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Hodge, Joanna (2019) Community and co-existence: Nancy and Derrida reading Hegel, Separately and Together. In: Continental Perspectives on Community Human Coexistence from Unity to Plurality. Routledge, pp. 29-47. ISBN 9780367409555

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**Version:** Accepted Version

**Publisher:** Routledge

Please cite the published version

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# Community and Coexistence

## Nancy and Derrida Reading Hegel, Separately and Together

*Joanna Hodge*

*Esprit and morality:* The German, who knows the secret of how to make spirit, knowledge and heart boring, and has accustomed himself to feeling that boredom is moral, fears of French *esprit* that it may put out the eyes of morality- and yet his fear has in it the fascinated dread of the little bird before the rattlesnake. Of the celebrated Germans, none perhaps possessed more *esprit* than Hegel—but he also possessed so great a German fear of it that this fear was responsible for creating the bad style peculiar to him.<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Introit

The citation at the head of this page is from Nietzsche's *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*. It points to a tension between the registers of French thought, for which the term *esprit* is a marker, and a form of conceptuality which presumes that concepts have meanings determined independently of the natural languages in which they are expressed. It is a theme returned to recurrently by Theodor Adorno, a writer whose responses to Friedrich Nietzsche are perhaps under researched, in the composition of his extended discussions of meaning and conceptuality: *Negative Dialectics*. A reading of Nietzsche, and an appreciation of Nietzsche's attempts to rescue a register of writing in German, from an over mastering conceptuality, prove a resource for Adorno, in his repositioning of dialectics, without a third term, with no resolution of hypothesized antitheses, either conceptually, for Hegel, or in history, with Marx. The same move may be found, but expressed of course in French, in the writings of Georges Bataille and of Maurice Blanchot, who borrows Bataille's phrase concerning a negation without application (*négation sans emploi*). Writing in French, Nancy and Derrida are therefore inclined to cite the formulations provided by Bataille and Blanchot, rather than those of Nietzsche and Adorno. There is then a threefold genealogy for a critique of Hegel's conception of determinate negation, and of an operation called *Aufhebung*, its determinate resolution, to be traced through the writings of Adorno, of Bataille, and of Blanchot, back into the interrogative style of Nietzsche's interrogations.

A key remark here is the following from one of the texts jointly authored by Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, and translated into English, in a collection edited by Simon Sparks:

It became clear in our discussions that “retreat of the political” could, at first reckoning, take on at least three different meanings:

1: The *Aufhebung* of the political, if it is admitted that the Hegelian State *aufhebt* the political itself (an admission which remains to be clarified, and which remains to be submitted to the following counter proof: is not the *Aufhebung* fundamentally political?).<sup>2</sup>

The remaining two indicated meanings concern, first, a subordination of politics to a prior determination of social relations, in terms of a dynamic of forces and relations of production, in Marxist thinking; and, second, Heidegger on an *Entzug*, a withdrawal of being, and an arrival of ambiguity and fragmentation, in place of any unity and determinacy of meaning. The hypothesis is that the work of the concept, as *Aufhebung*, moves thought from a level of human individuality, and interaction in a given world, to an order of logical necessity, constituting a world order, with a subordination of individual destiny to some universal or cosmopolitical interest. For this order, the fate of each individual is the graveyard, the *Schaedelstaette*, invoked in the concluding pages of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*. In this spirit, then the resistance of Adorno, Bataille, and Blanchot to the work of the concept is deemed futile: an expression, even, of an all too bourgeois resentment.

Tracing out this genealogy is not the task for this chapter. Here what is under discussion is the manner in which the writings of Nancy and of Derrida arrive in a space which opens up as an inheritance within this lineage. For both Jean-Luc Nancy and Jacques Derrida, a reading of Nietzsche accompanies their engagements with the Grand Masters of the German tradition: Heidegger, Husserl, Hegel, and Kant, and indeed with what remains of the Greek inauguration of philosophy, as both practice and theory. Nancy participated in editing and translating for an edition of Nietzsche’s writings in French; Derrida’s text *Spurs*, in French, dates from 1978. In section 197 of *Daybreak*, Nietzsche follows up this opening citation of this essay with the following remark:

*German hostility to the Enlightenment:* Let us consider the intellectual contribution to general culture made by the Germans in the first half of this century, and let us take first the German philosophers: they retreated to the first and oldest stage of speculation, for, like the thinkers of dreamy ages, they were content with concepts, instead of explanations—they brought to life again a pre-scientific species of philosophy.<sup>3</sup>

The century in question is of course the nineteenth century, but this diagnosis of a retreat to “the first and oldest stage of speculation” may fit certain features of both Husserl’s and Heidegger’s preoccupations, their declarations of a revival of ontology, and of yet another return to “the things themselves.”

These declarations are analyzed by Adorno in *Negative Dialectics*, and no treatment of the arrival and re-arrival of ontology in philosophical discussion is complete without a necessary detour through Adorno’s critique of the delusions of an ontology which fails adequately to address its lineage, and its material and historical conditions of possibility. Where unsympathetic readers may find Nancy and Derrida to be departing from a domain of philosophical enquiry, classically understood, with its ready-made distinctions between metaphysics and ethics, aesthetics and epistemology, their attempts are rather to be understood as reinventions of a philosophical terminology, to provide a register of discussion more hospitable to what is unprecedented, and scarcely articulable, in contemporary conditions. It is in this critical spirit that the readings of Hegel, offered by Nancy and by Derrida, are here to be explored, together and separately.

## 2. Politics and the Political

The discussion is to be located within a space opening out following the experiment, in France, in the early 1980s, twinning the notion of a politics, as practical activity, in a given public space, *la politique*, with a concept of the political, *le politique*, as the space of meanings, and identity conditions within which such activity takes place, and as which public space itself arrives. The role of Hannah Arendt in opening out this distinction is freely affirmed by Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe on a number of occasions. They admire the way in which Arendt reflects on how the destruction of public space by the Nazis in Germany undermined effective resistance to their murderous regime. In the first context, that of *la politique*, political institutions and inheritances, identities and party allegiances are already formed, and in play; in the latter, the ontology, indeed the very possibility of constituting such institutions, identities, and allegiances is put under interrogation. The distinction reworks and then upsets the classical distinction between theory and practices, as contained within a theoretical domain, provided by the concept “the political.” Instead analysis is to show how that theoretical domain itself acquires shape and shifts as a consequence of new practices arriving within the supposedly subordinated domain. The discussion of the relation politics/the political thus provides a telling example of a conceptual deconstruction, for which a settled relation, or hierarchy, reveals itself to be rather the site for a contestation and instability of both meaning and understanding: indeed, of the scope of politics itself.

It is also significant that the distinction, politics/the political bears a family resemblance to Heidegger's redeployment of Husserl's distinction between ontic and ontological domains. The contrast is between ontic domains, of distinct orders of determinate entities, as delineated and described by Husserl, and his phenomenological descriptions, and the domain of ontology, re-opened, or indeed opened for the first time, by the gesture at the start of Heidegger's *Being and Time*, announcing a retrieval of the question of the meaning of being, out of its Greek origins in Plato's dialogue *The Sophist*. It can be shown that what is taken by Heidegger to be ontologically primary, *Dasein*, plays a dominant role in what can then be articulated and expressed in the following investigations. Jean-Luc Nancy's disruption of the self-evident status, for Heidegger, of the term *Dasein* plays a major role in revealing that the subordination of the ontic within a prior ontological order disguises a privilege assigned to this one set of ontic determinations over all others. With the disruption of the pairing politics/the political, there is also a challenge to Heidegger's pairing ontic/ontological, and to the consequent privilege to *Dasein*, as a distinctive, unified set of capacities, the *Vermögen*, renamed by Heidegger existential potentialities, with respect to being, *Seinkönnen*, capacities for receiving and transmitting meaning, and delimiting what there is.

The distinction between politics and the political thus carries the mark of Heidegger, a trace which then destines it in equal measure to controversy, and misunderstanding, and to an unavoidable necessity of considering how the grand progress of European culture culminated in twentieth century Germany in six million state-ordered murders. Heidegger's distinction between the ontic and the ontological is by no means hard and fast, for it makes sense only with respect to the status as *Dasein*, which remains radically incomplete, in the enquiry broken off in *Being and Time* at the end of the second of the six proposed sections. Heidegger construes *Dasein* as distinguished by its dual insertion, as ontically given in systems of meanings, by inheritance, but also as source of any possible meaning, and site for considering the nature of existing, while affirming its own distinctive existence (*Entschlossenheit*). Thrown into its world, *Dasein* projects beyond itself, and into a future, conceived of as radically open, thus providing both spaces and times for invention and reinvention. For Hegel, *Dasein*, existence, functions as a third term in his dialectical logic, as a term resolving the conceptual antithesis between the two equivalent, but antithetical terms, being and nothingness. For Heidegger, by contrast and in addition, it marks a site of self-relating (*sich zu sich verhalten*), and has this dual status as both a specific kind of entity, with ontic determinateness, and the site of any meaningful discussion whatsoever, delineating what there is, and how it comes to be so, in an ontology.

Long before Nancy and Derrida arrive on the scene, the meaning and delimitation of the scope of the term *Dasein* slides between a Hegelian

determination of the concept and Heidegger's program of exploring a site for self-affirmation. For Hegel, the meaning of the term results from a practice of resolving conflict between antithetical propositions, by moving to a higher, more inclusive level of conceptuality in the operation called *Aufhebung*. For Heidegger, *Dasein* is in each case a result of a double gesture of repeated self-attributions (*Jemeinigkeit*), and of a self-affirmation (*Bezeugung*), in terms of already given collective meanings, inherited and transmitted. It thus acquires the status of a self-attribution in a context of collective inheritances and futures, and Nancy insists on retrieving the dimension of the *Mit-*of *Dasein*, and on a formation for *Dasein* within a pre-given context of a *Mitsein*, a being with, as joint inheritance. The key contrast here is between the operation called *Aufhebung*, which occurs in the order of conceptually given meanings, and that of *Bezeugung*, affirmation or attestation, which functions more like a member of the congregation affirming the word of the preacher, by interleaving the exclamation "hallelujah."

Heidegger's unfulfilled task then in *Being and Time* is to uncover a site at which meanings for twentieth-century existing may be determined. Where the Greeks had temples, as analyzed by Heidegger in the 1935–36 lectures and essay "The Origin of the Artwork," the modern world, it appears, has Nuremberg rallies. Derrida opens up the possibility that such a meaning may arrive in the form of a misguided insistence on a foundational difference between human beings and other animals. This arrives in his papers on *Geschlecht*, or speciesism, and in the published lecture cycles, especially *Of Spirit* and *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. Heidegger in that essay is marking up the manner in which a combination of architecture and religious intent in the Greek world created buildings in public spaces for which he can find no obvious analogy in his own times. As is well enough known, in 1933, Heidegger thought that he had found such a source of meaning in Adolf Hitler, and his National Socialist Movement.

In his noxious Rectoral Address in 1933, Heidegger urges students to identify with both movement and leader, invoking the three orders of Plato's *Republic*, ruling, guarding, and developing individual skills, as roles to be taken up by members of the student body, thus affirming the *Führerprinzip*, the imagery of the *Wacht am Rhein*, and making space for that specifically student duty of burning books, and destroying culture, as memorably depicted in Elias Canetti's social commentary *Die Blendung*, or *Auto da fe*, in which Canetti depicts the collapse of German intellectual life. The movement with its "inner truth and greatness,"<sup>4</sup> the sentence inserted by Heidegger into his 1935–36 lectures: *Introduction to Metaphysics*, when published after the war, may quite precisely be described as seeking to intervene in an existing system of politics, to reinvent it, with newly forged, and intensified practices of terror and persecution, as a new ordering of institutions and meanings. Heidegger's

commitment was such that in extant letters he adduces failure to support the Nazi program as reasons for refusing to support appointments and promotions of academics. All this is well known, and was already sufficiently well known in France in the 1980s.

Heidegger's analyses of history in *Being and Time* reveal a further gap, which opens up between his understanding of meaning in history, as negotiable and malleable, dependent for its determinacy on an upsurge of human self-affirmations, the *Bezeugung* of Division Two, and that of Hegel, for whom a logic of development takes place at a level above and beyond the will and agency of human individuals. History for Hegel is construed as a progress of a consciousness of freedom, in which first one, then the few, and finally the many may meaningfully make a claim on freedom. This process may be thought of as the move from a self-reflection on the meaning of freedom, as first a self-affirmation, and then a recognition that such individual claims on freedom require that others concur and enable, and, finally, that all shall arrive in the domain of such claims. It may also be mapped on to a rough and ready account of human history, in which from a relation of free master and enslaved subordinates, a process may be discerned in which gradually systems of subordination and enslavement are abolished, either in line with some abstract claim about human rights, or because of a logic of economic development, in which self-exploiting workers turn out to be less of a responsibility than enslaved peoples, or some combination of the two.

These alternate accounts of history can be deployed in another domain, in which a distinction between politics and the political may also be put to work, in assessing differences between Leninist or Bolshevik Marxism, which puts an emphasis on party mobilization, to seize power, as opposed to gradualist, Menshevik, and social democratic Marxist analyses, which proceed by building alliances, and supposing the collapse of capital to be an inevitable consequence of the play of contradictions within, and between forces and relations of production. For the latter, there is an extension of a logic of contradiction, and of some necessary process resolving antitheses between social and economic forces, thus extending a logic of contradiction in to the domain of actual historical relations. A structure of inevitability, internal to production processes, is expected to reveal itself as historical process, with a teleology, in which historical forces necessarily work through to a completion in the course of time. Notions drawn from an Aristotelian teleology thus combine in Marxist thinking with modern conceptions of economic production. These grounding concepts of completions, and necessary outcomes are disrupted and challenged through the development of the various notions of desterrance, differance, and deconstruction by Derrida, thus making him an unorthodox kind of Marxist, if he is Marxist at all. They are also disrupted by the notions of unworking (*désœuvrement*), and a negation without function (*négation sans emploi*), from the writings of Maurice

Blanchot and Georges Bataille, which are drawn out from their readings of Marx and of Hegel. In Jean-Luc Nancy's emphasis on a logic of eco-technics, there is a follow through on a different kind of logical necessity, one of disaggregation and a distribution of forces, rather than on a logic of a unifying drive, forming a single historical destiny.

### 3. Centre for Philosophical Research on the Political

Following the conference on Derrida's writings held at the University of Strasbourg in 1980, under the doubly inflected title *The Ends of Man*, Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe set up towards the end of that year a Centre for Philosophical Research on the Political. Simon Sparks in his introduction to *Retreating the Political*, provides a citation from their description of the initial colloquium:

The colloquium *The Ends of Man* cannot be described as simply "philosophical." It should be devoted to the possibility of traversing and displacing, in every sense, the philosophical, literary, critical, poetic, signifying, symbolic etc. regimes; and consequently, of traversing and displacing the "political" and "meaning" as well. The stake of the colloquium would be, in every respect, to breach the inscription of a *wholly other* politics.<sup>5</sup>

It is worth noting that the phrase "tout autrement," wholly otherwise, was given as the title of Emmanuel Levinas's appreciative remarks about Jacques Derrida's writing, in a contribution to the volume of French periodical, *L'Arc*, dedicated to Derrida in 1973. The notion of a retreat or withdrawal repeats the movement of a phenomenological reduction, away from the level of proliferating of appearances, to that of the essences, providing underlying unities of meaning, underpinning the orderliness of those appearances. It also cites Derrida's notion, in the title of the essay, "Le retrait de la métaphore," in which he rehearses his appreciation of Heidegger's claim about the affinity between the supposedly literal meaning of metaphysical concepts, for example *Dasein* and *Aufhebung*, and the supposedly metaphorical use of terms in a secondary sense. Instead of affirming the classical notion of a reduction, this withdrawal rather reveals the radically contingent, and indeed unstable nature of symbolic orders and systems of signification in which the meanings in question are enmeshed.

When announcing the termination of the Centre, in 1982, the following elaboration was given:

Taken as a philosophical question, and from the point of view of what we have for the time being called the essence of the political, the question of the political evokes the necessity of dwelling on what



makes the social relation possible as such, and that is also to say on what does not constitute a simple relation (which is never given) but which implies a “disconnection,” or a “dissociation” at the origin of the political event itself.<sup>6</sup>

In this closing address, two features emerge for attention: as remarked, there is a privilege assigned to a reading of Hannah Arendt’s analyses of time and totalitarianism, and, even more startling, and remaining to be taken up, “the question of the mother,” about which Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe write, as a fourth issue which remains to be addressed, along with those of grounds, finitude, relatedness. These four components are to be put in focus in any further attempt to delimit the specificity of a domain to be called the political:

4: The question of the mother It is a question which comes to us from Freud and we treat it in practically his own terms. It is the question of identification, what one can and must refer to as a general problematic of mimesis: how and according to what relation does the identification which, according to Freud, is “the earliest *Stellungnahme* toward the Other,” take place?<sup>7</sup>

Reference is made to Freud: *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*. These questions of mimesis, of acquiring identity by acting out and performing, and of setting up a relation of differentiation, by imitating, functions in both individual processes of maturation and collective levels, forming political allegiances and identities, in ways which cry out for further analysis and research.

The space thus configured sets up a relation between politics and the political, and an inheritance of Marxist theory and practice. It reveals the dimensions of a dispute between Hegel and Heidegger, on the meaning of *Dasein*, and on the scope and nature of history. In this space, there arrives both a series of disagreements, and a certain alliance between Derrida and Nancy, with a number of others, to situate an inquiry into a disconnection between orders of logical and of political necessities. What is to be explored now is how Nancy and Derrida, in their responses to a splitting between a notion of politics as usual, and a politics as insurrection, and, indeed, to the devastating example of Heidegger’s commitments and affirmations, return to and retrieve components from a reading of Hegel. This gesture of retrieval destabilizes Heidegger’s notion of repeating, his proposed *Wiederholung*, of an opening up in Greece to a specifically philosophical mode of meditation. My discussion thus focuses on the distinct moves for a retrieval or repetition, for a resolution or a suspension of a certain conceptuality, and on construals of a relation to history, with a dispute concerning the status of the term, or concept *Dasein*.

Derrida's readings of Hegel, and those of Nancy have distinct registers, both contributing to a joint program of work, and setting up differences between them. Their joint but distinct responses to Heidegger, and to Nietzsche and to Hegel also demonstrate differences in their philosophical interventions, and itineraries, and play a role in the emergence of the differences which arrive in their estimations of, for example, the status of a concept of fraternity, for political thinking, and of the status of Nancy's notion of a deconstruction of Christianity. For both, any formulation in terms of an essence of the political threatens to install a privilege to a Husserlian movement of reduction, and to Hegel's logic of being, essence, and the concept, repressing the disruptive moment of Nietzsche's affirmation of differences between languages, and the irreducible markings of stylistic specificity. It suppresses Heidegger's doubt about whether the withdrawal of being from the order of appearances can be thought to leave intact an orderly series of appearances, or whether rather in the modern epoch this withdrawal reveals a fragmentation and dissolution of unities and meaning. The question of method arrives, in the startling form of a challenge to the focus on posing and answering questions as best procedure for philosophical inquiry.

Derrida already in 1967 had put a focus on the violence at work in the formation of a community through the posing of a question, and Jean-Luc Nancy, in posing the question: "Who comes after the subject?" as a topic for collective discussion, puts pressure on the structure and function of the question/response format which reinstalls what it seeks to question: the status of an individual speaking subject. These developments are to be expounded in the next sections, in which I shall examine first how Derrida's encounter with Hegel and with the question of the question arrives in the early essay on Levinas, and then evolves in his reading of Hegel in *Glas*; I shall then look at the reading of Hegel proffered by Nancy in his early monograph, *The Speculative Remark*, in a context provided by his reflections on Nietzsche's aphorisms, and on a relation between system and fragment, as set out by Bataille and Blanchot, in their responses to German Romanticism.

#### **4. Fraternal Relations: Derrida Reading Hegel With Levinas and Jean Genet**

Derrida is on record, marveling that Nancy can write a text using two terms which carry with them such a weight of philosophical history, "sense" and "world," in his, in fact, aptly titled study *The Sense of the World*. My remarks now will rotate around two poles: this disagreement between them on the pertinence of this term "deconstruction of Christianity," and a reflection on the notion of a community of the question, opened up, in Derrida's early essay on Emmanuel Levinas, to which Nancy returns

in his preface to the collection published with a long interview with Derrida, "Eating well' or the calculation of the subject," under the overarching title: *Who Comes After the Subject?* In the preface, Nancy disarmingly remarks:

The role of editor I must admit has made me forget that I could and probably should, having asked the question, have written a response myself. It's too late now and perhaps this is no bad thing. In the interview with Derrida I made some observations that will perhaps serve to clarify my position. But I will add a few words here to indicate the precise direction my answer might have taken.<sup>8</sup>

Nancy then specifies that he is inclined to accept Hegel's definition of "that which is capable of maintaining within itself its own contradiction":

The dominant definition of the philosophical (or "metaphysical") subject is to my way of thinking the one proposed by Hegel: "that which is capable of maintaining within itself its own contradiction." That the contradiction would be its own (one recognizes here the dialectical law) that the alienation or extraneousness would be ownmost, and that subjectivity (following Heidegger here, and distinguishing the subject-structure from anthropological subjectivity) consists in reappropriating this proper being-outside-itself: this is what the definition would mean.

And he adds an important rider, concerning the function here of the verb "to be":

"To be" thus has the function here of an operator of appropriation: in fact, it means "to have" or "produce" or "understand" or "support" etc. In a rather hasty manner, I could endeavor to say it is the technological interpretation of Being.<sup>9</sup>

This notion of a "technological interpretation of Being" indicates the manner in which Nancy will both affirm and transform Heidegger's insistence, in *The Question About Technology*, that Being, what there is, arrives in the modern world in the mode of a technicity, whose essence is precisely not technological.

Nancy's analyses of a notion of eco-technics puts an emphasis on a current conjuncture between Marxist theories of the economy, as political economy, and an inheritance of classical philosophical distinctions between subject and object, product and producer, skills and systems of production, in which, as Heidegger notes, discrete skills and practices of self-forming (*techne*) are transposed into global systems of formation and communication. The basic status of a concept of self-forming

processes of artifice and *techne*, and naturally given structures and constraints on growth, given as *phusis*, is shown to have been eroded. Heidegger's account of an intensification of nihilism, with a deepening state of abandonment is thus displaced, and instead, an abandonment by and from Being permits a proliferation of meanings, in place of single unified structure and hierarchy, installing a space of free play, released from the constraints imposed by now outdated, no longer operative concepts. Nancy concludes his preface with the following remark:

This community without the essence of a community, without a common being, is the ontological condition of existence as presence-to. The plural coming is a singular coming—and this is not a prediction. But how could one say what it “is”? One (Who?) might try by saying: the plural liberates (or shares) the singular, the singular liberates (or shares) the plural, in a community without a subject. That is what we have to think about. Who thinks, if not the community?<sup>10</sup>

These notions of a being in common, without common being, and of a singular plurality and of plural singularity take up and develop the notions of *partage* (distribution and sharing) and *comparution* (joint appearing and collective meaning formation) already underway in his other writings.

It will help to cite at some length from Derrida's essay, “Violence and Metaphysics,” in order to develop how, for both Nancy and Derrida, there is no longer any obvious identity to the practice, and profession of philosophy, and philosophizing. I shall cite Derrida with ellipses:

That philosophy died yesterday, since Hegel or Marx, Nietzsche or Heidegger . . . ; that philosophy died *one day within history* . . . ; that beyond the death or dying nature of philosophy perhaps even because of it, thought still has a future, or even as is said today, is still entirely to come because of what philosophy has held in store; or more strangely still, that the future itself has a future—all these are answerable questions. By right of birth, and for one time at least, these are problems put to philosophy as problems philosophy cannot resolve.<sup>11</sup>

This distinction between the form of the question and the formulation of a problem is to be noted, as is that between a philosophy, hypothesized as timeless, and philosophizing, or thinking which takes place in time, subject to temporal constraints and shaping, and thus with a relation to futurity. The juxtaposition of the classical practice of philosophy to a newly forged notion of thinking is of course a gesture affirming aspects of Heidegger's account of some kind of turning away from the universalizing mode of philosophy, constructing concepts for all eternity, to a more

restricted and determinate meditation on and within the passage of time, in given languages and contexts. Derrida continues:

It may even be that these questions are not philosophical, are not philosophy's questions. Nevertheless, these should be the only questions today capable of founding the community within the world, of those who are still called philosophers.<sup>12</sup>

And he signs off:

A community of the question about the possibility of the question. This is very little—almost nothing—but which, today is sheltered and encapsulated an unbreachable dignity and duty of decision. An unbreachable responsibility. Why unbreachable? Because the impossible has already occurred.

The impossible which has already occurred, with its attendant responsibilities, is the gesture of constructing a discourse, philosophy, with universal scope, with its claim to provide an all-inclusive, overarching address. The benefits are that it provides the syntax for making claims on behalf of all human beings; the drawback is that then there begins the malicious enterprise of deciding who shall and who shall not count as fully human.

Derrida invokes a triple inheritance from Hegel, from Husserl and from Heidegger, on a reactivation of the ambition of philosophy, as inaugurated among the Greeks, seeking wisdom in the name of truth. The twin inheritors of this program are the Cartesian program of collective neutral scientific enquiry, and the various resulting positivisms, and Heidegger's gesture of reconfiguring a notion of ontology, grounded in the finitude of *Dasein's* historical existing. The task of thinking together these divergent strands is blocked when the one tradition speaks and writes for the most part in American English, and the other, this community of this question, is German speaking, masculine, and seeking, in different ways, to claim a descent from Greek origins, in which dialogue, and an intimation of a being beyond entities arrive as method, and as object of enquiry. The name of Marx, as the fourth addition to this triad, suggests a need for further additions of further names, through which such a restricted community may be exposed for what is: a closed shop, or community constituted by imposing rigorous conditions for entry, such that there will always be an accommodation to those who arrived and claimed it first.

My intent here is to explore how Derrida and Nancy, with certain others, stage the possibility of a collective inheritance, by exploring the distributed nature of the inheritance, by virtue of which their encounter may be set up. Derrida's readings of Hegel assist him indirectly with developing conceptions of archive, and trace, *clandestination* and *destinerrance*, with which he responds to the problem of Heidegger's version

of the political destiny of philosophy. The two key sources are the essay on Emmanuel Levinas, "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas," which dates from before the writing of Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*; and the non-book, or work of mourning, *Glas (Death Knell): What Remains of Absolute Knowledge*. Absolute knowing, *le savoir absolu*, has its telling abbreviation or siglum, SA, encrypting both Hitler's brown shirts, the *Sturm Abteilung*, or riot squad, which romps through Heidegger's writings, in the 1930s, and the *ça* of Freud's *id*, as translated into French. Derrida is intrigued by what happens to German concepts, when they migrate across the Rhine, and into French, both actually (the German occupation 1940–44) and virtually. He also provocatively reads Heidegger's critique of the linkages between metaphysics, humanism, and an uncritical anthropocentrism, as a critique of Levinas's conceptions of the face and of ethics. He writes: "Now, Levinas simultaneously proposes to us a humanism and a metaphysics."<sup>13</sup> Thus he locates Levinas as a classical metaphysician, closer to Heidegger than Levinas might find comfortable. It is a mark of Levinas's respect and capacity for generous reading that he responds with warmth and appreciation to this alarming, deliberately provocative diagnosis.

Derrida has already, with his readings of Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Hegel, shown how they respond to reaching some kind of limit of metaphysical reinvention, with conceptions of the exhaustion of metaphysics. An urgent need to reinvent philosophy becomes almost a common place, in the twentieth century, echoed across from phenomenology to an insistence on logical form, from deconstruction to logical positivism, from process metaphysics to neuro-cognitivism. The death knell of absolute knowing is tied by Derrida to a death knell for classical metaphysics, and where, for Hegel, the concept is formed at dusk, when the thinking process is completed, for Nietzsche there is here a new dawn, at Daybreak, while for Heidegger, the thinking process starts where the inadequacy of the claims of metaphysics have been recognized for what they are. Derrida also explores how Marx and Engels, in their *Communist Manifesto*, had sounded the death knell of capitalism, and considers the death knell of philosophy, from a site informed by the meditations on finitude provided by the phenomenologies, variously, of Heidegger, Husserl, and, indeed, Nietzsche.

In *Specters of Marx* these themes arrive closely twisted together, and Marx's insistence on revealing a logic of capital underlying, but obscured by daily working relations is conjoined by Derrida to a reflection on the strengths and limits of Husserl's analyses of the logic of appearances. For Derrida, clearly, the question is: how to write philosophy when the form of writing itself already predetermines what can count as meaning, concept, reason. The text of *Glas* is carefully constructed to be unreadable, as it proceeds in twin columns of loosely related enquiries, one concerned with Hegel's concepts of community, and family life, his bastard

child and experience of melancholy; and one with Jean Genet's depiction of the life of those imprisoned, actually and virtually, in the social order thus instituted. The structure of family life, delineated by Hegel in all seriousness, as a necessary subordination of women to men, and of men to the state, is parodied in Genet's meditations on the Holy Family, with its absent father, and sexual abnormalities, and their reenactment, as mimesis, in the structures of identification, desire, and violence, as they are formed through the sexual relations of homosexuals incarcerated in cells in French prisons. There are echoes too of the use made by Marx and Engels of the triad of the Holy Family, with its awkward doubling: father, son, and holy spirit; virgin mother, holy infant, incestuous foster father, to try to make sense of a division of labor between political economists in the nineteenth century.

The essay on Levinas, like *Glas*, is similarly, strictly speaking unreadable since it works as a palimpsest of its own earlier versions, as published in 1964, and similarly positions itself in relation to, while disrupting a series of founding triads in philosophical narratives: Socrates, Plato, Aristotle; Hegel, Kierkegaard, Levinas; rationalism, empiricism, critical philosophy; positivism, vitalism, and the New Scientific Spirit, discussed by Bachelard. These two texts may be studied as performances by Derrida of the impossibility of the possibility of a philosophical conceptuality and community today. In relation to reading Hegel, the point might be put figuratively, by asking whether Jews and homosexuals, and homosexual Jews, and Jewish homosexuals can arrive as such in the pages, and movements of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and the answer is, of course, in the negative. The hybrid texts of Derrida, and indeed of Adorno, of Judith Butler, and of Alexander Garcia Duttman might be thought of as tracing the resulting lines of tension. The title and highly provocative contents of that other text by Marx, *On the Jewish Question*, arrives ready formed to disrupt in advance any community of the question. The form of the question distributes and differentiates, empowers, and disempowers, in advance, all possible positions from which to respond.

## 5. Nancy Reading Hegel With Nietzsche and Heidegger

At first sight it looks as though Nancy proceeds more directly in his approach to reading Hegel, and to disputing the stability of the resulting concepts and conceptual operations. His first solo-authored monograph is *The Speculative Remark*, where the arrival of the occasional French term, and the invocation of Cicero's *Witz*, joke or pun, are brought to the fore. In his thesis for the Doctorat d'état, *The Experience of Freedom*, examined by among others Jacques Derrida, Nancy exposes a displacement of Hegel's conception of ethical community, *Sittlichkeit*, through a disruptive reading of Heidegger on existence, *Dasein*, and of writing

(*écriture*), as a *Schreiben*, to be opposed to a phenomenological *Beschreiben*. Nancy insists on the *Mitsein*, being with, of *Dasein*, discussed by Heidegger as generating the notion of a coexistence, and co-appearing (*comparution*), prior to the notion of existence, and of appearing, taken to be foundational in Heidegger's analyses. Where for Derrida the encounter between Hegel and Heidegger is accompanied by the voices of Levinas and Marx, for Nancy, it is perhaps more a reading of Adorno and of Arendt which permits him to read both, Hegel and Heidegger, while declaring allegiance to neither. Through appreciation of the meditations on evil by Adorno and Arendt, Nancy arrives at a site from which to open a response to evil, and its manifestations, without falling prey to the ontological trap of codifying evil as some kind of necessity in the history of the world, which is shown to stand as some kind of proxy for an indefensible notion of a unified history of a single unified species: humanity. Nancy invents for this the word "ontodicy," and where critiques of ontotheology are common enough, a full exposition in terms of a critique of ontodicy remains to be performed.

Nancy proposes to rethink the space of reasoning as no longer circumscribed by Hegel's concept of the concept, and of dialectical and speculative meaning, nor yet by the horizons of phenomenology, but as fragmentary, and with disseminating meanings, or significance, preferring the notion of *signifiance*, an open-ended proliferating of meanings, to that of signification, which refers meaning back to systems of signs and signifiers, articulated in terms of pre-given systems of meaning and meaning transmission. Nancy, like Derrida, encounters Hegel in a context informed by the arrival of Lacan's adaptation of Hegelian conceptual-ity to fit with Saussurean linguistics. Lacan welds together a Hegelian dialectics, Saussure's linguistic theory, and a Freudian account of the family, into the Lacanian system of imaginary, symbolic and real, which then necessarily installs Lacan as the one true Master. This monstrous construct is then carefully unpicked by Derrida, Lacoue-Labarthe, and Nancy, working in some kind of unison, to the extent that Lacan refers dismissively, if inaccurately, to Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, as Derrida's disciples. This gesture is of course revealing since the very notion of pursuing philosophical, or theoretical inquiry, in a mode of cooperation, with genuine respect of the work of others, as opposed to the mode of conflict and conquest, fits ill with both Lacanian and indeed Hegelian procedures. This would be the mode of coexistence.

The English translation of the German terms *Aufhebung* and *aufheben* is given by A.V. Miller in his version of Hegel's *Science of Logic* as "sublation," "to sublimate," thus inventing a word in English to cover an innovation in Hegel's German. Hegel's "Remark: The expression "To sublimate" occurs at the end of the first section of the *Logic*, on being, nothingness, and becoming, marking a transition to the concept of *Dasein*, determinate being. This is commented on by Nancy in his monograph, with a



focus on the occurrence of the term *Witz*, translated by Miller as pun. "The Remark" in Miller's translation, begins:

To sublata, and the sublated (that which exists ideally as a moment), constitute one of the most important notions in philosophy. It is a fundamental determination (*Grundbestimmung*) which repeatedly occurs throughout the whole of philosophy, the meaning of which is to be clearly grasped and especially distinguished from nothing. What is sublated is not thereby reduced to nothing. Nothing is immediate; what is sublated on the other hand, is the result of mediation; it is a non-being but as a result which had its origin in a being. It still has therefore, in itself (*an sich*), the determinateness from which it originates.<sup>14</sup>

The series of terms to be explored are therefore: sublation, and basic determination, recurrence, and nothing, immediacy, and mediation. Hegel continues:

"To sublata" has a twofold meaning in the language: on the one hand it means to preserve, to maintain and equally it also means to cause to cease, to put an end to. Even "to preserve" includes a negative element, namely that something is removed from its immediacy and so from an existence (*Dasein*) which is open to external influences, in order to preserve it.<sup>15</sup>

Now this twofold meaning is explored, developed and parodied by Derrida in his 1968 lecture "Différance" where he explores the double meaning of the term "difference," with an underlining of a certain duplicity in this, and then all other philosophic terms, as ambiguous between commonsense and technical meanings, by writing it as the inaudible term, "différance." The philosophical term *aufheben* arrives out of the two ordinary language meanings, as indicated by Hegel, forming a third highly sophisticated philosophical meaning. Thus, where Derrida marks up duplicity, inaudibility, and a requirement that the difference of "différance" be marked up in written script, Hegel has marked up a triad, with two everyday meanings transposed into a single complex conceptual structure.

Nancy is then preoccupied with what Hegel, perhaps uncharacteristically, says next:

It is a delight (*erfreulich*) to speculative thought to find in the language words which have themselves a speculative meaning; the German language has a number of such. The double meaning of the Latin *tollere* (which has become famous through the Ciceronian pun: *tollendum est Octavium*) does not go so far: its affirmative determination signifies only a lifting up. Something is sublated only in so far

as it has entered into a unity with its opposite; in this more particular signification as something reflected, it may fittingly be called a *moment*.<sup>16</sup>

A radical ambiguity arrives at this point. For “*tollendum est Octavium*” might be translated as: “Octavian is to be elevated.” It might also be translated as “Octavian is to be removed.” Furthermore, the notion of a “*modus tollendo tollens*” invokes a procedure in a syllogistic logic, for which *modus tollens*, also *modus tollendo tollens* (Latin for “mode that denies by denying,” or denying the consequent), is a valid form of argument and a rule of inference. It is an application of the general truth that, if a statement is true, then so is its contra-positive. It might take the form, hypothesis: if not P, then not Q; affirmation, not P; therefore, not Q. If he is not alive, then he cannot be Emperor; he is not alive; therefore, he cannot be Emperor, which was, at the time, true of Julius Caesar, but not of Octavian, who was about to become Augustus Caesar.

In this context, where Octavian’s immediate predecessor, Julius Caesar had been assassinated, and thus removed from life, rather than raised to the status of Emperor, the Ciceronian pun has rather more political heft than at first meets the eye. Octavian becomes in due course the first Roman Emperor, converting Republic to Empire, as Hegel and indeed Nancy are, of course, well aware. Hegel continues:

We shall often have occasion to notice that the technical language of philosophy employs Latin terms for reflected determinations, either because the mother tongue has no words for them, or, if it has, as here, because its expression calls to mind more what is immediate, whereas the foreign language suggests more what is reflected.<sup>17</sup>

And here in a magnificent series are to be found the differentiations between a technical language (*eine philosophische Kunstsprache*), a mother tongue (*die Muttersprache*), and a foreign language (*die fremde Sprache*). If a people are to learn philosophy, it must learn to speak more than one language, and perhaps, even more, to recognize that what constitutes a people is always plural, not one unique ethnicity, not one single uniform language, and not one exclusive, self-enclosed system of expression.

Where, for this stage in Hegel’s argument, in the *Science of Logic*, it is *Dasein* in which contrary forces are to be found in some kind of unity, Nancy, as previously noted, follows through on how, for Hegel, an ambiguity in the notion of subjectivity, as grammatical and personal, as individual and as in common, permits this unification to be hypothesized in relation to a concept of the subject. However, where, for Hegel, the logic of the concept secures the affirmability of such a unity, the entire enterprise of Nancy and Derrida, reading Heidegger and Hegel separately and together, can be shown to reveal the instability of that unification,

the potentially totalitarian consequences of such an affirmation, and the dangers of an imposition of a unity, where there is rather divergence, irreducible plurality and open-endedness. The dangers are a limitless attribution of meaning and authority to whatever forces capture control of state and then international institutions. To these consequences, there are sites of resistance, within a collectively inherited juxtaposition of traditions. These sites of resistance emerge into view in careful explorations of what remains of absolute knowing, and in the scarcely perceptible disruption of Hegelian order, in Hegel's oblique invocation of assassination, as a response to arbitrary rule.

## Notes

1. Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, 114.
2. Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *Retreating the Political*, 133.
3. Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, 117.
4. Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 213.
5. Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *Retreating the Political*, xix.
6. Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *Retreating the Political*, 180.
7. Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *Retreating the Political*, 133.
8. Nancy in Cadava, Connor, and Nancy, *Who Comes After the Subject?*, 6.
9. Nancy in Cadava, Connor, and Nancy, *Who Comes After the Subject?*, 6.
10. Nancy in Cadava, Connor, and Nancy, *Who Comes After the Subject?*, 8.
11. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 79.
12. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 80.
13. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 142.
14. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 106–7.
15. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 107.
16. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 107.
17. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 107.

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