolute.

Gadamer borrows arguments from the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and *The Science of Logic* in order to explain why the technical-scientific methods are deficient in the sciences of spirit.

Our inquiry started from our dissatisfaction with the modern concept of methodology. But this dissatisfaction found its most significant philosophical justification in Hegel's explicit appeal to the Greek concept of methodology. He criticized the concept of a method that dealt with the thing but was alien to it, calling it ‘external reflection’. The true method was an action of the thing itself.²⁸⁷

We will discuss soon the way in which the methodological direction from *Truth and Method* separates from Hegel. Before, however, we wish to consider a preliminary issue.

The particular nature of these objects and the relationship they maintain with the thinking subject are problems present throughout the entire history of metaphysics. To renounce subjecting the object to

²⁸⁶ G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 46–47.

²⁸⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 459.

some scientific schemas that only reify and utilise it, we need to elucidate, first of all, the particular character of the phenomena intended to be “pulled out from their hiding state”. It is clear that hermeneutics is facing completely different objects than the modern natural sciences.

The comprehension of a historical phenomenon, for example, cannot be achieved by resorting to the mathematical model imposed by modernity. This fact generates a difficult question. The difference between these objects implies the existence of a different region of reality, subject to other principles of becoming and hard enough to be circumscribed. Therefore, we should ask ourselves how far the field of physical objects extends and how exactly the aesthetic or historical phenomena differ in terms of their inner nature and structure. In addition, it should not be overlooked the way in which such phenomena can be included in the field of knowledge.

Briefly, the problem concerning the object represents the first step that must be clarified in order to understand the possibility of hermeneutics and determine to what extent the claim for a new concept of truth can be supported.

The question about the levels of reality is not related only to the sciences of spirit. On the contrary, it occupies an important place in modern epistemology. It is well-known that quantum physics (applied at the level of micro-reality) and the theory of relativity (macro scale) require different methods of approach.

That being said, how could be treated in the same manner a chair, the white snow and the phenomenon of the war between the Russians of Tsar Alexander and the French led by Bonaparte (carefully analysed by Tolstoy in the second part of the *Epilogue of War and Peace*²⁸⁸)?

Unlike Husserl's intentional approach (discussed and supplemented by Gadamer) or the analytical demarche meant to establish if all students from the classroom see or not the same chair (B. Russell), the degree of complexity of the last example (the historical phenomenon) rejects, from the beginning, a whole series of ways of knowledge. Let us think about the failure to provide for it a definitive causal explanation²⁸⁹ (which would imply, according to some epistemological theories of the experiment, the possibility of repeatability).

A detailed demarcation of the phenomena that cannot be grasped by using the principle of sufficient reason can be found in the writings of J.-L. Marion. Although his explanations regarding the four types of saturated phenomena (the event, the idol, the body and the icon) differ from Gadamer's philosophy, we cannot

²⁸⁸ Tolstoy ingeniously combines the description of events with reflections on the philosophy of history.

²⁸⁹ According to Carnap, for phenomena of high complexity we can find different causes, depending on the standpoint adopted. For the collision of two cars, the engineer's explanations will be different from those of the court or the psychologist. Stefan Celmare, *Studii de filosofie* (Iași: Editura Junimea, 2006), 74–75.

neglect the importance of his arguments for the expansion of the phenomenal field. The purpose that centralises the efforts of Marion is the inclusion of Revelation (the fifth saturated phenomenon that embraces the other four) in the field of phenomenological inquiry. In the light of the causal interpretations, this possibility would disappear in the shadow²⁹⁰: it would lead only to a moral type of hermeneutics, as the Kantian approach seems to be for him²⁹¹ or to the “labour of concept (Hegel)”²⁹² (a fact we do not fully agree with, given the special Hegelian meaning of this expression). Both options miss the unique character of Revelation, *i.e.* an event that exceeds the conditions of experience and the limits imposed by the principle of causality.

At first glance, Marion’s attempt seems to be, if not impossible, at least in contrempe with the manner in which philosophy takes reality into account. All saturated phenomena exceed the Kantian categories. Moreover, they overturn the two basic elements of Husserl’s phenomenology: the horizon and the self. The excess of intuition, which “saturates” the intention,

²⁹⁰ “The emergence of the principle of reason forces metaphysics to assign each being its concept and its cause, to the point of dismissing any beings irreducible to a conceptualizable cause as illegitimate and hence impossible.” Jean-Luc Marion, *The Visible and the Revealed* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 2.

²⁹¹ “Revelation will be reduced to an imperative, hence to the moral law, or it will founder outside of all reason, hence outside of all possibility” (*ibid.*, 3).

²⁹² *Ibid.*

makes it difficult to locate them within the topology of the existent. But Marion claims the opposite: “(...) the history of philosophy has a long-standing knowledge of such saturated phenomena. One could go so far as to maintain that none of the most important metaphysicians has avoided the description of one or more saturated phenomena, even at the price of a head-on contradiction of its own presuppositions”²⁹³. Thus, the infinite, in Descartes, conforms itself to the saturate occurrence. The Kantian sublime²⁹⁴, in its turn, dynamites its possible *categorical* interpretation; the aesthetic idea, as opposed to reason’s ideas, has as its core the excess of intuition.

Therefore, the new topology should include, besides the *phenomena poor in intuition* (formal languages, ideal mathematical entities) and regular events (described by Husserl based on their relationship—generally dominated by intention—with intuition), a third

²⁹³ Ibid., 46.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 2–33 (In the case of aesthetics “(...) it is no longer a matter of the nonadequation of the (lacking) intuition that leaves a (given) concept empty; at stake rather, is a failure of the (lacking) concept that leaves the (overabundantly given) intuition blind. Henceforth, it is no longer intuition but the concept that is lacking”). Jean-Luc Marion states a similar idea in *Being Given. Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*: “(...) but it is no longer a question of nonadequation of (lacking) intuition leaving a (given) concept empty. It is inversely a question of a deficiency of the (lacking) concept, which leaves the (superabundantly given) intuition blind. As a result, it is the concept that is deficient, no longer intuition.” Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given. Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 196–199:

category: the phenomena exceeded by intuition. Marion clarifies, for this purpose, the possibility of those occurrences that cannot be objectified or, in other words, of those which are situated *par excellence* outside the field of knowledge of the modern sciences.

As for our inquiry, his analysis offers important clues regarding the objects of hermeneutics. Once the special character of saturated phenomena is accepted, the ways of understanding them, whatever they might be, cannot return to the temptation of applying the epistemic model. Moreover, Marion managed to solve another important problem: to approach the Revelation within the horizon of philosophy. The phenomenological description of the other four saturated phenomena, having as starting point the reduction to what it is given, raises, however, some unsolved questions. The degree of complexity of historical experience or the experience of art requires a global manner of understanding. The reduction, in this case, may lose sight of some important elements and constitutive relational connections.

Gadamer adopts a provocative direction. His main theme of research is rooted in the tradition of classical hermeneutics: the phenomenon—the targeted object—is the text (philosophical, literary, etc.) transmitted through tradition. The rules of understanding promoted by the Enlightenment (the imperative of renouncing to any form of prejudice; the assumption that universal human reason is able correctly to guide our comprehension) or by the Romantics are

insufficient. The comprehension of the aesthetic object or the historical event (models for philosophical hermeneutics) requires special methodical mechanisms (the representation in the light of the concept of “play”, the hermeneutic circle, the structure of anticipation possessed by *Dasein* (Heidegger), the phenomenon of language, etc.). Starting from here, the comprehension of the phenomena of a higher degree of complexity than the texts (already considered in the multiplicity of horizons in which they exist) also becomes possible. At the same time, a major philosophical issue comes out: the universality of hermeneutics (a problem introduced by Gadamer once with the interrogation about language).

We will name this type of object *complex hermeneutic phenomenon*. In the following subsections, we will explain the special relationship it maintains with the subject (a relationship that defines, in fact, its own nature).

b) *Everydayness* as the Initial Moment of Dialectical Hermeneutics

Until then, it is worth briefly to discuss the essential contributions brought by Martin Heidegger to philosophical hermeneutics, starting with *The Hermeneutics of Facticity* and continued in *Being and Time*, as well in his later works after *Kebré*. By doing so, we

intend to sketch the direction of understanding proposed by Gadamer and its possible limitations.

We already saw how a hermeneutic phenomenon presents itself to the researcher. Let us also consider the overall structure of any theoretical question, as exposed in the first pages of *Sein und Zeit*²⁹⁵. Regarding the investigations about Being, *that which is interrogated* and which should open the way for revealing the answer is *Dasein* (“ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an issue for it”²⁹⁶), more precisely the *Dasein* that we are ourselves, here (*Da*), in the universe of everydayness²⁹⁷. In the light of this particular access path, hermeneutics is no longer a doctrine or a technique of understanding. “In connection with its original meaning, this term means rather: a definite unity in the actualizing of $\epsilon\sigma\mu\eta\nu\epsilon\upsilon\epsilon\iota\nu$ (of communicating), *i.e.* of the *interpreting of facticity*”²⁹⁸. Understanding, as a hermeneutical possibility, is present from the beginning to the end of our factic life. It is a

²⁹⁵ The three elements of any interrogation are *das Gefragte*—that which is asked about, *ein Befragtes*—that which is interrogated, *das Erfragte*—that which is to be found out by the asking. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), 24.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

²⁹⁷ “At the outset of our analysis it is particularly important that *Dasein* should not be interpreted with the differentiated character of some definite way of existing, but that it should be uncovered in the undifferentiated character which it has proximally and for the most part” (*ibid.*, 69).

²⁹⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Ontology—The Hermeneutics of Facticity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 11.

mode of being of *Dasein*, which includes, among others, the comprehension of its own self (“the *wakefulness* of *Dasein* for itself”²⁹⁹).

However, this re-evaluation of the phenomenon of everydayness should not mislead us. The interpretation of facticity constitutes only a possible opening horizon, not the goal of Heidegger’s research. The *Analytic of Dasein* begins with facticity but chases well-defined purposes: the temporality and the meaning of Being. Heidegger does not pursue the banality of facticity, including its daily gossips. The impersonal *das Man* matters only to the extent that its phenomenological understanding may lead to authenticity. Nevertheless, when the fundamental ontology from *Sein und Zeit* is abandoned, everydayness (as a starting point for hermeneutics) is derived in other parameters (*Aletheia*; language as the shelter of Being, etc.). Furthermore, the discussions (from Heidegger’s later writings) regarding the impossibility to define, by the instrumentality of colloquial language³⁰⁰, the term *Ereignis* suggests a diametrically opposite approach. Being, as *Ereignis* (in

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

³⁰⁰ The attempt to answer the question “What is *Ereignis*?” shows us the limitations of our daily language. Any answer, Heidegger states in *Time and Being*, implies an appropriate utterance of a state of things. However, Being refuses this act. “But if the matter at stake prohibits our speaking of it by way of a statement, then we must give up the declaratory sentence that is anticipated by the question we have raised.” Martin Heidegger, *On Time and Being* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 20.

its simultaneous donation and retraction³⁰¹), will occupy, from now on, a privileged position. Its donation (*es gibt*) interpellates and particularises man.

That is why *Dasein*, in the state of fall, is not criticised. In fact, its theoretical attitude, if we may call it so, under the impersonal *das Man*, is *idle talk* (annexed to *curiosity* and *ambiguity*³⁰²). It is precisely this type of attitude that should be investigated when we consider the everydayness of *Dasein*. This type of inquiry produces developments like Cioran's (who, by reducing the adjectives that sustain our public lives, reaches the nothingness³⁰³) or some absurd materialisations, perfect metaphors of common sense, such as, for example, the famous plays of Eugene Ionesco. To what extent all this matter in the act of understanding (directed toward the significance of Being or upon the hermeneutic phenomenon)?

We answer: it matters because only this way it is possible for us to leave behind the banality of facticity and become aware of the true elements of our lives. It is significant, in this respect, the interpretation that

³⁰¹ "Expropriation (*Enteignis*) belongs to Appropriation (*Ereignis*) as such. By this expropriation, Appropriation does not abandon itself; rather, it preserves what is its own" (*ibid.*, 23).

³⁰² "This ambiguity is always tossing to curiosity that which it seeks; and it gives idle talk the semblance of having everything decided in it." Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 219.

³⁰³ "The contact between people–society in general–would not be possible without the repeated use of same adjectives. Forbid them by law and you will see to what small extent man is a social animal." Emil Cioran, *Amurgul gândurilor* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1992), 32.

Heidegger operates on the concept of consciousness (*Bewußtsein*), as employed by Hegel in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. In *Hegels Begriff der Erfahrung*³⁰⁴, he talks about *Bewußt-sein* (the *fact-of-being-aware*). The meaning of this term, Heidegger explains, coincides with Hegel's notion of knowledge. "The two explicate each other. To be conscious means to be in the state of knowledge. Knowledge itself proposes, presents, and so determines the mode of 'Being' in being conscious"³⁰⁵.

Obviously, Heidegger forces this interpretation for reaching the "question of Being", which it is glimpsed in this linguistic inclusion of *sein*—of *being-in-the-world*—in *Bewußtsein*. What interests us is, however, the manner in which the space of everydayness it exceeded. At the same time, it is appropriate to ask ourselves to what extent everydayness is a negative moment (in a dialectal meaning) of the hermeneutics of Being.

Let us consider two paradigmatic examples of the transition from everydayness (from idle talk and ambiguity) to what we might call, in Heidegger terms, the state of authenticity.

The first is from the second section (B) of Chapter VI, *Self-alienated spirit. Culture (Bildung)*, from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. After experiencing the shortages of the ethical world (VI), consciousness returns upon

³⁰⁴ Martin Heidegger, "Hegels Begriff der Erfahrung," in *Holzwege* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1963), 140–142.

³⁰⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Hegel's Concept of Experience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 55 (Heidegger, "Hegels Begriff der Erfahrung," 140).

political society and faces the opposition between power and wealth, assessed using the concepts of *good* and *evil*. It experiences the alienation from itself in all possible forms. The failure makes consciousness head toward the world of thinking, for it cannot return, at this stage, to itself. The discourse promoted by the Enlightenment, being in contradiction with itself, turns out to be a product of idle talk. The concept of *utility*, which is a result of this discourse, produces, when transposed in the historical world, an irreconcilable conflict among its followers (occurred during the regime of *Terror*, which followed the French Revolution). The possibility to get out of this circle is an extreme one. Only after perceiving the suppression of its own self as imminent (the fact of being suspicious, the guillotine, as results of absolute freedom), consciousness can return upon itself, can perform the absolute negation (the negation of the negation) and take its own self as an object, thus becoming moral spirit.

The second sequence is from Heidegger's *Being and Time*. We think of the fragments in which the author analyses *anxiety* (*die Angst*) and *being-toward-death* (*Sein-zum-Tode*). The similarity is high. *Dasein* reaches its state of authenticity only because of an existential shock. Then, it regards itself, acknowledges the shortcoming of its fall and, consequently, becomes able to perceive the "question of Being".

In both cases, consciousness managed to exceed the space of everydayness only after it became aware of its

particular character. After its negativity was brought to light, understood and fructified.

Dasein's facticity made Heidegger conceive a phenomenological hermeneutics. The capitalisation of dialectical negativity represented at least a preparatory stage of it. Jean Greisch emphasises this aspect: “what is specific for a phenomenological hermeneutics is to recognise that *to see*, in the sense of *understanding* the donation of the phenomenon, is a difficult art. Only by saying what this phenomenon is not, we become able to discern the specific modalities of its donation”³⁰⁶. In this respect, Greisch admits that phenomenological hermeneutics can be compared to Hegelian dialectics. The difference between them resides in the fact that the first accepts the donation, as glimpsed in *es gibt*, into the research field, in parallel with a phenomenological attempt to understand life (an act that, of course, implies a special type of interpretation³⁰⁷). As we already saw, the act of interpretation is not something external, but an inherent component of factic life, directed toward the ambient world, *Dasein* that I am and the *Dasein* of the others. In addition, it should not be neglected that, in order to understand the world, Heidegger appealed, in his writings before *Being and Time*, to Christianity (a place of a superior *Dasein* than the everyday *Dasein*)³⁰⁸.

³⁰⁶ Jean Greisch, *Ontologie et temporalité* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1994), 26.

³⁰⁷ For more details, see *ibid.*, 36–37.

³⁰⁸ “We must also ask the question (hermeneutical in itself) under what

All these facts indicate to which direction the comprehension of everydayness must be guided. We asked to what extent it constitutes the starting point of any hermeneutical research. We are now able to formulate an answer. The universe of everydayness is the place where the philosophical or literary texts exist and from which their comprehension receives, more or less visible, its orientation. This fact becomes even clearer in the case of a historical phenomenon. Being, if we think of Heidegger, asserts itself here, and *Dasein*, in its turn, may hear it and let itself be called by it. However, and we are moving toward the heart of the problem, the road ahead must be rigorously defined.

First of all, we should observe that any interpretation assumes a certain distance between the interpreter and his targeted object. Historicity—the medium in which the text occurs and, at the same time, the horizon from which the interpreter picks up his object—must be *brought to consciousness*. In other words, it must be understood as an opening place. At the same time, the process of interpretation, as an explicit takeover of the object into the project, requires, paradoxically, that the interpreter to place himself above this object (otherwise, he will formulate false conclusions) and, at

conditions this world can be discovered. On this subject, Heidegger's answer does not considerably differ from Dilthey's: because of Christianity, we learned to explore this dimension. (...) To provide content for the notions of *self-care* and *world of the self*, the appeal to the ancient Christian experience proves to be indispensable." Greisch, *Ontologie et temporalité*, 39.

the same time, inside its environment. If equilibrium is lost and the balance tilts in favour of the latter, the *malentendu* of the *relativity of comprehension* occurs. Historicity, Gadamer insists, should not be understood as suppressing the truth and producing, in its stead, mere interpretive authenticity and expressiveness. Truth is not some sort of “historical expression”. On the contrary, “*historicity* is a transcendental concept”³⁰⁹. That is why we should refuse the *antinomical* understanding of the thesis “knowledge is historically conditioned” and its antithesis “the certainties of knowledge are timeless and unconditional”³¹⁰. The two are located in different planes. When Gadamer says that *understanding* is a historical concept³¹¹, he suggests, in fact, its potential perfectibility and, at the same time, requires us to take the object into account in accordance with both the present and the past research horizons.

The second type of error rooted in the soil of everydayness occurs when the notion of understanding is reduced to the act of view. In reality, the latter constitutes only a limited possibility of openness. To accept, for example, the culture of Indies does not imply renouncing to consider it as a part of universal history, an act that involves a certain hierarchy. Accepting Indian rituals cannot replace the inquiry on the role that Indian civilisation played in the evolution

³⁰⁹ H.-G. Gadamer, “Supplement I: Hermeneutics and Historicism,” in *Truth and Method* (London: Continuum, 2006), 527.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 530.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 523.

of humanity (as Hegel suggests in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*). Understanding subjected to the act of view fails to grasp the deep character of its object, being content, instead of it, only with a bunch of neutral phrases. To *view* Christianity or the Eastern or Western spirituality means to limit ourselves only to a series of sociological statements. Michel Henry rigorously demonstrates the phenomenological error of this type of understanding. The concept of *view* involves, for the French author, a regard inside the domain of *the truth of the world* (a deficient truth when compared to *the truth of life*). Let us not forget, moreover, the limits imposed by Heidegger: in *Being and Time*, the domain of *view* is rigorously limited. *Dasein* sees and understands the objects by the instrumentality of the structure *something as something*. Only after the object is understood in its character of utensil, it may be detached from the ambient world and scientifically researched.

Finally, we should notice that everydayness might also easily hide in shadow the true concepts of objects, replacing them with a surrogate subjected to private interests. In the context of numerous speeches about ideology, capitalism, for example, is positively evaluated, being taken as an axiological landmark for other types of economic systems. This practice cannot be regarded as veritable understanding, achieved in terms of historicity (in which we find ourselves), but only as something derived from the banality of the present horizon, so at a mediocre level. In other words, only from the perspective of the impersonal *das Man*: of

idle talk and ambiguity. Completely different happens when Heidegger analyses the difference between the authentic and the inauthentic in order to reach, based on such results, the simultaneous disclosure and concealment of Being. In this case, we are dealing with a genuine capitalisation of everydayness, which begins with the state of inauthenticity—therefore from the inside—and rises above it.

In its character of interpretive starting point, everydayness should be defined (and capitalised) as: 1. the *place of existence* of the object, whose influence is exercised, to a lesser or greater extent, upon it; 2. the medium from which the subject projects its interpretative intention and which he must understand (must bring it into consciousness) and overcome; 3. a model that must be capitalised in order for the existential structures of the subject and its specific hermeneutical methods to be discovered. However, all three may generate erroneous starting directions.

Consequently, understanding proves to be determined by the preservation of what we might designate, from now on, as *hermeneutic equilibrium*. For Gadamer, it implies capitalising our prejudices and tradition under well-defined conditions. Let us record two more examples. The analytic of Dasein (from which he borrows important elements) respects this requirement. It starts with *Dasein* in the state of fall but aims at a higher purpose than to describe its basic fields of activity. The series of experiences made by consciousness in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* also respect

it. That is because consciousness (even before being self-consciousness) lives and formulates its theses in the space of everydayness. Thus, it is protected from the danger of abstract thinking and is able to evolve because it also possesses the possibility of self-understanding and self-adjusting its future path according to the logic of the concept.

The interpretative challenge provoked by the appeal to everydayness must follow a middle path in order not to fall in the banality of facticity or raise in the domain of artificial conceptual constructions. Preserving this type of equilibrium is a *sine qua non* condition for the truth of the phenomenon to be achieved.

2. Methodological Issues. New Shapes of Dialectics

a) Understanding–Dialectics–Dialogue

When applied in research, the conditions of *hermeneutic equilibrium* raise some difficult questions. To conceive a method based on them (so independent of the technical-scientific matrix and directly determined by the particular nature of the targeted object), we must clarify, first of all, the relationship between understanding and dialectics.

In *Truth and Method*, their juxtaposition can be spotted in three decisive moments. The first: when Gadamer decides to redefine the act of understanding

by resorting to the dialogue model. The second: when he aims at reshaping the *subject–object* relationship, by blowing up the classical connection and insisting on their mutual co-determination. The third: when the author proceeds to clarify the question regarding the very possibility of hermeneutical knowledge and to redefine the concept of truth. Let us begin by examining the first.

We already discussed Hegel’s criticism (adopted by Gadamer) against the external methods of research. Their deficiency is double. 1. Whereas the epistemic model is imported from the outside, its translation into the field of the sciences of spirit generates a distorted image of the object. 2. Such a method fails to disclose the true essence of the hermeneutic phenomenon because it causes its particularities to be lost during the process of reduction.

It is, therefore, necessary to resort to dialectics. The access path promoted by Plato or Hegel accurately folds on the central object of philosophy: the act of understanding³¹². It is appropriate, therefore, to start from the excellent papers dedicated to Hegel’s philosophy³¹³ (written by Gadamer between 1961 and

³¹² “If the purpose of philosophy is not producing or reproducing art, mathematics or other activities of the human mind, but comprehension (...), this comprehension is an activity that has its own immanent method.” Benedetto Croce, *Ce qui est vivant et ce qui est mort de la philosophie de Hegel* (Paris: V. Giard et E. Brière, 1910), 4.

³¹³ H.-G. Gadamer, “Neuere Philosophie,” cap. I “Hegel,” in *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 3 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1987), 3–105.

1971) in order to outline the speculative nucleus from *Truth and Method*.

Dialectics, Gadamer admits at the beginning of *Hegel und die antike Dialektik* (1961), constitutes a real alternative (close to Plato's philosophy³¹⁴) to mathematical demonstration. That is because the logical progression through which the determinations are overcome (and retained, at the same time, in consciousness) eliminates artificially constructed hypotheses³¹⁵ and respects the imperatives of rigour and necessity. In addition, by distancing itself from the ancient model, Hegel's dialectics does not remain stuck in the sphere of objectivity but includes self-consciousness, as a substantial element. "The movement in itself is neither a predicate of what it is moved nor a state in which a certain being exists"³¹⁶. It is a general determination of Being, whose comprehension requires streamlining the (rigid) categories of the understanding. It follows as a corollary that speculative truth cannot be reduced to the mere forms of judgements³¹⁷. The faculty of understanding cannot accomplish the synthesis of opposite

³¹⁴ "Auf alle Fälle hat aber Hegel sein eigentliches Vorbild für den Begriff des philosophischen Beweisens nicht in Aristoteles erblickt, sondern in der eleatischen und platonischen Dialektik." H.-G. Gadamer, "Hegel und die antike Dialektik," in *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 3, 6.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

³¹⁶ "Bewegung selber ist überhaupt kein Prädikat des Bewegten, kein Zustand, in dem sich ein Seiendes befindet" (*ibid.*, 10).

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

determinations. In fact, neither reason (if we strictly follow the Kantian division of the faculties of knowledge) can perform this task.

Hegel's efforts to "restore" the philosophical demonstration, Gadamer explains, rest on the agreement between the dialectical methodological principles and the phenomenal soil of hermeneutics: "two things help him in this regard: the dialectical method to radicalise a *positum* until it becomes self-contradictory and, secondly, the ability to make the speculative content hidden in the logical instinct of language appear"³¹⁸. According to him, Hegel experiences "the linguistic suppleness of Greek thinking" within the German language, the spirit of his epoch and the tradition of the Lutheran Reform³¹⁹.

Let us consider, in parallel, the concept of understanding from *Truth and Method*. The idealist-speculative reconfiguration of the Greek model has not an arbitrary purpose. It allows solving an impasse encountered by both Dilthey and Husserl. Moreover, it is supported by a particular structure of interdependency, which includes the model of the *hermeneutic circle* (Heidegger) and the explicit capitalisation of the concept of tradition.

Comprehension is rooted in the mutual transfer *I-thou* (the latter understood as general *otherness*: a present person, a speech, a historical event, a forwarded text,

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 26.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

etc.). This nucleus, Gadamer finds it in the agreement that underlies any discussion between two participants and allows each of them to seize the particularity of the other. Things happen similarly in the case of an author present through the scriptural message. In both situations, the ideational exchange takes place in the horizon of historicity, of tradition, and is articulated according to the expectancy of meaning and *the claim of unity* of the message.

Schleiermacher provided important clues for this type of approach. He required that the particular meaning of a fragment to be established according to its context³²⁰. Although the development he gave on this thesis turned toward psychologism (by promoting both a sympathetic way of understanding and the transposition in the mind of the contemporary readers of the author), we must notice the substantial role that he conferred to the hermeneutic circle. Unfortunately, Schleiermacher went beyond the limits of our human condition and the (present) horizon from which interpretation is initiated, and wrongly stated the possibility of a complete disclosure of the initial message³²¹.

³²⁰ “As the single word belongs in the total context of the sentence, so the single text belongs in the total context of a writer's work, and the latter in the whole of the literary genre or of literature.” Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 291.

³²¹ In Schleiermacher, Gadamer explains, “the interpreter is absolutely contemporaneous with his author”. In this regard, Dilthey has the same attitude: “Just as natural science always examines some present thing

Dilthey, on the other hand, reinforced (in the footsteps of Ranke and Droysen, so against German idealism) the hermeneutical connotation of the concept of *expression* (understood in its inherent connection with *life*, with all significant individual experiences). *Comprehension* became “understanding of expression” (and, thereby, the causal explanations promoted by natural science went to the second place, despite his ideal of epistemological legitimacy³²²) and *significance*—“expression of *life*”. Surprisingly, *life*, initially close to Hegel’s notion of *spirit*, was derived to the antipode. It lost, once with the acceptance of *historical consciousness*, the speculative development of its concept. Historical consciousness was regarded as a possibility of self-knowledge, endowed with scientific potential but, as Gadamer affirms, it inevitably led to a blockage. Knowledge became “comprehension of the expression of life”, but, aiming only to depict the events, it missed the true historical experience³²³.

Husserl also substantially reshaped the act of understanding (let us think about his remarkable research concerning the horizon from which comprehension is initiated). However, he faced a

for the information it can yield, so the human scientist interrogates texts” (ibid., 233).

³²² “From the outset, Dilthey’s efforts were directed toward distinguishing relationships in the historical world from the causal relationships of the natural order” (ibid., 219).

³²³ “Thus Dilthey ultimately conceives inquiring into the historical past as *deciphering and not as historical experience*” (ibid., 234).

similar shortfall. He recognised the place and the transcendental character of the *Thou*, but only as secondary elements. His concept of *intersubjectivity*, just as the psychological approach of Dilthey, did not succeed to clarify the relationship between these instances. The concept of *life* (the world of life as a given *a priori* element of any experience; a reduced subjectivity from which derives all that is objective) was deprived (because of the abyssal separation between his phenomenology and the Hegelian idealism) of its true essence. “Thus, in fact, the speculative import of the concept of *life* remained undeveloped in both men. Dilthey simply tries to play off the viewpoint of life, polemically against the metaphysical thinking and Husserl has absolutely no idea of the connection between this concept and the metaphysical tradition, in general, and speculative idealism, in particular”³²⁴.

At this moment, we find ourselves at a decisive turning point. The *aporia* of otherness requires a radical resolution, which cannot come from elsewhere than from what appeared as exceeded, namely Hegelian dialectics. Indeed, Gadamer recognises, “the dialectical process of the *Phenomenology of Mind* is perhaps determined by nothing so much as by the problem of the recognition of the *Thou*”³²⁵. Let us see how the solution articulates.

The errors of transcendental phenomenology

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 242.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 339.

regarding the *I-thou* relationship are alleviated in the writings of Count Paul Yorck von Wartenburg, who decides to operate a reconfiguration of the great idealist-speculative topics. Thus, Hegel re-enters the scene and redirects the evolution of hermeneutics. *Life*, as Gadamer indicates, receives a better understanding when Count Yorck interprets it as “self-assertion” and “unity in division”³²⁶. The way in which the essence of self-consciousness is derived follows the famous dialectical correspondence from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The possibility of self-knowledge is to be sought in what is different from the self, in its negativity³²⁷. Moreover, its particular character should be seized, in parallel, under the auspices of this new epistemic determinant. Gadamer explicitly stresses the importance of this approach, by which Paul Yorck von Wartenburg unifies the two directions deemed as irreconcilable by his predecessors.

Of course, his methodological indications are valuable but insufficient. The manner in which hermeneutics should accomplish the *claim of truth* of its objects requires further developments. The direction he provided is, however, of a capital importance. In his biographical writings, Gadamer confides how much the

³²⁶ Ibid., 242.

³²⁷ “As Hegel had already shown and Yorck continues to hold, this structure of being alive has its correlative in the nature of self-consciousness. Its being consists in its ability to make everything the object of its knowledge, and yet in everything that it knows, it knows it” (ibid., 244).

works of Martin Heidegger influenced him. Still, as surprising as it may be, the phenomenological structures of understanding accurately follow the dialectical guiding principles.

Indeed, the main impulse for elucidating the very possibility of hermeneutics comes from the author of *Being and Time*. For him, the act of understanding is an *existential* of *Dasein*, antecedent and immanent to any activity³²⁸. Therefore, hermeneutical comprehension must have, as its starting point, the universe of *everydayness*. At the same time, any act of reading, any effort to clarify a historical phenomenon is driven by the *expectations of meaning* of the interpreter. The perfectibility of this procedure resides in the “dialogical” model³²⁹. It is not about an arbitrary intervention or a relativist interpretation. The requirement imposed by Gadamer consists in maintaining a constant openness to otherness, which implies a continuous revision of our preconceptions, in accordance with the object³³⁰.

One of the most important achievements of hermeneutics derives from here: the removal of the

³²⁸ “*Understanding* is not a resigned ideal of human experience adopted in the old age of the spirit, as with Dilthey; nor is it, as with Husserl, a last methodological ideal of philosophy in contrast to the naivety of unreflecting life; it is, on the contrary, the original form of the realization of *Dasein*, which is being-in-the-world” (ibid., 250).

³²⁹ In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, consciousness exceeds the natural *positum* and opens the new triad similarly.

³³⁰ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 269–270.

neutral attitude from the process of understanding. Otherwise, the ideational exchange would be missed. The vitality of a text (an event, a speech, etc.) would be abducted; the object would be converted, in the end, in a simple (historical) entity, whose influence on the present would become negligible. Naturally, this methodological guidance does not remove but, on the contrary, confirms the requirement of a true recovery of the concepts of the past through the prism of our own dilemmas. “Interpretation is *motivated*”, Gadamer affirms in this context.

This fact raises another important question: how can we distinguish our beneficial anticipations and preconceptions (whose importance is often affirmed by the German author) from those that mislead interpretation? The answer we propose may seem, at first glance, quite strange: by means of *awareness*, more correctly, by means of the very *fact-of-being-in-the-state-of-consciousness* (*Bewußt-sein*).

We saw, in the previous section, from where it comes and how this concept articulates. We also pointed out the role it plays in preserving the hermeneutic equilibrium of interpretation. The expectancy of meaning, generated by tradition and shaped by the presuppositions that, inevitably, we project, is a derivative of this principle: “we have to recognise the element of tradition in historical research and inquire into its hermeneutic productivity”³³¹,

³³¹ Ibid., 284.

Gadamer says; but not by means of a historical-epistemic³³² method, not from the outside, but from the inside. The correct employment of this special type of prejudice resides in the dialectics of *bringing to consciousness*.

Let us also consider the well-known sequence from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*—the *master-slave* struggle. The slave is able to carry history forward because he knows what means to be free, but he also knows that he is not. What gives consciousness the possibility to capitalise its historicity, its prejudices, is the fact that it is aware of the impossibility to cancel them altogether. It understands them as its inherent *given* elements and, subsequently, decides to capitalise them. This requirement, still abstract at this moment, becomes clearer in the light of the phenomenological concept of *the hermeneutic circle*³³³.

The circularity of interpretation is powered by the fusion of the objective and subjective sphere, as glimpsed by Hegel in *The Science of Logic*: “The circle, then, is not formal in nature. It is neither subjective nor objective, but describes understanding as the interplay of the movement of tradition and the movement of the

³³² “At the beginning of all historical hermeneutics, then, the abstract antithesis between tradition and historical research, between history and knowledge must be discarded” (ibid., 283–284).

³³³ “In fact, the *hermeneutic circle* expresses a dialectic *sui generis*; since it engages the totality (and plurality), it brings exigency.” Alexandru Boboc, *Adevăr și conștiință istorică* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1988), 144.

interpreter”³³⁴. Consequently, the *expectancy of meaning* should no longer be considered as a mere personal opinion, but as a hermeneutical attitude produced by our historical heritage (understood by the instrumentality of language). Each epoch leaves its traces on the meaning of a text. The act of understanding is always initiated in the present, as naturally as possible: the interpreter is concerned with the various problems he encounters and tries to provide answers for them.

Gadamer calls the ontological determinant that supports this type of knowledge the *fusion of horizons*. Thus, temporality is reassessed: the past is understood in its defining continuity with the present; the present, in its turn, as the mediator between the text and the horizon of the past, in which it was produced. Hence derives the resolution of Schleiermacher’s and Dilthey’s psychologism relied on *empathy*. The temporal distance, thanks to Heidegger’s philosophy, no more constitutes an abyss but “is filled with the continuity of custom and tradition, in the light of which everything handed down presents itself to us”³³⁵.

The *question–answer* hermeneutic structure embodies precisely this Heideggerian thesis, shaping it as a dialectical movement. “Only in an inauthentic sense can we talk about understanding questions that one does not pose oneself. (...) To understand a question means

³³⁴ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 293.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, 297.

to ask it"³³⁶. The question to which the text is intended to provide an answer cannot be properly understood unless it is personally asked by the interpreter himself.

Any scriptural message challenges us: to ask about it in this manner means to put it in *a state of openness*. This structure makes possible any dialogue. Moreover, it facilitates the comprehension of otherness, being a solid alternative to the epistemic-historical methodology. However, Gadamer clearly states that we cannot find a method able to indicate, with certainty, the proper way in which we should ask. The hermeneutic technique of interrogation resembles the manner in which Socrates interrogated his interlocutors and generates different levels of understanding the message.

b) The Perfectibility of Comprehension. The Problem of *Spurious Infinity*

Understanding, in its dialectic character, cannot exceed the boundaries of human finitude. Here is the main objection that Gadamer brings against Hegel's philosophy. The impossibility of a complete comprehension of the meaning blows up the teleological theory of objective *historismus*, but that at

³³⁶ Ibid., 368.

the risk of falling into what Hegel calls *spurious infinity* (*die schlechte Unendlichkeit*).

We cannot speak about interpretation outside the (dialectal) binomial *question–correction*, just as we cannot claim absolute knowledge from the part of hermeneutics. Because any interpretation is motivated (a fact which allows the interpreter to be “called” by tradition), and such an act mediates the temporal horizons, its results may always be improved. Gadamer's attitude regarding Hegel's philosophy is, therefore, ambivalent. Hegel opposes transcendental idealism and claims that we can achieve true knowledge by means of speculative reason. Gadamer follows his strategy in order to establish his own theory of understanding (different from the epistemic methodology). His purpose is not narrower. But his new way of comprehension does not produce a total disclosure of the meaning. Moreover, *circularity*, as a main determinant of understanding, seems to be, at first glance, perpetually improvable. Are we dealing, therefore, with a logical error neglected by Gadamer or with a chimerical claim from the part of Hegel?

The above contradiction is not a real one. Our thesis is that Gadamer's hermeneutics not only does not conflict with the error of *spurious infinity* but also takes it very seriously into account and values it as a criterion for verifying its results.

If we intend, by pushing to the extreme this task, to avoid in any domain of knowledge the error of *spurious infinity*, we should ask ourselves how could we

understand the evolution of history when we already live the *post*-end of history? This strange paradox does not indicate anything else than the particular way in which we should regard the *infinity of understanding*. If speculative logic unites the categories in order to discover their truth in a superior concept (which will include both separated moments, overcame and, at the same time, preserved—*Aufhebung*), a genuine understanding of the development of history requires an explanatory *all-comprehensive* concept. Absolute knowledge implies an explicit knowledge of the process through which consciousness reached its concepts. In its absence, our knowledge would be nothing more than a contingent abstraction. Hegel's requirement should be considered very carefully. If history does not end with Napoleon and, of course, all contemporary commentators agree that the German philosopher did not claim such a thing, this fact indicates us that the achievement of our knowledge (regarding the philosophy of history) resides in this type of conceptual-dialectical all-comprehension, and not in the finiteness and rigidity of a final declarative conclusion.

Secondly, the Hegelian *all-comprehensive* concept is defined by its teleological character. Freedom, as the purpose of history, does not contradict the openness of interpretation, but only the relativity in which it might fall. Its accomplishment does not suppose the reign of the arbitrary will. On the contrary, it requires an all-comprehensive capability to understand the world.

Moreover, let us not forget that Hegel did not criticise the general notion of infinity but only *spurious infinity*. Quantitative spurious infinity, for instance, manifests itself a circular movement between two contradictory instances³³⁷, a movement that forces the concept to remain frozen at a lower level, instead of unifying both contradictory determinations³³⁸. For this reason, the error of *spurious infinity* makes its presence felt in the following cases:

1. The univocal orientation in accordance with only one temporal horizon. (1.1) If interpretation remains stuck on the horizon of the present, it becomes: (1.1.a) *pseudo-interpretation* subjected to *everydayness* (hermeneutical disequilibrium), in other words, poor comprehension of the text; (1.1.b) *immobility*, so blockage in the (unique) anticipation of meaning; (1.1.c) the mere pragmatic use of a text or a significant event.

Maintaining interpretation in the horizon of the past (1.2) leads to: (1.2.a) the neutrality of understanding: the text is recovered as a mere museum curiosity, its claim of truth being, thus, denied; (1.2.b) a chimeric claim of comprehension, supposed to establish, in a definite and

³³⁷ G. W. F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 192.

³³⁸ Talking about the particular way in which Hegel discusses, in *The Science of Logic*, about causality, A Ott explains: “the infinite progress is, in fact, nothing else than the eternal repetition of a single and same thought, the thought of a cause, of its effect and of the report between them.” A. Ott, *Hegel et la philosophie allemande* (Paris: Joubert, 1844), 246–247.

irrevocable manner, the original intention of the author, by claiming scientific and historical legitimacy.

2. The relativity of interpretation. In other words, accepting as valid any type of supra-interpretation (in the meaning that Umberto Eco confers to this expression), thus violating the requirements and limitations of rigorous hermeneutical research. *Spurious infinity* means, in this case, a continuous passage from a level to another, making interpretation impossible to be controlled or oriented in a valid direction.

To avoid all of this, Gadamer imposes the principle of *fusion of horizons* (“the horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past”³³⁹). The second type of error can be solved by establishing well-defined limits that circumscribe the *hermeneutic circle*. The *expectancy of meaning* involves a preliminary *conception of perfection* and the anticipation of the whole. Finally, the validity of the *question–answer* interpretative structure is governed by the dialectical principles of *becoming*. That is why we can rightfully speak about the *negativity of understanding*. Davey Nicholas³⁴⁰ argues in favour of this fact, referring to the particular manner in which the expectancies of

³³⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 305. He also adds: “There is no more an isolated horizon of the present in itself than there are historical horizons which have to be acquired. Rather, *understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves*”.

³⁴⁰ Nicholas Davey, *Unquiet Understanding. Gadamer’s Philosophical Hermeneutics* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2006), 12–14.

meaning are overcome by virtue of the negative character of understanding. Finally, a proper interpretation requires from the part of the interpreter: 1. to know himself and to become aware of the prejudices he has when he reads a text; 2. to include his own intentions and questions in the final product of comprehension.

Undoubtedly, Gadamer limits the Hegelian soar, but, if we accept (by virtue of Hegel's philosophy of history) the possibility of applying the concept of absolute knowledge in the field of comprehension, hermeneutics may avoid the error of false infinity. The interpreter must be very careful at these two categories of blockages in order to maintain *everydayness* and *authenticity* in a state of hermeneutic equilibrium.

3. The Reconfiguration of the *Subject–Object* Relationship. The Hermeneutic Subject

a) Hegel's Criticism against the Kantian *Subject-Object* Separation

The gap between the two gnoseological instances—the external, independent object and the receptive thinking subject—feeds the ideological *corpus* of the modern sciences. Despite the rigorous character they claim, the expansion of the methodical domination and its inherent technical-objective annexes subjects the most

different domains of knowledge to a pseudo-doctrinal system of the slogans of common sense. In the space of everyday routine, under the restricted viewfinder it promotes, only those phenomena and explanations that can be labelled “scientifically approved (by the specialist)” are admitted. Heisenberg’s “uncertainty principle” or Einstein’s ideal of unity are accepted, simultaneously, in the same section of “wonders of science”. The facile eclecticism prefers, on the contrary, only “healthy” causal explanations. And that—if we consider the remarkable works of Michel Henry—at the risk of entirely neglecting life—the real and unique condition of any action.

The problem of subjectivity is very complex. A great philosopher as Immanuel Kant would not have admitted the precariousness of such developments. The “Copernican revolution” from the *Critique of Pure Reason* demonstrates the essential role that the subject plays so that an exterior object to become a phenomenon, in accordance with our human faculties of knowledge (sensibility and the understanding). The subjective side of knowledge is thus attested, and that happens within a philosophical system, *par excellence*, objective. The understanding is limited to know only phenomena, the *noumenon* remaining unknowable. Yet, objectivity does not apply to this type of entity, but exclusively to its phenomenal appearance, in the framework of human experience. That is because objectivity is a property of subjective sentences, and not of the object aimed to be investigated.

In the *Critique of Judgement*, Kant captures another important hermeneutic element. The *subject-object* metaphysical separation, from the *Critique of Pure Reason*, is not an exclusive one. Given the diversity of human passions, it must be complemented with the subjectivity of judgement, which, without claiming conceptual knowledge of the object, generates undeniably rigorous results: the reflective faculty of judgement, Kant explains, subsumes phenomena under empirical concepts “in accordance with its own subjective laws and needs while remaining in harmony with the laws of nature in general”³⁴¹.

For there always remains a great difference between representations which belong to knowledge, as related merely to the object and to the unity of our consciousness of these representations, and likewise between the objective relation in which they belong to the faculty of desire when regarded as the cause of the reality of the object, and representations which merely stand in relation to the subject, when they afford their own grounds for merely maintaining their existence in the subject, and to that extent are regarded in relation to the feeling of pleasure. This latter is not a case of knowledge at all, nor does it furnish any knowledge, although it may presuppose something of the kind as a determining ground.³⁴²

³⁴¹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 327.

³⁴² Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 321–322.

His merit is, therefore, double: Kant deduces, on the one hand, the necessity of subjective reflection for unveiling the object (whose donation cannot be fully understood by using only intellectual knowledge). The speculative methodological orientation according to the object is thus envisaged, but, unfortunately, not entirely developed. The object remains motionless, despite its active interaction with the subject. On the other hand, by mediating intellectual knowledge and desire by means of judgement, Immanuel Kant manages to promote a particular type of subjectivity in the very domain of nature—*nature as art*. Of course, that means permanently to report the object to the feeling of pleasure and displeasure, a fact that causes, in the case of hermeneutics, a gnoseological limitation. Even so, the preeminent role he granted to the *self (ego)* in the field of aesthetics and teleology provides an important orientation for the act of comprehension.

For this reason, Hegel's critique of transcendental idealism does not aim at the subject itself, but only at the relationship it maintains with its object. When he accuses Kant's philosophy of subjectivism, Hegel does not seek a reduction of the thinking subject. He denounces, on the contrary, the erroneous manner in which reality is subject to the faculty of understanding. It is worth to insist on this topic to clarify the dialectical meaning of the subjective instance.

In *Faith and Knowledge*, a paper written in 1802 (five years before the *Phenomenology of Spirit*) and published in the journal founded together with Schelling—*Kritisches*

Journal der Philosophie—he undertakes a substantial critique of Kant’s idealism. Briefly resumed³⁴³, Hegel accuses him of subjectivism, formalism and psychologism. His criticism is directed against:

- (a) *The separation between sensibility and the understanding.* He states that, in fact, this is not a definitive separation, but an apparent one, which depends on a *fundamental unity*³⁴⁴, whose elucidation must become the main task of absolute idealism, since overcoming the opposites no longer seems to be impossible, but natural and necessary³⁴⁵. This separation inevitably leads to the *phenomenon—thing-in-itself* dichotomy, so to subjectivism: even our most certain knowledge reflects the subject at the expense of the object, as it is in itself. As for the understanding, Hegel agrees that it is not able to provide knowledge about the *noumenon*. Therefore, his criticism does not aim at the analysis made by Kant regarding its operating mode but at his overall vision upon it. Besides being

³⁴³ By limiting ourselves only to those aspects related to the *subject—object* relationship.

³⁴⁴ “Kant did not reach the identity between thinking and being (...). The relative identity of experience comes, in fact, from the original identity.” Jean Hyppolite, *Figures de la pensée philosophique*, Tome I (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1991), 179.

³⁴⁵ “This absolute identity is not a universal subjective postulate never to be realized. Nor is the cognition of it a faith, that is, something beyond all knowledge; it is, rather, philosophy’s sole knowledge.” G. W. F. Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1977), 68.

wrongly considered as an irreconcilable moment of the process of knowledge, intellectual knowledge is also overvalued at the expense of reason. In other words, both the antecedent (the unity that originated them) and the subsequent (reason, as a superior power of knowledge) are incorrectly conceived.

(b) *The subject-object relationship.* In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the subject represents the object, while the latter is described only as being represented. Hegel's approach from the *Phenomenology of Spirit* shows that, by thinking the object, consciousness (the subject) finds itself coerced and manages to understand itself as a "unified thinking subject"³⁴⁶. Hence the accusation of formalism. It aims at the manner in which Kant overlooked some important determinants of reality: "[Kant] limited himself to knowledge but left aside the historical existence of the individual who knows"³⁴⁷.

(c) *The faculty of reason.* Hegel considers that it was wrongly understood by Kant because, for him, it is not capable of capturing the original unity.

³⁴⁶ "The absolute identity of the subject and the object has passed into this formal identity, and transcendental idealism into this formal and more properly, psychological idealism" (ibid., 75).

³⁴⁷ Hyppolite, *Figures de la pensée philosophique*, 106. The French philosopher adds: "He missed the solution of this problem, for reason itself has historical conditions, and human nature precedes, maybe, the notion of reason".

Moreover, Hegel criticises its moral employment.

- (d) By accusing Kant of psychologism, he refers to (d) *the deduction of categories and the general division of the faculties of knowledge*³⁴⁸.

b) The Temporality of the Subject

Without minimising the importance of Kant's philosophy (in *Faith and Knowledge* the problem of *a priori* synthetic judgements, the relationship between the

³⁴⁸ Of course, some of these Hegelian objections might be criticised. For further discussions on this problem, see Karl Ameriks, "Hegel's Critique of Kant's Theoretical Philosophy," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 46.1 (1985): 1–35; Paul Guyer, "Absolute Idealism and the Rejection of Kantian Dualism," in *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*, ed. Karl Ameriks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 37–57; Paul Guyer, "Thought and Being: Hegel's Critique of Kant's Theoretical Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, ed. C. Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 171–211; John E. Smith, "Hegel's Critique of Kant," *Review of Metaphysics* 3.26 (1973): 438–460. Some of these authors consider that Hegel searches in Kant roots still undeveloped of absolute knowledge. Paul Guyer claims, for instance, that Hegel interprets Kant in the light of his own idea of the history of philosophy. The exegete disagrees to accuse Kant of psychologism with respect to the deduction of categories. He reminds us that Immanuel Kant did not establish them empirically or psychologically, but demonstrated their necessity, precisely to escape the danger of metaphysical dogmatism. As far as we are concerned, we consider that Hegel's objections can be validated only if they are understood in the light of their complete development from the system.

categories or their triadic arrangement are considered as elements that could provide a basis for absolute idealism; likewise, for example, the Kantian theory of apperception or the intuitive understanding), Hegel proposes a radical solution for the double error of subjectivity (the over-valuation of the subject at the expense of the represented object (the problem of the *thing-in-itself*) and its static character from the relationship which it maintains with the object—the latter being considered only as represented, not as transformed and able to transform, in its turn, the subject). Consciousness' experiences from the *Phenomenology of Spirit* testify the dialectical character of this interdependency³⁴⁹ and its fundamental unity. Consequently, true knowledge of the object can be achieved only if the subject is conceived as affected, but also as affecting the object; as being already in the proximity of the object, in a *world* that he continuously transforms. By virtue of this fact, the act of understanding exceeds the restrained possibilities of judgement and provides a genuine access path toward the complex human phenomenon.

The subject defines itself during the mutual interaction with the object. That is the nucleus from which derives the possibly of hermeneutics. The act of revealing the meaning resides in this dialectical

³⁴⁹ The movement of experience makes visible the contradictions of both the object and the subject. Consequently, they can be overcome (*Aufheben*) only after consciousness (*Bewußtsein*) becomes aware (*Bewußt-sein*) of them.

structure. An object can be understood only by virtue of the subject's capability of transforming its negativity (the external world).

Gadamer borrows and develops, with great finesse, this nucleus. The *hermeneutic circularity* (this movement through which understanding gradually improves itself) depends on the *subject-object* interdependency and functions because of their common existence in the same world. "What makes historical knowledge possible is the homogeneity of subject and object"³⁵⁰. This type of historical knowledge (able critically to unveil tradition) makes the subject capable of understanding both its object and itself³⁵¹.

In hermeneutics, this dialectical relationship produces the concept of *applicability*. For Gadamer, any interpretation should affect and transform the subject. However, the concrete achievement of such a requirement is subtler than it may seem at first glance. In fact, *applicability* processes a double interpretative motivation: the question that the interpreter addresses to a text³⁵² and the question to which the text was intended to answer.

A remarkable passage from Gadamer's *History of Concepts as Philosophy (Begriffsgeschichte als Philosophie)*

³⁵⁰ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 217.

³⁵¹ "Its being [of self-consciousness] consists in its ability to make everything the object of its knowledge, and yet in everything that it knows, it knows itself" (ibid., 244).

³⁵² The interpreter, in order to understand, "must not try to disregard himself and his particular hermeneutical situation" (ibid., 321).

(1970) gives us important clarifications on this topic. To explain why it is also imperiously necessary to clarify the second type of question, the German author considers, as an example, the concept of *freedom*. Philosophy was often criticised for having delivered an endless series of definitions and meanings for it, almost always contradictory. This criticism, raised by common sense, is incorrect. When Plato talks about choosing *non-life* (*das Lebenslos*), when Christians about the relationship between freedom and the Divine Will, or when epistemology addresses questions about determinism, we are not facing, in fact, the same *problem of freedom*, in other words, a problem that crossed the ages, receiving contingent resolutions. The question we seek to answer, Gadamer explains, is different each time. When we ask, for instance, “what does freedom means?” in a conception of the world dominated by the causal sciences of nature, the concept of causality is already part of the question.

Comprehension resides in the fusion of these two interrogations. *Applicability*, which articulates the meaning (*the temporal horizon of the present*) by means of which the subject defines itself and re-projects his interpretation (*the temporal horizon of the future*), depends on the preliminary comprehension of the question raised by the object (*the temporal horizon of the past*). In this purpose, both the object and the entire movement that generated it must be *brought into the present*.

We will denote this structure as *the temporality of the subject*. The metaphor of *translation*, often used by

Gadamer, should be understood based on it: the subject must not objectify the text but keep it alive in the present, as an active advocate of its own responses.

c) The *Subjectness* of the Subject

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger defines the subject by stating: “The ‘essence’ of this entity [of Dasein] lies in its ‘to-be’ [Zu-sein]”³⁵³. Here is the first clue that indicates the particular meaning of the concept of *existence* from his well-known sentence *Das Wesen des Daseins liegt in seiner Existenz* (“*The essence of Dasein lies in its existence*”³⁵⁴). Yet, this approach suffers from a drawback: it is only one-sided. Even if *Dasein* is surprised in its existential movement of self-redefinition, the constitutive influence of the object is overlooked. The change of perspective operated after *Kehre* corrects or, more accurately, completes the comprehension of subjectivity, by pursuing the connection which the subject maintains with Being, not by an *analytic* of *Dasein*, but starting from Being itself.

³⁵³ “Das Wesen dieses Seienden liegt in seinem Zu-sein.” Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1967), 42 (Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2003), 67).

³⁵⁴ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 67. The second meaning of the concept of *existence* (only about Dasein it can be said: *it exists*) is *understanding*.

The essence of *Dasein*, Heidegger states, does not reside (only) in existence (*Existenz*), but in *Ek-sistenz*, which means its ability to “listen to the voice of Being”³⁵⁵. Michel Haar explains this fact in the following sentence: “Being is not that which opens *before* man or proceeds *toward him*, for Being repossesses man and encompasses him from head to toe”³⁵⁶. Man must initiate a reverse project, by deciding to keep quiet in order to hear and receive the “voice” of *Sein* from *Da-sein*.

This shift redefines subjectivity, a fact that seems to confirm its dialectical essence (despite Heidegger’s vehement criticism against Hegel, who, in his eyes, forgets *the interrogation concerning Being (Seinsfrage)* and misses, thus, the ontological difference between *Sein* and *Seiendes*). A difficult question arises at this moment: why chooses Gadamer to assume the speculative model imposed by Hegel in order to redefine the hermeneutic subject and not the Heideggerian phenomenological indications from his last works?

To answer this question, let us begin with Heidegger’s study concerning Hegel’s concept of *experience*. Three sentences, extracted from the *Introduction* to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, come to elucidate the particular nature of consciousness: 1. “But

³⁵⁵ “Das Stehen in der Lichtung des Seins nenne ich die Ek-sistenz. Nur dem Menschen eignet diese Art zu sein.” Martin Heidegger, *Brief über den ‘Humanismus’* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1949), 13–14.

³⁵⁶ Michel Haar, *Heidegger and the Essence of Man* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993), 111.

consciousness is *for itself* its own *concept*”, 2. “Consciousness provides itself with its own standard” and 3. “Consciousness examines itself”³⁵⁷. All three indicate that the subject must be understood as a unitary whole, living a special type of becoming. Its itinerary of formation (*Bildung*) is not split; we are not dealing with two *consciousnesses*, a *natural* and a *real* one (the latter possessing absolute knowledge). “Natural consciousness and real knowledge are indeed the same, in that natural consciousness as what is not-yet-true, and real knowledge as its true, necessarily belong together”³⁵⁸. Knowledge involves an inner dialogue guided by what Heidegger calls, by resorting to the original meaning of the Greek term, the *Skepsis* (a type of regard that respects *Seiendes* as *Seiendes*³⁵⁹). For this reason, Hegel’s phenomenology should not be understood as an arbitrary process, but as a presentation (*Darstellung*) that presents itself (“the presentation of knowledge in its appearance”³⁶⁰). As a

³⁵⁷ 1. “Das Bewußtsein aber ist für sich selbst sein *Begriff*” Martin Heidegger, “Hegels Begriff der Erfahrung,” in *Holzwege* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1970), 156; 2. “Das Bewußtsein gibt seinem Maßstab an ihm selbst” (*ibid.*, 165); 3. “Das Bewußtsein prüft sich selbst” (*ibid.*, 168, 176) (Martin Heidegger, *Hegel’s Concept of Experience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 80, 95, 102, 114).

³⁵⁸ “Das natürliche Bewußtsein und das reale Wissen sind in der Tat das Selbe, insofern jenes als das Noch-nicht-Wahre mit diesem als seiner Wahrheit notwendig zusammengehört” (*ibid.*, 146) (Heidegger, *Hegel’s Concept of Experience*, 63, 64).

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 148.

³⁶⁰ “Die Darstellung des erscheinenden Wissen ist der sich vollbringende Skeptizismus. (...) Die Darstellung führt sich als solche

corollary, the *subjectness* of the subject should be circumscribed by using the notion of *ambiguity*. This concept includes all three theses about consciousness, rediscovering them in their true meaning. By reading the text of the conference *Hegels Begriff der Erfahrung*, we learn that consciousness (the subject) *is* and, simultaneously, *it is not* its own concept, *gives* and *does not give* its own criterion, finally, *examines* and *does not examine* itself³⁶¹. That happens because, as the German phenomenologist well notes, consciousness is “something that, at the same time, it is not”³⁶². This special type of (self) appearance—namely *experience* (let us remember that the initial title of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* was *Wissenschaft der Erfahrung des Bewußtseins*—“Science of the Experience of Consciousness”)—is the true essence of the subject: “experience designates the subject’s subjectness” (*Erfahrung nennt die Subjektivität des Subjekts*³⁶³).

What does this sentence mean? For Heidegger,

vor, statt nur aufzutreten. Der Weg der Darstellung geht nicht vom natürlichen Bewußtsein zum realen, sondern das Bewußtsein selbst, das als dieser Unterschied des natürlichen und realen in jeder Gestalt des Bewußtseins ist, geht vor einer Gestalt zur anderen fort” (ibid., 159).

³⁶¹ Ibid., 177. Consciousness is not, but *becomes* its own concept. It *examines* itself to the extent that it becomes the result of the permanent interaction with its object. But it *does not examine* itself, whereas it embraces, on each stage, an opinion that, later, will turn out to be false.

³⁶² “Mit dieser Zweideutigkeit verrät das Bewußtsein den Grundzug seines Wesen: etwas schon zu sein, was es zugleich noch nicht ist” (ibid.).

³⁶³ Ibid., 176 (Heidegger, *Hegel’s Concept of Experience*, 114).

whereas the subject must be understood in the light of experience, *experience* means “the word of Being, since Being is apprehended by way of beings *qua* beings”³⁶⁴. In short, *experience* is *Being of beings*, more precisely of those beings that became, meantime, subjects³⁶⁵ (*Das Erfahrung ist das Sein des Seienden*³⁶⁶). We should not neglect, on the other hand, that, for Heidegger, the entire history of Western thought has, at its foundation, the oblivion of Being. Here is the dominant critical element of his remarkable commentary on the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. In this conference, the author chooses to operate an interpretative capitalisation of Hegel's philosophy and not a deconstruction of dialectics. However, this approach is initiated in accordance with his particular conception of the historicity of thought. Heidegger depicts the ontological soil from which consciousness develops itself, but only for initiating a dialogue with what he considers that has not been taken into account by his predecessors³⁶⁷. For this reason, he defines *experience* as “that which appears,

³⁶⁴ “Erfahrung ist jetzt das Wort des Seins, insofern dieses vom Seienden her als einem solchen vernommen ist” (ibid., 177) (Heidegger, *Hegel's Concept of Experience*, 113–114).

³⁶⁵ Ibid., 176.

³⁶⁶ Ibid., 186.

³⁶⁷ For a detailed analysis regarding the possibility of a dialogue between Heidegger and Hegel, see Dominique Janicaud, “Heidegger–Hegel: un ‘dialogue’ impossible?” in *Heidegger et l'idée de la phénoménologie*, ed. Franco Volpi (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publisher, 1988), 145–164.

insofar as it appears (ὄν ἢ οὐ)³⁶⁸, by borrowing the significance from Greek antiquity: “appearance showing itself” (“as early as the Greek thinkers, even since the οὐ arose as the φυσικῆ, the presence of what is present, the οὐσια of the οὐ is φαίνεσθαι: appearance showing itself”³⁶⁹). That is why he sees, at the end of consciousness’ paideic journey, the appearance of Being as *to-be*, as *Absoluteness of the Absolute*³⁷⁰. In fact, even consciousness’ inner dialogue is understood as a dialogue that embodies in unity the ontical consciousness (the natural, so pre-ontological consciousness) and the ontological (real) one, thus being perceived the *ontological difference* that resides in the *fact-of-being-aware* (*Bewußt-sein*).

Heidegger made out of Hegel “a thinking partner in a still open *gigantomachy* concerning Being”³⁷¹. This notable phrase of Dominique Janicaud emphasises the central hermeneutical direction from *Hegels Begriff der Erfahrung*. Yet, from a Hegelian point of view, it might

³⁶⁸ “Mit der Namen Erfahrung nennt Hegel das Erscheinende als Erscheinende, das *ὄν ἢ οὐ*.” Heidegger, “Hegels Begriff der Erfahrung,” 176 (Heidegger, *Hegel’s Concept of Experience*, 113).

³⁶⁹ “Die Anwesenheit des Anwesenden, die οὐσια des *ὄν* ist schon für die griechischen Denker, seitdem das *ὄν* als die φυσικῆ aufging, das φαίνεσθαι: das sich zeigende Erscheinen” (ibid., 191) (Heidegger, *Hegel’s Concept of Experience*, 137).

³⁷⁰ “Die absolvierte ständige Anwesenheit des Bewußtsein ist das Sein des Absoluten” (ibid., 187).

³⁷¹ Dominique Janicaud, “Critique du concept de l’*époque*,” in *Die Idee der Historischen Epoche*, ed. Domenico Losurdo (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2004), 146.

be objected that this ontological interpretation falls into abstraction and misses the spiritual existence. As concerns the problem of subjectivity, we cannot neglect that Heidegger loses sight the concrete steps through which consciousness defines itself. Gadamer capitalises precisely this fact in order to explain how it is possible for a subject to reveal the meaning of a phenomenon. He chooses to do so despite the rejection (caused by *Dasein's* finitude) of the absolute subject, in other words, of a subject who might know “the absolute as a subject”. Consequently, he succeeds to observe more carefully the real and concrete path of consciousness’ formation, which means not only the way in which the triads are overcome, but also the particular forms from which, and in which they transform themselves.

Let us now turn our gaze toward Hegel’s *Phenomenology*. In the beginning, in front of consciousness lays an external and independent object. The first three chapters (I. *Sense-Certainty*; II. *Perception*; III. *Force and Understanding*) depict its efforts to understand it, by making use of sensibility and the understanding (faculties of knowledge considered, at this moment, able to provide certainty). But the result is far from being true knowledge. Instead of it, consciousness only experiences a series of striking contradictions. All its initial assumptions are destroyed one by one. Yet, the failure is not total. It is a productive one. By accepting it (thus, becoming aware of it), consciousness gains new determinations. It finds out, for instance, that it is not mere consciousness, but self-

consciousness. A new confrontation, carried, this time, against itself, for its own essence, makes self-consciousness become spirit (then, spirit aware of itself). The subject gradually develops itself by confronting the negativity standing in front of it (a physical object, an object understood as *another* self-consciousness (the struggle between master and serf) and so on). Hence, we must be cautious. We are dealing with a dialectical sequence. Or, dialectics involves not only overcoming the moments but also memorising them (*Aufhebung*). To improve our knowledge about nature, we must not renounce identifying its inner *forces*; spirit, in its turn, does not replace self-consciousness but incorporates it. That is why the essence of the subject does not reside only in experience (“presentation that presents itself”, as Heidegger well notes) or in its result (the absolute subject, which understands “the absolute as a subject”), but also in a baggage that encompasses all memorised experiences. By investigating the dialectical movement of experience, Heidegger discloses the ontology of formation (*Bildung*) but misses at least two elements, essential for understanding the hermeneutic subject.

The first: the character of *intersubjectivity* of the subject, in other words, the *fact-of-being-spirit*³⁷² that defines it. The resolution of the aporia of *otherness*—*impasse* faced by Schleiermacher, Dilthey and Husserl—

³⁷² “Self-consciousness is not *I* but *us*, *I* in another.” Jean Hyppolite, *Figures de la pensée philosophique*, 199.

relies on this *existential* element. When Heidegger talks about “Being-with” (*Mit sein*) of *Dasein*, as a constituent part of “being-in-the-world”, he provides hermeneutics with an important tool. But he does not clarify how a text, a historical event and, generally, a complex hermeneutic phenomenon could be disclosed according to its particular nature, which is *subjectivity brought into the present* through tradition. Of course, Heidegger speaks about *Mitdasein*, but hermeneutics cannot content itself with that only. The process of comprehension cannot be carried out if its concrete performer was not revealed in advance. Gadamer emphasises this fact in his studies about Hegel’s philosophy: “self-consciousness is not the individually point I = I, but *I* who *we* are and *we* who *I* am, in other words, spirit”³⁷³. The interpreter must become aware that he address a phenomenon whose historical appearance is a product of a spiritual subject like himself and whose possibility to reach the present lies in the spiritual, historical tradition precisely because such a phenomenon is itself of a spiritual nature³⁷⁴.

The second is related to the object. It is one of the most important consequences of translating the *subject-*

³⁷³ H.-G. Gadamer, “Die Dialektik des Selbstbewußtseins,” in *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 3. *Neuere Philosophie*, Cap. I *Hegel* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1987), 50.

³⁷⁴ “(...) the knowing subject, the understanding historian, does not simply stand over against his object, historical life, but is himself part of the same movement of historical life.” H.-G. Gadamer, “Hermeneutics and Historicism,” in *Truth and Method*, 637.

object dialectic relationship in the field of hermeneutics: *the truth of the object*. At this moment, we discover that truth must not be understood only as belonging to the subject, as the result of *objectual confirmation (the correspondence theory of truth)*. The object itself possesses truth.

In short, the subjectness of the hermeneutic subject consists in:

1. A special type of *temporality*, having as a corollary the circular *subject–object* relationship. It involves the following elements: 1.1. the *affected* object, *i.e.* the object understood in the light of the interpreter’s personal motivations, interrogations and spirituality; 1.2. The *affected* subject, which reinitiates the dialogue and corrects his initial expectancy in accordance with the *claim of the meaning* of the object (the latter understood as being a response to the questions asked by its author/actant). We should not forget that the hermeneutic object is a spiritual one, and not a mere “objectified” exhibit from a museum of history; 1.3. a new way of interpreting the object, performed in accordance with the newly acquired information.

The last two requirements eliminate both the error of *objective interpretation* (understanding the text as a mere outdated artefact) and *subjective interpretation* (the relativity of interpretation).

2. *Intersubjectivity/spirituality*—the capability of the interpreter to recognise and capitalise tradition as his ontological residence.

3. His capability, so far only anticipated, to comprehend the truth of the object, by virtue of the speculative character of language.

4. Experience and Truth

a) The Hermeneutic Concept of *Experience*

The meaning of the term *experience* (*Erfahrung*) derives, etymologically, from the verb *Fahren*³⁷⁵ (to travel by means of a vehicle) and the noun, with the same root, *Gefahr* (danger). Its primary meaning, Schnädelbach explains, is “*far, beyond a limit*”. The meaning of the verb is “to *exceed a boundary, to travel and face there, far away, a risk*”³⁷⁶. Empiricism considerably altered the original concept, adapting it to the ideal of epistemic certainty. Francis Bacon, for example, understands *experience* as a methodical and well-planned behaviour meant to guide the inductive progression³⁷⁷.

³⁷⁵ Heidegger explains the meaning of *Fahren* from *Erfahrung* by using the word *Ziehen*, “reaching forth”. “Experience is a mode of being present, that is, of Being” (*Das Erfahren ist eine Weise des Anwesens, d.h. des Seins*) Heidegger, “Hegels Begriff der Erfahrung,” 180–181 (Heidegger, *Hegel’s Concept of Experience*, 120).

³⁷⁶ Herbert Schnädelbach, *Introducere în teoria cunoaşterii* (Piteşti: Editura Paralela 45, 2007), 105.

³⁷⁷ Locke will radicalise this concept by reducing experience at the level of sense-perception.

Erfahrung designates, in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, two different attitudes (in a relationship of interdependency)³⁷⁸: 1. the receptivity of sense, by means of which the object affects the subject; 2. the act of thinking an object, an act organised by the categories of the understanding. "Kant distinguishes between perceptual judgments, *i.e.* those in which only the connection of sensations in space and time is expressed, and judgements of experience, in which such a connection is asserted as valid and given in the object"³⁷⁹.

We saw, in the previous chapters, the deficiencies of this approach and the solution proposed by Hegel. After analysing Heidegger's hermeneutical approach from *Hegels Begriff der Erfahrung*, we clarified: the way in which the subject defines itself; the self-presentation of experience as an existential possibility (let us remember the redefinition of *Existenz* (from *Being and Time*) as *hat zu sein. Dasein* "is" not, it has *to be*); the concept *Ek-sistenz*, which requires that the self-projection of Dasein to be explored starting from Being. Moreover, we saw that consciousness is understood, this time in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, as "something that, at the same time is not" (*ambiguity*). Hence, the definition of *experience* as "the subjectness of the subject". Finally, we explained why and how must be complemented this

³⁷⁸ Rudolf Eisler, *Kant-Lexikon* (Zürich: Georg Olms Verlag, 1984), 123–129.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 456.

theory of subjectivity, thus reaching the triple essence of the hermeneutic subject (*temporality*, *spirituality* and its relationship of mutual determination with the object).

Experience, therefore, does not designate an artificial procedure, imposed from the outside. Neither is it a derivative of the factual, inauthentic way of understanding, which Dasein possesses from the beginning to the end of its *being-in-the-world* (as it manifests in the comprehensive structure “something as something”—*Etwas als Etwas*). Dialectical experience (Hegel) should be logically guided in order for the object to be overcome (after consciousness becomes aware of its contradictions) and, thus, to be opened a new access path toward a superior type of knowledge. In other words, for consciousness to be capable of overcoming the blockage of everydayness, *i.e.* that infinite circularity on the same level (*spurious infinity*). Gadamer describes the mechanism of hermeneutical experience insisting on its negative character³⁸⁰. He also emphasizes the necessity of disclosing not only the initial *positum* but also the interpreter’s own character, in order for him to correct his initial opinions. The object of our experience “must be of such a nature that we gain better knowledge through it, not only of itself but of what we thought we knew before—*i.e.* of a universal”³⁸¹. It happens the same in the case of the

³⁸⁰ “(...) experience in the genuine sense is always negative” Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 347.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*

object of art: “the work of art has its true being in the fact that it becomes an experience that changes the person who experiences it”³⁸². The direction indicated by Gadamer supports the thesis that disclosing an object is a comprehensive act initiated by a subject which is aware (*Bewußt-sein*) of the collapse of its previous opinions.

That is the reason why we cannot speak about unidirectional comprehension. On the contrary, the true comprehensive act embodies in unity the plurality of meanings, by the instrumentality of all *existential* determinations of the subject.

Because of the particular nature of subjectness, experience depends on the following conditions:

1. The capitalisation of tradition³⁸³ (and, we will see soon, of language as the place of its existence). Without thoroughly questioning about the historicity of the subject, in other words, without accepting its spiritual character, *i.e.* consciousness aware of its own spirituality, the comprehension of the object is compromised³⁸⁴.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 103.

³⁸³ “In order to understand (...) [the interpreter] must not try to disregard himself and his particular hermeneutical situation” (*ibid.* 321).

³⁸⁴ “Belonging together always also means being able to listen to one another. (...) Openness to the other, then, involves recognising that I myself must accept some things that are against me (...). I must allow tradition's claim to validity, not in the sense of simply acknowledging the past in its otherness, but in such a way that it has something to say to me” (*ibid.*, 355).

2. The acceptance of the phenomenon as living otherness. Let us think about the recognition which self-consciousness claims during the *master-slave* struggle, and which is claimed, similarly, by any phenomenon of the past. The experience of *Thou* resembles, for Gadamer, the dialectics of question and answer³⁸⁵, which has, as a central pillar, the concept of *applicability*. The acceptance of the meaning conveyed by tradition involves a transformation of the subject (of its opinions and future projects). Of course, comprehension depends on each type of object. We cannot overlook the individual nature of any hermeneutic phenomenon and the differences between them (between a literary, poetic or theoretic text; between a scriptural message and a historical event, etc.). Nevertheless, the requirement of initiating a living dialogue remains common to all. Even in the case of the historical event, we can perceive its claim of meaning sent toward the present, a claim that gives us the opportunity to question it about its covered significances.

3. The fusion of horizons (which can be achieved by virtue of the subject's temporality). Any translation of a text "reproduces" it³⁸⁶. That means, it brings into the present the truth claimed by the object (the truth as a whole, as Hegel says, a truth which includes the process

³⁸⁵ The task of hermeneutics is "entering into dialogue with the text" (ibid., 362).

³⁸⁶ Ibid., 390.

through which it was reached).

Thus conceived, experience is able to replace the external technical-scientific methods. *To understand* does not mean any more “to know”, if “knowledge” involves establishing the *truth-correspondence*, nor, for instance, to “know” the meaning of a transmitted text by observing it under the auspices of *historicism*. “Whoever seeks to understand a text as a philologist or historian does not report the text to himself. He tries to understand only the author's opinion”, Gadamer states. On the contrary, understanding implies crossing a path with many stages³⁸⁷ (let us think, for example, about the triad *interpretation–application–understanding*). It involves not only the simple description of an object but also the process of its gradual disclosure. The object, in other words, must not be objectified but subjectified. It must be surprised both as a part of the tradition that produced it and within which we—its interpreters, as spiritual subjects—exist and as a response to the interrogations raised by another subject. Afterwards, it must be researched by virtue of our contemporary motivations (of the answers it might provide to our present-day questions)³⁸⁸. That is why Gadamer rejects the concept of *original lecturer* and criticises the possibility to guide the act of comprehension according

³⁸⁷ “Interpretation is not an occasional, post facto supplement to understanding; rather, understanding is always interpretation, and hence interpretation is the explicit form of understanding” (ibid., 306).

³⁸⁸ “(...) to understand a text always means to apply it to ourselves” (ibid., 399).

to *intentio auctoris*. “The horizon of understanding cannot be limited either by what the writer originally had in mind or by the horizon of the person to whom the text was originally addressed”³⁸⁹.

b) Language and Universality

At this moment, the concept of *language* enters the scene, as a key determinant of hermeneutical experience. Language, in its verbal character, constitutes the medium of the fusion of horizons, a medium that conveys tradition³⁹⁰ and makes possible the dialogue: “It is from language as a medium that our whole experience of the world, and especially hermeneutical experience, unfolds”³⁹¹.

Gadamer reaches, thus, the main problem of hermeneutics: its universality. How this claim, quite strange at first glance, should be understood? How, in other words, hermeneutical experience can be extended outside the boundaries of a text, by the instrumentality of language? Let us not forget language gave so many headaches to both philosophers and literates. Let think about the impossibility felt by Heidegger to express

³⁸⁹ Ibid., 396. (“Normative concepts such as the author’s meaning or the original reader’s understanding represent, in fact, only an empty space that is filled from time to time in understanding” (ibid., 397); “all the meaning of what is handed down to us finds its concretion (i.e. is understood) in its relation to the understanding I—and not in reconstructing the originally intending” (ibid., 468).

³⁹⁰ “(...) tradition is essentially verbal in character” (ibid., 391).

³⁹¹ Ibid., 453.

Being, in its simultaneous donation and withdrawal (*Ereignis*). This fact motivated his recourse to poetic language. Hegel also faced the shortages of the sentence, striving to compensate them by conceiving a speculative form of it. Literature, on the other hand, is full of examples when the characters try in vain to express their thoughts, or when the writer himself declares the impasse and admits the existence of an ineffable region of reality.

Yet, Gadamer asserts exactly the opposite, and that in a radical manner. Hermeneutics, he claims, covers the whole *being-in-the-world*: any act of comprehension is possible only by virtue of language.

In the last part of *Truth and Method*, we find out that Gadamer's concept of *language* does not designate the empirical language by means of which we communicate. It is not about the language we speak and which, undoubtedly, opens the field of playing for comprehension. By speaking about language, the German philosopher aims at something much deeper: its ontological fundament.

After bringing to the foreground the problem of language, his hermeneutics becomes an ontological one. Universality—as its primary goal—is brought from the domain of methodological inquiry into the hidden land of Being. We encounter the first clue when the German philosopher reveals the verbal language as the mundane structure of consciousness. The way we learn a foreign language is a good example in this respect. This experience discloses the community that speaks it and

provides for self-consciousness new information about itself (the temporal horizon of the future). The experience of language also brings to light a mirroring rapport: the change of morals and values, for example, can be perceived by tracking the degradation suffered by words. It is thus attested the indestructible bond between language and the world. Of course, Gadamer refers to the world of tradition in which language's *factualness* (*Sachlichkeit*) manifests, and in which the matters of fact (*Sachverhalte*) come into language³⁹². On this soil, it is possible for us to experience the world, an experience potentially infinite but always undertaken within the limits of human finitude.

We know that hermeneutics needs dialectics in order to conceive a method able to grasp the inherent movement of its targeted phenomena. Now, we find out that this movement must be understood starting from the phenomenon's particular possibility to come into language, to be discovered as it articulates itself into it. "This event is not our action upon the thing, but the act of the thing itself"³⁹³. Gadamer does not express, by this sentence, a kind of unexplainable donation, but only the way in which language continuously operates a process of defining and redefining the concepts. The disclosure of tradition resides in a lingual dialogue that reveals historicity as the *history of effects* (*Wirkungsgeschichte*). "The significance of the

³⁹² Ibid., 442.

³⁹³ Ibid., 459.

hermeneutical experience is rather that, in contrast to all other experiences of the world, language opens a completely new dimension, the profound dimension from which tradition comes down to those now living³⁹⁴.

If we ask how exactly language makes possible the disclosure of a phenomenon, we reach the limit case of hermeneutics: the meta-hermeneutical experience, having as its object language itself. Being is present in language. The latter, in its existential character, cannot be approached from the outside³⁹⁵. On the contrary, it can be surprised only in its relationship of mutual determination with man and the world. This relationship is, *par excellence*, a speculative one. Hence the speculative (but finite³⁹⁶) character of hermeneutical experience (including the experience of the aesthetic object³⁹⁷).

Hence its universality: because of language, the element of understanding is to be found in any knowledge or orientation in the world³⁹⁸.

³⁹⁴ Ibid., 458.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., 449–450.

³⁹⁶ “(...) this speculative medium that language is represents a finite process in contrast to the infinite dialectical mediation of concepts” (ibid., 469); “(...) we are guided by the hermeneutical phenomenon; and its ground, which determines everything else, is the finitude of our historical experience” (ibid., 453).

³⁹⁷ “We can now see that this speculative movement was what we were aiming at in the critique of both aesthetic and historical consciousness that introduced our analysis of hermeneutical experience” (ibid., 470).

³⁹⁸ “The speculative mode of being of language has a universal

c) The *Experience of Truth* and the *Truth of Experience*

The two nouns of the title of Gadamer's book are rather in opposition. "Truth *and* Method" can be correctly rewritten as "Truth *without* Method" (if by *method* we understand a scientific technique). Pulled out from the epistemic influence, the meaning of the concept of *truth* also changes. "Truth *without* method" does not mean any more "Truth (correspondence / *adaequatio rei et intellectus*) without method" but something completely different.

Before starting to clarify the hermeneutic concept of truth, let us quickly review the two remarkable models that support it.

The first: truth understood in the original meaning of the Greek *aletheia*. In *Being and Time*, Chapter §44, Heidegger explains that, in order to surprise the ontological background that makes possible any subsequent *adequatio* between sentence and object, we must retrieve the ancient concept, translated as *the state of unhiddenness*. "To say that an assertion *is true* signifies that it uncovers the entity as it is in itself"³⁹⁹. This act (whether it is about a *ready-to-hand* existent, our own *Dasein* or the *Dasein-with*) can be carried out only by virtue of Being's *unhiddenness*. "Dasein is *in the truth*"⁴⁰⁰,

ontological significance" (ibid.).

³⁹⁹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), 261.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., 263.

means that it is endowed with *Being-uncovering*⁴⁰¹. Hence, truth and falsity are not, in the first instance, two possibilities of enunciation governed by the principle of non-contradiction. On the contrary, we can speak of truth when *Dasein* understands itself in an *authentic* manner (the truth of existence) and of falsity when, during its factic life, it understands itself starting from the world of *ready-to-hand* objects. In both cases, if we relate them to the conference (written after *Kehre*)—*The Essence of Truth*, it is about *ek-sistence*, whose occurrence depends on Being. We should also note that Heidegger does not speak only about the state of *unhiddenness* but also about a state of *hiddenness* (resumed in his later works by the instrumentality of *Ereignis*). The *truth of essence*, of the famous sentence at the end of this conference—“the essence of truth is the truth of essence”, designates Being. More precisely, Being as the generator of both *hiddenness* and *unhiddenness* and, thus, as the generator of a space of disclosure that precedes any act of understanding, including propositional adequacy.

The second model belongs to Hegel. Here also, the concept of truth exceeds the theory of *adequatio*:

Whoever calls *truth* the *correctness* of an *intuition* or a *perception*, the agreement of *representation* with the subject matter, has for a minimum no expression left for that which is the subject matter and the aim of philosophy⁴⁰².

⁴⁰¹ “What is primarily ‘true’—that is, uncovering—is *Dasein*” (ibid.).

⁴⁰² G. W. F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic* (Cambridge: Cambridge

The *truth*, in the Hegelian meaning, refers to the act of understanding, as it gradually emerges until it becomes absolute knowledge. Each triad of the *Phenomenology* or the *Science of Logic* receives its true meaning only after it is sublated [and preserved] in a superior one. Let us consider some examples. At the end of *Section II (Quantity)*, just before the *Measure*, in the first book (*The Doctrine of Being*) of the *Objective Logic*, Hegel asserts: “Quantum is henceforth no longer an indifferent or external determination but is sublated as such, and it is a quality and that by virtue of which anything is what it is; the truth of quantum is to be *measure*”⁴⁰³. At the beginning of the second book (*The Doctrine of Essence*), so after the *Measure*: “The *truth* of *Being* is *essence*”⁴⁰⁴. At the beginning of the *Subjective Logic*: “From this aspect, the *concept* is at first to be regarded simply as the *third* to *Being* and *essence*, to the *immediate* and to *reflection*. *Being* and *essence* are therefore the moments of its *becoming*; but the *concept* is their *foundation* and *truth* as the identity into which they have sunk and in which they are contained”⁴⁰⁵. The so-called *truth* of the previous triad proves to be only a partial one.

University Press, 2010), 562.

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*, 280. “Except that quantity is not only a quality, but the truth of quality itself is quantity, and quality has demonstrated itself as passing over into it. Quantity, in its truth, is instead the externality which has returned into itself, which is no longer indifferent. Thus is quantity quality itself, in such a way that outside this determination quality as such would yet not be anything at all” (*ibid.*).

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 337.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 508.

The disclosure of truth ends with the last section of the *Subjective Logic—The Idea*. We learn, there, that truth *in and for itself* resides in the *absolute Idea*, understood as a process that denies both subjectivity and objectivity (taken separately), by bringing them together into unity. The absolute Idea requires the unity of thought and life, of theory and praxis. Hegel advances, therefore, a new type of relationship between the notion and reality, based on reason, at the level of absolute knowledge. The adequacy required by the concept of truth implies, at this point, the adequacy between the absolute Idea and its reality⁴⁰⁶. In this context⁴⁰⁷, we can rightly speak of *the truth of the object*, *i.e.* the *true* existence of the latter in accordance with its concept. The genuine form of truth, explains Foucher de Careil, is not a certain intuition but “the very act of understanding”⁴⁰⁸.

If we refer to Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* and decide to pursue the odyssey of self-consciousness, we encounter this form of truth only at the level of spirit aware of itself. In the light of this higher gnoseological moment, all “consciousness’ adventures”—as Constantin Noica likes to call them⁴⁰⁹—can be resumed

⁴⁰⁶ Wolfgang Janke, *Die dreifache Vollendung des Deutschen Idealismus. Schelling, Hegel und Fichtes ungeschriebene Lehre* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), 151.

⁴⁰⁷ “The idea is the *adequate concept*, the objectively *true*, or the *true as such*. If anything has truth, it has it by virtue of its idea, or *something has truth only in so far as it is idea*.” Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 670.

⁴⁰⁸ A. Foucher de Careil, *Hegel et Schopenhauer* (Paris: Hachette, 1862), 30.

⁴⁰⁹ Constantin Noica, *Povestiri despre om* (Bucharest: Editura Cartea

and revealed in their deep historical and religious significance.

The hermeneutic concept of truth capitalises both directions:

1. The phenomenological one: the ontological structure of language is perceived as the foundation of any act of comprehension.
2. The Hegelian one: 2.1. by fructifying the speculative character of language and, consequently, of any act of understanding; 2.2. by guiding comprehension according to the truth of the object.

We already discussed the difference, in terms of purposes, between knowledge (as implied by the scientific methodological paradigm) and understanding (as a way of disclosing the hermeneutic phenomenon). The “method” of understanding is experience, which is possible by virtue of language (as its ground) and of consciousness’ *existential* elements. During his journey, truth emerges in two forms. The first aims at the text, to the extent that it is a bearer of truth: “the claim of truth required by the text”. Therefore, we can designate as *the experience of truth* the process of bringing the truth into the present, as a result of a living and motivated dialogue with the object. This experience can be extended, by virtue of the ontological character of language, to any historical and aesthetic phenomenon.

However, hermeneutical comprehension requires more than that. The *experience of truth* must be followed by what we might call *the truth of experience*. This second meaning of the concept of truth expresses the final moment of experience. In this respect, we must be very careful. Consciousness' experiences culminate, in Hegel's *Phenomenology*, with absolute knowledge. *Truth*, at the end of *The Science of Logic*, turns out to be the absolute Idea. On the other hand, we know that precisely this final moment makes Gadamer separate himself from Hegel. *The truth of experience* resides in the ontological character of language. Language is potentially infinite in its speculative structure but depends on human finitude. For this reason, Gadamer, although he does not consider that "absolute" understanding is possible, borrows *the speculative orientation according to the "logical instinct of language"* and the manner in which Hegel "experiences the linguistic suppleness of the Greek thought"⁴¹⁰. We encounter a similar idea in his study from 1971—*The idea of Hegel's Logic*. He resumes, in this book, the correlation between speculative logic and the "instinct of language"⁴¹¹ (by which language defines its concepts) and states: "the speculative sentence is not as much sentence as it is language"⁴¹². But he also insists⁴¹³ that the law of *finitude* determines the phenomenon of language.

⁴¹⁰ Gadamer, "Hegel und die antike Dialektik," 27.

⁴¹¹ Gadamer, "Die Idee der Hegelschen Logik," 80.

⁴¹² *Ibid.*, 83.

⁴¹³ "In reality, our human nature is so much determined by finitude that

If, on the one hand, truth designates the endpoint of experience and, on the other hand, an absolute ending is, however, inaccessible for a human being, how should we understand this kind of truth, which is the result of experience? Let us start from the subsequent definition: hermeneutical experience is “an understanding, an event that happens to one”⁴¹⁴, *i.e.* the event of capitalising the truth of the object in question (which is the result of *the experience of truth*) in the perimeter of the existing language. This fact makes us think about the experience of beauty and the poetic statement. When Gadamer asserts that the truth of the latter depends on the ambiguity that characterises it⁴¹⁵, he does not mean that we are performing *supra-interpretation*, but that it is possible for us continuously to improve our interpretation and correct it by searching *the truth of (claimed by) the object*. In other words, by an object understood in its all-encompassing concept, which includes, besides the temporal horizon of the past, the temporal horizon of the present (the answer it provides to our motivated questions) and the temporal horizon of the future. The last provides a new opening space, more comprehensive, as furnished by hermeneutical experience in its totality and, of course, by the new

the phenomena of both language and thought, which we try to figure out, must always be seen as being governed by the law of human finitude” (ibid., 82).

⁴¹⁴ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 460.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., 482. “The event of thought is present in the speculative sentence.” Gadamer, “Die Idee der Hegelschen Logik,” 81.

questions that the object raises.

Hermeneutics is able to go beyond technical comprehension⁴¹⁶ because it fructifies the mutual (and necessary) fusion of these two concepts of truth. “Understanding (...) does not consist in a technical virtuosity of ‘understanding’ everything that was written. Rather, it is a genuine experience (*Erfahrung*)—*i.e.*, an encounter with something that asserts itself as truth”⁴¹⁷. *The experienced truth* makes available an opening place from which we can project ourselves toward the future (the third horizon of the subject’s temporality; the last stage of the process of *subjectifying* the object). That is how should be understood the return, from the last pages of *Truth and Method*, to the concept of *game*, a game that “plays the interpreter who plays it”, seducing him, just as beauty does it. “In understanding, we are drawn into an event of truth and arrive, as it were, too late, if we want to know what we are supposed to believe”⁴¹⁸. Therefore, it is not about transposing ourselves into the soul of the author (Schleiermacher), but about participating in the meaning of the text. “The truth of experience always implies an orientation toward a new experience. (...) The dialectic of experience has its proper fulfilment not in definitive

⁴¹⁶ “(...) the whole value of hermeneutical experience (...) seemed to consist in the fact that here we are not simply filing things in pigeonholes but that what we encounter in a tradition says something to us.” Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 483.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 483.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 484.

knowledge but in the openness to experience that is made possible by experience itself⁴¹⁹.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., 350.

SECTION IV

THE HEGELIAN MODEL
OF THE SOCIAL–POLITICAL SCIENCES

CHAPTER NINE

THE SPECULATIVE THEORY OF THE SCIENCES OF SPIRIT

Hegel's system is a reference point for German 19th-century philosophy. In the beginning, its echoes were direct and very powerful, especially among scholars or in the Hegelian circles. After a short period, the so-called *left wing*, of which were part Ludwig Feuerbach, Bruno Bauer, David Strauss or Max Stirner, begun to distance itself from the doctrine of speculative idealism, interpreting Absolute Spirit exclusively in human terms⁴²⁰ and refusing Hegel's political doctrine (deemed as a broad justification of the Prussian State⁴²¹).

⁴²⁰ On the contrary, in its true Hegelian meaning, it is the herald and the representative of the Absolute in our human world. Hans Dreyer, *Der Begriff 'Geist' in der deutschen philosophie* (Halle an der Saale: C. A. Kaemmerer, 1907), 89.

⁴²¹ The Young Hegelians, dissatisfied with the Prussian State, turned against Hegel's political conception from *The Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, whereby they believed that he sustains and justifies it. One of the first who initiated this movement was Arnold Ruge who, in the context of the Revolutions of 1848, organised the left extreme of the Parliament of Frankfurt. Ruge claimed that Hegel's theory of the state contradicts the real existence of this institution. Karl Marx adopted his criticism. For further details, see Robert Nola, "The Young Hegelians, Feuerbach and Marx," in *The Age of German Idealism*, ed. Robert C.

Reluctances, this time regarding the philosophy of history, also came from the part of an author as Benedetto Croce, who stated that it promotes individual determinism. He did not agree that history implies moral progress (or regress, as some opposite theories claimed⁴²²). Good and evil, for him, are not separate elements (or the final moments of becoming). We face them both, in their continuous movement which underlies the dialectic of universal history.

Then, it followed a quite long negative period. Reactions against his philosophy, though not as vehement as those to come, came from the part of Friedrich Schelling. After 1841, when he took Hegel's teaching position at the University of Berlin, left vacant for ten years after his death, they amplified. Schelling said (in some lectures heard by Feuerbach, Ruge or Kierkegaard) that the system of speculative idealism is one of thought, not of reality⁴²³. Instead, philosophy should aim at real existence, in its human and theological-spiritual character.

However, the future attempts to comprehend the cultural phenomenon could not be undertaken

Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins (London: Routledge, 1993), 293–296.

⁴²² Irina Ovisiannikova, “L'époque historique et l'historicisme de Benedetto Croce,” in *Die Idee der Historischen Epoche*, ed. Domenico Losurdo (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2004), 366.

⁴²³ Timothy C. Luther, *Hegel's Critique of Modernity* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009), 253; Dale E. Snow, *Schelling and the End of Idealism* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), 3.

independently of Hegel's philosophy. Let us think, for instance, of the neo-Kantian School of Baden, fundamentally opposed to absolute idealism, but born and developed near it. The answers, which its representatives strived to offer, had to face the challenges of idealism and overcome them.

The break-up with Hegel was already initiated during his lifetime. Some very influential authors such as Schleiermacher or Ranke deepened and transmitted their aversion to the future generations. But their radical refusal was tributary to a series of inaccurate interpretations, which neglected: 1. the ontological-gnoseological substrate of Hegel's system; 2. the unitary whole of interconnections, in the absence of which all-encompassing knowledge is not possible; 3. the self-development of the concept, as a result of its continuous interaction with the real, historical world. Their efforts made the sciences of spirit advance. They strove to solve those many impasses and questions present at the beginning of their process of consolidation, but—a fact well noticed by Gadamer—they did not succeed completely to fulfil this goal. Some important issues related to the act of understanding remained without answers.

Such shortcomings made the author of *Truth and Method*, but also thinkers such as Karl Marx or Oswald Spengler in Germany, Benedetto Croce in Italy or Arnold Toynbee in the United Kingdom, reconsider Hegel's philosophy. The remarkable works of Jean Hyppolite and Jean Wahl provided in France, in the

1930s, a more accurate image of him. They did not consider him as a builder of a rigid and abstract system, meant to subject reality to some logical illusions, but as an author endowed with the capability to capture and disclose vitality⁴²⁴. In the footsteps of young Marx's critical works and Lenin's *Notebooks*, Alexandre Kojève brought major contributions to this movement. Unlike Hyppolite, he interpreted the system of absolute idealism according to his leftist beliefs⁴²⁵. Even so, he succeeded to reveal much more of the real Hegel than those studies that deemed speculative idealism as panlogism, and criticised it for omitting the problem of individuality.

So far, we discussed many of such inaccuracies of comprehension. In the section below, we aim to reconstruct, based on their resolution, a Hegelian model able to guide our contemporary social and political sciences.

1. The Interconnected Principles of the Philosophy of History (Nicolai Hartmann)

At the beginning of *Das Problem des geistigen Seins*, Nicolai Hartmann lists twelve theses meant to summarise Hegel's philosophy of history⁴²⁶. We intend to

⁴²⁴ Bernard Bourgeois, "Jean Hyppolite et Hegel," *Les Études philosophiques* 2 (1993): 147.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*, 157.

⁴²⁶ N. Hartmann, *Das Problem des geistigen Seins* (Berlin: Walter de

reorganise and supplement them (the author himself admits that they were drawn without claiming completeness⁴²⁷) in order to rebuild the speculative model of the sciences of spirit.

Hartmann's theses may be summarised as follows:

(1) *Objective spirit* is the bearer of history. It is "an essence of a higher order than the individual, a spiritual substance having its own existence and life".

(2) Nevertheless, *objective spirit* also leads history, by virtue of reason, which is universal governance.

(3) The essence of reason is freedom, and the ultimate goal of history is the self-fulfilment of freedom.

The fourth thesis is a result of the first three. (4) Universal history, as Hegel himself states, is "the progress in the consciousness of freedom" (*der Fortschritt im Bewusstsein der Freiheit*). Freedom becomes real only after its true meaning is acknowledged.

The fifth clarifies the particular character of this final goal: (5) "The essence of history is the process itself", not only its final stage, as it was for Fichte. Let us remember the well-known statement of Hegel: *Das Wahre ist das Ganze*. Each stage, Hartmann explains, is a form of spirit, which does not recur. Consciousness

Gruyter & Co, 1949), 6–9.

⁴²⁷ Hartmann, *Das Problem des geistigen Seins*, 6. For an elaborate study about Hegel's philosophy, see Nicolai Hartmann, *Die Philosophie des Deutschen Idealismus*, Teil II, *Hegel* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1960).

must conserve and internalise all these forms.

(6) “History is the succession of national spirits”. The world-spirit divides itself into a multitude of particular spirits. Each one develops its own laws and principles. Because of this movement (through which they are overcome and, at the same time, preserved), the world-spirit succeeds to reach the completeness required by its concept. By internalising all completed stages, consciousness becomes aware of its own spirituality.

That is because, in the historical life of a nation, (7) the self-realisation of such a principle begins long before consciousness becomes aware of it. It exists *in itself* (as potency—in the Hegelian meaning of this notion) from the very beginning, but it becomes *true* only after it develops itself and, most importantly, after consciousness understands it in its spiritual character.

Therefore, (8) the historical process of becoming has an organic character. Let us remember its periodicity: birth, apogee and decline.

(9) The private passions of individuals constitute the engine of this movement—the *cunning of reason* (*Die List der Vernunft*). Even if individuals only follow their interests, they contribute, without knowing it, to a common unitary purpose, which is the advancement of society, as dictated by the world-spirit. This conception generated many controversies regarding individual agency in history. In fact, its real Hegelian meaning neither resembles Adam Smith’s “invisible hand” (society benefits more if its members only seek to meet

their private interests) nor signifies that our actions are dictated by destiny or by a transcendent spirit. On the contrary, man can decide and act freely. Sometimes his actions coincide with the logical path of the world-spirit. Other times they do not, in which case they either produce some narrower effects, soon cancelled by history, or accentuate the contradictions of the epoch, accelerating the inevitable dialectical passage to a new and superior stage of development.

The last two sentences express precisely this fact: (10) great historical men are those whose actions head in the same direction as the world-spirit. On the other hand, (11) “any artificial correction of history, any appeal to *what it should be*, any inorganic revolutionary act or any designed ideology is illusory”. Real and historical, Hartmann says, is only this continuous development, this inner and necessary march of objective spirit.

Additions

I.

The fourth sentence equates the end of history with the fulfilment of freedom. What justifies this congruence? According to the above scheme, their middle term is *reason*. On the one hand, reason governs the *fact-of-being-barrier* and (at the same time) *conductor* of spirit. On the other hand, it is the essence of freedom.

This statement also introduces a new term into the equation, namely *consciousness*. This fact converts it from a concluding sentence in a synthetic one. But it does not provide a principle for the concrete historical development nor a criterion able to indicate whether the form that freedom embodies in a particular society is arbitrarily established or not. Consequently, for not to remain abstract, our scheme must be supplemented with another fundamental principle, not listed by Hartmann but, from our point of view, indispensable.

(12) The universal process of becoming is governed, concretely and logically, by the self-development of the concept.

This movement is not an abstract one nor does it follow a schema *a priori* constructed. It resides, on the contrary, in a two-way relationship of implication between the concept and the real historical world. This implication, unlike those of classical logic, is a speculative one, vertically oriented. It defines the way in which consciousness must understand reality, namely

by disclosing its inherent conflicting elements, the deficiencies of each particular experienced concept and all the abstract elements which, when transposed in the historical world, change their appearance.

Dialectics starts from zero. *The Science of Logic* with *Being*, which, at a closer look, turns out to be nothingness. The *Phenomenology* with the simplest form of knowledge, *i.e. sense-certainty*. *The Philosophy of History* has, as the initial moment, the first, undeveloped form in which freedom (whose concept was already deduced in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*) manifests itself. The *Philosophy of Right* begins with the first form of *property*⁴²⁸.

[The goal] (...) is as necessarily fixed for knowledge as the serial progression; it is the point where knowledge no longer needs to go beyond itself, where knowledge finds itself, where Notion corresponds to object and object to Notion.⁴²⁹

Both *Being* and *sense-certainty* do not correspond to their own concepts. That is because (and here intervenes the

⁴²⁸ “Right is in the first place the immediate existence which freedom gives itself in an immediate way” Hegel, *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, 56; “abstract right is nothing but a bare possibility” (*ibid.*, 55). Besides, Hegel stated from the outset: “what constitutes scientific procedure in philosophy is expounded in philosophical logic and is here presupposed” (*ibid.*, 19).

⁴²⁹ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 51. He makes a similar statement in the *Philosophy of Right*: “Truth in philosophy means that concept and reality correspond.” Hegel, *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, 42.

twelfth statement), such a correspondence would imply: a) *Being* to possess concrete determined existence (which also imply the existence of its negative); b) *sense-certainty* to be capable of disclosing the individual targeted object. In reality, instead of grasping the particular, *sense-certainty* leads to a universal (*here, there*) valid for any object.

This experience compels consciousness to change its initial assumption, thus reaching a new, superior type of knowledge. Consciousness becomes self-consciousness and seeks to be recognised by another self-consciousness like it. Then, it discovers that the first form of its subjectivity—the master—does not meet the criterion of recognition. Again, the concept does not correspond to the object: the master, instead of being recognised by an equal of him, is recognised only by his inferior (by the servant).

*Begreifende Wissen*⁴³⁰—this final superior type of knowledge requires from the part of the (spiritual) thinking subject to be able to observe the identity or the difference between concept and object. It must also possess the ability to view the object in terms of its conceptual structure⁴³¹. If object and concept are not

⁴³⁰ “Diese letzte Gestalt des Geistes (...) es ist der sich in Geistsgestalt wissende Geist oder das *begreifende Wissen*.” Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, in *Werke* Band 3, 582. “Das Erkennen ist aber begreifendes Denken.” Hegel, *Die Wissenschaft der Logik*, in *Werke* Band 6, 553.

⁴³¹ Klaus Brinkmann, *Idealism Without Limits. Hegel and the Problem of Objectivity* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), 214.

congruent, neither the first nor the second (since for both lack objectification) are true.

The way in which the concept develops itself varies from case to case. It adapts and transforms itself in parallel with consciousness' experience. As a result of this movement, freedom turns out to be the true concept of history, having its real objectification in the state.

II.

Since the fourth thesis does not state the "progress of freedom" but "the progress in the consciousness of freedom"⁴³², this fact implies a series of conclusions (foreseen in the notion *begreifende*) regarding, this time, the final moment of philosophy as science, *i.e.* absolute knowledge or, as we already call it, *all-encompassing knowledge*.

We saw why consciousness (*Bewusstsein*) should be understood as *Bewusst-sein*, as the *fact-of-being-in-the-state-of-awareness*. Its inner nature (its latent spiritual character) requires it to leave behind its natural state, to develop itself by experiencing, one by one, all fragments of reality, but also to preserve them (*Aufhebung*) in

⁴³² "The History of the world is none other than the progress of the consciousness of Freedom; a progress whose development according to the necessity of its nature, it is our business to investigate." G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1914), 19–20.

memory. Only this way the error of *spurious infinity* and, within the historical world, the error of repeating the already exceeded stages can be avoided. What makes consciousness possess *all-encompassing* knowledge is precisely its capability to recollect and internalise (*Errinerung*) all exceeded stages. Only after it reaches the true *state-of-awareness*, namely when it becomes *spirit aware of its own spirituality*, the achievement of freedom can occur.

Consequently, *true freedom* depends: 1. from an ontological point of view, on its gradual objectification within the historical world; 2. from a gnoseological point of view, on the capability of consciousness to understand the various forms of historical process and their internal logic. Understanding the latter requires understanding: the dialectical structure of progression; the necessity to overcome, gradually, the moments encountered; the process through which it reached, in the end, all-encompassing knowledge (a process governed by the self-development of the concept, under the auspices of speculative logic).

History and consciousness progress in parallel. Freedom gradually objectifies itself within the state and depends on the capability of consciousness to understand both its true concept and the real concept of the state. For this reason, *the progress in the consciousness of freedom* must not be understood as an artificial imperative, but as a logical derivative of the concept of freedom.

The theses listed above attests that the relationship of consciousness with history is an ontological-gnoseological one. Reason is real. For something to be real, it must be objectified. Therefore, reality is either rational either mere accident—in which case it cannot influence universal history.

General conclusion regarding *all-encompassing* knowledge: each of the twelve theses involves all the others. Any Hegelian concept makes sense only if it is regarded through the whole conceptual system”. Therefore, the problems encountered in previous chapters cannot be solved by making use of only a single principle.

2. The Theory of the Concept

a) The Movement of the Concept towards Absolute Knowledge

“Science dares only organise itself by the life of the Notion itself”⁴³³. “Since the Notion is the objects' own self, which presents itself as the *coming-to-be of the object*, it is not a passive subject inertly supporting the accidents; it is, on the contrary, the self-moving Notion which takes its determinations back into itself”⁴³⁴.

⁴³³ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 31.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

Let us also consider the following fragment from *The Science of Logic*:

(...) what is to be considered as method here is only the movement of the concept itself. We already know the nature of this movement, but it now has, first, the added significance that the concept is all, and that its movement is the universal absolute activity, the self-determining and self-realising movement.⁴³⁵

The first determinant that any concept must receive in order not to be a mere *abstract* (so unreal) *concept* is its objectification—its transposition from the mind of the subject in the real world. “According to a realistic tendency that affirms in Hegel, he denies any value of a system without objectivity. Spirit needs things (...), it lives and moves into them”⁴³⁶.

The only requirement that natural consciousness has to fulfil is to pay attention to the concept. Since it does not possess, at this incipient stage, any other skill than the desire for certainty, it must carefully observe the determinants that the concept progressively receives, in other words, it must undertake its experience. If this experience had been observed from the position of a subject already in possession of absolute knowledge, it would have known the ontological substrate that supports the existence of the object. Unfortunately, natural consciousness does not possess such an ability.

⁴³⁵ Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 737.

⁴³⁶ Jacques d’Hondt, *Hegel și hegelianismul* (Iași: Polirom, 1998), 106.

But it can notice if the concept becomes self-contradictory. *Sense-certainty*, for instance, which was supposed to unveil the object and its particularities, provides, instead of them, only a universal. We are facing similar cases at the beginning of Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* or in the *Philosophy of Right*. The first people, for instance, are not free, nor their leaders, despite what they think of themselves; abstract right regulates only a natural form of possession that has no determined value either itself alone or in its abstract relationships with other similar entities or owners.

The self-development of the concept and consciousness' experience imply each other and develop in parallel. They are in a relationship of mutual implication, but not one on a single level, just as the double negation (the determined negation) does not make consciousness return to the first denied *positum*. Since the interaction between them does not function under the auspices of classical logic, it generates, each time, a superior concept and drives consciousness toward a higher gnoseological moment. The object, whose internal contradictions were seized, is changed, the new one being approached, this time, by a superior subjective instance, possessing better capabilities of knowledge⁴³⁷. The new object may be the negative of

⁴³⁷ "(...) since what first appeared as the object sinks for consciousness to the level of its way of knowing it, and since the in-itself becomes a *being-for-consciousness* of the in-itself, the latter is now the new object. Herewith a new pattern of consciousness

the previous or, some other time, the complex entity that supports it. The choice depends on the options available in each moment of consciousness' evolution. That is why it is incorrect to affirm that Hegel imposes, from the outside, a rational dialectical schema.

During this journey, consciousness:

1. improves its knowledge about the concept (*The Science of Logic*), as well as its capability to unveil the world through experience;
2. acquires an overview of its possibilities of knowledge (*meta-knowledge*), which makes it able to conceive a valid, functional gnoseological theory⁴³⁸;

comes on the scene as well, for which the essence is something different from what it was at the preceding stage. It is this fact that guides the entire series of the patterns of consciousness in their necessary sequence. But it is just this necessity itself, or the *origination* of the new object, that presents itself to consciousness without its understanding how this happens, which proceeds for us, as it were, behind the back of consciousness. (...) *For it* [for consciousness], what has thus arisen exists only as an object; *for us*, it appears at the same time as movement and a process of becoming. Because of this necessity, the way to Science is itself already *Science*, and hence, in virtue of its content, is the Science of the *experience of consciousness*." Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 56.

⁴³⁸ "For this course the method has resulted as the *absolutely self-knowing concept*, as the *concept that has* the absolute, both as subjective and objective, *as its subject matter*, and consequently as the pure correspondence of the concept and its reality, a concrete existence that is the concept itself." Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 737. "What constitutes the method are the determinations of the concept itself and their connections, and these we must now examine in the

3. becomes aware of the ontological structure inherent in both the subject and the external world;
4. acknowledges that it is not an independent subject (which only records data from outside) but one that maintains a dialectical relationship with its external objects and other people, that lives in a particular culture, during a particular historical moment and maintains a relationship with the Absolute;
5. becomes aware of the truth of its proximate world;
6. becomes able to differentiate between what is mere appearance and the substrate that makes any appearance possible;
7. becomes able to observe the internal contradictions of the world (we think, for example, about the contradictions of the political or the economic world);
8. becomes aware of the logical process (and not of the hazard) that brought it into the present.
9. realises that the external world is nothing else than the externalisation of spirit itself
10. understands the world both *logically* (identifies the contradictions, removes the veil of appearance) and *historically* (recognises its development stages, the characteristics of

significance that they have as determinations of the method” (ibid., 738).

political systems, of the state, knows that society is not determined only by a single class of principles, such as the geographic or economic ones, but all of them intertwine).

The notion of *absolute knowledge* (or, as we reformulated it, of *all-encompassing knowledge*) designates precisely this special manner of *understanding* the structures of the world, their interconnections and the dependency between the levels of reality (physical, political, economic, religious, etc.). On such a high position, consciousness becomes able both *to understand* (*verstehen*) and *to act*, in the true meaning of these two concepts.

Having sketched this overall picture, we can proceed, from now on, to clarify some particular questions. Regarding the movement of the concept, we are now fully able to understand why it must begin with the *undifferentiated universality*⁴³⁹. This unity is, in fact, unity only *in itself*. That is because, although it has the possibility to objectify itself, without effectively realising it (without receiving concert determinations) it cannot possess an ontological status. Being equates, in this case, with its negative, with nothingness. It is only a logical entity without content.

This ontological imperative, Hegel calls it *self-negation* or *self-differentiation*. It is not a requirement imposed

⁴³⁹ Robert Bruce Ware, "History and Reciprocity in Hegel's Theory of the State," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 6.3 (1998): 426.

from the outside but the condition of existence of any real concept. That is the meaning of the Hegelian reflective. By self-differentiating itself, the concept also limits itself. By limiting itself, it particularises itself and, mediated as such, heads toward the concrete universality. Then, this universality becomes the new *positum* to be investigated. “The concrete universality that results from the preceding stage is the abstract universality that determines itself in the next phase”⁴⁴⁰. Its new assumptions constitute the starting point of a new dialectical triad. However, we must be cautious. Each triad has its own mechanism because its content is each time different. The same remains only consciousness’ availability to perceive this process without adding anything by itself.

In the end, the universal and the particular unify themselves in the absolute Idea. The latter is a universal form, to the extent that it supports the process of differentiation, so the process of self-determination of the concept. “The concept is progressively self-determining (...), the Idea is its reality. (...) The Idea is ‘the unity of the concept and reality’ or ‘the unity of the concept and objectivity’”⁴⁴¹.

As concerns the *subject-object* relationship, Hegel does not establish it by inference, induction or other epistemic methods. The subject is, in the beginning, an

⁴⁴⁰ Ware, “History and Reciprocity,” 426.

⁴⁴¹ Joseph McCarney, *Hegel on History* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 52.

abstract universal. The same with the object, since this notion is able to designate the most various phenomena such as the table in front of us or the Second World War. This fact is often overlooked when epistemology tries to impose its methods or limitations in the sciences of spirit.

Their relationship develops gradually. Consciousness experiences each type of object it encounters (the physical objects, its own self, the skull, which, at first glance, seems to reflect the character of its owner, a series of historical civilisations, etc.) until it reaches absolute knowledge. In other words, until its separation from the object proves to be only a formal one (by virtue of Absolute Spirit, which originated both of them as its externalisations): “In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* I have presented consciousness as it progresses from the first immediate opposition of itself and the subject matter to absolute knowledge”⁴⁴². The moments of this process are not overcome due to some external analyses.

(...) this method is not something distinct from its subject matter and content—for it is the content in itself, the dialectic which it possesses within itself, which moves the subject matter forward. It is clear that no expositions can be accepted as scientifically valid that do not follow the progression of this method and are not in tune with its simple rhythm, for it is the course of the fact itself.⁴⁴³

⁴⁴² Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 29.

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.*, 33.

The new direction is logically established⁴⁴⁴. *Sense-certainty*, for instance, instead of reaching an individual object, as it was supposed in the beginning, reaches a universal. This contradiction makes consciousness overcome its initial supposition and approach its opposite, namely the universal.

b) From *Erinnerung* to *All-Encompassment*

For Hegel, philosophy is science. Its final moment is *all-encompassing* knowledge. It is not about a transcendent capability that would allow consciousness to know everything. On the contrary, *absolute knowledge* designates the acquired superior gnoseological capability of a subject that not only overcame but also recollected and internalised all experienced objects and learned, in the end, that they are, in fact, externalisations of Absolute Spirit in the concrete, historical world. In Hegel, we encounter the identification of history with this kind of recollection and remembrance⁴⁴⁵ (*Erinnerung*).

⁴⁴⁴ Joseph McCarney, *Hegel on History*, 27–29.

⁴⁴⁵ Angelica Nuzzo, “Logic and Time in Hegel’s Idea of History—Philosophical *Einleitung* and Historical Periodization,” in *Die Idee der Historischen Epoche*, ed. Domenico Losurdo (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2004), 166.

Erinnerung does not designate some sort of reproduction of one or more representations produced by consciousness in the past. The movement of internalisation/recollection reflects spirit's movement of externalisation (*Entäußerung*). "By the instrumentality of the historical *Erinnerung*, we resume the externalisation to the highest level of significance and complexity"⁴⁴⁶. Consciousness overcomes and preserves (*Aufhebung*) on each stage, but only in the end it becomes able to understand the true meaning of what it has exceeded. "In some sense, any historical event contains all of those events that caused it, along with all of those other events to which it gives rise"⁴⁴⁷. By possessing this superior ability of knowledge (and the collection of memorised moments), consciousness—which became, in the meantime, spirit aware of its own spirituality—can return upon each exceeded moment and understand it in its complexity.

Spiritual consciousness understands the world, so not only observes its particular events in order to determine their causes and influences. We know that history cannot rely on causal explanations. On the contrary, all-encompassing knowledge allows spiritual consciousness to perceive the inner character of becoming (its unitary development) and disclose the phenomenon, by scrutinising it in order to identify its

⁴⁴⁶ Jacques d'Hondt, *Philosophie de l'histoire vivante* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1966), 366.

⁴⁴⁷ Ware, "History and Reciprocity," 425.

inherent contradictions. Thus, it may also discover the logical direction toward which the world-spirit is heading.

The truth is the whole. Hegel not only tries to establish the gnoseological conditions of science. He wants to reach its completeness by means of a (self) presentation able to take into account all the exceeded stages. This requirement is stated in the *Introduction* to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, but only at the end of this journey, when the identity between the concept and its objectification in the historical world is fulfilled in its necessary character, its true meaning can be understood. Historical consciousness develops its gnoseological potential until it becomes spirit, owner of all-encompassing knowledge. A theoretical attitude is insufficient in this regard. Consciousness must face the concrete externalisations of the Idea. As a result, when it reaches this high level, it no longer regards the development of universal history through the limited viewfinder of sensibility and the understanding but perceives it by making use of speculative reason. “Reason is not the re-naming of an esoteric Absolute, but the standpoint of *absolute Wissen* reached by finite consciousness as the conclusion of the whole process of experience”⁴⁴⁸. In the case of absolute knowledge, we can no longer speak of the separation between theory and praxis. The latter is assumed by the first. “The philosophical programme of the *Phenomenology* (...) sets

⁴⁴⁸ Nuzzo, “Logic and Time,” 166.

out, from the very beginning, to think the two dimensions of history—namely its *practical* and *theoretical* dimension—in their unity”⁴⁴⁹. In other words, they complement each other in a unity that assumes its historical dimension. “The notion of a *begriffene Geschichte* expresses Hegel’s dialectical attempt to think of the unity of time and logic, alienation and freedom, nature and spirit”⁴⁵⁰. All of them must be understood as processes, not as static terms, to the extent that *process* signifies “the conciliation between the historical succession in time of the figures (*Gestaltungen*) of spirit and the eternal and timeless succession of the logical forms of the concept (*Begriff*)”⁴⁵¹.

3. The Logic of the Concept as a Principle of Understanding Universal History and the Evolution of the State

In the writings before the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the position occupied by history was rather ambiguous. In his *Jena writings*, Hegel used the term *Volkeiste* to designate the unity of a people and the role it played in the evolution of universal history. History was considered as a dimension in which “the singularity of

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., 167.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

a people attains universal meanings through its actions”⁴⁵². In the writings from Nuremberg, history (logically conceived and designated, in the last part of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, as *begriffene Geschichte*) was conceived both as philosophical history and as *philosophische Ansicht der Geschichte*, as opposed to *historische Geschichte*⁴⁵³.

It results from here that history, in the classical meaning of this science, cannot grasp the depths of the event. We already saw deficiencies in the causal approach. Essential problems such as the progress of freedom (as a corollary of the development of the state) or the effects produced by an agent can receive only ambiguous answers. That is why Hegel speaks, this time in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, of three different methods (immediate, reflected and philosophical), of which only the last can truly comprehend the past. Because of its speculative character, only philosophical history is able to trace the evolution of spirit (the way it shapes itself depending on the contradictions in encounters). The science of history—and here is the key to understanding Hegel’s thought—does not need to pursue all the causal threads of an event in order to understand it. In fact, it could never complete such a task. A certain causal series makes a particular event occur. However, even if it occurs as such or is replaced by another, the logical

⁴⁵² Ibid., 165.

⁴⁵³ Ibid., 167.

direction toward which history is heading remains the same. It can be explained why Napoleon tried to impose, from the outside, a constitution to Spain, but whether if he tried or not, the result would have been the same. Unlike the other two possible approaches, philosophical history is aiming at grasping the spiritual unity of the world. “A merely *historical history* goes only as far as detecting the contingent development of a people in its individuality, whereas *philosophical history* alone raises to the *universal spirit of the world* (*allgemeiner Weltgeist*) as the true agent of historical events”⁴⁵⁴.

History receives a definitive place in Hegel’s system in the *Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences*, where *Weltgeschichte* is considered as a moment of Absolute Spirit: “only its conceptual dimension allows history to become *world-history*”⁴⁵⁵—*denkende Geist der Weltgeschichte*. This fact supports our thesis. The *Weltgeist* (from the philosophy of history) involves a powerful ability of understanding, subsequent of consciousness’ *state-of-being-aware*, which is *all-encompassing knowledge*. On this superior level, it is required from the part of spirit to be aware of its own spirituality. That means to be aware of the entire series of experiences, to acknowledge them in their character of externalisations of the Idea and to know, explicitly, the complex process through which consciousness developed its gnoseological abilities (*meta-knowledge*). For this reason, Napoleon, who did not

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., 168.

know these things, does not embody the *world-spirit*, but the *world* (vital) *soul*.

Universal history is rooted in objective spirit. Through the necessary self-development of the latter (understood as a logical-ontological movement), spiritual consciousness rises above its mundane *objectification*. It becomes capable of understanding the social world in its spiritual substrate, thus gaining all-encompassing knowledge, as pointed out by Hegel's expression *Wissen des absoluten Geistes*. "Every stage is really the Idea, but the earlier stages contain it only in more abstract form"⁴⁵⁶.

History is the presentation of this self-development. It unifies both meanings of the concept of *freedom*, *i.e.* the practical one (the ethical and political development of the state⁴⁵⁷, moving from a formal, subjective form of freedom toward absolute, objective freedom⁴⁵⁸) and the gnoseological-comprehensive one (a way of thinking acquired by capitalising the temporal instance of the past, and able to guide the possible future actions of the subject). Their connection, as exposed by Hegel in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, was already glimpsed in his writings from 1805–1807. "In this period the *logic* which governs the internal articulation of history is a

⁴⁵⁶ Hegel, *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, 126.

⁴⁵⁷ Georg Lasson, *Hegel als Geschichtsphilosoph* (Leipzig: Verlag von Felix Meiner, 1920), 75–76.

⁴⁵⁸ Philip T. Grier, *Identity and Difference. Studies in Hegel's Logic, Philosophy of Spirit and Politics* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2007), 238.

phenomenological logic guided by the process of consciousness' self-cognition and coming-to-itself through alienation in its otherness"⁴⁵⁹.

Once its internal contradictions are seized, the initial *positum* is overcome. For this reason, the movement has the character of necessity. Let us remember that Hegel calls this process *movement of scepticism*, and Heidegger explains, in his turn, in *Hegels Begriff der Erfahrung*, its role as the engine of the dialectical movement.

Contradiction matters for this development as long as it is seized and exceeded. This act is of major importance in the triadic sequence. In its absence (without *Bewusstsein* to become *Bewusst-sein*), we would return, after the second negation (in other words, after the negation of the negative of the first sequence), at the first hypothesis, being initiated, thus, the circle of spurious infinity. If the contradiction is acknowledged, the unity of extremes becomes possible. This logical development, pursued and demonstrated from inside, through the succession of consciousness' experiences (in the *Phenomenology*) or by the inner movement of the concept (in *The Science of Logic*), when it is translated and applied in the research field of history, gives birth to the concept of understanding (*Verstehen*). "Hegel saw the development of world history as a manifestation of the progress of spirit over time, as a movement of ever-increasing apprehension by consciousness of its own and the world's fundamentally intertwined

⁴⁵⁹ Nuzzo, "Logic and Time," 165.

intelligibility”⁴⁶⁰. The logical capability of experiencing the contradictions puts the phenomenology or history in motion, and not the reverse.

Hegel opposes Kant’s theories about Providence and perpetual peace. Indeed, he conceives the state as a unitary whole, for which an order and an operating principle can be found. But this does not mean that the whole should be considered as a general principle nor that it can be included among the transcendental ideas, of which Providence, whose limitations cannot be surpassed, is a part. On the contrary, he speaks about a unified object, whose self-development approaches it to the Idea. The latter manifests itself in the world in accordance with its principle, which is *freedom*.

The possibility of conceiving a universal history lies in the possibility of possessing all-encompassing thinking. All social entities, in their continuous transformation, form a unitary whole. Their true meaning can be understood only in accordance with it. This manner of approaching history avoids the drawbacks of causal explanation and takes into account the concrete individual. This way, consciousness can also discover, behind the illogical and the hazard, the progressive realisation of the concept, in its rational, so necessary, character. Being aware of all this, its actions are heading in the same direction as the world-spirit. That happens as in the case of someone who

⁴⁶⁰ David McCabe, “Hegel and the Idea of Philosophical History,” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 15.3 (1998): 370.

undertakes an action but finds out, based on its effects, that he was wrong. If that person possessed all-encompassing knowledge, he would have been able to take the correct decision, not because of his brilliant instinct, but as a consequence of a rational act of thinking, able to make him aware of the implications of his action. “The deed which, in Hegel's view, attains its full expression in *world history* is the struggle for self-knowledge conceived as a total human project and one which requires not only thought but the actualization of thought in practice”⁴⁶¹. True changes are possible only by virtue of this superior capability of understanding the past. “What makes Hegelian philosophy of history possible is the thesis that this logic can (...) be transposed to history. Spirit is the indispensable medium and vehicle of the transposition (...)”⁴⁶². It was reproached to Hegel's philosophy of history that it omits those cultures that do not fit in his interpretative template. In reality, this concealment is based on the following two theses. 1. “Not all peoples who do have a *historical history* belong to world history”. 2. The succession of peoples in history has a character of necessity and differs from the contingency of a mere succession of events.

⁴⁶¹ Maletz, “History in Hegel,” 222.

⁴⁶² McCarney, *Hegel on History*, 87.

Additions

I.

It derives from those above a critique of positivist thinking. In short, the author of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* does not agree that the historian only to collect rough facts⁴⁶³. Such surface characteristics, Hegel says, “render an excessively simple picture and, consequently, do not reveal the essential reality of law which is something much more involved and far less unambiguous”⁴⁶⁴. He must not limit himself only to describe accidental phenomena, without trying to observe their spiritual substrate and the logic of their becoming. On the contrary, historical facts must be understood from the level of all-encompassing knowledge. A revolution, for example, cannot begin just because an individual believes that this should happen. This type of action does not correspond, in reality, to the concept of revolution. Hegel criticises the positivist tendency not only because of its superficial manner of understanding history (so without exhausting its logical-speculative connections, which are stronger than empirical data and have greater potential to guide the true act of understanding) but also for “ignoring a very basic class of social facts, those

⁴⁶³ But he also does not accept those metaphysical theories which, by ignoring the concrete data, artificially construct history.

⁴⁶⁴ Peter J. Steinberger, “Hegel as Social Scientist,” *The American Political Science Review* 71.1 (1977): 97.

relating to the negative aspect of Being”⁴⁶⁵. Its explanations are inferred based on contingent and disparate phenomena of the past. “But because of the empiricist refusal to look at anything other than positive phenomena, the explanation of any social regularity can only be inferred”⁴⁶⁶. Hegel proposes a different method. The spirit of ancient Greece or Rome, for instance, is not only described, based on several archaeological and scriptural data, but also reconstructed in the fullness of the spiritual elements that characterise it.

II

A set of conditions that, as Peter Steinberg suggests, must govern any act of comprehension, can be derived from Hegel’s philosophy

1. The present society must be understood in its historical character. Both the material world (its geographic and economic data) and the ways of thinking that emerged during its evolution and generated different social structures, must be taken into account.
2. The researcher must understand himself based on the dialectical relationship that he maintains with his objects.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., 98.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

3. Unilateral theories⁴⁶⁷, such as those exclusively economic, materialist or, as the Romantic ones, spiritual (relying on feeling and intuition), should be rejected. As the objectification of the human mind (let us think that it is transformed through labour), society constitutes a reference point based on which self-consciousness may improve its knowledge about itself.

4. The Philosophy of Right, Uniqueness and the End of History

Given this interdependency, the principles of the *Philosophy of Right* prove to be the ontological foundation of political practice. “Hegel understood *Philosophy of Right* as an expression of the form of the Idea in modern political life, and the discovery of the movement of the concept in the historical development of the community”⁴⁶⁸. Because of this movement, consciousness finds out that freedom is an element that grounds its relationship with other people. Individual freedom, in the beginning only abstract and *for itself*, becomes general freedom, as the Idea of freedom requires it.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., 109.

⁴⁶⁸ Ware, “History and Reciprocity,” 424.

During this journey, consciousness undertakes the experience of the *ethical world*. The moment of *Sittlichkeit* goes far beyond the previous ones (morality, traditional ethics, etc.) and initiates the process of unification between the subjective will and the objective welfare of all.

The unity of the subjective with the objective good in and for itself is *ethical life*, and in it we find the reconciliation which accords with the concept. Morality is the form of the will in general on its subjective side. Ethical life is more than the subjective form and the self-determination of the will; in addition, it has as its content the concept of the will, namely freedom.⁴⁶⁹

Ethical life encompasses all forms of social life, beginning with the family and work (as a collective activity), continuing with the legal system and finishing with the state. The latter is not an isolated unit, but maintains relationships with other similar units, giving birth to history, as “the exposition [*Auslegung*] and actualisation of the universal spirit”⁴⁷⁰; “spirit giving itself the form of events”⁴⁷¹. Ethical life advances due to the dialectical movement of unification of all micro-units (by virtue of their mutual relationship⁴⁷²). An individual

⁴⁶⁹ Hegel, *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, 153.

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 316.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 328.

⁴⁷² “(...) the state and its citizens are conceived, in terms of their reciprocal universality, as continuously determining one another.” Ware, “History and Reciprocity,” 438.

can influence, but also the community to which he belongs may influence him, in turn. His social environment determines his being but, at the same time, he is also endowed with the ability to transform it. Precisely for this reason, we can correctly state that society evolves according to the Idea and determines itself just like an organism. That is an important argument against those authors who believe that Hegel considers man only as an instrument in the service of the state. In reality, “the state is considered as the process of its own development, which occurs in accord with the form of the Idea, as it differentiates itself among its parts (including institutions, social and economic groups, individual attitudes and interests, etc.)”⁴⁷³. The state continuously recreates itself through the process of self-differentiation. Hegel conceives it “not as any determinate social order, but rather as the historical process, developing through the opposition of substantive and subjective universality”⁴⁷⁴. Both, the state and *Sittlichkeit* should be interpreted in terms of logical categories, “not as static, determinate entities, but as designating a dialectical process of historical development powered by the reciprocity of the individual and the collectivity”⁴⁷⁵.

The theses (7) and (9) raise the problem of uniqueness. As Jacques d'Hondt observes, Hegel tries

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., 439.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid., 445.

to prove, in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, that a particular form of government corresponds to each stage of formation of a state. Democracy flourished in the antiquity, constitutional monarchy appeared among the European Nations in the 19th century, especially in Prussia, because Prussia fulfilled most of the conditions implied by this form of government⁴⁷⁶.

It should be also noted that universal history does not end with the last page of Hegel's writing. A book of history can expose its subject only until the present moment. That is the meaning aimed by Hegel when he speaks about the Prussian State, as the last moment of history. Two arguments come to support this thesis.

The first (identified by Jacques d'Hondt): in his last history courses, from 1830, Hegel added additional events produced that year⁴⁷⁷. Regarding *the end of history*, the German philosopher was often accused that he arbitrarily imposed it, a fact that denies the possibility of any new evolution. In reality, Hegel had in mind the traditional meaning of this term. History aims at exposing the facts of the past (*Vergangenheit*), relating them to what already occurred. Moreover, we cannot forget his intention to draw up a universal history, a philosophical one, which takes into account only the past events⁴⁷⁸.

⁴⁷⁶ Jacques d'Hondt, *Philosophie de l'histoire vivante* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1966), 82.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 128.

The second: in the last pages of the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, Hegel expresses his faith in the perfectibility of society:

The question of the perfectibility and education of the human race arises here. Those who have maintained this perfectibility have divined something of the nature of spirit, something of the fact that its nature is to have 'Know thyself' as the law of its being, and, since it apprehends that which it is, to have a form higher than that which constituted its mere being. But to those who reject this doctrine, spirit has remained an empty word, and history a superficial play of contingent, so-called 'merely human', strivings and passions.⁴⁷⁹

Moreover, at the end of his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, he states:

This is the point which consciousness has attained, and these are the principal phases of that form in which the principle of Freedom has realised itself—for the History of the World is nothing but the development of the Idea of Freedom. (...) If the Objective [Objective Freedom] is in itself Rational, human insight and conviction must correspond with the Reason which it embodies, and then we have the other essential element—Subjective Freedom also realised.⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁹ Hegel, *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, 316.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 476.

We should also notice that the level reached by consciousness at this final stage of history (his contemporary era) is not the same as that described in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Consciousness is not yet in possession of absolute knowledge. The *world-spirit* has not yet reached its final moment. Spirit “is nothing but its active movement toward absolute knowledge of itself”⁴⁸¹. We cannot pretend that this requirement is entirely fulfilled in the German world, in which the philosopher lived.

5. Agency and Freedom in History

Based on the above scheme of interconnected principles, we can establish if an individual is able to act freely, as well as the role he plays on the stage of universal history.

Hegel discovers a series of constant elements of history in both the various concepts of *reason* and the sciences of subjective spirit. He is also concerned about the connection between human history and nature. All these elements are investigated in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, as moments experienced by consciousness. Karl Rosenkranz reminds us that Immanuel Kant also tried to comprehend universal history. He glimpsed the problem of freedom, although he did not completely

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., 319.

manage to expose it. Hegel resumes it, by placing freedom in the proximity of the legal system. Thus, he notices the link that exists between history and the objective spiritual unity that is the state. The latter supports the first and makes freedom become objective⁴⁸².

Rosenkranz's main question is: "how does anything new occur in history" if, on the one hand, human action is subject to strict necessity and, on the other hand, the changes in history (the rise and fall of states, the revolutions or the reforms) seem to be chaotic? Is there a principle, he asks, which governs the connection between these phenomena?

Hegel's theory, Rosenkranz explains, does not rely on such principles, for they cannot be found anywhere. This is an extra argument in favour of his realism. For Hegel, the logic of becoming is neither exterior nor involves a unifying principle imposed from the outside.

We already saw that, in order to become true, freedom must objectify itself in the historical world. In turn, consciousness must become aware of all its objectifications. Here is the key to solving our dilemma. *World history means the progress in the consciousness of freedom*⁴⁸³. Freedom objectifies itself within the state. Because of the state, "man contemplates himself and realises, more and more clearly, that he is a free being.

⁴⁸² Karl Rosenkranz, "Hegel's Philosophy of History," *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 6.4 (1872): 342.

⁴⁸³ Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, 476–477.

He is, indeed, free *in himself*, but becomes effectively free *for himself* once with the progress in the consciousness of freedom, which is gradually deepened, each stage being internalised and reprised in the next one⁴⁸⁴. Therefore, “that which is truly new in history is the deeper apprehension of the conception of freedom, which permeates and transforms all special elements of life with itself⁴⁸⁵. The human mind, in its phenomenal character, is perfectible. The various human actions cannot always be different because the individual disposes of a finite number of possibilities. What differs is consciousness’ ability of comprehension (the trigger of action), *i.e.* its ability to seize the true meaning of the event.

Freedom is the middle term between the evolution of history and the consolidation of the state. Spiritual consciousness permeates them both, guiding their development in accordance with their concepts. The rational, speculative elements develop themselves through their continuous interactions with the real, historical world, which is the place of their existence. The concept of freedom and the concept of the state depend on each other. In fact, the state, whose substance is the social, institutional world, is the materialisation of an intentional project, more or less rationally conceived depending on the level of understanding that consciousness possesses each time.

⁴⁸⁴ d’Hondt, *Hegel et l’hégélianisme*, 120.

⁴⁸⁵ Rosenkranz, “Hegel’s Philosophy of History,” 340.

The evolution of the state is driven by the logical imperative of objectification. In order to become real and true, the concept needs to be objectified in the world. Otherwise, it will remain a mere mental construct or, in Hegelians terms, a “mere abstract concept”. Theoretical law and consciousness’ ability to understand *duty* in its *real form* (which involves *action*) develop in parallel. All these facts make Rosenkranz affirm: “the law-books of nations are the concrete criterion according to which this consciousness of freedom may be measured”⁴⁸⁶. In the absence of such solidifications, the Idea cannot achieve its full development. We are not referring, at this point, to some utopian ideas. For Hegel, the same as for Fichte or Schleiermacher, the police or the industrial states are, as Rosenkranz well observes, only caricatures of the real state⁴⁸⁷.

Hegel's *Philosophy of History* begins with the simplest elements. Then, determinants such as the geographic environment or the particular economic system will prove to be necessary, but not sufficient for a true comprehension. Let us remember the penultimate section of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. It was the moment when consciousness acknowledges the past by considering its religious substrate.

At first glance, Herder and Hegel enumerate the same organic stages of development of a civilisation.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid., 341.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid., 343.

But Hegel's guiding principle is entirely different. For him, they are stages of objectification of freedom. In the Oriental world (the age of youth), only a single individual, *i.e.* the supreme leader, was free. Thereby, freedom was not *true*; it did not correspond to its concept. In the ancient world, only a few members considered themselves free, *i.e.* the citizens. The modern world aims at freedom for all.

The "Napoleon" Case, discussed earlier, revealed the following conflict. For Goethe, Bonaparte is a *daemonic leader* who changes the course of history according to his plan. Tolstoy, on the other hand, believes that the Emperor is, in fact, carried by destiny, losing the battles when the latter becomes detrimental to him. Unlike Bonaparte, the Russian General Kutuzov prefers to wait and not to attack. He withdraws from the struggle, despite the will of the other military leaders, because he knows how to listen to the voice of spirit and, consequently, does as it suggests to him. He knows that winning a fight depends on many complex and indiscernible social and psychological forces. During the clashes, it can be clearly seen that all the plans conceived at the meeting of generals have no effect if they are not in accordance with the "direction" of destiny.

We discussed the way in which Hegel's philosophy reconciles these two opposing conceptions. Now, after having approached the concept of freedom and highlighted the existence of a special, internal logic of the development of history, we can resume the problem

of agency. Contrary to many interpretations, Hegel does not subject the agent to transcendent Providence or some artificial schemas. “Given the way Hegel understands a *geistiges* being, an action counts as a free action if undertaken in a certain way, executed in the light of certain kinds of considerations, certain motivating reasons”⁴⁸⁸. For Hegel, the concept of freedom involves two connotations that complement each other.

The first designates its comprehensive side. An individual who does not possess all-encompassing knowledge cannot act freely, in the true meaning of this term. Let us think of the formal structure of any connection. The difference between a necessary and a free one consists in the fact that the latter requires to be explicitly acknowledged by consciousness. “In the latter the bonds of the former have been comprehended as internal to the very nature of the things bound, which means that the things bound have been comprehended as internal to each other”⁴⁸⁹. Freedom involves three characteristics: universality, particularity and individuality, which correspond to the structure of the concept, as exposed in *The Science of Logic*⁴⁹⁰. The first expresses consciousness’ self-awareness, *i.e.* the

⁴⁸⁸ Robert Pippin, “Hegel, Freedom, the Will. ‘The Philosophy of Right,’” in *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, ed. Ludwig Siep (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2005), 51–52.

⁴⁸⁹ Will Dudley, *Hegel, Nietzsche and Philosophy. Thinking Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 19.

⁴⁹⁰ Frederik Beiser, *Hegel* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 198–199.

capability of an agent to be aware of himself and the situation he faces. The second, his possibility to choose, according to each situation, one of the many possible actions, and to undertake it. Finally, the third requires self-limiting his action to this choice. At this point, the will (as an engine) identifies itself with the direction toward the *world-spirit* is moving. If these conditions are not met, the action performed is subject to the irrational desires of the individual and, consequently, its effects are contingent. His irrational will might make spirit advance, but, as well, it might have no effect in history.

The second meaning is ontological. Freedom objectifies itself differently at each stage, thus guiding the evolution of both society and the state. Metaphorically speaking, the world-spirit (which should be understood as a logical entity) draws its course by cunningly making use of the passions of individuals (*Die List der Vernunft*).

From the outset, Hegel distinguishes between three ways of studying history: original, reflective and philosophical. The first designates the simple, objective narration of the events, from the perspective of those who lived them. The second requires understanding them based on their connection with the other elements of the historical epoch. The third—philosophical history—aims at a deeper type of comprehension. The researcher must become aware of the main factors of the historical process as well as the effects they produce on him. This approach is based on the ability of consciousness to understand concrete situations.

Consciousness is transformed and transforms, in turn, the world in which it lives according to the dialectical model of the *subject–object* relationship. The ontological connection between itself and the world resides in *reason*. “[Hegel] is concerned not with the contingencies that litter human history but with philosophy's capacity to comprehend and reveal the structures underlying world historical events”⁴⁹¹. At first glance, this seems to be a theory *a priori* constructed. But things are not as such. The Idea is not a transcendent entity; it does not predetermine the advancement of history. In fact, Hegel's purpose is “to demonstrate how human history can be comprehended by speculative reason within the structures of the *Logic* and thereby to show how history can be seen, finally, as the externalised Idea”⁴⁹².

Thinking gradually detaches itself from natural objects in the attempt to understand, conceptually, both its own inner connection with them and the relationships between the logical categories of reason⁴⁹³. Historical comprehension is, therefore, a particular application of logic, one that, in fact, strengthens the latter, conferring to it an objectified content. This fact does not mean that history pursues, in the smallest details, the logical rigour.

⁴⁹¹ McCabe, “Hegel and the Idea of Philosophical History,” 379.

⁴⁹² *Ibid.*

⁴⁹³ “(...) die Philosophie der Geschichte nichts anderes als die denkende Betrachtung derselben bedeutet.” G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, in *Werke*, Band 12 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970), 20.

The problem we are facing now is the following: on the one hand, Hegel speaks about a logical, accurate development of spirit; on the other hand, we must admit that history is full of irrational accidents.

The sentence “*what is rational is actual and what is actual is rational*”⁴⁹⁴ is not an ontological one. It is a gnoseological sentence. *Rational* is not a predicate of reality in its totality but the condition that the latter must fulfil in order to produce historical effects, in other words, to exist. What is irrational has no existential value. It cannot affect. It exists only as an element used by the *cunning of reason*.

To solve this dilemma, David McCabe distinguishes between the historical event and the philosophical comprehension of it, undertaken in the framework of the system (a mediated reflection). *Logic* has the purpose to bring order among variable instances⁴⁹⁵. Therefore, in order to reveal their connection, we must logically pursue the way in which the Idea expresses itself in the historical world. The relationship between logic and the world, in which resides the process of objectification of the Idea, functions as a three-step movement⁴⁹⁶. It starts with the logical-theoretical construction. Secondly, thinking connects itself to the world in order to determine if its logical structures are in accordance with reality. Thirdly, thinking returns to itself to redefine and

⁴⁹⁴ Hegel, *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, 14.

⁴⁹⁵ McCabe, “Hegel and the Idea of Philosophical History,” 381.

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 382.

improve its knowledge. Stationary civilizations are good examples of the contingency of the world. Because they are stationary, they are not part of universal history, just as the irrational actions of an individual are unable to change its course.

The problem of agency entails another issue whose resolution is glimpsed, with great finesse, by Helmut Kuhn. Dialectics⁴⁹⁷, in its radical meaning conferred by Hegel's philosophy, links non-temporal being with the historical temporal process. In this light, the latter proves to be not a mere factual sequence, but an intelligible series. The dialectical movement engages three sources⁴⁹⁸: the ontological antitheses, the organic rhythm and the religious reconciliation.

The first designates the connection between some seemingly contradictory elements, such as Being and the spatiotemporal process, the Absolute and the relative or the necessary and the contingent.

The organic rhythm makes possible the historical equilibrium, in its double form: static and dynamic. The first is the result of two opposing forces that act simultaneously. Kuhn speaks about the inner power of a system to adjust itself: "a spontaneous rather than an automatic power of restoration"⁴⁹⁹ of a system, whose initial disequilibrium was not an accident, but a normal

⁴⁹⁷ Helmut Kuhn, "Dialectic in History," *Journal of History of Ideas* 10.1 (1949): 15.

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

historical occurrence. Then follows the restoration of the balance, *i.e.* the dynamic equilibrium between equilibrium and disequilibrium. The Roman Republic, as a self-regulating system of polar tensions, is a good example in this regard. The dynamics between equilibrium and disequilibrium is reflected by the balance between the supremacy of few nobles and the mass of plebeians.

The third, the religious reconciliation, is possible through Christianity. A literary example is Goethe's *Faust*.

These three dimensions, independent in themselves, are interconnected and, Kuhn explains, merge in a single dialectic, as it is Hegel's system. In the paper from 1798, *The Spirit of Christianity and its Destiny*, the dialectics of organic rhythm and that of reconciliation merge in the person of Jesus Christ. His role is double⁵⁰⁰. He is both the Restorer of the unity of life and the Saviour who makes possible the spiritual rebirth of humankind. In Hegel's *Jena Writings* (1802-1806), a third dimension comes to supplement the first two.

The problem is that these three dialectical processes leave no place for free human action: "the 'organic rhythm' is below the level of the human person. Its concern is with forces. (...) The 'religious reconciliation' rises above the level of the person"⁵⁰¹. Human action, instead of being free and responsible,

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

seems to be unable to exceed the boundaries of one or the other. Consequently, history is dehumanised. The events are products of destiny or other blind forces that subject the individual, not materialisations of *free will*.

At a closer look, things turn out to be completely different. Helmut Kuhn notes that there is a middle plane between these processes, in which they work together without identifying themselves, and which attests that man is a rational agent. From this position, he can observe and understand them, thus getting to understand himself as the actor of the concrete situations he faces. He acknowledges the following: 1. the connection between his temporal and bordered existence and non-temporal being; 2. the organic rhythm, as a fundamental determinant of the world; 3. his own self, as the place of reconciliation with the Absolute. From this middle plane, he does not perceive three independent sources but regards them as ordered elements that merge into unity. Therefore, the ontological problem regarding the connection between the Absolute and the relative becomes the practical task of religious reconciliation, carried out during the organic process of history⁵⁰².

⁵⁰² “The abstract ontological problem as to how to relate the Absolute to the Relative (source one) becomes for philosophizing man the concrete practical task of Religious Reconciliation (source three), to be achieved amidst a world-process exhibiting Organic Rhythm (source two)” (ibid., 28).

Man is not a completely independent being. Nicolai Hartmann highlights this fact by saying that the higher ontological level (the level of action) is supported by the lower ones. Martin Heidegger, in turn, talks about the *state of thrownness* of *Dasein*. However, he is able to act and transform his present condition, because he possesses *reason*. He can conceive reasonable rules and decide how they should be applied. Both the agent and the historian must beware of the error of perspective. Kuhn insists that the principles of historiography are not primarily deduced based on empirical observations, but derived from ethics and metaphysics⁵⁰³. The historian must consider them for revealing the meaning of the past, and the political leader to act.

⁵⁰³ Ibid., 29.

CONCLUSION

At the end of World War I, in the summer of 1918, Oswald Spengler challenged Europe by publishing the first volume of *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* and announcing, besides the controversial decline of the West, the cultural earthquake that was going to strike the continent (as a symptom of the last period of life of Western civilisation).

Nowadays, cultural identity issues, ambiguous theories about the political development of society or historical pseudo-interpretations subjected to personal interests are continuously multiplying. A series of neo-sophisms envelops in uncertainty and confusion the fair reflection. In a study published in 1953 (*Wahrheit in den Geisteswissenschaften*), Gadamer made a remarkable observation: “The fact that reason itself is corruptible is the most unfortunate experience the mankind had in this century”. In this context, the sciences of spirit are facing a difficult task, for it is their responsibility to remove the veil of ambiguity and doubt. However, to accomplish such a task, they must first return and clarify their own principles, methods and targeted objects.

Our goal was to elucidate the way in which Hegel’s philosophy shaped the ample process of formation and development of *Geisteswissenschaften*. Thus, we reached the following two conclusions.

1. We are not dealing, as we might expect, with a linear type influence, strongly felt in the beginning, during the lifetime of the German philosopher and shortly after, and decreasing in intensity with the passage of time. On the contrary, the reception of Hegel followed a dialectical path. We encounter a blast of Hegelianism during the years the author of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* taught at the University of Berlin and at most two decades after his death. Soon after 1850, all efforts to found the sciences of spirit channelled against absolute idealism. The separation, initiated by Friedrich Schleiermacher, Leopold von Ranke or Hermann Lotze, was aggravated by the neo-Kantians of the Baden School. Its representatives, thoroughly concerned about strengthening the principles of the cultural and social sciences, considered the speculative approach as ineffective. As interpreted by Wilhelm Windelband or, more radically, by Heinrich Rickert, its logical rigidity and the univocal spiritual perspective made it unable to capture the uniqueness of the individual. Moreover, whereas the concept of *spirit* was considered as abstract and unreal, Rickert preferred to replace the term *Geisteswissenschaften* with *Kulturwissenschaften*. Nevertheless, we cannot overlook the impact of Hegel's doctrine, even in this negative form. The failure in solving *aporias* such as those regarding the subject (the performer of hermeneutical research) or related to the problem of objectivity led, in the next period, to a recapitalisation of Hegel's philosophy. In the light of the new questions of the 20th

century, important thinkers such as Nicolai Hartmann, Oswald Spengler, Arnold Toynbee or H.-G. Gadamer brought the Hegelian philosophical system to the forefront of European culture, substantially improving its comprehension.

2. Many of Hegel's successors inaccurately interpreted his system in order to reject it. Key concepts were taken out of context and regarded as petrified elements, not as partial moments, as they really are. The complex series of interconnections was simplified. The realism that characterises Hegel's philosophy was overlooked, the author being accused of panlogism.

Gadamer teaches us that interpreting a text depends on certain factors from which we cannot separate: our historical background, our expectancies of meaning and all the interrogations that made us initiate the comprehensive labour. Therefore, we cannot know, from the beginning, the true significance of Hegel's ideas and concepts. Their meaning must be gradually disclosed. We do not possess a template that could be applied, for example, on Rickert's criticism, so we conclude his errors. On the contrary, his theories and arguments compel us to read more carefully the pages of Hegel. His objections oblige us to modify our initial ideas. For this reason, the goal that we proposed above must be complemented by the reconstruction of a speculative model appropriate to our contemporary social-political sciences.

Based on these facts and the methodological arguments from the *Introduction*, we decided to divide

our research in the following four sections:

(I) *The Philosophy of History. The Genesis of the Sciences of Spirit.* The efforts of some important thinkers, like Giambattista Vico or Herder, to understand the past laid the foundation of the modern human sciences. Moreover, their works revealed a series of issues that need to be solved so that they do not remain defective and chaotic. How, for example, could we conceive a rationally founded discourse about political action without clearly having understood the particularities that define the cultures involved, the relationship between man and nature, the historical character of the individual and many other problems as such? In the first chapter, we discussed the direction of thought adopted by Hegel's precursors concerning *Geisteswissenschaften*. This overview made us perceive the originality and depth of his responses. The organic structure of universal history, for instance, as described by Vico or Herder, was embedded in the speculative system. Hegel developed his philosophy of history based on a series of more solid principles, surprised in their logical and necessary self-determination, and not derived from artificial metaphysical elements or obtained through induction, from contingent empirical data.

Immanuel Kant, in turn, strived to explain what human freedom means and elucidate the very possibility of writing a universal history, based on the results of his critical philosophy. Hence the need to clarify the relationship between his transcendental idealism and the philosophy of spirit. After all, the

gnoseological limits of the understanding and reason, as imposed by him, represented a veritable touchstone for Hegel.

He faced not only these directions. His thinking also developed by reacting against both the rationalism of the *Aufklärung* and the Romantic sentimentalism. Hegel's ambition to overcome the separation between the understanding and feeling (the latter being considered by the Romantics as the only way to surprise the Absolute) brought him in the proximity of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Their methods were different, so we cannot talk about a consistent influence between them. It is something else that caught our attention, namely, what we have called, in the second chapter, the "Napoleon" case. The contradiction we had to deal with was the following: on the one hand, for Goethe, the *daemonic* Napoleon embodies the agent able to change the course of history. On the other hand, in the eyes of the Russian writer Leo Tolstoy, the Emperor cannot modify its course as his free will dictates. On the contrary, he is subject to fate.

Our thesis is that the solution to this radical difference of perspectives comes from Hegel (although his famous words, *Napoleon—the world-soul on horseback*, seem to support Goethe's theory). Two essential conclusions derived from our investigation: 1. It is indeed possible for an individual agent to change the course of universal history (the complete explanation regarding the conditions he should fulfil in order to perform such an action resulted from the

reconstruction undertaken in the last section). 2. Hegel's concept of *freedom* has a comprehensive side. Both of them made us consider more carefully those authors who claimed that speculative idealism implies individual determinism.

We metaphorically entitled the second section (II) *Breaking-up with Hegel*. As we already said, the separation dates back in the years the German philosopher taught at the University of Berlin, being caused, besides the rational confrontations of ideas, by vanity disputes. Under the title '*Historismus*' and *Hermeneutics without Speculative Thinking*, we resumed the confrontations carried against absolute idealism by Schleiermacher, Leopold von Ranke and Wilhelm Dilthey.

They were followed by another series initiated during the famous *Conflict of Methods* (*Methodenstreit*). The neo-Kantian School of Baden had a substantial role in the development of the sciences of spirit, providing for them a critical orientation centred on the very possibility of objectivity. The proposed alternative, meant to replace Hegel's dialectics, was the logic-axiological theory of knowledge. Hermann Lotze set forth the idea of comprehending the world by the instrumentality of values. He conceived his axiology based on the generic form of aesthetic judgements and the paradigmatic value of *beauty*. Moreover, he vehemently rejected the idea of a system and refused to make use of speculative reason.

The impact of his philosophy was narrower than he hoped. The next generation borrowed from him only

the generic concept of value, completely renouncing to its aesthetic components. We discussed, in the fourth chapter (*Objectivity in the Sciences of Spirit*), the way in which Wilhelm Windelband, Heinrich Rickert and Max Weber chose to develop this new direction. We should not neglect that these thinkers interpreted the writings of Hegel rushed and truncated. The author of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* did not neglect, for instance, individual freedom, inscribing any action in an abstract logic, as they claimed. Nor he deduced, separate from concrete reality, the individual from the universal. On the contrary, he patiently observed its self-appearance, as it emerges from the continuous interaction of the concept with reality, of consciousness with the historical world. The answer which Hegel gave regarding Kant's critical idealism also applies here. The faculty of understanding, he said, cannot approach the Absolute not because it is a human one, but because it is a faculty of knowledge situated on an inferior level than speculative reason. That is why it is not capable to disclose the superior units. We are not dealing, in the case of these authors, with relativism and subjectivism because their theories are wrong or restrictive, but because they make use of some limited faculties of knowledge. Our final reconstruction, based on the new contemporaneous capitalizations of speculative idealism, comes to support these observations.

We also briefly reviewed, in the last part of the second section, the particular way in which Émile Durkheim and Ernst Cassirer approached Hegel's

dialectical philosophy. The first of them drew our attention because of his substantial contribution to the consolidation of sociology. In the case of Cassirer, notable is that him, as a representative of the neo-Kantian School from Marburg (closer to positivism than the School of Baden), decided to distance himself from its general direction and dialectically explain the development stages of symbolic forms. He also explicitly expressed his intention to conceive a phenomenology, in the Hegelian meaning of this notion, and not as established by Edmund Husserl.

Given the influence of Hegel's works in economics and political science, especially because of the left Hegelian wing, he seems to be one of the most influential philosophers in history. Such a *Wirkungsgeschichte* we intended to point out in the section headed *Back to Hegel*. His influence on Marx was analysed in the chapter entitled *General Dialectics—Regional Dialectics*. As a contribution, we brought up the idea of the regional dialectics of Karl Marx, which is part of the general one. In short, Marx is more Hegelian than he is usually perceived and more than himself intended to be.

France rediscovered Hegel in the works of Jean Hyppolite and Jean Wahl. The German philosopher was no longer described as a builder of a rigid and abstract system, meant to subject reality to some logical phantasms, but as an author endowed with a great sense of seizing the vitality. Marx's critical works devoted to Hegel's philosophy and Lenin's *Notebooks* concerning

dialectics contributed, this time in Russia, to a more favourable image of him than those that described speculative idealism as panlogism and accused it of missing the problem of concrete individuality. Alexandre Kojève substantially influenced this movement. Unlike Hyppolite, he undertook the exegesis in accordance with his leftist beliefs. Even so, he revealed much more of the real Hegel than many other studies before.

We discussed, in the next chapter, the work of Nicolai Hartmann—*Das problem des geistigen Seins*. The recourse to Hegel is substantial and the criticism more reasonable and relevant. For this reason, we resumed and used, as the foundation of our reconstruction, the twelve principles of Hegel's philosophy of history, as identified by Hartmann in the first pages of this book.

We investigated the influence exercised by Hegel on H.-G. Gadamer's hermeneutics in the last chapter of this section. The connection, made by the German philosopher, between the phenomenology of Martin Heidegger and speculative dialectics was essential for the development of the sciences of culture. The task of philosophical hermeneutics is comprehension. Yet, Gadamer explained, from the outset, that we cannot achieve this goal by making use of some mechanical procedures borrowed from outside. The conjunction from the title *Truth and Method*, if the word *method* designates the process of technical objectification, rather suggest the expression *Truth without Method*. Removed from the epistemic influence, the meaning of

the concept of truth also changes. *Truth without Method* no longer signifies *truth-correspondence* (*adaequatio rei et intellectus*) *without method*, but something entirely different. The path, which the subject crosses in its attempt to comprehend the hermeneutic phenomenon, is that of experience. Its ontological-speculative structure excludes the arbitrariness of interpretation. Let us think of the “hermeneutic circle” or the *double question* that guides comprehension (the question asked by the subject (*the motivation of understanding*) and the initial question that brought the object into existence). We defined, in the first part, the notion of *hermeneutic equilibrium* and used it to highlight the fact that comprehension is always oriented in accordance with the temporal instance of the present. We explained why it is necessary to establish well-defined boundaries for this first moment and clarified the possible interpretative errors that it can easily generate. By pursuing Gadamer’s arguments, we also demonstrated that it is vital for hermeneutics to adopt Hegel’s dialectics. We went, afterwards, from the act of hermeneutical comprehension to its actor—the subject (in the case of written texts, the interpreter) in order to clarify what the *subjectness of the hermeneutic subject* means and to prove that it cannot be explained without resorting to Hegel’s theory (even if Gadamer’s conception is deeply rooted in the phenomenology of Martin Heidegger). The double concept of truth, reached in the last part of this chapter, came to elucidate

the very possibility of disclosing the complex hermeneutic phenomenon.

The experience of truth designates the way in which a text, bearer of a special type of truth (just like the historical event or the aesthetic object), should be brought into the present and disclosed. *The truth of experience* indicates the final “event” of understanding. The difference between them can be illustrated by referring to the concept of *applicability*. In the case of the first, the goal is to discern and capitalise the prejudices, respectively the voluntary or involuntary expectancies of the subject, and give the phenomenon a meaning. The second implies genuine *participation*. In order to avoid the error of spurious infinity, the interpreter must generate for the object the temporal horizon of the future, *i.e.* an opening space able to allow a broader experience of it. Both concepts of *truth* are possible because of the following elements: 1. the ontological character of language, which justifies the universal coverage of hermeneutics; 2. the *subjectness* of the subject, which it implies: 2.1. a special type temporality (*the fusion of horizons*); 2.2. intersubjectivity/spirituality (which makes possible the comprehension of tradition, through which the object is transmitted to us, but which leaves, at the same time, its mark on it, as well as on our interpretation); 2.3. the *subject–object* relationship.

The conclusion of the last section, (IV) *The Hegelian Model of the Social–Political Sciences*, can be summarised as follows: all these sciences have an undeniable

speculative side, even if many of their theorists claim to be anti-Hegelian.

To reconstruct this model, we borrowed and adapted Nicolai Hartmann's scheme of interconnected principles of the philosophy of history. Then, we endeavoured to clarify the Hegelian theory of the concept by analysing: 1. the notion of absolute knowledge; 2. the way in which the concept moves toward the Idea; 3. how, and from where, the *subject-object* relationship derives.

We proved that Hegel's concept of *freedom* has a comprehensive side. Consciousness becomes free only at the end of its paideic journey, after having acknowledged its own spirituality and all the experiences that it overcame (*Aufhebung*). The notion of *absolute knowledge* does not designate some sort of transcendent ability but this higher, nevertheless accessible, manner of grasping the complexity of becoming. For this reason, it must be placed in the centre of the speculative model. By possessing it, consciousness becomes able to understand the historical nature of the present and to project, based on it, its future actions. In fact, in the absence of individual free action, society remains frozen even if its conflicts are somehow perceived.

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