

Scenes of action – criticism of the ending

Gustavo Chataignier

Universidad Católica del Maule. Centro de investigación en Religión y Sociedad (CIRS)
gustavo.chat.gad@gmail.com



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Abstract

This text investigates the procedurality inaugurated by the action of subjects, which can be seen especially in the developments devoted to the play *Antigone*, in the *Phenomenology of the Spirit*. The conflict of irreducible rights entails the creation of a theory of action – in which the ends do not justify the means. Such an ethical requirement, always a posteriori, is imposed when the non-control of the relational world is verified, implying, finally, an open historicity. However, if simply being in the world is an action since it produces effects, we ask ourselves about the conditions (background in a situation governing expectations, but also the history of thought) and potentialities (disruptive emergence that organizes expectations, in becoming) of action. Thanks to externalizations that generate a problematic field, in the form of language, work and desire, we contract alterity relations and arrive at ourselves, through the other, fatally different from the starting point. It is up to philosophy to judge the implications of each particular action.

Keywords: dialectics; tragedy; Hegelianism; theory of action; open historicity

Resum. Escenes d'acció – crítica dels finals

El present projecte investiga la processualitat inaugurada per l'acció dels subjectes, evidenciada principalment en els desenvolupaments dedicats a l'obra *Antígona* en la *Fenomenologia de l'esperit*. El conflicte de drets irreductibles dona lloc a l'elaboració d'una teoria de l'acció —en la qual el fi no justifica els mitjans. Aquesta exigència ètica, sempre a posteriori, s'imposa quan existeix una falta de control sobre el món relacional, la qual cosa implica en darrera instància una historicitat oberta. Si el simple fer d'estar en el món és una acció quan produeix efectes, ens preguntem per les condicions (fons d'una situació que regeix les expectatives, però també la història del pensament) i les potencialitats (emergència disruptiva que organitza les expectatives, en procés d'esdevenir) de l'acció. Gràcies a exterioritzacions que generen un camp problemàtic, en forma de llenguatge, treball i desig, contraïm relacions d'alteritat i arribem a nosaltres mateixos, a través de l'altre, fatalment diferents del punt de partida. Correspon a la filosofia jutjar les implicacions de cada acció particular.

Keywords: dialèctica; tragèdia; hegelianisme; teoria de l'acció; historicitat oberta

Summary

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1. Introduction

What relevance does a theory of action has for the present moment? The issue involves a broad wide, both in the mobilization of elements that form the tradition and in the contemporary assessment of such a legacy. Even more so when we consider the so-called “linguistic turn” and the sketches of a current “affective turn”. In both cases, the sphere of practical reason is mediated either by unconscious structures or by processes that generate affection. That is, as far as we are concerned, the idea of an omniscient reason indifferent to practical and symbolic encounters, as well as the postulation of an identity between praxis and ethics resulting in the closing of the act in itself, only respond to a mechanistic delusion of reason: the world machine reveals itself through an effort of reasoning in clear and distinct representations, a process within which any and all setbacks are forcibly, inexorably, left behind.

However, if simply being in the world is an action since it produces effects, we ask ourselves about the conditions (background in a situation governing expectations, but also the history of thought) and potentialities (disruptive emergence that organizes expectations and produces proceduralities, in a becoming agency) of action.¹ Due to externalizations that generate a problematic field, in the form of language, work and desire, we contract alterity relations and arrive at ourselves, through the other, fatally distinct from the starting point: “Language and work are externalizations in which the individual no longer conserves and no longer possesses himself; but in these externalizations it makes the interior totally come out of itself, and abandons it to the Other” (Hegel, 1992 I: 198), the dimension of desire referring to the reflexive and immaterial repetition of the reaction of consciousnesses in a relational nexus (until the point of desiring the desire of the other, and not just one thing). It is up to philosophy to judge the implications of each particular action. The specificity of Hegelianism about the conception of action, and consequently, its contribution to the contemporary debate, consists in: 1) the historicization of acts and objectivities (not separated from them, it proposes the hypothesis of a progressive determination in the irreversible course of time

1. Ernst Bloch (1981: 138-142) opposes the impediment of law to the tendency of law, which is still ambiguous and open to creation. In contrast to the first, the second remains immanent in the general movement of history.

and a regressive conceptual foundation, that is, a posteriori); 2) a relational ethics, whose universalist aim hopes to allow the coexistence of differences. Virtuous action, so to speak, cannot be unilateral, and must consider its inter-subjective constitution.²

We extract some considerations from the book, in free translation, *Proposition of equaliberty [or equal-liberty]* (from the French *Proposition de l'égaliberté*), by Étienne Balibar (2010). The struggle for equal freedom would be based on the antinomy of citizenship. This suggests that the reciprocity that exists within every community, namely that of rights and obligations, is unstable. In which power is constituent and institutions are established. Predicted an equilibrium between liberty and equality, mediated both by fraternity and property and institutions, leads to rupture effects within the political (Balibar, 2010: 56-73). Thus, universalism allows for two interpretive fields, one extensive and the other intensive. The first one would be idealistic, in that it envisions a distinct rule that is realized by controlling specific entities, while the second one advocates a complete equality between people (Balibar, 2016: 74). In this last hypothesis, forces in the present situation are responsible for mobilizing actors, promoting the shaking of society. A definition of humanity is a consequence when one opposes forms of discrimination to a social corpus; it entails forms of an “internal exclusion”³ (Balibar, 2016: 143).

We believe it is necessary to justify our choice, not only for the sake of clarity, but also for the sake of the affirmative or propositional aspect of such an undertaking. But also, before that, it may be considered as a part of a new trend, if not global, at least North American, of rereading and revaluation of Hegel. A pragmatic bias is announced in the apprehension of his system as a continuous a posteriori explanation of motivations and, at the same time, a correction of errors, constantly reconstituting the initial point of experience. In this sense, a “non-metaphysical” reading of Hegel (Lumsden, 2008; Kervégan and Mabilie, 2012) would autonomize parts or problems of his system, independently of a non-relational and therefore pre-critical foundation, before

2. Which does not result in a mere accommodation of points of view, all equally valid. Therefore, any action against society must be prohibited. The limit arises with the question of alterity if history is made by reappropriations based on present interests and values.
3. The structure of equal-liberty is, as its author explains, “refuting”. Even though it is positive and enunciative, it denies tyranny and privileges at the same time. This is the “negative bond” of citizenship. A theory that is disproved (formal equality) by practice (figures of injustice) has the power to transform life in common, with rebellion inscribed in its constitution, its formation (Balibar, 2016: 13, 145, 9, 130, 41). Democracy stands out as an “Arch-institution”, as it precedes all others among the institutions immanent to the instituting power. We move from a natural or essentialist discourse to a historical and insurrectional discourse: “Equal freedom therefore designates the right to have rights only where individuals and groups do not receive them from an external sovereign power or a transcendent revelation, but attribute themselves this right, or establish these rights among themselves” (Balibar, 2016: 141). Note the reference to Arendt’s universalism (1990: 330) and the theme of the “right to have rights”: “the right to have rights means to live in a structure where one is judged by actions and opinions and a right to belong to some sort of organized community”.

Kant and thus yearning for the absolute. The term “spirit” becomes, more prosaically, culture. Or, according to Karin De Boer (2010: 182), neither subject nor substance, but rather, it (re)constitutes itself in the successive attempts of self-understanding of thought. McCumber (1993: 28-29) postulates that Hegelianism underwent several mutations along its path of historical appropriations. This means that, just as the giant dinosaurs turned into smaller and yet more agile creatures (we think of birds), it may be that Hegel’s legacy went through an analogous process. Behold, the great tyrannosaurus gave way to reduced, but more adapted, versions of thought. The system is seen, or rather works, as a “reception of determinations” (Mabille, 2012: 331). In other words, the challenge is to try to give systematicity to the irreducible contingency, understood here as an element to be related and differentiated with history – generating history. Instead of seeking a Hegelian survival on the side of systematization, it is a matter of paying attention to independent processes or fragments of the system. For it is necessary to stick to processes of negation that, while determining the singularity, evoke its other, the universal of time that carries everyone. An “anthropological difference” (Balibar, 2016: 32) can be affirmed. The contemporary theme of the production of subjectivity – here seen as a passage – in the context of life in the polis is thus answered.

At first, we will expose the main lines of Hegelian thought; at another stage of the route, it is time to detail our central point; later, we will extract some consequences of previous developments, notably in the field of ethics, as well as in the theory of history, open to and formed by contingency.

2. On the centrality of the *Phenomenology of the Spirit*

There are some privileged sources for the study of tragedy in Hegel.⁴

4. The young Hegel also makes reference to both ancient plays and contemporary tragedies, in the context of explaining the transition from Judaism to Christianity, involving the unifying principle of love, in 1796 (Hegel, 2003). The tragic dialectic is at work here, with its oppositional character. However, without having theology as a horizon for discussion, we will not enter these texts. In any case, the Greeks foreshadow Christ (cf. Hegel, 1978; Hyppolite, 1974: 120). In turn, the 1802 text also deals with law with a view to the formation of the spirit or common ethical life, of a shared *socius*, whose argumentation has reconciliation as its horizon; Aeschylus’ Oresteia is approached, since the polis recognizes its parts – even if the absolute plays with itself (Hegel, 1990: 69). On the other hand, the courses in aesthetics, which were given in the thinkers’ Berlin period and published after his death, cover a lot of material about theatre in general and ancient tragedy in particular. Unlike the proposal of a science of experience and an introduction to the system, it is up to the *Aesthetics Courses* to situate the artistic phenomenon as immanence – but also a moment, to be fatally overcome, of knowledge. The elaboration of a system of the arts, within which a temporal succession goes hand in hand with different artistic manifestations, assigns a place to art in the self-discovery of thought – at the same time that if it is not erased, it relativizes its function. The descriptions of the pieces are systematic, and the principle of contradiction leads to reconciliation. These works will be used either to establish a background for the aesthetic discussion or to comment on developments

We will privilege his considerations in the *Phenomenology of the Spirit on Antigone*, by Sophocles (5th century B.C.), as they orchestrate the loss of immediate meaning: the rupture with a harmonious and religious totality implies the assumption of a destiny. All owing to the action, triggering unintended processes.⁵ More than a specialist text on Hegel and German idealism, we are interested in processes of universalization and their subjective constitution, which Balibar understands to be a historical anthropology. Anyway, there is current literature on Hegel's *Antigone*, in several languages. Here we point out three correct articles.

Firstly, "Hegel's *Antigone*: Opposition and tragic collision of ethical self-awareness" by Gonzalo Tinajeros. The author argues that the tragedy is an example of opposition and collision between two conflicting ethical self-awarenesses, based on different convictions about ethical substance. Such extremes inexorably enter into war and tragic collision due to the defense of their particular principles. However, this necessarily produces for each of these extreme positions the painful knowledge of their own error, for not having recognized the truth in the ethical spirit of the other conscience. (Tijaneros, 2020: 99-118).

The article "Hölderlin thinking about rhythm, Hegel thinking about the rhythm of tragedy: two complementary approaches to tragedy", by Kathrin Holzermayr Rosenfield, discusses the convergences between Hölderlin and Hegel's readings and conceptions of tragedy. The analysis of Hölderlin's translations approaches the idea of movement and recomposition, expressed in a concept by Hegel in *Phenomenology*. Hölderlin emphasizes the importance of rhythm and counterrhythmic movement in tragic poetry. For him, rhythm is a form of expression that allows the poet to capture what is tragic, defined by the tension between opposites. The caesura, in turn, is seen as a moment of pause in the rhythmic flow, giving the reader the opportunity to reflect. Counterrhythmic movement, in its inner workings, is understood as a form of expression that allows the poet to create tension. While Hegel will privilege the conceptual register and the reflexivity arising from the shock (Holzermayr Rosenfield, 2020: 92-114).

In turn, the article "Action and death in Hegel's *Antigone*" offers an interpretation of the Hegelian concept of action, based on the analysis of Sophocles' *Antigone*. The author argues that action, although presented as an absolute principle, has a paradoxical structure that hides the negativity of death. Attach-

inspired mainly by *Phenomenology*. Jacqueline Rossi (2007) has an article in which she discusses the new role of tragedy in *phenomenology*. In her study, she reviews previous Hegelian approaches.

5. Hyppolite's comment would be, for Balibar, "irreplaceable" and "indispensable" – one would not know how to express it better. Hyppolite is mentioned as "the greatest French commentator on Hegel's *Phenomenology*", understood in "the upsurge of the problematic of intersubjectivity". Some pages after this statement, Balibar confesses his debt with Hyppolite: "In his commentary on the *Phenomenology*, to which (no mystery here) my entire discussion owes quite a lot, Jean Hyppolite" (Balibar, 2017: 6 and 160).

ment to substance is consubstantial to action, and therefore, even if the history of the spirit has left the ancient “ethical substance” behind, (modern) action cannot free itself from the tragic character. Attachment to substance is consubstantial with action. This means that action is linked to ethical substance. The paradoxical structure of the action, which hides the negativity of death, is a consequence of this attachment to substance. In other words, action can only be understood in relation to its connection with a broader ethical substance. However, Hegel did not intend for the tragic conflict to be overcome by modern action or the modern spirit in general. Therefore, although the history of the spirit has left the ancient “ethical substance” behind, (modern) action cannot free itself from the tragic character. In other words, for Hegel, the tragic conflict cannot be set aside, but rather be mediated and transformed into an opposition to be reconciled in the life of the polis (Perez, 2019: 107-126).

No wonder, Hegel (2004: 257) does not mince words in his admiration for the piece, “the most excellent, the most satisfying work of art”. What is at stake is already the model of a passage of time that determines its actors, despite their self-representations.⁶ In short, tragedy offers a model of understanding analogous to history.⁷ Perhaps with the advantage that, once originally located in Greece, it proposes the ethical re-dimensioning of life in common, thus moving away from typically modern divisions. Making the tragic process explicit implies, forcibly, reaching an unplanned effective and shared point, to recompose one’s own rationality. Once exposed to the concept (Hegel, 1992 II: 174 and 182), singularity is lost, opening its one-sidedness.

6. The main issue is to detect a sense of time in favor of a regime of collective determination, similar to what Koselleck calls a singular collective.’ The ‘single event’ or ‘complex of events’ characteristic of masterful *historia vitae* are no longer capable of engendering an ‘exemplary narrative’ capable of repetition in modern times. This is the emergence of the ‘singular collective’. Such a collective apprehends “the interdependence of events and the intersubjectivity of the course of actions”; the “separate units” are arranged, a posteriori, in “system”, which does not completely determine them, but imposes a relational framework on them. From the providential order, we move on to the ambiguities of “human planning” (Koselleck, 2006: 46-53, 130-132).
7. The modern world, according to Jacques Rancière’s interpretation of Hegel, would not be indecisive or irreconcilable like the ancient world, given the paradigm of Orestes’ absolution in Aeschylus’ *Eumenides* (cf. Hegel, 2004: 244, 257). This fact would have resulted in the inauguration of the “empire of law”. In the modern age injustice is not perpetrated against the gods, but against men; conflict separates the small group that decides and a multitude exposed to such power – choosing the lesser evil (cf. Rancière, 2012: 125-126). The Hegelian perspective on reconciliation, on the one hand, is complemented by a critique of jusnaturalism, which posits that law arises from violence, in the dialectical framework. It is, however, important to emphasize the possibility of opening up the normative field. What comes later and can be considered beyond intentional evocations is either advanced in artistic figuration or, yet, a new moment in which the previous elements are necessarily no longer the same. The initial opposition between being and nothing (or between beings) evokes a sense of becoming that preserves both determination and indeterminacy from previous moments. This sense of becoming appears to be a sense of disappearance, since every process is necessarily and radically finite.

The centrality attributed to the *Phenomenology of the Spirit* is explained insofar as the so-called procedural synthesis or reconciliation does not imply a rest, so to speak, from negativity. It is not abandoned that estrangement is a motor for knowledge, even though it implies the appeasement of wills and the deceleration of clashes. The word of synthesis must be understood only as a moment after the clash. In short, the idea of tragedy, or of perpetual self-denial in a relational world, allows an autonomous reading, detached from the systematic need constructed later.⁸

The exact place of *Phenomenology* in the work and in the Hegelian system has been a matter of debate since the death of its author, in 1831. The publication that marks the thinker of his youth, in 1807, still does not fit in either the great logic or the compendium of sciences – both integral and organizing productions of systematic intention. Entering such a debate is far beyond our scope⁹. Nevertheless, our appeals to a theory of action would place us in the field of a formation of consciousness, *Bildung* or a new Paideia. Even so, it is useful, as a pedagogical care, to seek references in the consolidated system, namely, in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*, third volume (Hegel, 1995). This is the following division, according to which the chapters of the *Phenomenology* would respond to linked parts of the system: subjective spirit (sensible certainty, thing, conscience, self-consciousness, reason – chapters I to V); objective spirit (spirit, or ethical life – chapter VI); absolute spirit (religion, in chapter VII; philosophy for chapter VIII).

Consciousness addresses itself to the object, intends to know it; nevertheless, in apprehending it, it also knows itself. Beyond the divisions of modernity or the specifications operated by understanding (separation between subject and object), reflection is a moment of the Absolute because it produces a timeless return to itself – or the absolute as a passage from one state to another. In dynamic or relational terms, it is not an absolute, ossified knowledge,

8. The duality of history in Hegel can be perceived according to two tendencies: estrangement and interiorization. The resulting duality of movement is a self-production that is externalized (the self-presentation of matter or functional reality as truth and certainty) and its presentation in the form of free evolution and dependent on chance, or the separation of the spirit from entities (Hegel, 1992 II: 216-219). According to Marcuse (1991: 319-320), both meanings confront the two tendencies found in Hegel: one for the immobilization of history (interiorization determined by absolute knowledge that ends as movement) and another that aims to maintain historicity (strangeness in contingency).
9. In a recent work, Marcos Nobre (2018) bets on the radical singularity of the *Phenomenology*, a work that, read in this way, would not be integrated with the systematic principle – even if it was presented as an introduction to the “system of science” and even as a system of the science of experience. You can find Adorno (1979: 60) on the experiential perspective: in addition to the usual static dualisms, like rationalism and empiricism, Hegelian philosophy intends to “capture the spirit in its encounters with the world, by capturing them, but also by shaping the experience in the flow of spirit”. For a systematic appropriation, see Labarrière (1968) and Poeggeler (1985). The premise of Nobles argument, which begins with the introduction and progresses later in relation to the rest of the book, is that the historical conflict (the realm of the effective) plays an essential role in shaping the subject and its own self-absorption.

but an absolute that addresses the subject and establishes an opening. The initial point of the experience is intensified and repeated with and from another empirical basis. Consciousness only discovers what it was already when it passes through the examination of contingency, that is, when it manifests itself to us. Then, it becomes in and for itself, modified by the encounter and the encounter. Such an exchange of subject and object, if on the one hand, gives a certain stability to the forces in presence, on the other hand, it will require new configurations, as soon as the naturalness of reproduction and indifference towards entities is suspended. The identity between subject and object occurs either ephemerally in experience or essentially in thought. In a regime of reciprocal determination, and therefore of exchange of position regarding activity and passivity, both become something different from what they were, because they are in history, in the flow that carries everything. This is the identity, speculative and not immediate, between the terms in relation.

We believe it would be beneficial to include the subject in the discussion of the emergence of the spirit, without reading it as an instrumentalizing or self-sufficient omniscience. The substance separates from itself, generating a point of excess that becomes autonomous. This rupture establishes the subject. The subject is therefore an interval of the substance in its self-relative movement. The unity separates itself from itself, generates multiplicity and returns to itself (the one creates the two that returns to the one, from the immediate to the immediate through mediation). This assertion is flawed, insofar as the one is not one, it is not about the intact collection of exteriorization, in fact, forever lost, radically contingent. When the substantial unity liquefies in the multitude of predicates, it will be up to one of them to assume the position of subject and (re)construct himself with the presuppositions (in turn, these will inevitably be modified). Therefore, there is no unity: “(...) each One is a return to oneself from the two”, from the initial and immediate separation between the Being and his experience. The destination to which one returns, the object of return, does not pre-exist the act of returning, being, let us insist, created in a performative way. We are in Hegelian harbors, which are not at all safe. In these murky waters, the one is equivalent to the other, with a genuine identity of the opposites. The one (the substance) is distant from itself in the two (the subject) (Žižek, 2012: 325-326).

Lukács views human history as being divided into three layers, namely subjective, objective, and absolute. The smaller scale is already the bearer of the larger one, just as the understanding of the molecular is not exterior to the molar.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the logic of negativity is the same. In this arrangement of rhythms, the Hungarian philosopher comments that it is not a question of

10. In the second of the “Theses on the concept of history” Walter Benjamin starts from the individual. One personal happiness depends on the redemption of his past, “(...) on the fulfilment of what could have been, but which was not”. Redemption would be a movement of reparation, in which the happiness of the individual and of an entire generation would be restored. We move insensibly towards collective reparation (Löwy, 2001: 35-36).

a “known history”, but rather of a history felt as a succession of different destinies, in which the effectiveness of the instrument is questioned. The relentless passing of time in its irreversibility reveals the subjective inner truths thanks to the relational and distinct exteriority of self-images. History reveals itself and reveals entities (Lukács, 1981: 253-257).

The starting point is the “sensible consciousness” in the face of the evanescent here and now of the object, apprehended as a sensation. When it sees itself apprehending the thing, the conscience starts to look for the internal laws of the phenomenon, arriving at the “understanding” separating laws. Consciousness understands itself by understanding reality. She is the bearer of the desire for knowledge that opposes both the object and other consciousnesses, giving rise to intersubjective recognition. In this uneven process, both are initially seen as objects. To preserve life, the defeated one withdraws; the victor believes she enjoys life, as long as she is served (i.e. mediated) by the other. This is the dialectic between master and slave.¹¹ Then there is the figure of the unhappy conscience: Stoic and medieval man project themselves into the beyond, separated from objectivity. Such dissatisfaction is the engine for the movement that leads to its opposite, that is, happiness. The observing reason acts in reality, and through its actions, consciousness becomes for itself. One moves from the subjective to the objective spirit, whose presentation and understanding takes place in morals, law, institutions and history. Finally, the absolute spirit, or the historical way in which nature escaped and oppositions were overcome: art (objective moment of intuitive knowledge), religion (subjective moment of knowledge through faith or representational) and philosophy (concept that brings together the previous elements). Let’s stick to the objective spirit, following our scope.

Here is the hypothetical beginning of the story. Consciousness, as reason (previous moments), created a world:

Insofar as the spirit is the immediate truth, it is the ethical life of a people. The spirit must advance to the consciousness of what it is immediately; it must suppress the beautiful ethical life, and reach, through a series of figures, self-knowledge. (Hegel, 1992 II: 306)

11. “Through this experience, a pure self-consciousness is established and a consciousness that is not purely for oneself, but for another. [...] Both moments are essential; but as they are at first unequal and opposite, and their reflection into unity has not yet resulted, so the two moments are like two opposing figures of consciousness: one, independent consciousness, for which being-for-itself is the essence; another, dependent consciousness, for which the essence is life, or being for an Other. One is the master, the other is the slave.” (Hegel, 1992 I: 189). A successful recognition process, so to speak, implies giving reason to the other: in fact, I am an object, or a stranger, to myself. Instead of focusing on the recognition of identity, it focuses on the recognition of the other and, consequently, the other in me. The emergence of a distinctly separate consciousness and the emergence of a mutually exclusive relationship are attributed to the externalization of consciousness and the mediation of otherness. A subjective encounter in which recognition is flawed, rather than unequal, relies on reification, redefining the other as a thing rather than an interlocutor.

All that the ancient muse sings ceases. The spirit is no longer restricted to a self, but takes the form of an Us. The networks of opposition and reciprocity engender a common world (made by us all), which guides the becoming of life, thus introducing its “historicity dimension”: “A self, who is Us, and a We who is Me” (Hegel, 1992 I: 125).

The spirit, at the same time, determines individuals and is the fruit of their interpellation. Material and symbolic reproduction creates a totality, or substance, which is maintained by virtue of the set of exteriorizations. The manifestation of this principle is found in the people, whose cell is the citizen (Hegel, 1992 II: 11). Ethics, then, is the life of the community or the non-separation of the individual from the social body. After a brief evocation of theories contrary to Hegelianism, we will resume the explanation of *Phenomenology*, precisely at the point where tragedy enters the scene.

3. From the *logos* of tragedy to the tragedy of *logos*

The story takes place after the death of Oedipus in Colonus. It is noteworthy that, within the so-called Theban Trilogy, which includes Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus, and Antigone, the last piece to be written was Oedipus at Colonus. Daughter of Oedipus and Jocasta, Antigone, accompanied by her sister, Ismene, regains Thebes, following the fate of the Labdacids, that is, the descendants of Oedipus and his grandfather Labdacus. Eteocles and Polyneices, his other brothers, disputed his fathers’ succession to the throne, claiming that the succession agreement had been breached by Eteocles. Annoyed, Polyneices retreats to Argos, where he rallies support to depose his brother. In the bloody battle between the cities, the brothers end up dying simultaneously, one by the hand of the other. Thus, it was Creon, the only man in the lineage, brother of Jocasta, who assumed the throne. Polyneices was seen as an enemy of the polis, and the first measure of the new sovereign was to refuse funeral honors. Eteocles would win all the trappings destined for heroes. As a punitive example, the remains of Polyneices would remain untouched, devoured by beasts and eaten away by the weather. Antigone’s rebels are opposed to this situation. The play begins the morning after the battle (Sophocles, 2011).

3.1. *Antigone*

According to a comment by Jean Hyppolite (1974: 211), the Hegelian exposition of *Antigone* lends itself to endowing the decay of the ancient city with an image. Extrapolating the hermeneutic framework, at least in a more concrete sense, the relationship between normative ethos and subjective exchanges is in contradiction. Now, the timelessness of this scene allows us to evoke this past. Present and yet out of step with the present, the past stands as a critical model. The snake sheds its skin once the impasse between a “no longer” an operative norm in relation to present exchanges and a delimited “not yet” configuration is overcome. Through the tragedy, “the logic of contradiction

entered fifth century Greece”. “The city itself is questioning itself. Sometimes the heroes, sometimes the chorus, embody successive civic and anti-civic values” (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, 1999: 280). The citizen is, both in the theater and in his life, a spectator (Segal, 1994: 195). Here, the idea is to think and say tragedy in a single movement, to connect it with thought, which ends up undoing itself forever.

The main conflict takes place between *nomina* (custom) and *nomos* (law) (divine law and human law, family and city, singular and universal), glued to the immediate experience in a historical datum, in the spirit of a people (which will be overcome). The conflict between individual and collective interests is not opposed to the realization of an ideal, since the world already embodies the ideal of participation by all. The new ideal arises from the loss of the existing one. Both Antigone and Creon know exactly what to do, their actions update their contents in ethical consciousness. Creon does not hesitate to condemn Polyneices, nor does Antigone hesitate to bury her brother: “When hesitation appears in Greek tragedy, it is nothing but weakness in the face of action, not a moral conflict” (Hyppolite, 1974: 226). Good intentions, the duty to be, or even the love itself, depart from the conflict with the other. It is up to action to reconstitute expectations: “It is precisely the action itself and only the action that will make the self [subject] emerge in his abstract independence and set him free of all concrete content as a person” bearer of rights [regulated by an impersonal principle]” (Hyppolite, 1974: 210). Once it is outside itself in action, spirit already differs from itself. It is not explained in causalist or intentional terms, but fundamentally as a tendency and effort, that the production of effects resulting from the action is unplanned (Renault, 2015: 15).

The “dialectical step” is this: if the singular (a law) is against the universal (a being that is connected to all beings), the latter (the universal) is against the former. As a conclusion, the universal contradiction is established.

In this sense, the challenge is to elaborate a new law that considers the human and the divine. On the one hand, the public law of the city regulates the social and political life of the people; outward manifestation of the will, self-conscious; on the other, that of the Penates (gods of the home), hidden, natural, germ of the world, immediacy.

It is worth our attention that the Dutch professor Karin De Boer (2010: 2) interprets this. In her book on the “The Sway of the negative”, she centers her analysis on what she terms a “logic of entanglement”. Such entanglement would be constitutive, and Hegel would have had two ways of dealing with it: one “tragic” and the other “dialectical”. In short, an “ethical” bias and another considered “ontological” (De Boer, 2010: 26) – a term that, specifically here, lends itself to the understanding of a closed normativity.¹² In

12. The meaning of the term in Marcuse’s youth is discussed on p. 210, 211, 198, and 203-205. It is his belief that relating the idea of knowledge to the idea of the absolute through the mediation of life breaks with the conception of the absolute. It so happens that in the *Logic*,

tragedies, she argues, complementary determinations inherent in particular principles are necessarily opposed; the conflict only ceases when both sides recognize their respective one-sidedness. It is not, therefore, a simple conflict of identities – but, fundamentally, of “contrary determinations of any particular principle” (De Boer, 2010: 3). Regardless of the object, this philosophy “(...) will understand it – whatever it may be – as the effort to update itself through a self-differentiation that resolves the tragic conflict between contrary determinations”, restricting the initial symmetry (De Boer, 2010: 26). It is rather a principle of subordination, a relational effect, than a telos. One could appeal, at the same time, to overdetermination or dominance, in a contingency regime, even because the process repeats itself. It deals, the author concludes, with the “extreme precariousness of human life”, whose efforts to update, in history or in the conceptual field, try to get rid of a primary and irreducible indifferenciation (De Boer, 2010: 28). For Hegel does not eliminate it, although he directs it (until the next change). A successful recognition would take into account the entanglement mentioned above, although De Boer (2007) argues that the Hegelian systematicity prevents this.

Sophoclean play shows us a new way of thinking about customs and laws that is based on the idea of death. Since it is immediate, the ethical order will break down; however, since it is part of the order of the spirit, it will be the object of reflection of recovery. The spirit immediately realized in nature and morality immediately confirmed in customs go to the “abyss”, with death as a radical horizon of alterity with itself: “Human law proceeds in its living movement from divine law, the law that governs on earth from the subterranean law, the conscious of the unconscious, the mediation of the immediate; and, for that very reason, it returns to the place from which it comes” (Hegel, 1992 II: 19).

Hegel insists on the complementarity of laws or on the understanding of the universal as coming from its other, the singular initiator of processuality. The State is made by families and individuals; these are realized and posited, they become aware of themselves, as a consequence of the regulated social life. There is dissociation in distinct families. However, the *polis* puts a brake on this movement, contracts the systems of particularities, its economic expansion

history is, at most, the accumulation of states of knowledge, unlike the changes in entities in *Phenomenology*. If the *Phenomenology* demands the ontological organization of the *Logic*; the latter, in turn, finds itself reinvigorated with the principle of being as mobility disposed in the *Phenomenology*: the effective and positive being is “split”, which implies the understanding of being-there as “there”. inequality” (or inequality). Life understood as historically constituted is deemed to be the foundation of being, to the detriment of the innate capacity for thought. Marcuse’s vision begins with a critique of the postulate of the *Logic* where being and thought coincide. In this work, the primordial unity of being is prior to all difference. However, “this return to the primordial opposition of subjectivity and objectivity” is the instance that allows the understanding of a non-fatalist history. Since then, history acquires a specific meaning, namely, its development takes place in the regime of estrangement: be it in the becoming of nature or in the act of thinking.

– otherwise the parties would turn to the enjoyment and acquisition of exclusive wealth: this is the role of laws and wars, namely; to put the citizen at the service of the community.

If Creon is a tyrant, the family, in turn, is not a safe haven. The community, despite its contradictions, emerges as a natural community that prefigures the spirit of the city, based not only on love, but also on the growth of children (Hegel, 1992 II: 16 and 24), which in turn harbinger psychoanalysis. Let us think of the fratricide now exposed. The family is already an element in the chain of labor and symbolic reproduction of society on a smaller scale. Not only natural, the family is already part of the ethical substance (it is not solely based on the immediacy of procreation): economy, education and individuality (ruptures). The completion of this subject, duly formed, without further demands, is the dead – free from the accidents of life. From which it can be concluded: “The family is the cult of the dead; it unveils the spiritual meaning of death” (Hyppolite, 1974: 216). The individual negates himself in the species (human, in external negation); internally, he truly denies himself in death. A non-immediate denial is a task for those who remain. The transition from the local to the universal occurs within the community, through the interrelationships established through language, work, and desire. Thus, the family makes death a “spiritual operation” (Hyppolite, 1974), granting in it a “right of conscience”, beyond immediate nature (unlike natural death, which does not preserve what it denies). In short, the family replaces nature and elevates the singular to the universal. The unburied person lacks the universal dignity of the buried person, as demonstrated by Polynices and Homer, who asks that Hector return his spoils to the Trojans. That said, two opposites are gathered in memory, the death of the living and the life of death: “It is life that carries death in itself and is maintained in death itself, which is the life of the spirit” (Hegel, 1992 II: 38).

The analysis of conflicting consciences shows that the reflexive subjectivity or self only comes out of performance. The opposition between a self-consciousness linked to a particular law and the immediate experience of substance, of reality, is clear. An abstract universal exists, which is opaque and not yet determined, and presents itself as destiny or necessity. The truth of this need is the appearance of itself as it unveils (Hyppolite, 1974: 221) (“behind the curtain the spirit finds itself”, in the *Phenomenology*, 1992 I: 118). If Kant said that destiny cannot be judged because it doesn't have experience, Hegel said that the idea of destiny comes from experience: “The operation (Tat) is exactly what makes pure life seem separate and makes it appear before the eyes”. Destiny is the objective manifestation of what individuals and peoples are as pathos (subjectively): “a particular destiny is, therefore, the revelation of a pathos determined in a history” (Hyppolite, 1974: 223).

In contrast to the current idea of self-belonging, our life appears to be strange, and we blame ourselves for an experience that is limited by time. Guilt is a feeling of belonging to the social and an internalization of the other, without the need for an external law. The subjective feeling is condemned by the

objective action, which is external and eternal, thanks' to a procedural unity. It is in this separation with destiny that we see our (subjective) infinity, as we come into contact with our "inorganic nature" (destiny), and by it, we are formed, modifying ourselves (being reborn in this life: we give ourselves our law – determination internal to the relationship). According to Hyppolite (1974), the question of *amor fati* was already being posed by modernity before the philosopher of the Superman. At the same time of dying and being reborn, fate is opposed to reconciling with it through love. The uniqueness that acquires significance, no longer separating itself; the pathos, on the other hand, persists, as ideal figures (Antigone, Creon, and Oedipus) that endure throughout history. Knowledge is lost at its origin, i.e. the not knowing. The opposition of two contents becomes a formal opposition present in all self-consciousness (knowing and not knowing) and, since then, "seeing oneself" means "seeing oneself split" (Hyppolite, 1974: 225).

For Balibar, we would find ourselves at the scene of the birth of politics. A deadly struggle, a timeless figure, takes shape. Particular positions try to become universal in the dispute between distinct and excluding universalities): "(...) they are the two faces of the same phenomenon". The law presents itself "splitted between the model of will and that of destiny". According to the commentator, the Hegelian analysis can also be placed in modern terms, that is, between faith and reason. Their conflict engenders the ideal of education for humanity (*Bildung*, as formation) and makes the social world intelligible (Balibar, 2016: 77-78). Succession occurs both as a figure of community closure and as a figure of universal opening. The recognition and exclusion functions are possible in this dynamic and change according to the present arrangement. The current process is characterized by an interminable nature.

The act of recognizing the other results in yet another unexpected outcome: the reality of matter is also recognized, which rejects exclusivity and encompasses everything – acknowledging, if not ideally, another nation, at least its (utopian) representation created by art.

4. Of the cunning of reason and the reasons of passion

The critique of the a priori limits of reason in Kant crosses the realm of history. For the philosopher from Königsberg, regularity in human history is not immediately apparent. Thus, an "individual freedom" is captured as a natural event, that is, following laws. That is why nature is the "conducting thread" of the human adventure on earth. The most derisive act and the meanest passion do not show rationality, that is why nature is appealed to. If there is rationality in man, then it is up to the natural dispositions to realize it, not in the individual, but in the species and over time. We can see in Kant (1980: 28-29, 31) that the desire to live in society is accompanied by repulsion, which jeopardizes every societal project. Nature uses men for its own ends. The breakdown of intentionality will be taken up by Hegel.

The *Encyclopedia* posits the free course of contingency in nature and history.¹³ A reinterpretation of the concept of “the cunning of reason” is justified: the need for passion and the presence of great men for the realization of history do not reduce them to puppets. The effectiveness of the historical field is distinct from the intentions and passions of its agents. We address the argument that what is posited by reason must find its home in the other, in a proximity that gives rise to the renegotiation of distances. By reorienting the concept of ‘the cunning of reason’ to the principle of contingency, we achieve a shift in the Hegelian letter. For the very idea of systematic thought is expected to operate under other commands. The cunning of reason is understood as a theory of action producing unforeseen effects.

Related to the philosophical tradition, the “cunning of reason” allows itself to be understood, hopefully not in a cunning way, by at least four keys of reading: the absolute subsumption that identifies everything, reaching the point of ending history itself (rationalism) ; the subjective posture of cynicism, impotent – and indifferent – in the face of the course of the world (cynicism); the course of history at the end of the day would correspond to a theodicy, carrying out the will of God (providentialism); the spirit is necessarily realized, man cannot but accept what happens to him (fatalism). Note that the four working hypotheses are interchangeable, since the absolute can be either mechanical or theological; cynicism and fatalism are moments of the same movement, whose explanation can rest, once again, either on reason or on theology (Bouton, 2005). Aside from that, we will insert the absolute privilege of contingency, giving rise to a new frontier to explore.

The man with too much self-esteem lives in the “domain of passions”, where his “particularity” is realized. The Hegelian theory does attribute a share of happiness to it; man realizes his “finitude” when he is confronted with “his Other” and then reconciles with him. However, sarcastic, or rather pessimistic, Hegel continues his reasoning: “In considering history, one can also adopt the point of view of happiness – but history is not the place of happiness”. The following sentence is even more touching: “The periods of happiness in it [history] are nothing but blank pages”, since “satisfaction” would reside in objectives that far surpass the individual perspective (Hegel, 1965: 115-116).

The “cunning of reason” machines: “one can call the cunning of reason the fact that it lets the passions act in their place, so that this alone is the means

13. Hegel says that the sciences keep some positive traits because they are about the regime of effectiveness and the rules of existence: “Their beginning, in itself rational, passes in the contingent as long as they have it. In this field of variability and contingency, the concept cannot prevail, only rationalities. (...) In the same way, the idea of Nature is lost in its singularization and contingencies, and natural history, geography, medicine, etc. they fall into determinations of existence, into species and differences that are determined by external chance and by the play [of things], not by means of reason. History also enters this case insofar as, if the idea is its essence, its appearance is, however, in the contingency and in the field of the arbitrary” (Hegel, 1994: 182).

by which they come into existence, experiencing losses and suffering damage” (Hegel, 1965: 129).

What does reason? Let us raise two questions: does it deceive passion, directing it, and does it impose itself? Or is she aware that her realization is her loss, that is, its own opposite?

In this first hypothesis, would there be an irreducible cause? If so, would it be an element that gives direction to becoming, in a relationship of dominance with other determinations (actions take place)? We would be facing the process of implementation, here is the irreducible issue. The knowledge or ignorance of the process is irrelevant, since the “contrary” raised to the post of effective is procedural, that is, a result – and therefore something non-volitional. Or would it be dealing with a purpose that had always been foreseen? In this line, the irreducible is reason that determines without letting itself be determined, averse to encounters – it changes them, of course, without, however, letting itself be contaminated by them.

A second key still appears to us as plausible: it is not reason “itself” that presents itself to us at the end of the chain of realization. Rather, reason is linked to its presupposition (natural or historical) in order to arrive at its truth (because of the otherness). This leads us to a theory of action, which unites the non-control of exteriority with the irrational of passion. Its product, always to be reworked, consists of reason. Its effectiveness in time confers intelligibility to history.

Paradoxically, the chaos of passion produces order, or, without value judgment, of the self-relative stability characteristic of the effective. It is important to note that individual passions build a system of universal dependence, even if each individuals’ goal does not go beyond selfishness (Hegel, 1998: 291).¹⁴ From this starting point emerge both compassion and the satisfaction of the demands of others, as well as the contradictions immanent in the functioning of the *socius* and its eventual resolutions – never definitive.

According to Bouton, we are faced with an “equivocal” notion: an independent course of action that, at the same time, not only dismantles rationalism in terms of the fatalism of action, but also instrumentalizes individuals. In this last perspective, a “subjective-spiritual force” fulfills what it has always

14. It is worth considering the famous phrase “What is rational is effective; and what is effective is rational” (Hegel, 1998: 84) in order to avoid the identity between reality and rationality. The preface to the *Philosophy of Right* explains that the science of the State is not concerned with how the State should be, but rather with how it should be known (Hegel, 1998: 105). Thinking about what is rational in the actual consists of thinking about what, within the State or any other present figure, exceeds it. Reality corresponds to the pure contingency of being-there, which is exhausted in its immediacy or neediness (the being that finds itself in front of nothingness and generates the movement of becoming). Effectiveness means that we are relational and opaque to ourselves – we are always already mediated. Thus, it brings together necessity and contingency, explaining itself as the domain of mediation – participant of the immediate. There is a distance from oneself to oneself, generated by reflexivity. From emergence to absorption. In short, the effective is that what has become, precisely what is given to be thought.

been (Bouton, 2005: 324). By writing that “nothing great in this world is accomplished without passion” (Hegel, 1965: 108-109), Hegel endows passion with effectiveness. For our project, the subjects are involved.

5. Conclusion

There is an empiricist privilege, a centrality of the *hic et nunc*, evoked by Hegel himself (1985: 1280), which guides all ethical deliberation. As Emmanuel Renault postulates, this presentism is distinguished both from theoretical models whose action is guided by tradition (which would be the case of romanticism) and by the conduction of an indeterminate future (the duty in both Kant and Fichte). It is a matter of elaborating “(...) forms of rationality that guide the present history (...)”, following the example of the relationship between the post-revolutionary State and the *Philosophy of Right* (Renault, 2015: 17). The present is captured in a negative and indirect way: both a repertoire of available one-sided positions and a way of thinking about oneself reflexively (rather than seeking a relationship between philosophy and the present) (Renault, 2015: 28). Now, neither recapitulation nor opposition, the present is, above all, transition or alterity with itself. Let us remember the motto of the *Philosophy of Right*: “Conceptualizing what is, that is the task of philosophy, because what is, is reason; (...) thus, philosophy is also its time apprehended in thoughts” (Hegel, 1998: 87-88).

History as an agent, in reciprocal action with its subjects, brings up the issue of immanent criticism. The mapping of the field of action and the production of conditional utterances are part of the ethical exercise of created and creative subjects. Limits that have been evaluated are reset. The critical tradition, which seeks norms for the validity of thought, presents itself as a tool for elucidating action and its conditions. Our terminology comes from another tradition of thought, the French one, from an anti-hegelian, indeed. Rather, it is a “theoretical practice” (Althusser, 1965: 72). Once again, it is up to theory to illuminate the practical paths, explaining the theoretical mediations in which we are inserted. History, economy, language, and even biology are all intertwined. The Marx of studies prior to *Capital* cites Hegel’s lessons on the history of philosophy: the concrete (of thought) is the synthesis of multiple determinations.¹⁵ In other words, the world precedes us as a mesh of meanings

15. “The concrete is concrete because it is the synthesis of multiple determinations, therefore, the unity of diversity” (Marx, 2011: 54). “The first moment of all manifestation is the existence, that is, a specific being by itself, opposed to the other; in a further form, thought conceives itself more concretely, goes deeper into itself and becomes aware of spirit as such. In an antecedent stage, the spirit is abstract, and in this constriction it recognizes itself as different in opposition to the other. When it happens that it clings more completely, then it is no longer simply confined to a particular existence, insofar as it is known or possessed in it, but it is the universal which, determining itself as such, contains its other within itself. The spirit, as a concrete spirituality, understands the substantial that appears different from it: after having taken its manifestation and after having rebelled against it, it recognizes itself in its intimate content: only then does it conceive its antithesis and become just for

– exposed to changes, even if reiterated in a regime of repetition. The non-separation of theory and practice involves examining the mechanisms by which practice is conditioned. The knowledge of reality is part of this same reality. The (very) young Marx, in his doctoral thesis on the difference between the philosophies of nature of Democritus and Epicurus, 1841, pointed to philosophical praxis as theoretical, guided by criticism (Marx, 1982: 85). The ends do not justify the means (injustice can at best be explained, but not legitimized), nor does the environment exist by itself (our being in the world has consequences). Dialectically linked, means and ends constitute an object of criticism. In other words, it is necessary to assume the abyss between means and ends and, from there, to confront, each time, reality with the end.

Criticism is the practice of establishing limits and, as a result, attempting to establish a value. All valuation takes place through judgment according to a norm. However, it is up to philosophy to distinguish valid norms from those that are not, hence the confusion between philosophy and criticism. The pursuit of truth, righteousness, and beauty, a traditionally reserved activity for philosophy, if it opposes or, more appropriately, distinguishes itself from practical application, requires a rigorous examination of its boundaries and consideration of its past determination, a realm in which truth and error coexist side by side and switch positions. On the one hand, there are reception conditions and subjective expectations, which make the present evaluation not start from zero. However, the naked and immediate appearance of the phenomenon is what challenges previous expectations. We find ourselves in the discomfort of sticking, at the same time, to the historical mediation and to the thing, in an intellectual squint. A change within experience implies a shift in the horizon of expectation (Koselleck, 2006: 191-196, 305-309). Faced with this suspension of meaning, we seek to name the very thing that challenges us, in a dialectic between “no more” and “not yet”.

Reflective activity does a great disservice by understanding praxis as a unity without remnants and intervals between thought and action. Any perspective that departs from philosophy or its realization, with the primacy of practical reason, can only review its own statutes. Work on oneself and work on matter are not separate. Criticism is the overcoming of subjective relativism and positive objectivity, carried by history and therefore in speculative (that is, conceptual and not immediate) identity. There seems to be no other reasonable way out than the effort to think case by case.

itself. with it” (Hegel, 1975: 375); “The general forms of antagonism are the universal and the singular, or, in another way, thinking as such and external reality, sensation, perception. The concept is the identity of the universal and the particular; thus putting these two as concrete in themselves, the universal in itself becomes the unity of the universal and the particular, and the same can be said of the particular” (Hegel, 1975: 389).

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Gustavo Chataignier is a lecturer and researcher at the Catholic University of Maule (Talca, Chile). He holds a doctorate in philosophy from the University of Paris 8, and completed a post-doctoral fellowship at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ). His thesis, *Temps historique et immanence*, directed by Bensaïd and subsequently by Vermeren, was published by L'Harmattan (Paris, 2012). A member of the Laboratoire des Logiques Contemporaines de la Philosophie (Paris 8), of the Centre d'Études des Langues et Littératures Anciennes et Modernes (Rennes 2) and NuFFC (Núcleo de Filosofia Francesa Contemporânea, UFRJ), he was awarded the Chaire des Amériques in 2020, by the Institut des Amériques, at Rennes 2 University. He is also a member of CIRS (Centro de Investigación Religión y Sociedad, UCM). With Hussak, he translated *Malaise dans l'esthétique* by Jacques Rancière into Portuguese (PUC-Rio and 34). His main interests are aesthetics, critical theory, dialectics and contemporary French philosophy.

Gustavo Chataignier és professor i investigador a la Universitat Catòlica del Maule (Talca, Xile) i doctor en Filosofia per la Universitat de París 8, després d'haver fet una estada postdoctoral a la Universitat Federal de Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ). La seva tesi, *Temps historique et immanence*, dirigida per Bensaïd i posteriorment per Vermeren, va ser publicada per L'Harmattan (París, 2012). Membre del Laboratoire des Logiques Contemporaines de la Philosophie (París 8), del Centre d'Études des Langues et Littératures Anciennes et Modernes (Rennes 2) i del NuFFC (Nucli de Filosofia Francesa Contemporània) (UFRJ), va ser guardonat amb la Chaire des Amériques el 2020, per l'Institut des Amériques, a la Universitat Rennes 2. També és membre del CIRS (Centre de Recerca Religió i Societat) (UCM). Ha traduït al portuguès (amb Hussak) *Malaise dans l'esthétique*, de Jacques Rancière (PUC-Rio i 34). Els seus principals interessos són l'estètica, la teoria crítica, la dial·lectica i la filosofia francesa contemporània.
