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HEGEL AND POSTMODERNISM: A REENGAGEMENT¹

ABSTRACT

This paper introduces and addresses fresh perspectives in the engagement between Hegel and his postmodern critics and detractors. The first part of the paper examines some of the central discussions on postmodernity, specifically in the works of Lyotard and Habermas, and how they, in different ways, reengage Hegel. The second part focuses on Vattimo's deployment of the concept of the postmodern *credo* as a way of returning to Hegel's own interrogation of modern belief. The paper shows that the common thread linking the modernity of Hegel with the "postmodern moment" remains belief, and in particular, belief in belief itself. The final part provides a brief introduction to all the contributions in this issue.

KEYWORDS

Hegel, Lyotard, Habermas, Vattimo, belief, history, faith, modern, postmodern.

(Post)Modernity as an Incomplete Project

Modernity, in the eyes of Jürgen Habermas, is an unfinished project, as one of his famous text states in its very title.² The expression "unfinished project" immediately reveals its Kantian flavour and leads us to Kant's notion of the regulative idea and to the ideal of a permanent moral emancipation of the humankind. Similarly to Kant's ideal of moral progress, Habermas' modernity is an ongoing process guided by the regulative idea of rationality. In other terms, according to Habermas, human being has never stopped emerging from the state of their self-incurred immaturity. If the emancipation is an unfinished project, then, consequently, the state of immaturity is always present, constant and, in some sense, completed.

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2 Habermas 1997. See also: Habermas 1985.



On the other hand, by declaring modernity an unfinished project, Habermas intends to counteract all those denials of the fundamental postulates of modernity that he pinpoints in postmodernity. From the point of view of an open regulative ideal of modernity, every stance that declares itself postmodern appears as anti-modern or pre-modern. Habermas clearly associates the postmodern attitude with neo-conservative politics: “Postmodernity decisively presents itself as a form of Antimodernity”, writes Habermas, quoting an article from the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, and adds that postmodernism is just a diagnosis of our times (Habermas 1997: 38), that is, a sign of the crisis of the project of modernity which, unable to cope with its limits, starts to negate its own foundations – rationality, subjectivity, progress, etc. It seems that there is nothing more modern than finding modernity exactly in the act of its self-negation. However, Habermas’ vision is premised on two unspoken ideas: unidirectional linearity of historical time and a partial historization of modernity. The first indicates a homogeneous time of modernity measured by its universal axiomatic framework, the object of critique in Walter Benjamin’s theses on the concept of history; the second implies a historization of the very process of modernity only with reference to what has preceded it, to what is constructed as an ancient pre-modern period. In other words, modernity serves to historicize its past but is not able to historicize itself in terms of its future.³ The future of modernity is then seen only in the act of resistance against the “forces of the past” that struggle to undermine it. The temporality of modernity is a sort of defensive present that wants to keep modernity in its unfinished, unrealized state, again similarly to the Kantian moral subject. Habermas therefore fixates the epoch of modernity in a sort of a-historical state which, in political terms, means maintaining the current political power relations. His argument against postmodernity points that it exists and finds its *raison d’être* only as a delegitimizing force that aims at disavowing the achievements of the Enlightenment. Nonetheless, this logic applies equally to Habermas’ project of refurbishing modernity through communicative rationality and the institution of consensus: it legitimizes itself also through a delegitimization of its postmodern critique. An “open project” needs its “enemies”. By insisting on the incompleteness of modernity, as a sort of Kantian regulative idea, Habermas misses seeing that the problem does not reside in the faulty realization of this ideal but in the very modality of its setting. In sum, Habermas proposes to re-launch the constitutive nexus of modernity (rationality – emancipation – universality) against the postmodern declaration of its end as exhaustion of the emancipatory charge of the modern. Only in this way can one believe and hope to keep alive the incomplete project of modernity.

3 Habermas defines modernity precisely via the criterion of the dimension of the future: unlike ancient times, modernity is a new world open to the future (Habermas 1985: 15). But then he claims that the living presence of modernity is validated through a permanent repetition and reconfirmation of the rupture with the past. Modernity seemed truly opened to the future only once and in the past.

For Lyotard, conversely, modernity cannot be kept alive anymore. Contemporary societies revealed the crisis of its legitimation (what he calls “grand narrative”). All grand narratives evaporated and dissipated into heterogeneous discourses and a plurality of irreducible language games that cannot be translated into one universal metalanguage. For the French postmodernist, simply saying, modernity collapsed and we have to take this failure seriously, that is, it has to be raised as the flag of new times: “Let us wage a war on totality; let us be witnesses to the unrepresentable; let us activate the differences and save the honor of the name” (Lyotard 1984: 82). In philosophical terms, the failure of modernity would mean a failure of the Hegelian system of absolute spirit, of reason in world history, as well as of Marx’s prospect of universal revolutionary emancipation.⁴ Wittgenstein’s model of language games, therefore, provides Lyotard a conceptual tool to understand the condition of fragmented rationality and perished universality, where every discourse, every language game, legitimizes itself according to an inner and flexible dynamic. Paralogy – another Lyotard’s concept that expresses the need for new legitimation⁵ – aims at providing a certain coordination of differences and particularities, a local coordination deprived of systemic and universal regulation. The questions here can be the following: is a local determinism of paralogy a satisfactory framework for the flourishing of differences? Is the “paralogic” coordination just a regime of knowledge that serves to not obstruct the flow of exchange between “linguistic games” within the still dominant “narrative” – the one dictated by capital?

Lyotard thinks, and this is important to stress, that postmodernity is not a new epoch that simply comes after modernity. It is rather the rupture of the logic of modernity that occurs within modernity itself and is somehow constitutive of it. It is curious to recall Lyotard’s claim that inverts the linear order of postmodernity and modernity and calls our attention to the paradoxical character of the prefix *post*: “A work can become modern only if it is first postmodern. Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state and this state is constant” (ibid.: 79). A few lines after, Lyotard suggests a specific temporal character of the postmodern: “*Postmodern* would have to be understood according to the paradox of the future (*post*) anterior (*modo*)” (ibid.: 81). Future anterior or the future perfect grammatically expresses those actions that will happen as if they were already finished or even those hypothetical actions that could have happened in the past but without certainty. In other words, the postmodern is a hypothetical realization of modernity, an uncertain event; it is both an already-happened future and the past that is not over. But does it mean nonetheless that the postmodern for Lyotard would be a sort of incomplete

4 In Lyotard’s text published in May 1985 in “Critique” (See: Vattimo 1986: 20–21), he explicitly states that the metanarrative of the Hegelian rationality of the real is refuted by Auschwitz, the metanarrative of communist revolution by Stalin and the gulag, the metanarrative of free-market economy by constant crisis of capitalism and the metanarrative of democracy by May 68. It is not necessary to comment, but just to question, why didn’t Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 or the Vietnam war refute any metanarrative?

5 See: Lyotard 1984: 60–66.

condition/project as well? If the postmodern is not the end of the modern but its nascent state which is “constant” does it mean that every postmodern act at the same time abolishes and reconfirms modernity? In other words, is postmodernity an unfinished act of doing away with modernity within modernity?

Lyotard and Habermas converge on saying that postmodernity is the sign of the fundamental crisis inscribed in modernity itself.⁶ The difference is, however, that Lyotard accepts the sign of crisis as “a condition” of an almost inevitable process that must be accepted as, in a certain sense, emancipatory, while Habermas sees the postmodern as a sign of a risk or danger for the very idea of modern emancipation that must be preserved. For Lyotard, the postmodern is a chance to finally do away with the violence of modern subjectivity. For Habermas, instead, the postmodern is a regression due to a stagnation into which this modern subjectivity has fallen. For Lyotard, the Enlightenment has to be deconstructed; for Habermas, it must be reconstructed, that is, to enlighten the Enlightenment (Habermas 1985: 353). But is there another level of convergence between these two authors? Is not a certain proximity guaranteed by the substitution of the paradigm of production with the paradigm of communication (Habermas) and with the paradigm of pragmatics of knowledge (Lyotard)?

While faith is without content and cannot remain in this emptiness, or while it goes beyond the finite, which is the sole content, and finds only emptiness, it is a *pure longing* (*ein reines Sehnen*). Its truth is an empty *other-worldly beyond* for which there is no longer any adequate content to be found since everything now stands in a different relation. – With that, faith has in fact become the same as the Enlightenment, namely, the consciousness of the relation between the finite existing in itself and a predicate-less, unknown and unknowable absolute. The only difference is *that the Enlightenment is satisfied Enlightenment*, whereas *faith is the unsatisfied Enlightenment* (Hegel 2018: 333).

This is how Hegel resolves the dialectical tension between faith (*Glauben*) and Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*) in the famous passage of his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Balibar calls this dialectic “the crux of Modernity” (Balibar 2020: 24). Two opposing figures of consciousness – faith and Enlightenment – find themselves reduced to the same falsity, because they share the same “rationalistic” presuppositions. In Hegelian terms, each finds its truth in its own opposite, since each figure needs the other for its internal development, and, in such a way, both prepare the terrain for their overcoming. Can we recognize in Hegel’s words a possible resolution of the contradiction between Lyotard’s postmodern condition and Habermas’ unfinished modernity? Is not Habermas the truth of Lyotard and *vice versa*?

It would be too easy and immediate to identify Habermas’ position with Enlightenment and Lyotard’s with faith in this analogy. However, what makes

6 On the polemics between Lyotard and Habermas, see: Huysen 1984; Rorty 1984; Frank 1988; Wellmer 1985.

Lyotard's position actually closer to Enlightenment, as represented by Hegel, is the state of satisfaction: the postmodern functions as an ultimate realization of this satisfaction of Enlightenment with itself, fulfilled however in its self-negation, in the condition of its consummation. It is a pleasure of free play between linguistic games spiked perhaps with a frustrating and painful feeling of inadequacy. On the other hand, Habermas' stance, like Hegelian faith, figures as an unsatisfied Enlightenment, locked in the ideal of its absolute completion and expressed as pure nostalgia toward something that has never been realized. In this sense, it is not surprising that for both Habermas and Lyotard, Kant remains an explicit point of reference: for the former in the ideal of permanent progress, for the latter in the experience of the sublime as the allusion to the unrepresentable. But does this mean that the only theoretically and politically legitimate employment of Hegel today, after postmodernity, must go through Lyotard and postmodern theory, rather than through Habermas' communicative normativity?

Postmodernity as Historical Event

For Gianni Vattimo, like for Lyotard, modernity has failed. However, Vattimo explicitly translates this condition of failure into a discourse on the end of modernity, which, in his view, is nothing but the completion of the end of metaphysics, as announced by Nietzsche and articulated by Heidegger. The important distinctive feature of Vattimo's theory of postmodernity is its focus on the concept of history. In his programmatic book *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Post-modern Culture*⁷, which represents one of the first original philosophical responses to Lyotard's "postmodern challenge" in the Italian panorama, Vattimo builds upon Gehlen's concept of "posthistoire" and claims that the end of modernity is possible only as the end of metaphysics, which in turn is realized as the end of history, or better, as the experience of such an end.⁸ Postmodernity, therefore, cannot be an epochal *novum*, a new stage in comparison with modernity. On the contrary, the postmodern is thought of as the dissolution of the identity between being and the *novum*. In this way, the modern conception of history as a progressive production of the new loses its ontological grounding. Vattimo is aware of the significant conceptual problem that the declaration of the end of history embraces: what is the position of this declaration in historical terms? It cannot be external to the very course of history and therefore must belong to a certain historical horizon. But then how is it possible to declare the end of history from within history itself?

Rather than a descriptive declaration, the end of modernity and its historical teleology is the result of the very weakening of history, of its self-dissolution. In other words, the end of modernity is not a factual, objective truth

⁷ Vattimo 1985 (for an English translation, see: Vattimo 1991).

⁸ Vattimo speaks about dehistoricization of experience (1985: 18). On the topic of the end of history, see Vattimo 1986 and Vattimo 1987a.

with universal validity, but simply a historical judgment, i.e., an interpretation staged by historical events. The postmodern moment is an event in the history of being that cannot be a matter of subjective choice or a style of thinking. The postmodern is a consequence of the weakening of the Being, a sort of kenosis, a self-emptying of metaphysical categories. The first event that announces postmodernity would be the Death of God expressed in Nietzsche's philosophy. As Nietzsche claims, God is dead since He was killed by the believers themselves who could not stand the old truth; God had become unworthy of belief. In other words, history delegitimized God as the absolute ground of reality. The end of metaphysics is the very result of the history of metaphysics and culminates in the late modernity. The end of history thus has its own history.

The concept that helps Vattimo think through this process of weakening historical being is that of *Verwindung*, which he adopts from Heidegger. Modernity is not overcome or dialectically sublated, according to the concept of *Überwindung*, but rather subjected to *Verwindung*, which means getting over modernity, recovering from it, and coming to terms with it, incorporating modernity, but also twisting or distorting it.⁹ In other terms, the position of the postmodern remains within the history of modernity with an attitude of its radicalization. The Italian thinker of postmodernity is aware that the horizon of history remains the only pivot for the legitimization of postmodernity, which does not lie in absolute foundational principles with universal validity (such as truth), but rather in the multiplicity of different temporal and spatial contexts. In this way, the philosophy of history becomes an important part of the theory of postmodernity, and Vattimo will emphasize this point increasingly in his later works. In an interview from 2008¹⁰, as a sort of self-criticism, he asserts that discourse on the end of history would be another "metaphysical truth" and that the post-metaphysical vision of the end of history can only be one that breaks with the idea of a unitary, encompassing, and linear history of universal progress, but not with history as such. The end of modernity would be, in some sense, the re-opening of history which, according to Vattimo, has its precise political contents (for example, anti-colonial struggles). Precisely these historical events delegitimize the Western ideology of progress. Unlike Lyotard, Vattimo tries to give social and political substance to the formal discourse on the delegitimization of modernity. In that regard, he often quotes Benjamin and his idea that unitary linear history is nothing but the victorious ideology of dominant classes. What Vattimo was less apt to see is that the fragmentation of histories and their discursive localization can also serve as a weapon for dominant ideologies.

What is at work in Vattimo is not history determined by the teleology of progress or by any sort of theological providence, but history as an open process of interpretations, a radicalization of Gadamer's *Wirkungsgeschichte*. Already

9 For a better grip on the term, see: Vattimo 1987b and Chiurazzi 1999.

10 Ida Dominijanni, "Il pensiero dei deboli. Intervista al filosofo torinese in occasione delle Opere Complete." *Manifesto*, 12/01/2008.

here we can see some analogies with Hegel, which explains why Vattimo's intellectual itinerary was constantly in dialogue with the Hegelian position, with moments of lesser and greater disagreements.¹¹ However, not dissimilar to the flight of the owl of Minerva, postmodern theory takes its flight after history itself has delegitimized the foundationalist principles of modernity, after modernity has weakened the metaphysical identity of being and history. It would be too ambitious to reconstruct here all the complexity of Vattimo's relationship to Hegel, but it seems that Vattimo's position boils down to that of his *maestro*, Hans-Georg Gadamer, in his hermeneutical partial reappropriation of Hegel: phenomenology of spirit but without the absolute. It might not be too exaggerated to say that Vattimo's "absolute knowledge" is the very consciousness of the historical genesis of the postmodern moment, understood as the process of weakening.

It is true that Vattimo's theory can be seen as a historico-ontological response to Lyotard's formal epistemology of the postmodern and its system of knowledge. However, the formality seems an inevitable consequence of Vattimo's position as well. What kind of formality is at issue here? An answer can be found in late Vattimo's notion of "credere di credere" or "believe to believe". In trying to construct a certain post-metaphysical Christianity, Vattimo concludes that the only legitimate Christian *credo* is one that can be certain about the very act of believing ("I believe to believe") because it remains defiant toward any attempt to provide objective grounds to faith and at the same time uncertain concerning its effects in terms of salvation. By being wary of all metaphysical theological foundations of religion, as well as of the authoritarian institutionalization of the Church, Vattimo counteracts the dogmatism of those who believe in God but do not believe in their belief. "I believe to believe" makes sense only as a personal double performative act expressed in the first-person singular. It is an empty, formal act of weakened belief that practices nothing but hope combined with an attitude toward Pascal's wager. Therefore, the contents of such an act of "weak belief" can be acquired only in the intersubjective praxis through an ethic of dialogue, cooperation, and interpretation. Vattimo's *credo* could be summed up as saying, "Thank God I am an atheist", but it can be reformulated as following: "Thanks to metaphysics I am a postmodernist".

Hegel's Modernity and Belief

The question of belief remains central to the distinction between the modern and the postmodern, as much as it remains one of the guiding threads of Hegel's philosophy in general. Lyotard's definition of postmodernity rests on this

¹¹ Vattimo deals with Hegel already in an early piece, long before his postmodern orientation, where he attempts to employ Bloch to propose a dialogue with the German philosopher and give a non-metaphysical reading of his system, see: Vattimo 1970. Hegel is also an interlocutor in discussions in his later works as well, see: Vattimo 2014.

same concept. He defines postmodernity as “incredulity toward metanarratives” (Lyotard 1984: xxiv). But this definition encompasses, in his view, modernity itself because the latter cannot exist “without a shattering of belief” (ibid.: 77). Incredulity persists throughout both conditions, because, as noted above, the postmodern is “undoubtedly a part of the modern” (ibid.: 79). While the modern remains caught up in nostalgia for the sublime and attempts to provide a proper form to point to the unrepresentable as a “missing content” (ibid.: 81), the postmodern dispenses with nostalgia (ibid.: 41), positing formlessness as the proper form for the unrepresentable.

The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable... (ibid.: 81)

In this perspective, Hegel appears as the paradigmatic modern thinker and could even, as Jameson claims, anachronistically be called “an ideologist of the modern” (2010: 2). This perspective implies that Hegel was confronted with the “postmodern” moment, which belongs to modernity itself. The difference is that for Hegel, the incredulity that characterizes the postmodern condition remained limited to a particular sphere of life — civil society — where incompatible truths were subject to mutual disbelief and could, therefore, be discarded not as truths in the full philosophical sense, but as “mere opinion” (Hegel 1991: 132). At the level of truth as opinion, the social bond results in nothing more than a “*crowd*” or “*aggregate*” (ibid.: 342). The mechanisms that would undermine the “grand” narratives, just as they would demolish any sublimity and grandeur, are already in place within Hegel’s description of civil society. The philosopher’s “ideological” role, following Jameson’s characterization, resides in his attempt to place limitations on this disorganizing effect of the social sphere. Civil society, in Hegel’s eyes, must remain presentable in the form of a political whole — the state — which in turn is embedded in the narrative of world-historical progress. In other words, Hegel’s modernity still relies on credulity, or rather, on the idea that the task of politics, and by extension of philosophy itself, is to raise the community above what he saw as the bonds of cynical and atomized relations of “means” and “ends” (ibid.: 220).

On the other hand, the postmodern condition appears as incapable of fashioning a comprehensive doctrine that can transcend the level of what Hegel termed particular relations. Consequently, these relations appear to possess no real hold over the social order, which now functions, as Deleuze and Guattari put it, without the need for belief (2000: 375). Belief in a “grand narrative” is superfluous in such a condition and cannot appear as a collective undertaking. Hegel, however, was concerned only with the anticipation of such a condition¹² and the predicament that the disorganizing forces of civil society would expand beyond the confines of the Westphalian state. To him, this fear manifested in

12 On this anticipatory attitude in Hegel’s philosophy of right, see: Hristov 2022: 252–254.

the image of the “crowd” – a collection of individuals held together by contractual relations alone. But according to Lyotard, this fear was predicated on a “paranoid” image of an organic society, since the “breaking up of the grand Narratives leads to what some authors analyze in terms of the dissolution of the social bond and the disintegration of social aggregates into a mass of individual atoms thrown into the absurdity of Brownian motion” (1984: 15). He adds that “nothing of the kind is happening; this point of view, it seems to me, is haunted by the paradisaic representation of a lost ‘organic’ society” (ibid.).

However, this “total” and “organic” image of society, for Hegel, still functions as a condition of a higher certainty [*Gewissheit*], since a disposition of trust must be related to the political whole. “The political *disposition*, i.e. *patriotism* in general, is certainty based on *truth* (whereas merely subjective certainty does not originate in *truth*, but is only opinion)” (Hegel 1991: 288). It is obvious, then, that any certainty which could transcend the mere sphere of “only opinion” must be renounced as an object of modern “nostalgia”. The postmodern, instead, “must be characterized as a situation in which the survival, the residue, the holdover, the archaic, has finally been swept away without a trace” (Jameson 1992: 309), giving way to a thoroughly “cynical reason” (Jameson 2010: 4). Hegel would then represent one of the last attempts to attain certainty at the intersection of community and belief.

But an understanding that presents modernity as the last “condition” of belief, following Lyotard’s diagnosis, oversimplifies the question. Jameson found his inspiration in the work of Deleuze and Guattari, who had no qualms about presenting capitalism as a whole — both in its “modern” and “postmodern” moments — as an “age of cynicism” (2000: 225). Although the “postmodern” moment appears to have come to terms with the loss of certainty, modernity, as Hegel also observed, was itself confronted with the problem of cynicism. Already in his *System of Ethical Life*, Hegel regarded the protagonist of civil society, the *bourgeois*, as a figure with propensity toward “hypocrisy and mutual hostility” (Harris, in Hegel 1979: 69). This is why he believed that the principle which should make this figure socially competent was “honesty” (Hegel 1979: 153). His *Philosophy of Right* would later present a more developed institutional arrangement where the *bourgeois* could express their cynical attitude, but only under the conditions of sublation [*Aufhebung*] into a comprehensive political whole. In retrospect, such an arrangement appears as an untenable compromise between the “nostalgia” for the whole and the seeds of postmodernity, which already reside within. But it was no coincidence that Hegel became the first thinker to theoretically delimit the modern state’s capitalist interiority. Just as modernity may appear “less cynical” due to its “nostalgic” outlook, the cynicism pervading that condition made modern thinkers “look back” to history. Hegel is among the many authors of his day who tried to comprehend his own time by marking a difference with past ages, particularly with antiquity. This could be the reason why, by comparing the modern political community to its ancient counterpart, he was able to discern the difference between what should belong to his conception of the state and what should remain contained

only by being first excised.¹³ What he expelled from the political state and re-integrated into it as a self-sufficient “whole” — the contractual relations of *bourgeois* — came to form the body of civil society.

The modern habit of “looking back” made many of Hegel’s contemporaries, such as Benjamin Constant, reflect on this habit itself. For instance, Constant remarked that while the ancients could possess “complete conviction about everything”, the moderns had almost no convictions, “save about the hypocrisy of convictions” (2003: 360). Despite the political divides between the two thinkers, this observation was not foreign to Hegel. By comparing two kinds of hypocrisies, he also wrote about a curious new form of disbelief characteristic of the moderns. Hegel argues that ancient hypocrisy corresponded to its concept to a higher degree, in other words, it conformed to what we understand under the term. The ancient hypocrite carried a “cloak of goodness” (1991: 183) behind which they could hide their malicious interests, but the modern hypocrite operates under a “subtler guise” (*ibid.*). Hegel argues that the moderns do not hide behind a facade anymore because everyone can see through it (*ibid.*). Modernity is marked by a change in the nature of deception, no longer able to rely on the childlike naiveté of the ancients. Modern thinking’s preoccupation with doubt, since its inception in Descartes’ meditations, has been driven by the idea of truth as certainty. This is why, as Constant claims, the modern human type — the *bourgeois* — remains always vigilant against “ulterior motives” (Constant 2003: 359), a disposition that gives way to the bonds of civil society. The Greeks were capable of believing their myths even when interrogating their “truth”, but modernity faces something more than the erosion of this ability. It must deal with an altogether distinct modality of belief, one that simultaneously transforms the nature of disbelief. This is why Hegel claims that the character of modern hypocrisy does not primarily reside in deceiving others; it can act as such deception only to the degree that it is first and foremost an exercise in self-deception. The modern hypocrite, instead of hiding their “true” interests behind a facade, tends to elevate their subjective opinion to the level of firm and indomitable belief. They take their own opinion as a measure of all certainty, thus turning their individual beliefs into a benchmark of universal conviction, “thoroughly persuaded of its truth” (Hegel 1991: 184).

This implies that objective goodness is merely something constructed by my conviction, sustained by me alone, and that I, as lord and master, can make it come and go [as I please]. As soon as I relate myself to something objective, it ceases to exist for me, and so I am poised above an immense void, conjuring up shapes and destroying them. (*ibid.*: 184)

He continues to argue how “this supremely subjective point of view can arise only in a highly cultivated age in which faith has lost its seriousness” (*ibid.*). Such an observation aligns with Nietzsche’s later finding that “hypocrisy belongs to an age of strong faith” (2005: 200), one not yet subdued by nihilism,

13 See, for example, Hegel 1991: 222–223.

while modern hypocrisy is merely “imitated” (ibid.) in an act of self-imposed blindness. This blindness, to return to Hegel’s terms, manifests when subjective opinion seeks to occupy the position of universality without mediation. Another name for this phenomenon is fanaticism, which aspires “to find the whole in every particular, and could accomplish this only by destroying the particular, for fanaticism is simply the refusal to admit particular differences” (1991: 304). An example of this hypocrisy, in Hegel’s eyes, took the form of belief paraded during the Jacobin phase of the French Revolution. Along with Constant, Hegel regarded this event with disdain, as a self-deceptive attempt to recover ancient principles as a supplemental ground for modern social bonds. However, the event also signalled modernity with all the self-doubts about its own ability to believe, something evident in the fanatical urge to “imitate” (Constant 2003: 366) a previous age, more adept at believing, foregoing centuries of “mediation” and “development”.

Following from this, it would be more correct to name modernity as a condition in which, as Vattimo has put it, one still believes in belief, and based on this belief, seeks to recover a more comprehensive ability to believe. Modern fanaticism appears then only as an extreme symptom of a much more pervasive “condition”. Does this mean that Lyotard is too quick to associate Hegel’s project of “totalization” with the idea of “real unity”, and accuse this “illusion” (1984: 81) for the political terrors of modernity? Hegel himself already recognized this “essence” of terror, and the destructive dangers which rest in the unmediated attempt to recapture certainty. This undertaking is from the outset both politically and philosophically bankrupt, which is why “the whole of Hegel’s philosophical production is an elaborate refutation of all possible concepts of immediacy” (Jameson 2010: 13). Any type of certainty that would be taken for granted in modernity, is in some shape or another, an “illusion” imposed in an act of self-deception.

However, does this mean that Hegel’s project presents us with a higher order illusion, which rests on the idea that mediation can reconstitute certainty? He still looked for continuity with the preceding ages, but not to perform a direct imitation, but to mark its difference by claiming a new kind of certainty, to be constituted by movement of doubt itself. The loss of certainty is not an event to be lamented for Hegel, because, as Jameson shows by commenting on the famous chapter of “sense-certainty” from *Phenomenology of Spirit*, “the breakdown of the relationship between words and things is for Hegel a happy fall insofar as it redirects philosophical thought toward new forms of the universals themselves” (1992: 139). Premodern certainties, despite any nostalgia attached to them, had to be lost due to their internal inadequacy and their immediate nature. They were simple and given certainties, inherited and reproduced through the channels of tradition, with varying degrees of self-reflection, but incomplete when considering the criterion of reflection itself. They could not survive the waves of “repeated interrogation” (Muldoon 2014: 105) unleashed with the inception of modernity, which infected every “shape of spirit”, from religion to art and philosophy. Despite this, certainty remains the goal for

Hegel, with its organic form intended to provide solutions for quintessential issues such as alienation and loss of authenticity. In seeking to tame doubt, so that it would cease to act as an external threat to truth which can be believed, Hegel is very much modern. Doubt should become the engine through which difference affirms itself. In other words, as Frederick Weiss argues, doubt becomes the work of the negative:

Doubt challenges the claim on the part of any assertion to be the whole truth; it brings to bear upon that assertion its own “negativity” or limitedness, the recognition of which alone allows that truth to maintain its limited status as a positive function of a larger whole (Weiss 1972: 88).

Certainty gains its “modern” legitimacy in the interaction of two elements: difference, which is internal to doubt, on one hand, and truth, which must take on the form of a “whole” truth on the other. The experience of the whole necessitates a labour of doubt, which is why even the destructive mechanisms of civil society gain a positive and constitutive sense. However, the task of modernity resides in the attempt to overcome the condition of civil society, and regardless of the method itself, the realities of hypocrisy, cynicism, and disbelief still weigh heavily on the “modern subject”.

Reengaging Hegel after Modernity

If modernity, as Lyotard claims by quoting Horkheimer, was still haunted by the “paranoia’ of reason” (1984: 12), then the postmodern moment, still enveloped in modernity, reveals a different kind of paranoia. This paranoia is not based on the illusion that all phenomena can be grasped in their self-regulated and interconnected wholeness, but on the suspicion that our belief in having abandoned this illusion is itself an illusion, which in turn delivers us back to the whole. That this paranoia belongs to postmodernity itself, however, is evident to authors such as Deleuze. The image of capitalism from Deleuze and Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus* testifies to this, since the authors position this regime between the two poles of schizophrenia (the loss of meaning and an unprecedented capacity for self-differentiation on one hand) and paranoia (the resuscitation of premodern patterns of belief and representation on the other) (2000: 340). As Jason Read has pointed out, Marx and Engels’ famous image of capitalism, in which “all that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned” (2010: 16), is correct to the degree that it has to be supplemented with the observation that this process of continual melting and profanation is accompanied by resuscitation of archaic forms of certainties (Read 2008: 152), which are invoked in order to “supplement” capitalism’s “impoverished structure” (Jameson 1999: 20). If the postmodern moment belongs to the modern, as Lyotard argues, then it presupposes a return to the problems of modernity. The postmodern shares with the modern the same problem of belief, but with the added conundrum that this need itself comes to be regarded with suspicion.

The “positive task” (to use Deleuze and Guattari’s phrase, 2000: 322) of the postmodern condition, then, cannot be the recovery of certainty but the eradication of the need for certainty. In other words, we must overcome that hangover effect characteristic of modernity. The task is now explicitly identified as “destroying beliefs and representations” (ibid.: 314). True movement of difference and the most radical doubt, therefore, do not entail modernity’s propensity to “look back”, let alone to “go back” and preserve. Similarly to Vattimo, Deleuze argues that the Death of God left an “empty place” (2002: 175) unoccupied, which is why we should not look for the “empty tomb” anymore (Deleuze and Guattari 2000: 208) but “change” (Deleuze 2002: 175) the place itself. But the question remains whether this place can be changed at all, and if so, what role does Hegel play (and should he play any role at all) in this undertaking?

This issue of *Philosophy and Society* is dedicated to interrogating Hegel’s relationship with the problematic intersection between modernity and postmodernity. While the issue aims to place Hegel within the discourse on this relationship, it also seeks to engage Hegel with various authors of postmodernism, while also questioning the label itself, as many postmodern authors have done. We believe that the contentious status of the concepts of postmodernity and postmodernism is itself a crucial point of the debate. The issue contains nine original articles from various Hegel scholars from around the world.

In “Hegel and Postmodernity: Towards In-Finitude”, Bara Kolenc examines the complex relationship between Hegel, modernity, and postmodernity, arguing that postmodernity is a transitional phase leading to the decline of modernity rather than a succeeding epoch. The paper suggests that significant recent shifts have unsettled modernity’s frameworks, while Hegel’s philosophy still provides insights into transcending modernity through a revised human engagement with finitude and infinity, what Kolenc terms “In-Finitude” or “Un-Endlichkeit”.

In “Hegel and the End of the End of Grand Narratives”, Gary Browning argues that Lyotard heralds the end of grand narratives and the rise of postmodernity, while rejecting Hegel’s grand speculative theory for stifling difference and creativity. However, despite the decline of postmodernism and its critique of grand theories, Browning argues that grand narratives can be beneficial if critically engaged with, and Hegel’s philosophy remains relevant when viewed as open-ended rather than closed.

Manuel Tangorra, in the piece entitled “Peoples, Nations and Social Heterogeneity. From Hegel to Laclau and Back”, proposes that a dialogue between Hegel’s philosophy of history and Laclau’s post-foundationalism can help overcome the issue of persistent poles of identification. Tangorra achieves this by exploring Hegel’s distinction between “people” and “nation”, offering insights into the situational and affective roots of historical identities and broadening the understanding of political subjectivation beyond nationalist rhetoric.

In the paper “Hierarchies of the Dialectic: Hegel on Identity and Difference” Ionuț Văduva argues that a categorial reading of Hegel’s notions of identity and difference is essential to grasp their non-hierarchical relationship. Văduva shows that commentators misinterpret these concepts as merely instrumental. By focusing on Hegel’s *Science of Logic*, the paper shows the internal linkage and co-structural nature of the two concepts, preventing any hierarchy and emphasizing their movement and immanent relatedness.

In their co-authored paper “After Hegel: A Postmodern Genealogy of Historical Fiction”, Angelo Narváez León and Fernanda Medina Badilla explore the relationship between modernity and postmodernity by examining the evolution of criticism’s role as a philosophical narrative. The article discusses key moments in modern critical discourse, the influence of Kantian criticism on postmodern thought, and, from a Hegelian perspective, the relevance of universal history and its link to emancipatory narratives.

Iñigo Baca Bordons, in “The Empire Never Ended: Hegel, Postmodernism and Comedy”, shows that Hegel’s account of modernity aligns with Fredric Jameson’s definition of postmodernity as the cultural logic of globalized capitalism. By examining the interplay of Athens, Rome, and Christianity in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and the contrast between tragedy and comedy, the paper connects social, political, and economic structures with their representations, arguing that Hegel’s relevance today lies in linking Jameson’s periodization with Hegel’s aesthetic categories.

In “Madness and Subjective Destitution: Toward a Possible Exit from Capitalism”, Cynthia Cruz tackles the concept of madness, showing that for Hegel, madness is an inherent state experienced when acquiring new habits, akin to the inherent state of subjective destitution present at the start of being. These states converge during habit formation, when one is momentarily without nature and submerged in madness, creating a unique configuration that parallels but differs from the process of spirit’s becoming, suggesting that engaging in subjective destitution and madness can be a path to emancipation.

Timo Hendrik Ennen shows in “Countering Postmodern Genealogies: Brandom, Hegel and the Logic of Self-Determination” that Robert Brandom’s interpretation of Hegel offers a conception of normativity that addresses the flaws of both modernity and its critics, advocating for a “hermeneutics of magnanimity” over a “hermeneutics of suspicion”. While critiquing Brandom’s interpretation, the paper upholds his view that Hegelian philosophy counters subversive postmodern genealogies by emphasizing Hegel’s logic of self-determination, which argues that true explanation stems from internal coherence rather than external contingencies.

In the final text of the thematic issue, “Deleuze and the Hegelian State”, Julián Ferreyra delves into Gilles Deleuze’s political philosophy through the lens of the Hegelian concept of the State, examining three interpretations of the term “State” in Deleuze’s work. While Deleuze harshly criticizes the State, the paper argues that his critique doesn’t advocate for societal fragmentation. Instead, it compares Deleuze’s philosophy with Hegel’s to show that the forms

of *socius* in Deleuze's system occupy a conceptual space like the State in Hegel's framework. This analysis lays the groundwork for exploring the dominant social relation in modernity and the potential for a new political *socius*.¹⁴

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¹⁴ The first and second sections, "(Post)Modernity as an Incomplete Project" and "Postmodernity as Historical Event" (pp. 203–209), are written by Saša Hrnjez while the third and fourth, "Hegel's Modernity and Belief" and "Reengaging Hegel after Modernity" (pp. 210–217), are written by Đorđe Hristov.

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Hegel i postmodernizam: ponovni susret

Apstrakt

Ovaj rad uvodi i razmatra nove perspektive u odnosu između Hegela i njegovih postmodernih kritičara i protivnika. Prvi deo rada ispituje neke od centralnih rasprava o postmodernosti, posebno u delima Liotara i Habermasa, i kako oni, na različite načine, referišu na Hegela. Drugi deo se fokusira na Vatimovo korišćenje koncepta postmodernog creda kao načina povratka Hegelovom sopstvenom ispitivanju modernog verovanja. Rad pokazuje da je zajednička nit koja povezuje modernost Hegela sa „postmodernim trenutkom“ verovanje, posebno verovanje u samo verovanje. Poslednji deo pruža kratki uvod u sve priloge ovog tematskog broja.

Ključne reči: Hegel, Vatimo, Liotar, Habermas, verovanje, istorija, vera, moderno, postmoderno.