

LIFE AGAINST HISTORY

Arthur Kroker

In his remarkable *oeuvre*, "The Discourse on Language", Michel Foucault has this to say of Hyppolite's decentering of the Hegelian legacy:

But truly to escape Hegel involves an exact appreciation of the price we have to pay to detach ourselves from him. It assumes we are aware of the extent to which Hegel, insidiously perhaps, is close to us; it implies a knowledge of that which permits us to think against Hegel, of that which remains Hegelian. We have to determine the extent to which our anti-Hegelianism is possibly one of his tricks directed against us, at the end of which he stands motionless, waiting for us.¹

I wish that I could say truly of Professor Darby's rendering of Kojève's Hegel what Foucault has said of Hyppolite's Hegel — that he took the trouble to make of the Hegelian system an experiment "... in which philosophy took the ultimate risk".² But, after Kojève, and after Darby's encounter with Kojève, the Hegelian discourse on History, on the incarceration of life itself within the abstract monism of Consciousness, remains intact. Professor Darby encounters the Hegelian legacy, only to confirm that nihilism itself is an unhappy retreat into the discursive powers of monolithic history. Marx is forgotten, and Nietzsche is transformed into Hegel's truth-sayer. Such, at least, will be the substance of the following remarks.

I

Not unmindful of the eloquent disputation between Professors Strauss and Kojève concerning the nature of classical virtue and tyranny, "Kojève's Hegel" is the author of a *Phenomenology of Spirit* which inscribes in History the struggle between the passion for recognition and moral virtue. In the vernacular of Professor Grant, Kojève's Hegel is the architect of the "universal and homogenous state", the memory in advance of Heidegger's dirge over the "completion of philosophy" in the universe of techné.³

This classical contestation of positions, the quarrel between ancient and modern visions of philosophy, is made all the more enigmatic by Professor Darby's rendering of the significance of the New World. The "evening-land"

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of the post-historical is, in the eloquence of Kojève's phrase, the "non-time" between the crucifixion and the resurrection, between the "slaughter-bench" of Good Friday and the new morning of Easter Sunday. Professor Darby's analytic on the post-historical is, at first, not simply an exegesis of Kojève's Hegel, but a reaching back beyond Kojève to the unresolved paradox of Kojève's predecessor — Alexander Koyré. In Darby's reading of Kojève's interpretation of Koyré's discourse on the *Phenomenology*, there is a recovery of the "time-eternity" problematic. Thus, we are confronted with an exegesis three times removed from the original text. The analysis represents a threefold mediation of the meaning of Hegel's *Philosophy of History*, of the nature of absolute knowledge, and of the siting in Hegel of the realized state. A mediated philosophical discourse (a discourse which might also have involved the writings of Hyppolite, Marx, Croce, Lukacs, the British Hegelians) is not invalid by reason of its mediation. But this discourse is, at first, relative to a prior screening of the Concept, the Idea, through a theory of archetypes, tending to androgyny, which results now, perhaps in sympathy with an unannounced linkage of Kojève and Jung, in a version of Zen Hegelianism.

This interpretation of the Hegelian legacy has the advantage of attempting a rereading, in mythic terms, of the Hegelian legacy. In Sartre's sense, Professor Darby seeks a totalization of the human predicament, but one which fixates on the classic tensions of body-psyche, calculation-contemplation and imagination-corporealization. All of this for the necessary task of recognizing the horizon of nihilism which fringes the "non-time" of the modern era. One deficiency, however, of this mythic declaration on the Hegelian legacy is that the manuscript avoids a specific interrogation of Hegel's political thought. The analysis is thus marked by three absences: (1) Hegel's own ambivalence as expressed in *The Philosophy of History* concerning the "end of history" thesis, and the sense in which the change of the historical artifact would reopen the deployment of rational necessity; (2) an analysis of the relations of the categories of lordship-bondage as already reified categories which acquire their historical and philosophical signification with respect to labour; and (3) a specific discussion of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: of the formation of juridical personality; the translation of *desire* into a natural, then a social world; the development of the state as an inscription of rational necessity; and the ultimate embourgeoisement of the individual ego, through property-interests, through labour.

Ultimately, this interpretation of the Hegelian legacy is incomplete to the extent that it abandons the political and epistemological contributions of Hegel. The Hegelian legacy is presented, instead, as simply philosophy of time. This is not, therefore, analysis of the problem of rational autonomy — the tension between Kantian rationalism and the dark side of Romanticism — nor is it a simple condemnation of Hegel as the exponent of the universal and

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homogenous state.⁴ It is, through Kojève, an analytic on the logos of history and on the *coincidentia oppositorum* between historical praxis and theory, between the ontic and the ontological.

Professor Darby organizes the first two sections of his argument — "Politics, Power and Wisdom", and "From Speculative Magic to Technology" — around a summary statement of Kojève's insights, presented in the *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, concerning the time-eternity problematic in the *Phenomenology*. In the third and concluding section of the analysis — "The New World Described" — Professor Darby begins to interrogate what is most original in Kojève's thought: the cosmic and, indeed, eschatological themes of nihilism and techné in the New World. It is, at this point, in Professor Darby's rendering of Nietzsche's pronouncements on "historical culture" that I would take exception with the analysis, and suggest that Nietzsche might be read more accurately as a "radical decentering" of "Hegel's theology made philosophy". I would argue that the categories of nihilism are, in fact, the categories of reason and rational necessity, that the fate of the post-historical is that madness now operates under the sign of the Concept. And, I would say after Nietzsche that the problematical feature of the "New World", of the fate of man in the age of the post-historical, is the dramatic struggle which now ensues between the *totality of History* and the indeterminacy of *Life*.

Nietzsche, a philosopher of Life, understood that the danger of the universal and homogeneous state was its absolutist inscription of the seamless and undifferentiated sign of History on the body, on desire, on knowledge. Historical consciousness arraigns differentiated desire. History incarcerates the body. The "immediate, abstract ego" is objectified as self-consciousness reflecting upon itself and then mobilized into the circularity of Wisdom, of the State. Before the tension of the body and psyche, of imagination formalized and the "calculative rationality" of the consuming body — before, that is, the epochal insights of de Sade on desiring and Adorno on aesthetics — there is a prior reification. Hegel announces the recovery of History, and in this announcement there is already present the incarceration of life, of sensuality. Is not the metastasis of Napoleon-Hegel the death-note of philosophy. And is not the unwinding into the future of the dialectical opposition which constitutes the Hegelian legacy — between Being and Time, between the finite and Infinite — a *forced* tension.² This is a tension which, while experienced as the inscription of History on Life, now operates in forgetfulness of life. I would argue that Professor Darby has obscured Nietzsche's *decentering* of Hegel, although he has eloquently posed, in Heidegger's terms the agony of the twilight of the in-between of World and Earth. In "The Use and Abuse of History", Nietzsche is not Hegel's adjunct, but his critic. His injunction in *Ecce Homo* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is not, in forgetfulness, to speak to the *Zerrissenheit*, the alienation, of the

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modern, by returning us to the sign of the Concept; rather, his injunction would be — if Nietzsche is taken seriously in his notation that Hegel “ought to have said that everything after him was merely to be regarded as the musical code of the great historical rondo” — that we might better substitute for the critique of the history of the concept, the criticism of the Concept of History.

II

Professor Darby argues on behalf of Kojève that his is a discourse important not only for its exegesis of Hegel and for its instruction of Sartre, Lacan and Merleau-Ponty, but also as a distinctive contribution to a philosophical understanding of politics and technology.

Certainly, Kojève’s perspective on power, wisdom, dialectical opposition and the problem of time is not unorthodox. With and beyond Koyré, Kojève describes the essence of the *Phenomenology* to be a philosophy of time, and he notes that a philosophy of time, of history, is not possible unless time were to be ended. The philosophy of history is immanent in the moment of rational necessity. The revelation of the truth of the Concept will only occur with the coming of the dusk, with the movement in Hegel’s *The Philosophy of History* “of the Sun from the One of the East to the Many of the West”. As Professor Darby notes, the dialectic is resolved, in Kojève’s terms, with the appearance of the dyad — Napoleon-Hegel — with, that is, the tense reconciliation of power and wisdom, praxis and theory, State and System. From the imagery of Napoleon-Hegel there thus emerges a philosophy of history conceived as a totality, without irruption, without fissure, without differentiation.

However, in Professor Darby’s summation of Kojève’s interpretation of History as time, there is a sustained silence on two problems: (1) the problem of Universal Recognition as giving rise to the will to technology; and (2) the flattening of the horizon of ontology and history under the “weight” of an interpretation of the philosophy of history which does not speak to the problem of rational autonomy or to the problem of power in Hegel’s thought.

Additionally, there is one significant difference between Kojève and Darby. Kojève in his protocol on the Master-Slave relationship, in his summation, with Hegel, of History beginning with the flight from Universal Recognition, did not abandon Hegel’s insight that History is not only time, but that Work is time. Work is *Bildung* in the “double sense” of transforming the world and in transforming man.⁶ For Kojève, it is Work, this overcoming of the “existential impasse” of Mastery, which allows the Slave to overcome the initial advantage of the Master. While the Master was determined “to risk his life for a non-vital, non-biological need”, the Slave realizes his freedom with the recognition of “Work as Time”. Unlike Kojève, Professor Darby’s “cybernetized” Hegelianism abandons the transformational category of work; his analysis

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suppresses Kojève's understanding of the critique of labour. And in doing so Darby abandons the insight of both Hegel and Marx that "the enslavement of the bourgeois world, its central phenomenon, is not the enslavement of the working man, of the poor bourgeois, by the rich bourgeois, but the enslavement of *both* by Capital".⁷ In absenting from his analytic the notion of work as time, the beginning really of capitalist anthropology, Professor Darby remains silent on the possibility that the "dyad, formed by Napoleon and Hegel — this "Perfect Man", this completion of Christian theology in Enlightenment — may be overcome in actual history by the "third person" of Marx. The "non-time" of the post-historical may, indeed, be the "bourgeois world in which there are no Masters". Kojève ends the *Introduction* by noting:

To say that there is Totality, or Mediation, or dialectical Overcoming, is to say that in addition to given-Being, there is also *creative* Action which ends in a *Product*.⁸

If the Hegelian dialectic is, as Kojève argues, "not a method of research or of philosophical exposition, but the adequate description of the structure of *Being*",⁹ then the more adequate rereading of the discourse of Work as time, the discourse of the rise of the commodity form, is that of Marx. Is it not the logico-ontology of the "Hegelian-Marxist end of history" which haunts a purely eschatological reading on the non-time of the post-historical?

Finally, Professor Darby is most eloquent in his utterances on the meaning of the post-historical. However, his reflections, however ironic, on Kojève's archetypes of "reanimalization" — the eternal present of Sino-American existence and the nihilism of a "Japanized" form of life — begin a project which is not completed in the paper: the thematisation of nihilism, politics and technology. The devolution represented by Kojève's archetypes, this "playing backwards" of the Master-Slave dialectic, should really begin an exploration of nihilism in twentieth-century experience. Kojève's archetypes — pure nobility and baseness, the tensions of pure psyche expressed in reanimalization and "Japanized nihilism" — are for Kojève, as for Darby, the planetary dialectic. But Darby avoids an encounter with the nihilistic experience by withdrawing to the privileged position of the Concept. The drama of history — the actual deployment of politics and technology — is placed for security under the sign of the Concept; under, that is, the announcement that the end of history appears now in the form of the sovereignty of "absolute knowledge". Ultimately, Professor Darby might well have begun his interpretation of Kojève with an explanation of the active nihilist. And he might have initiated a more substantial inquiry into the nature of nihilism by asking: What is the relation of the continuous discourse of

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History to the formation of *Zerrissenheit*, to life itself? And, is the reduction of the human to the tension of *metaxy* — to the still-life of the in-between — representative of a mode of thought which forgets Nietzsche's injunction against the death of god? After Nietzsche, we are not abandoned to an empty descent of the infinite and the ascent of the finite. We are confronted, instead, with an elemental choice between barbarism and humanism. In Nietzsche's utterance, the sages of a philosophy of the Concept, of History in its monumental sense as totality, are also the theologians of the new age. They are the auditors of a nihilism without hope, and without saving grace. And so, I conclude with Nietzsche's cry:

Do you understand
Dionysus or Christ?

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Notes

1. Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, Harper and Row, New York, 1976, p. 235.
 2. *Ibid.*, p. 236.
 3. George Grant, *Technology and Empire*,
 4. Charles Taylor, *Hegel*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1975, p. 541.
 5. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thoughts Out of Season*, New York, Russell & Russell, Inc., 1964, p. 71.
 6. Alexander Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, (edited by Allan Bloom), Basic Books, New York, 1969, p. 52.
 7. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
 8. *Op. Cit.*, p. 259.
 9. *Op. Cit.*, p. 259.
 10. Friedrich Nietzsche,
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