

DARBY REPLIES TO SHELL AND KROKER*

Tom Darby

"Do you understand Dionysus or Christ?" With these words Professor Kroker ends the discussion of my article, *Nililism, Politics and Technology*. But surely from what Professor Shell has said about the article there is little doubt as to who she thinks I understand. Shell thinks I speak as a Christian of the Voegelinian perspective. Kroker thinks that there is at least a half chance that I speak as an atheist nihilist. Although I appreciate their comments, I disagree with much they have to say and find these conclusions amusingly odd, especially when considered together. Before we look at them together, let's look at them separately.

While Professor Shell does not seem to take much issue with my overall interpretation, she does raise objections. I will speak to the objections and then return to her interpretation.

Shell says that I do not appreciate the benefits of individual satisfaction afforded by technology. The benefits of technology, at least on the level of individual satisfaction, I consider too obvious to state. I am not writing about technology as would a liberal who wishes to praise it nor as a luddite who would bury it. My level of discourse is elsewhere. It should be evident that individual satisfaction, because it is the end product of the dialectic of recognition, is presupposed in the system. After all, part of the system is the civil society. It is that part which sees to individual needs. Pertaining to the quote from the *Phenomenology* that she says I "quoted somewhat out of context," here too it should be understood that the individual is preserved, not swallowed up by the system. Hegel says that subject equals substance and I argue that we have this in the form of a homeostasis of desire and need.

The last objection is the most interesting and important. She claims that the position I am left with at the end of the article calls either for a leap of faith or an exercise of the will to power. A leap of faith to where? Into the arms of Christ, I presume. If I advocated such I would not have ended the article with the quote from *Zarathustra* but with the Nicene creed. But maybe I am advocating the human shaping of human nature through an exercise of the will to power. If this were the case, I would not have talked of human nature in terms of the *metaxy*. Why do I talk of this doctrine that places man half-way between the beast and the gods? I talk of it because this is what Hegel historicizes on the level of both epistemology and philosophical anthropology. It is Plato who discovered the *metaxy* not Voegelin. Perhaps her reply should be re-titled "Confessions of

*Editor's Note: See *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, Vol V, no. 3 (1981). T. Darby, *Nililism, Politics and Technology*; S. Shell, *The Confessions of Voegelin*; A. Kroker, *Life Against History*, pp. 57-98.

DARBY REPLIES

Plato." Hegel claims that this in-betweenness can be surpassed. This is what he means on page 71 of the Baillie translation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* when he talks about the new goal being not a love for wisdom but the possession of it. Perhaps we should call her reply "Confessions of Hegel." But yes, it is Voegelin who calls Hegel a sorcerer who has *attempted* to perform magic. I differ with Voegelin in this respect: Hegel is a man like the rest of us, who, in a curious way, does perform magic. Voegelin has not looked at the *man* Hegel, neither has he looked at what it means for men to perform magic, nor has he looked at the relationship of magic to technique. I do agree with Shell that to interpret human nature in terms of the *metaxy* requires faith. At least today, such an interpretation would. But if there is an acknowledgement here on my part, and after all, acknowledgement is what confession requires, then it has to do with the question of what happens to human nature when it is not thought of in these terms. What happens is somewhat like our jumping over man in the manner of Nietzsche's dwarf. I clearly state what I am acknowledging in the article: "a need to take seriously both technology and nihilism." In other words I am not talking of a need or even possibility of returning to recycled dead values, but of a beginning by addressing ourselves to these two concerns. Even in our post-modern age I am advocating philosophy as a possibility. But for a possibility is all that we can hope; again, as with Nietzsche's dwarf, after our leap there is no guarantee that we will again descend once more upon the tight-rope bisecting the abyss below us and the sky above us.

This leads to Professor Kroker's commentary. He begins by quoting Foucault's comments on Hyppolite's Hegel and claims that I, unlike the latter, did not make an experiment of Hegel and did not let Philosophy take the ultimate risk. By this I take him to mean that, despite what I have to say about Hegel's philosophy, I remain an adherent of the philosophy of the Concept; that Hegel, in effect, is standing there motionless when I am done. Let's look at the whole quote from the *Archaeology of Knowledge*.

For Hyppolite, the relationship with Hegel was the scene of an experiment, of a confrontation in which it was never certain that philosophy would come out on top. He never saw the Hegelian system as a reassuring universe, he saw it in the field in which philosophy took the ultimate risk.

From this stem, I believe, the alterations he worked, not within Hegelian philosophy, but upon it, and upon philosophy as Hegel conceived it; from this also, a complete inversion of themes. Instead of concerning philosophy as a totality ultimately capable of dispersing and regrouping itself in the movement of the concept, Jean Hyppolite transformed it into an endless task, against the background of an endless horizon.
(p. 236)

TOM DARBY

On the whole I do not disagree with what Foucault claims for Hyppolite, but since the discussion is about what I was doing and not about what he was doing, I suggest as a way of elucidating my own project we look at this in light of what Hyppolite was doing in relation to Kojève.

If I had to pick a study of Hegel that is faithful to the letter of the text of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, it would be Hyppolite's. If I had to pick one that is faithful to the spirit, yet goes beyond it, it would be Kojève's. Hyppolite stops short where Kojève goes on. In *Genesis and Structure*, Hyppolite leaves us with the query: "Is Feuerbach's interpretation—which absorbs God into man instead of absorbing man into God—the consequences of Hegel's philosophy of religion? (p. 541) The subject of Hegel's mysticism Hyppolite will take only so far. At best he is ambiguous. (p. 594) As is well known, Kojève does not exhibit this kind of reserve. There is no ambiguity in Kojève. While philosophy for Hyppolite took "the ultimate risk," Kojève took a greater risk and took a risk that did not turn out well for philosophy. It is Kojève's Hegel who allows us to see perhaps more clearly the result of conceiving time as history and this is the concern of my article. But did I take the ultimate risk despite the possibility of a bad outcome for philosophy? Although the proof is in the examination of what I have written, I will again point the reader to my concluding quote from Nietzsche. The quote, has to do with the changing of human nature and the will to power and immediately follows my statements about the *metaxy*. I am saying that if this is the case, if the nature of humanness has been transformed, then we are left with will to power and not with philosophy. The outcome has not been so good for philosophy, but even in spite of this, I never deny the possibility of it. In fact, as I have already said in conjunction with Shell's comments above, I acknowledge its possibility.

Now I will turn to a few small matters in Kroker's comments, matters that merely need clearing up, and then return to my final point which is connected with the above.

Professor Kroker says that my interpretation leads toward androgyny. Although I am not exactly sure what he means by this, but since I do not talk about it here but somewhere else, I can only assume he refers to what I have said elsewhere. I do talk specifically about androgyny but I do so in my forthcoming book, *The Feast: Meditations of Politics and Time*. There I argue that androgyny is but one of a cluster of symbols that resolve the tension of various dialectical polarities, one being sex. On a mundane level this has to do with a variation of the master/slave dialectic and on another level with the presence of two dialectics in Hegel, one anthropocentric, the other theocentric.

Kroker argues that there are two major omissions: that I should have talked about work and that I should have talked more about nihilism. Responding to the first, I would say that the dialectic from which work is an exudate is the dialectic of desire. From this we not only get the dialectic of work but the dialectic of recognition. Marxists tend to forget this. I would argue that by talking about desire we thereby presuppose the dialectic of work and recognition and, although I could have gone to Marx to illustrate it, we do not need him to explain it.

DARBY REPLIES

Regarding his second point, I would say that a discussion of nihilism beyond what is to be found in section III of the article, is to go beyond Hegel and therefore beyond the subject matter. The title of the paper originally included the sub-title: "An Excursus into our Hegelian Legacy." A further investigation of nihilism is now being undertaken in my current project, *The Feast: Meditations on Nihilism and Technology*. Here a more 'mature' nihilism tumbles out of our previous subject matter, but cannot be discussed further in this context. We have to go beyond Hegel to Nietzsche for that.

The phrase the "non-time between the crucifixion and resurrection" is mine, not Kojève's. It was inspired by some things Hegel had to say in *Die System der Sittlichkeit*.

Now I will conclude with a brief response to the upshot of their commentaries taken together. If we take "understanding" in the broadest sense to mean "to stand under or among," then I would say that I, together with all of us, understand both Christ and Dionysus. They are the shadows that loom both behind and before us, the former is our past and latter is our future. Thus perhaps it is best in our "New World" to say that "understanding," as it pertains here, is to stand between them. It is from the position of this tension that we must interpret our world. It is a tension wrought of remembering the words in *Hebrews* that "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" while hearing clearly Hegel's and Nietzsche's word that God has died. It is to stand between the Passion and the willing will of the Dynamo.

Department of Political Science
Carleton University
