

# Hegel in the Americas: Interpretive Assimilation and the Anticolonial Argument\*

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**ABSTRACT:** This essay criticizes some strategies of Hegel scholarship, especially the non-metaphysical school and its recent metaphysical successor. My main claim is that these approaches are rhetorically opaque, and thus vulnerable to a certain anticolonial argument. In place of these strategies, I recommend and illustrate a more historically perspicuous approach that is sensitive to concerns about the role of European philosophy in the Americas.

**KEYWORDS:** Hegel, Interpretation, Metaphysics, Philosophy of History, Social Ontology.

“When I was young the British universities had been invaded by German idealism, but when the Germans invaded Belgium it was decided that German philosophy must be bad. And so I came into my own, because I was against German philosophy anyhow.”  
Bertrand Russell<sup>1</sup>

“In the work of our modernizers it is only the work of foreign philosophers, who are recognized as authorities, that are studied and discussed. But foreign philosophers, even those who visit our countries to deliver talks, very rarely quote us in their work”  
Guillermo Hurtado<sup>2</sup>

“It is for America to abandon the ground on which hitherto the history of the world has developed itself. What *has* taken place in the New World up to the present time is only an echo of the Old World - the expression of a foreign life.”  
Hegel<sup>3</sup>

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\* Invited paper.

<sup>1</sup> From the text of a radio show, reprinted in *Bertrand Russell Speaks His Mind* (London 1960), p. 16. Cited in AKEHURST, T. The Nazi tradition: The analytic critique of continental philosophy in mid-century Britain. **History of European Ideas**, 34-4, 2008, p. 548-557.

<sup>2</sup> HURTADO, G, Two models of Latin American philosophy. **The Journal of Speculative Philosophy**, 20-3, 2006, p. 204-213.

<sup>3</sup> HEGEL, G.W.F. **The Philosophy of History**. Trans. by J. Sibree. New York: Cosimo, 2007, [originally 1899].

Hegel scholars are commonly anxious about the relevance of his thought for contemporary philosophy, but typically we neglect to justify the very idea of relevance at stake in the proposal. Relevance is not an absolute good. In the abstract, rather, it would be neither good nor bad for the world if Hegel's thinking were to have great contemporary significance. In the following I try to acknowledge that some versions of Hegel are indeed of value today, but more importantly I hope to outline a few precautionary arguments. I distinguish two methods of interpreting canonical philosophers in regard to questions of contemporary relevance. They are, as I name them, *assimilative* readings and *reception-historical* readings. I argue that the first method tends to be, and in fact has been in anglophone contexts of Hegel scholarship, rhetorically opaque. The Hegels who should be of interest in the Americas today, I argue, are distinctly not the Hegels known to readers of anglophone Hegel scholarship - the Hegels of Pippin and Pinkard, Brandom and McDowell, and even the newer metaphysical varieties to the extent that these have failed to justify the place of Hegel scholarship in the contemporary world.

An assimilative reading is one that attributes to the target philosopher views that would be more plausible in the interpreter's context than are the views that the philosopher is commonly believed to have held. As such there is nothing wrong with assimilative interpretations. A philosopher may be wrongly imputed, in a given context, to have held strange views or ideas that appear needlessly foreign to the context. Hegel, for instance, might be thought to have believed in a World-Spirit. In that case an assimilative interpretation of his work might insist, plausibly, that he believed something slightly more sensible. The problems arise only when the assimilation becomes rhetorically opaque (as defined in Section 3 below), which in this case means that there is not sufficient mention of the views that stand under correction. Hegel will be said, straight away, to have asserted things that only someone *in* our context could assert. In that case Hegel could be fully assimilated to our context, and the point could be lost that, for instance, he has been dead for two centuries and knew little of our world.

My contention in the following is that an overwhelming amount of Hegel scholarship, borne of an anxiety that Hegel should always hold relevant and even *avant garde* views, takes exactly this form. While there is, again, little harm in this in the abstract, everything depends on the particulars. In the case of the assimilated philosophers it can easily be forgotten why we mention them - the bygone philosophers - at all. Could we not just write up the *avant garde* views in question

and defend them without mention of the deceased? Why do we attribute the arguments specifically to canonical figures like Hegel? These questions are not merely rhetorical, and I argue that they take on a special weight in colonial contexts. Why, after all, would we wish to promote the philosophy of Hegel, in whatever assimilated form, in places like South America?

Assimilationist readings will prevent us from addressing these last questions, which is to say they leave the Hegel scholar without a good answer to what I call the anticolonial argument. By ‘the anticolonial argument’ I refer to a line of thought that may be condensed as follows:

1. Philosophy is a form of cultural expression.
2. Philosophies are distinctive of specific cultures (distinctivist thesis).<sup>4</sup>
3. Hegel’s philosophy is distinctive of nineteenth-century German culture.
4. The prominence of Hegel, or other European philosophers, in the Americas reflects a special form of (insidious) intellectual colonization.

I wish to demonstrate the pull of this argument by showing how assimilative readings validate the key premise, viz., the distinctivist thesis. Assimilative readings of deceased philosophers are in fact distinctive in the sense intended, which is to say that they are parochial. When this vice is corrected by appropriate historical arguments, viz., when interpretation becomes less parochial, the thesis may be reasonably rejected. It is only then that we may respond to the anticolonial argument. The only question that will remain, then, concerns what makes an interpretation less parochial. The answer to that question will involve an analysis of reception-history. So my argument proceeds with an historical review of Hegel’s place in the anglophone world and its academies.

### *1. Assimilative Readings I: The Earlier Anglophone Contexts*

Hegel’s place in anglophone scholarship differs somewhat from his place in German or Brazilian scholarship. There is no doubt an interesting set of stories to tell about how Hegel came to Brazil,

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<sup>4</sup> I take this terminology from NUCCETELLI, S. Latin American Philosophy. In Nuccetelli, S., Schutte, O. and Bueno, O. (Eds.) **Blackwell Companion to Latin American Philosophy**, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.

and many of the disciplinary dynamics of anglophone philosophy seem to have been repeated in South American contexts.<sup>5</sup> Why would the rapidly growing Brazilian university system seek to include, specifically, some rather old German theories? I am not the one to give answers to these questions, but I am sensitive to the objections raised on this score by people who work on what we (in the United States) call Latin American Philosophy.<sup>6</sup> The argument is that the prominence of Hegel in places like Brazil reflects something of a colonization of the academy, and the mind, by Europeans. No doubt funding agencies play a role in this. European agencies pay European scholars to study in Brazil, or Brazilian scholars to study in Europe. The effect in either case is that Brazilian scholars and students become better acquainted with European ideologies, with Hegel's philosophy being just one of the very famous and very imposing European ideologies. So there is much to ask, not necessarily in a cynical manner, about whether Brazilians should study European philosophy, or whether there are not rather other sources to be uncovered within the large and diverse culture in Brazil. Of course, we have the right to argue that the philosophies of Europe are not merely European ideologies, but we should not do so by ignoring the criticisms made by Latin American philosophers (and perhaps more familiarly by African philosophers). We have instead to make the arguments in reply to them.

Some of the relevant questions, again, I will leave to my Brazilian colleagues, though I will occasionally add some reflections based on mildly polemical writings by Latin American philosophers. My immediate focus will be on how Hegel came to America and Great Britain respectively. This story involves somewhat the whole history of Anglo-German cultural conflict, the status of the United States as a former European colony that turned into an economic and militaristic superpower, and many other big issues. But the details of the story are much more mundane. In the middle of the nineteenth century, when it begins, there was very little academic philosophy in America.<sup>7</sup> What there was of philosophy, as we would recognize it, took place rather

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<sup>5</sup> For a brief account of Hegel-readings in South American, see BOSTEELS, B. Hegel in America. In Zizek, S. et al (Eds.). **Hegel and the Infinite: Religion, Politics, and Dialectic**. Columbia University Press, 2011, pp. 67–90.

<sup>6</sup> In addition to HURTADO, Two models of Latin American philosophy, and NUC CETELLI, Latin American Philosophy, see PEREDA, C. Latin American Philosophy: Some Vices. **The Journal of Speculative Philosophy**, 20-3, 2006, p. 192-203; RUIZ-AHO, E. Latin American Philosophy at a Crossroads. **Human Studies**, 34-3, 2011, p. 309-331; and STURM, F. Dependence and Originality in Iberoamerican Philosophy. **International Philosophical Quarterly**, 20-3, 1980, p. 249-263.

<sup>7</sup> Some important documents on this subject are collected in *College Curriculum in the United States*, by SNOW, L. (Columbia 1907).

in the larger public. Hegel was the particular favorite of large clusters of German immigrants, who were concentrated in the middle part of the country that today is called the Midwest. Cincinnati and St. Louis are two places of deep German ancestry, and it was there that Hegel's philosophy flourished from about 1850-1880.<sup>8</sup> The so-called Saint Louis Hegelians even founded the first philosophy journal in America, *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*. Its contents consisted largely of translations of German texts, including ones by Hegel.

In terms of strictly academic philosophy, the tradition in the United States is much younger than is philosophy in South America. The colonial academies of the South had a comparatively robust scholastic tradition.<sup>9</sup> The provincial colleges in the States, however, had a curriculum limited to a the equivalent of one philosophy course in the final year. In these courses students would read a few outdated, eighteenth-century British texts by authors such as Dugald Stewart or William Paley.<sup>10</sup> This circumstance lasted until at least 1876. In that year Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore became the first American research university.<sup>11</sup> Only in response to the founding of Hopkins did Harvard (until then a provincial college) follow a similar model.<sup>12</sup> Their new college president, Charles Eliot, vowed to attract the best researchers in the world in every discipline. In the case of philosophy, and several other disciplines, this meant that they sought resources and personnel from Germany. Academic philosophy began in America, then, only by importing what German philosophy it could.<sup>13</sup>

The effect of these developments on Hegel was that, a half-century after his death, he became an important figure in the founding of an American philosophy. William James, who played a big role in all this, notably lamented the fact that an idealism that had already been displaced in Germany remained the major school of American philosophy. This idealism, in James's view, was

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<sup>8</sup> FLOWER, E, and MURPHEY, M. **A history of philosophy in America**. New York: Capricorn Books, 2007; DEARMEY, M., and GOOD, J. Eds. **The St Louis Hegelians**. Vol. 2. A&C Black, 2001.

<sup>9</sup> For a small sample, see REDMOND, W. Self-awareness in Colonial Latin American Philosophy, Part 1. **Jahrbuch für Geschichte Lateinamerikas / Anuario de Historia de América Latina (JbLA)**, 41, 2004, p. 353-372. and Part 2, in **Jahrbuch für Geschichte Lateinamerikas / Anuario de Historia de América Latina (JbLA)**, 42, 2005, p. 209-234.

<sup>10</sup> See SNOW, **College Curriculum**.

<sup>11</sup> THOM, Helen Hopkins. **Johns Hopkins: a silhouette**. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1929.

<sup>12</sup> KUEHNEMANN, E. **Charles W. Eliot**. Boston/New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1909.

<sup>13</sup> The classic on this topic is KUKLICK, B **The Rise of American Philosophy: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1860-1930**. Vol. 344. Yale University Press, 1979. Kuklick, however, typically underplays the German influences in American universities.

a form of Right Hegelianism, and it remained in place until pragmatism gathered enough steam to supplant it.<sup>14</sup> The school textbooks of this era were German histories of philosophy such as those by Ueberweg and Windelbaum, who thus took the place of Stewart and Paley.<sup>15</sup>

While the British university has a much deeper tradition than does its American correlate, Hegel was nonetheless an important figure in Britain during the same period. Along with Kant, he was a key figure studied in Scottish universities and even in places like Oxford and Cambridge. In the 1860's and 1870's a number of curious Brits traveled to Germany to study the mysterious philosophies there. The literary legacy of this movement is notable. Hutchison Stirling's laudatory (and amateurish) *The Secret of Hegel* has been much derided, but there were also more measured and respectable texts such as those by Andrew Seth (later Pringle-Pattison).<sup>16</sup> The movement was most successful in Scotland, where German philosophy supplanted the native strain of 'common sense' thought.<sup>17</sup> Many of the best philosophers of the immediately subsequent period are now referred to, somewhat derisively as it were, as British Idealists, American Idealists, British Neo-Hegelians, etc. Later I will try to contextualize the modern categorizations of these figures, but the introductory point that I make here is that the very founding of anglophone academic philosophy, on both sides of the Atlantic, was greatly impacted by the slow effort to understand, translate, and interpret the great German philosophers.

Between about 1880 and about 1915, then, an idealism modeled loosely on Hegel was the chief philosophy at Oxford (where T.H. Green and F. H. Bradley reigned) and Cambridge (McTaggart), whereas in America the leading philosopher for much of this period was the idealist Josiah Royce of Harvard. This is the meaning of the first clause from Russell in my opening quotation: "When I was young the British universities had been invaded by German idealism."

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<sup>14</sup> James made this remark in James's quote appears in the 1882 volume of *Mind* (Old Series, Vol. VII), p. 186. For a discussion of this, see STERN, R. British Hegelianism: A Non-Metaphysical View?. *European Journal of Philosophy*, 2-3, 1994, p. 297.

<sup>15</sup> UEBERWEG, F. *A History of Philosophy from Thales to the Present Time by Friedrich Ueberweg: History of the ancient and mediaeval philosophy. Vol. 1.* Hodder and Stoughton, 1872; WINDELBAND, W. *A history of philosophy with especial reference to the formation and development of its problems and conceptions.* New York: Macmillan and Company, 1898.

<sup>16</sup> PRINGLE-PATTISON (SETH), A. *The Development from Kant to Hegel: With Chapters on the Philosophy of Religion.* Williams and Norgate, 1882; and *Hegelianism and personality.* W. Blackwood and sons, 1893.

<sup>17</sup> PRINGLE-PATTISON (SETH), A. *Scottish philosophy: A comparison of the Scottish and German answers to Hume.* W. Blackwood, 1890.

None of the philosophers in question, however, were mere commentators on Hegel, and there was nothing like a Hegel scholarship in the modern sense - our practice of taking a single philosopher from the past for a research specialty is a newer phenomenon. The philosophers in question rather renovated aspects of Hegel's system and modified it to fit their context. Occasionally they rejected parts of that philosophy, and in every case they integrated new scientific developments such as Darwinism.

T.H. Green and Bernard Bosanquet were the chief political thinkers among this group, and their political philosophies likewise owe much to Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*.<sup>18</sup> Green's students, given the demographics of Oxford, populated the British government all the way through the war period.<sup>19</sup> Hegel's philosophy was thus no mere academic concern, but rather his conceptions of right and the state were by extension a presence in English politics. What we have in this period, then, is *full-scale assimilation of Hegel's philosophy* into the educational system and even political life of Britain. One key point to take into consideration, on which Robert Stern has rightly insisted,<sup>20</sup> is that each the writers of this period intelligently distinguished their own positions from Hegel's. But it is fair nonetheless to say that their philosophies were very much modeled on his.

This Anglo-Hegelian legacy, however, lasted only until the outbreak of what we now call World War I. This is the meaning of the second clause I take from Russell: "but when the Germans invaded Belgium it was decided that German philosophy must be bad." There is a vast literature that documents the sudden unpopularity, one might even say stigma, of studying German theory after the war began (viz., August of 1914).<sup>21</sup> The image of German theory in the British mind became mixed with stories of wartime atrocities, bolstered by perhaps Britain's largest ever propaganda campaign.<sup>22</sup> There are some extant books, indeed, by idealists who argued that German

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<sup>18</sup> GREEN, T.H. **Lectures on the principles of political obligation and other writings**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986; SWEET, W. **Idealism and Rights: the social ontology of human rights in the political thought of Bernard Bosanquet**. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1997.

<sup>19</sup> See Collingwood's lamentations on this point in his *Autobiography* (COLLINGWOOD, R. G. **RG Collingwood: an Autobiography and Other Writings: With Essays on Collingwood's Life and Work**. Oxford University Press, 2013). For a history see HARRISON, B. **The transformation of British politics, 1860-1995**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

<sup>20</sup> STERN R. **Hegelian metaphysics**. Oxford University Press, 2009.

<sup>21</sup> For references and analysis see my HARRELSON, K. Hegel and the Modern Canon. **Owl of Minerva**, 44 1/ 2, 2012, p. 1-35.

<sup>22</sup> For a recent study see DAVIDSON, N. **The Propoganda of Endurance: Identity, Survival, and British Trench Newspapers in the First World War**. Masters Thesis, University of Tennessee, 2006.

philosophy bore little relationship to German aggression.<sup>23</sup> But these are the records of a lost ideological battle. Bertrand Russell was not merely being quaint when he condensed the story in the way he did.

These political circumstances, of course, were only half the story, since by that time Russell and Moore at Cambridge had already rejected the idealism of their teachers for unrelated reasons (hence Russell could claim, in the next sentence of the quotation, that he “was against German philosophy anyhow”). At Oxford in the 1910s there was also a newer movement, a realist philosophy led by Cook Wilson and later Gilbert Ryle<sup>24</sup>; at Harvard and elsewhere in America, William James’s pragmatism had outlasted Royce’s idealism. Rightly or wrongly, Hegel was then taken by all the newer philosophers, as different as they were from one another, for the hero of the old-guard. All these people knew Hegel’s philosophy very well, but his texts were considered untouchable by the subsequent generation. The later philosophers eventually came to call themselves only two or three decades later, so by the early 1940’s, ‘analytical’ philosophers.<sup>25</sup>

While the full disciplinary history is a good deal more complicated than I make it here, a brief survey of the fairly small Hegel literature from 1930 to 1960 supports my simplified take *at least as regards Hegel*. By the middle of the century the analysts, bolstered by Vienna Circle refugees, had pushed the pragmatists out in America. The pragmatists could tolerate Hegel, since their remaining hero, John Dewey, held great affinity for him. But the Vienna philosophers, most famously Karl Popper, considered Hegel to be dangerous and even totalitarian. Analytic philosophers in America, under the towering influence of Quine, likewise had no time for Hegel or any other German save (occasionally) Kant. This, then, is how things stood in the midcentury: the history of philosophy received relatively short shrift as it was among the analysts, but the more respectable among the dead were the ones we now refer to as the ancients (Plato, Aristotle) and the early moderns (Descartes, Hume, etc.).

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<sup>23</sup> MUIRHEAD, J. **German Philosophy in Relation to the War**. London: Oxford pamphlet series, no. 62.

<sup>24</sup> The story of Cook Wilson’s reign at Oxford is amusingly (if also unfairly) told by Collingwood in his *Autobiography*.

<sup>25</sup> Most histories of analytic philosophy miss this aspect of their material by taking the category ‘analytic philosophy’ for given. They then project it back into the further past, as far back as 1899 or 1903. What I emphasize here is that the category needed to be arrived at, and this was the product of both political and strictly literary developments.



Thomas Akehurst has compiled exhaustive lists of references and documents to substantiate similar historical points.<sup>26</sup> Here I wish to emphasize just a few writings by Popper, which suffice to introduce the necessary interpretive ideas. Popper himself was hardly a leader in any of this, and Akehurst even argues that Popper was a relative latecomer to the issues.<sup>27</sup> Nonetheless his casual polemic against the likes of Hegel in *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1945) had great popular appeal in postwar Britain and America. Briefly, he blamed Hegel and Marx (and to some extent even Plato!) for the rise of Nazism, and he framed Hegel's doctrines so that they seemed to lead directly to Auschwitz. This sounds preposterous to our ears, but even the really good anglophone philosophers (notably Russell and Ayer) believed after 1945 that *thinking like Hegel or Marx led in some way to Nazism*.<sup>28</sup> Popper's interpretation of Hegel is grossly unscholarly, to be sure, but such was the extent of cultural prejudice, and the confidence that democratic liberals in Britain and America were on the side of the good and the just.

There are a few very simple points of Popper's reading of Hegel that we may appreciate without too much detailed study. They concern, respectively, Hegel's metaphysics and his theory of history. But all of it may be summarized by saying that Popper and others objected to (what we now call) Hegel's political or social ontology, viz., his suggestion that the *State*, the *Volk*, or the *World-Spirit* are real entities. The core of Popper's caricature of Hegel is thus the manner in which his metaphysics seemed to underwrite his politics and theory of history. Like many of Hegel's enemies, Popper relied on a willful misreading of the *Doppelsatz*, which seems to assert an equivalence of the real and the rational. More important than this, however, were the (by 1945) customary complaints that Hegel reified the state. Whereas liberal democracy was founded on the notion of 'consent of the governed' and the right of people to revolt, it seemed to Popper that Hegel left the people no such resources.<sup>29</sup> Russell had made a similar point (and Ayer repeated it) when he claimed that Hegel's notion of freedom means only that we have the right to obey the police.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> AKEHURST, T. Nazi, and AKEHURST, T. **The cultural politics of analytic philosophy: Britishness and the spectre of Europe**. A&C Black, 2010.

<sup>27</sup> For an interesting reassessment of Popper's politics, see HACOEN, M. Karl Popper, the Vienna Circle, and Red Vienna. **Journal of the History of Ideas**, 59-4, 1998, p. 711–734.

<sup>28</sup> AKEHURST, The Nazi; and AKEHURST, The cultural politics, again, documents this exhaustively.

<sup>29</sup> "the only possible standard of judgment upon the state is the world historical success of its actions" (pg. 260)

<sup>30</sup> AKEHURST, The Nazi, 551.

All this is rather unserious as interpretation of Hegel, and I mention it only because it reflects how Hegel was viewed by several generations of philosophers in both Britain and America. The most prominent anglophone philosophers of the midcentury have this unflattering distinction in common: they all made a public show of praise for Popper's very poorly researched books. Gilbert Ryle lauded *The Open Society* in the pages of *Mind*.<sup>31</sup> Bertrand Russell was even more effusive, calling it "a work of first-class importance which ought to be widely read for its masterly criticism of the enemies of democracy, ancient and modern."<sup>32</sup> Russell even claimed his *History of Western Philosophy* was meant to establish the same theses, though that is much less obvious.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, Russell *knew* that all this was unscholarly as history, and he could not have believed that Popper had accurately accounted for the philosophies of Hegel or Marx. But such scholarly scruples were secondary. The important thing, for Russell as well as Popper, was to frame the old German ways of thinking as too tied (not *only* historically) to the horrors of fascism and the World Wars.

Of course, when discussing the interpretation of philosophers, we should not overstate the political side of things. There was another compelling set of reasons why Hegel became anathema in the English-speaking world. Idealist metaphysics had already suffered defeats in Britain and America, namely, for many of the same reasons that it fell much earlier in Germany (viz., in the 1860's)<sup>34</sup>: philosophical systems such as Hegel's were relics of the eighteenth-century academy, when the Tübingen *Stiftler* could devise holistic pictures of university studies. They did not, namely, respect the distinctions between philosophy and the rapidly growing empirical sciences. This simple point is important, and we will return to it in the next section. It suffices to note that Hegel's philosophy was unpopular also because it seemed to require that all the sciences be unified in a systematic philosophy, and this was the way neither of modern science nor modern universities.

I thus do not mean to overstate the effect of the political context, but only to illustrate the manner in which Hegel was *both* politically outcast and philosophically caricatured during the height of the analytic era. Hegel was too idealistic, too historicist, too systematic, and most of all

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<sup>31</sup> RYLE, G. Popper, K.R. - *The Open Society and its Enemies*. **Mind**, 56-222, p. 167-172.

<sup>32</sup> A Bibliography of Bertrand Russell: I. Separate Publications II. Serial, p. 443. This line derives from a blurb Russell wrote for Routledge and Sons, Popper's publisher.

<sup>33</sup> AKEHURST, The Nazi.

<sup>34</sup> For an analysis of the latter see my HARRELSON, K. The Priority of Epistemology in Early Neo-Kantianism. **History of Philosophy Quarterly**, 2015, p. 57-77.

too German for the anglophone philosophers of this era. A look at some of the Hegel scholarship of this period confirms this picture: Walter Kaufmann's "The Hegel Myth and Its Method" aims mainly at Popper, but Kaufmann knew as well as anyone what the climate was for the study of Hegel as well as (what he is more famous for) Nietzsche.<sup>35</sup> And Kaufmann enumerates the philosophical points of contention in much the same way, but in greater detail, than I recount above.

This is the *background* against which we should consider the major interpretive trends that preoccupied Hegel scholars in the late twentieth century: briefly, those who studied Hegel came to frame their interpretations against the metaphysical and political caricatures of the positivist era. They made Hegel 'non-metaphysical', and they undersold the extent of his political and historical commitments. But before I give my take on these trends, it is worth forecasting them by asserting that *Hegel scholarship in America has been a tremendous success in certain institutional respects*. If the goal was ever to revive interest in Hegel, and for some of the scholars I will discuss it clearly was, that end was achieved. Today the study of Hegel is a considerable industry: most of the better philosophy departments in America and Britain have at least one specialist in Hegel, and some have two or three. We Hegel scholars ought to appreciate the strangeness of this fact.

## 2. Assimilative Readings II: The Non-metaphysical Hegels

The dominant strategy of Hegel-interpretation in the later twentieth century was called, for most of its life, the non-metaphysical reading. Since certain brands of metaphysics are once again *en vogue*, the older guard of this movement, such as Terry Pinkard, now use the much more misleading name 'post-Kantian'.<sup>36</sup> Whatever we call it, the fact is that it became a compelling interpretation of Hegel. The expression 'non-metaphysical' derived from the title of Klaus Hartmann's 1971 essay, which was a programmatic but unscholarly call for a new strategy of Hegel scholarship. Hartmann opened by noting that 'we' – viz., certain philosophers of the early 1970's – lack an approach to Hegel.<sup>37</sup> He was no doubt right about this much, as I've tried to document briefly

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<sup>35</sup> KAUFMANN, W. **From Shakespeare to Existentialism: Studies in Poetry, Religion, and Philosophy**, Boston: Beacon Press, 1959, p. 88-119, Chapter 7: The Hegel Myth and Its Method.

<sup>36</sup> See my "Hegel and the Modern Canon" for my argument concerning the 'post-Kantian' title.

<sup>37</sup> HARTMANN, K. Hegel: A Non-Metaphysical View. In MacIntyre, A. (Ed.). **Hegel: A Collection of Critical Essays**. University of Notre Dame Press, 1972.

above. What was needed was a whole new strategy that would emphasize the sides of Hegel that least resembled the caricatures of Popper and others, and that least violated the norms of philosophy with regard to other disciplines.

Hartmann himself was a German and something of a neo-Kantian<sup>38</sup>, so for him respect for the boundary between philosophy and science was a major issue. He selected a single passage from Hegel's *Encyclopedia* on this topic, in which Hegel had used the word *Nachbildung*, and Hartmann constrained to read in a 'categorical' manner. He made it seem as if the categories of logic, according to Hegel, were to be borrowed from the sciences and merely *nachgebildet*, or conceptually reconstructed. Hartmann thus deliberately recast the project of the *Logic* such that it no longer seemed like an imposition on the sciences. This was not so much a direct reply to the likes of Popper, of course, but rather an outgrowth of a different German school of philosophy. Pinkard, one of Hartmann's acolytes, later acknowledged that his mentor was simply "spinning a Neo-Hegel out of German Neo-Kantianism."<sup>39</sup>

This was only the beginning, of course, and the non-metaphysical reading eventually moved from this merely programmatic stage into a period of more detailed textual scholarship. For evidence we need only look at the writings of the young Pinkard. Eventually he would form, with Robert Pippin, the power nexus in anglophone Hegel scholarship. But the younger version wrote more programmatic essays modeled closely on Hartmann's reading. In 1979 he published "The Logic of Hegel's *Logic*" in the *Journal for the History of Philosophy*, in which he sought more detailed textual support for Hartmann's argument.<sup>40</sup> He began that essay by repeating Hartmann's call for a very deliberately selective reinterpretation, noting the unfortunate circumstance that "Hegel's whole system is seemingly tied down to a very obscure metaphysics, that of the 'World Spirit.'" But he was hopeful that "not all of Hegel's philosophy is inextricably bound up with commitment to such shadowy entities."<sup>41</sup>

<sup>38</sup> PINKARD, T. Klaus Hartmann: A Philosophical Appreciation. *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung*, 1992, p. 600-608; HARTMANN, K. On taking the transcendental turn. *The Review of Metaphysics*, 1966, p. 223-249.

<sup>39</sup> PINKARD, T. What is the Non-Metaphysical Reading of Hegel? A Reply to Frederick Beiser. *Hegel Bulletin*, 17-2, 1996, p. 13-20.

<sup>40</sup> PINKARD, T. The Logic of Hegel's *Logic*. *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 17-4, 1979, p. 417-435

<sup>41</sup> PINKARD, The Logic, p. 417.

In the beginning it thus seemed as if all that was at stake was a modest selection of the parts of Hegel that bore little relationship to the philosophy of history or the metaphysical postulate of an absolute. And in the 1980's, an era when epistemology still served as the dominant area of analytic philosophy, Hegel scholars tried to make Hegel into a participant in the relevant debates.<sup>42</sup> It was not until slightly later, beginning in 1991, that Pinkard claimed that even the philosophy of history, the philosophy of religion, etc., could be revived on the non-metaphysical interpretation. In that year Pinkard published an essay called "The Successor to Metaphysics," in which he claimed explicitly that the Hartmann program could extend to the *Realphilosophie*.<sup>43</sup> (Hartmann was more modest in his attributions: he distinguished *his own* non-metaphysical political philosophy from Hegel's metaphysical one).<sup>44</sup> Pinkard concluded this essay, not entirely credibly, by insisting that his intention was not "to make Hegel acceptable to analytic philosophers." But regardless of what he intended, the acknowledged effect of his and Pippin's work was that Hegel increasingly became an acceptable niche market in the analytically dominated academy.<sup>45</sup>

By the 1990's all this had become somewhat polemical, since there were other people working on Hegel who wished to characterize his philosophy more in its historical context, and by use of its more indulgent metaphysical language. The controversy came to a head in the wake of a 1994 *Festschrift* for Hartmann, edited by Pinkard.<sup>46</sup> Frederick Beiser lambasted the volume in the pages of the *Hegel Bulletin* (which back then had the awkward title of *Bulletin for the Hegel Society of Great Britain*), calling all this irresponsible as history and the product of a growing academic clique.<sup>47</sup> No doubt Beiser was partly right in those claims, but Pinkard was also right in his reply when he claimed that the non-metaphysical Hegelians could analyze what Hegel was entitled to say given his supposed position in the post-Kantian tradition.<sup>48</sup> They could censure any excessive theorizing without having to dismiss Hegel wholesale, and more importantly they treated him as a

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<sup>42</sup> ROCKMORE, T. Hegel's Circular Epistemology as Antifoundationalism. *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 6-1, 1989, p. 101-113; SIEP, L. Hegel's idea of a conceptual scheme. *Inquiry* 34-1, 1991, p. 63-76.

<sup>43</sup> See PINKARD, T. The Successor to Metaphysics. *The Monist*, 74-3, 1991, p. 295-328.

<sup>44</sup> HARTMANN, K., *Politische Philosophie*. Freiburg und Munchen; Karl Alber, 1981.

<sup>45</sup> As evidence I point to the claims made by Pinkard's successors, such as Bowman and Kreines

<sup>46</sup> PINKARD, T. (Ed.) *Hegel Reconsidered*. Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer 1994.

<sup>47</sup> BEISER, F. Hegel, A Non-Metaphysician? A Polemic Review of H.T. Engelhardt and Terry Pinkard (eds), *Hegel Reconsidered*. *Hegel Bulletin*, 16-2, 1995, p. 1-13.

<sup>48</sup> Pinkard made this point especially well in his reply to Beiser – see PINKARD, What is the Non-Metaphysical Reading of Hegel?

live thinker whose texts obtained relevance even when measured against assumptions of then-current philosophical thought.

However we choose to judge the non-metaphysical Hegel in retrospect, we must admit that the whole interpretive agenda steadily increased in historical and argumentative rigor. We could hardly complain of the work by Pinkard, Pippin, and their students, as we can of Hartmann, that they neglected detailed textual and contextual study. But all this was also accompanied by an increase in attributive confidence. As it seems to me, those who began by drawing selectively from Hegel eventually convinced themselves that they were interpreting the real Hegel, and what is most objectionable in this movement is precisely the attributive confidence of the interpreters. To analyze this point we have two options: either we assume that they borrow from Brandom the very liberal interpretation of the *de dicto/ de re* distinction, in which case whatever they attribute to Hegel is *eo ipso* the real Hegel; or we assume that they wished to ignore the problem of interpretation altogether.<sup>49</sup> In the next section I consider the former possibility, although I suspect the latter is the correct one.

### 3. *Assimilative Readings: A Rhetorical Analysis*

Up to this point I have been mainly informal about the way I have characterized various interpretations of Hegel as having been motivated by political and institutional contexts. Here I wish to be slightly more formal in how I go about this. To interpret a philosopher, at least within the dominant anglophone regime<sup>50</sup>, is to attribute to him/ her certain beliefs or propositions. Interpretation is thus a species of belief attribution, and the varieties of the former follow the logic of the latter. A scholar writes sentences of the sort ‘Hegel believed *x*’. And the evidence for this is usually some written sentence *y*. So the scholar’s argument runs: ‘When Hegel wrote *y* he meant *x*’. Hegel of course wrote in German, in a bygone idiom with a very idiosyncratic vocabulary – we Hegel scholars always get *y* in that form. So the trick is to specify *x* in a different idiom, which

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<sup>49</sup> For a rejection of Brandom’s argument, see my HARRELSON, K. *Inferentialist Philosophy of Language and the Historiography of Philosophy*. **British Journal for the History of Philosophy**, 22-3, 2014, p. 582-603.

<sup>50</sup> Of course there are other methods of interpretation that do not require belief attribution, and a similar review of so-called continental scholarship would require different arguments here.

means for us in Portuguese, Italian, or English, and in a more contemporary vocabulary. We write ‘when Hegel wrote “*Was vernünftig ist, das ist wirklich; und was wirklich ist, das ist vernünftig*” he meant  $x$ ’. Scholarly debates then hinge on the appropriate methods about finding  $x$ . How, in other words, ought we restate the beliefs of dead philosophers *in our language*? How do I make Hegel speak modern English or Portuguese?

Brandom was right, in Chapter 9 of *Making it Explicit*, to argue that we sometimes have the right to rephrase these sentences in the form ‘Hegel believed  $x$ ’.<sup>51</sup> In other words, when we interpret another person by rephrasing their views in our terms, we may (in some cases at least) assert that they (really) believed our statement  $x$ .<sup>52</sup> So analytically-trained philosophers can attribute to Hegel all sorts of positions on questions of contemporary relevance. But this is the beginning of all arguments about scholarship, not the end. We still have to analyze, in particular cases, where scholars get their specific terminologies  $x$ , why they do so, what are the consequences of their doing so, etc. [NB: Brandom added to these observations some very misleading simplifications, such as the famous *indeterminacy of translation*, which states that there is no fact of the matter for any  $x=y$ , in which case there is no fact of the matter of whether any interpretation (‘When Hegel wrote  $y$  he meant  $x$ ’) is correct.]<sup>53</sup>

There is a further difficulty that derives from the fact that, in scholarly debates, belief-attributions quickly become second-order. Scholars do not argue only that ‘Hegel believed  $x$ ’, since to do so would represent a failure to engage what we call the secondary literature. We argue that ‘Scholars  $P$ ,  $R$ , and  $Q$  argued that Hegel believed  $x$  when he wrote  $y$ , but he (Hegel) really believed  $z$ ’. All this may seem pedantic on our part, and it is so. But my first argument is that this pedantry is inevitable in the interpretation of canonical philosophers, because:

**Principle of contextual meaning:** *In canonical contexts*, a relationship of mutual implication holds between first- and second-order belief attributions.

<sup>51</sup> BRANDOM, R. *Making it Explicit*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994, p. 495-613.

<sup>52</sup> My disagreement with Brandom is that he does not supply contextual limits on *de re* interpretation. See my *Inferentialist Philosophy of Language and the Historiography of Philosophy*, p. 17-19.

<sup>53</sup> Brandom’s more focused arguments for these points appear in BRANDOM, R. *Tales from the Mighty Dead*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2002, ch. 3, and BRANDOM, R. *Reason in Philosophy*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2009, Ch. 3, but these make reference throughout also to main argument in Ch. 9 of *Making it Explicit*.

When we argue that ‘Hegel was not a metaphysician’, for example, there is usually a rhetorical context in which others believed that Hegel was a metaphysician. First-order interpretations (sets of statements of the form ‘Hegel believed  $x_1, x_2 \dots x_n$ ’) have more or less clear second-order implications, when we are dealing with *canonical* texts, viz., ones for which there is already an extant picture of what, roughly, the philosopher in question believed. What I have called ‘the principle of contextual meaning’, in other words, holds only because certain extant interpretations belong to the scholarly common ground – this is not a generalized principle about language. Conversely second-order interpretations (sets of statements of the form ‘the members of school  $P$  believed as a consequence of historical conditions  $\phi$  that Hegel believed  $x$ ’) usually serve the interest of particular first-order agendas.

I will give a second, less formal and more Hegelian argument to the same point. No scholar writing today stands in an immediate relationship to Hegel’s texts. The very presence in our lap of German texts from the Age of Napoleon is rather mediated by a complex history. How can we say, then, what the text means in our context? Do we translate it into our language, where by ‘language’ I mean both ‘natural language’ and local, technical idiom? Surely we do, and for a philosophy of language such as Brandom’s – the loose affiliation of Pinkard/ Pippin with Brandom was thus a great fortune for the former – this is the end of the matter. Every interpreter assimilates previous utterances into her own idiom. That for Brandom is what linguistic exchange is all about. But his whole theory is built upon David Lewis’s scorekeeping model of linguistic exchange, which derives from live speakers engaging in competitive debate.<sup>54</sup> It does not apply so obviously to a Brazilian or an American reading a two-hundred-year-old book in a foreign language. To put it in Hegelian terms, this strategy ignores the entire mediation of the reader-text relationship.

To understand a text of philosophy, by contrast, we ought to consider what the utterances meant in the context of introduction, the material history of how it got to me, the various interpretive contexts that mediate my relationship to it, etc. We need also to account for the historical specificity of the interpreter, which Brandom’s theory neglects. He does not require us to recognize, as Hegel did, that we are just one speaker-interpreter in a larger world and in an

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<sup>54</sup> LEWIS, D. Scorekeeping in a language game. In: **Semantics from different points of view.**, Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer, 1979, p. 172-187.



historical context. By noting these mistakes, I do not mean to highlight a flaw in Brandom's theory when considered as analytic philosophy of language. But it is a flaw insofar as Brandom (and Pinkard/Pippin on the more generous reading) imagine it to have application to philosophical interpretation.

To provide a useful contrast with assimilative interpretations, I wish to distinguish between *rhetorically transparent* and *rhetorically opaque* expressions of interpretations. A rhetorically transparent expression reveals the entire polemical context:

**Model of rhetorical transparency in belief-attribution:** For reasons  $R$  and historical circumstances  $\phi$ , philosophers  $P$  and  $Q$  believed that Hegel asserted  $z$  when he wrote  $y$ ; but *not- $R$* , and rather  $M$ , so Hegel asserted  $x$  when he wrote  $y$ .

A rhetorically opaque expression, by contrast, presents itself rather as an immediate translation (Hegel asserted  $x$  when he wrote  $y$ ). It offers a translation without acknowledgement of the context. Most importantly, for the expression to work rhetorically it is necessary that we ignore, for a moment, certain of the mediating contexts. Now ask yourself a further question: what was the appeal of the non-metaphysical Hegel? The claim 'Hegel is not a metaphysician' had appeal mainly to the extent that we ignored *both* a certain set of contexts ('there have been many meanings of "metaphysics"') *and* the intended effect ('Hegel is not one of the bad metaphysicians that people fear he is'). What is even more curious is that (in the case in question) the sense of 'metaphysics' attributed or not to Hegel is in some respect produced both by Hegel and by his influence.<sup>55</sup>

The biggest shortcoming of opaque interpretations is that they do not permit us to discover, by engaging Hegel (for instance) in this way, any reasons or justifications for a particular approach to dead philosophers. And for us (inhabitants of the Americas) this means that we cannot, at least with their help, engage the anticolonial argument. Opaque interpretations may serve assimilative ends, which is to say they can help boost the status of Philosopher  $P$  in a particular context. In the case of Hegel they have done this well, as I have acknowledged. But this is only because Hegel interpretation, like the historiography of philosophy generally, always shadows issues of passing

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<sup>55</sup> This raises a deeper level of criticism, which would lead from mere 'reception history' to 'effective history'.

currency in philosophy. Hegel always looks, at least in contemporary American philosophy, as much as possible like an analytically-trained philosopher (which unsurprisingly is not that much!). The assimilative strategy, due to its rhetorical opacity, is essentially a conservative one.

#### 4. *Assimilative Readings III: The Return of Metaphysics*

What I have told so far is something of a history of anglophone Hegels up to about 2005, together with a brief rhetorical analysis from which I draw some criticisms about the interpretive strategies of a dominant school. In this section I wish to introduce what has happened since then, which is all much less interesting for my purposes: a collection of anglophone Hegel scholars have written books about Hegel's metaphysics. This was the obvious move to make for a young Hegel scholar raised in the context of the non-metaphysical Hegels. It was one I even planned myself before I made an historical turn in the argument. Robert Stern, in any case, beat everyone to the punch in 2008 (and he did a better job than anyone else likely would have done). Throughout the 1990's he had slowly worked on the argument by reassessing certain relationships between Hegel and the likes of Bradley, Seth, etc., and he finally gathered it all into a collection called *Hegelian Metaphysics*.<sup>56</sup> Stern knew that he was making what could seem like a polemical argument – he confessed it in the opening sentence of his introduction – but he mainly avoided mention of the non-metaphysical school. In the subsequent decade however more books were to follow, by Bowman, Kreines, and others.<sup>57</sup>

In two key chapters Stern dealt importantly with Hegel's relationship to the so-called British Hegelians.<sup>58</sup> These introduce the central problem of political ontology by examining earlier readings of Hegel's 'concrete universal'. Unfortunately, Stern did not emphasize the fact that this is not just an obscure piece of nineteenth century metaphysics; it is rather a notion with political significance of the very kind that anglophones worried led to Nazism. In analysis of terms like

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<sup>56</sup> STERN, R. **Hegelian Metaphysics**.

<sup>57</sup> LAURENTIIS, A. (Ed.), **Hegel and Metaphysics: On Logic and Ontology in the System**. Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2016; KREINES, J. **Reason in the World: The Philosophical Appeal of Hegel's Metaphysics**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015; BOWMAN, B. **Hegel and the Metaphysics of Absolute Negativity**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

<sup>58</sup> STERN, *British Hegelianism*, p. 117-142 and the much more philosophically ambitious STERN, R. *Hegel, British Idealism, and the Curious Case of the Concrete Universal*, p. 143 – 176.

‘humanity’ and ‘Englishness’, to be specific, a metaphysical Hegel risks upending the political individualism of the anglophone world. The Germans, so the earlier analytics thought, threatened democracy and liberalism by treating the *Volk* and the *State* as metaphysically real entities. The whole metaphysical versus non-metaphysical dispute thus condenses the entire basis of the Anglo-German culture war that dominated twentieth-century philosophy (and politics!)

Not wishing to be polemical, Stern revived the idea of a concrete universal mainly by domesticating it, acknowledging that the idea “relates to a crucial and genuine strand in Hegel’s position.”<sup>59</sup> This is a tame conclusion, given that it was Hegel’s idea in the first place. Stern then argued that universal characteristics such as ‘Englishness’ or ‘humanity’ do not subsume individuals into a social and political whole. In other words, he claimed that the previous anglophone caricature of Hegel was wrong, which fact was known all along (even by Russell). While Stern thus deserves credit for retrieving these doctrines of Hegel, and for establishing a more plausible relationship to the British idealists, his rescue attempts fell short of establishing a more historically responsible approach to Hegel. The only real upshot of Stern’s argument, which is never stated as such, is that Hegel’s brand of ‘conceptual realism’ is not politically threatening in the sense that Popper and Russell thought that it was. And this is easier to imply now that no one argues against Hegel in the manner of the earlier postwar propaganda.

The other point to consider in regard to the metaphysical Hegels is the easy manner in which all these authors - Stern, Krienes, Bowman, etc. - have situated themselves in relationship to previous assimilative readings: they have generally acknowledged the institutional success of the non-metaphysical reading, and wish only to capitalize and extend Hegel’s newfound respectability in the anglophone academy.<sup>60</sup> Each of them credits Pinkard and Pippin, namely, with having made Hegel acceptable to contemporary analytic philosophers. They make these points casually in the introductions to their books.<sup>61</sup> But each author also notes that the time has moved on, that it is appropriate now for there to be explorations of Hegel’s metaphysics. The metaphysical Hegel, in

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<sup>59</sup> STERN, *British Idealism*, p. 144.

<sup>60</sup> In another context STERN, R. Why Hegel Now (Again)—and in What Form? **Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements** 78, 2016, p. 187-210 (p. 192) Stern does acknowledge the “smug assimilationism” of the earlier non-metaphysical school. But he does not seem to mean by it the unmitigated indictment that I mean by it.

<sup>61</sup> Bowman refers to the “immense contributions to reintroducing Hegel as a serious thinker to anglophone philosophy” (pgs. 2-3, fn. 1) by Pinkard, Pippin, and Brandom.

other words, is rather self-consciously a continuation of the assimilation project that began with Hartmann's and Pinkard's writings of the 1970's. Stern's mild polemics against Kreines acknowledge all this.<sup>62</sup> The Anglo-German cultural wars are now over, and the analytic-continental divide, which was for so long *the* divide in American philosophy, is itself a relic of this history. Hegel need not be assimilated to the anglophone canon, but rather he has been. No analysis of publication histories or the academic job market could conclude otherwise.

##### *5. Latin American Hegels: The problem of a world history*

I wish to take much less liberty in composing a similar history of Hegel in Latin America, though I draw one brief point of comparison. In the anglophone world - founded politically as it is on an individualistic liberalism - the obviously objectionable aspect of Hegel's philosophy was his political or social ontology. Liberal politics takes the individual human person as its basic ontological category. Hegel presented a challenge to this, and his anglophone interpreters thus debated the extent of his commitment to realism about what we now call social wholes - those variations of *Geist* that Hegel described in his political and historical works. An even newer literature has focused on this point more narrowly. The debate has become whether Hegel's politics really needs his logic and metaphysics, or (naively) whether we could simply neglect to acknowledge that connection.<sup>63</sup> In some respects this is the right debate for scholars to be entertaining, though as I claimed above (and argue again below) it is illicit to maintain that we should ignore parts of Hegel's philosophy under the misguided insistence that the dead always ought to remain relevant to (some unspecified) contemporary theory.

For an assimilationist interpreter it is always open to try and cast Hegel's notions of *Geist* in slightly more deflationary terms, in which case Hegel's opposition to liberal politics becomes softened. Why it is so important that Hegel not be very different from us is never asked - and if it were all the scholarly programs would come crashing down. Interpretive assimilation is an easy

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<sup>62</sup> See STERN, Why Hegel Now, and also STERN, R. Kreines on the Problem of Metaphysics in Kant and Hegel. *Hegel Bulletin*, 39-1, 2018, p. 106-120.

<sup>63</sup> THOMPSON, M. (Ed.). *Hegel's Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Politics*. New York/London: Routledge, 2018; GOODFIELD, E. Lee. *Hegel and the Metaphysical Frontiers of Political Theory*. New York/London: Routledge, 2014.

game to play, but also a rhetorically dishonest one. It requires an almost complete, and usually willful, ignorance of historical context. It is dishonest because it enables the interpreter to deny the obvious fact that Hegel wrote in a very different time and place, and that he underwrote ideologies to which the interpreters themselves could not reasonably assent. Hegel, in any case, is neither Locke nor Mill, neither a liberal nor a Nazi, neither an analytic nor a continental philosopher, just as surely as he was not the efficient cause of the world wars.

In Latin America an analogous set of problems has arisen, although the Hegelian concepts under contention will differ slightly. How should the Latin American philosophers view their relationship to Hegel? To start with, in Latin America the more objectionable aspect of Hegel's philosophy is his theory of world history. Hegel's account is unabashedly teleological, even a theodicy of sorts, and it presents the progress of modern Europe in terms of an increasing awareness of our - the *Weltgeist's* - freedom. It is not a story that an inhabitant of the Americas would readily adopt.

Bruno Bosteels, in his brief account of Latin American Hegel scholarship, suggests that for early interpreters it was precisely the connection between Hegel's metaphysics and his theory of history that was considered to be the problem:

The most frequently rehearsed criticism of Hegel's thought in Latin American circles indeed does not apply in the first place to his dialectical method or to his inveterate idealism but rather and inseparably to his philosophy of history with its pivotal concept of the world-spirit driving home the identity of the real and the rational.<sup>64</sup>

The analogy is easy enough to draw at this point: whereas anglophone readers of Hegel needed to worry that his politics was metaphysical, Latin Americans need to worry that Hegel's sense of history is too teleological. For the South American reader, then, the assimilative task would require one of two options: either you divorce Hegel's sense of history from his metaphysics; or, you seek a vision of Hegel that has no such commitments to a theory of world history. In either case, then, the non-metaphysical readings would have a certain attraction in, for instance, Brazil. But this would present an especially strange circumstance: a German philosophy gets sufficiently anglicized so as to appear sufficiently harmless to South Americans. And just as importantly, the

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<sup>64</sup> BOSTEELS, Hegel in America, p. 71.

interpretive gymnastics needed for this assimilation would be beyond the skill of even the most virtuosic interpreter: that person would need to argue that Hegel did not believe that the progress of modern Europe was a matter of increasing, and seemingly inevitable, self-awareness by the *Weltgeist*.

Prominent Latin American accounts of Hegel, such as those by the Mexican philosopher Ortega y Gasset and the Argentinian Jose Pablo Feinmann,<sup>65</sup> *did* attempt to address these questions. And unsurprisingly they did not do so in a manner that would flatter our hero. Feinmann represents the extreme metaphysical reading of Hegel's world history. He saw in Hegel a kind of unconscious reassertion of the European right to impose itself on colonial lands:

The transformation of substance into subject expresses, *philosophically*, the appropriation of history on behalf of European humanity. There is no reductionism in affirming that, in Hegelian philosophy, the development of the spirit is identified with that of European history.<sup>66</sup>

In these short passages, however, there is much to which the more analytically-inclined Hegel scholars will rightfully object. Feinmann identifies Hegel's metaphysics, viz., the identification of substance with subjectivity, as the basic colonial act. (He contrasts this with Descartes and Kant, who at least portrayed the subject as isolated from an external world or thing-in-itself). So Feinmann saw Hegel's metaphysics as an expression of the colonial spirit, or the tendency of European humanity to impose itself on its other. This, of course, is a very indulgent metaphorical reading of Hegel. But it does beg the relevant set of questions: what is the relationship between European philosophy and European colonialism? Hegel, who in fact modeled both a political philosophy and a theory of world history on an idealist metaphysics, is not one who would claim that there is no such relationship. It is not open to the Hegel scholar to go the other way and argue for an anticolonial reading of Hegel.

As I see it, then, the basic problem concerning Hegel in Latin America begs for an elaboration of precisely this point - how the progress of freedom and self-awareness gave birth also to the colonial situation. And whatever the answer, we should not seek to actively separate the parts of

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<sup>65</sup> GASSET, O. Hegel and America. Trans. L. Buchanan and L. Hoflheimer. *Clio* 25-1, 1991, p. 69-81. FEINMANN, J. **Filosofía y nación: Estudios sobre el pensamiento argentino**. Buenos Aires: Ariel, 1996, p. 149-164.

<sup>66</sup> FEINMANN, *Filosofía y nación*, p. 155, Quoted in BOSTEELS, Hegel in America, p. 72.

Hegel's philosophy in such a way that these important questions become obscured. If assimilative approaches to Hegel, on the other hand, were to take root in South America, we should see lots of books and articles disavowing Hegel's commitment to a metaphysical basis for world history. The movement would repeat that of the anglophone Hegels, where for roughly a century the focus has been on disavowing Hegel's social and political ontology.

#### 6. *Dead Philosophers and Contemporary Relevance*

But all this begs the question of whether we should propose assimilative interpretations, and I have already answered that question in the negative. Here I will draw one further distinction as it pertains to the question of relevance. We should distinguish, namely, between historical and attributional relevance. Assimilationists aim only at the latter, at the expense of the former. It is almost a logical requirement of interpretive assimilation that the interpreter either ignore or scapegoat previous interpretations. Hence the non-metaphysical Hegelians portrayed the so-called British and American Neo-Hegelians in such a negative light. The assimilationist can only treat these earlier readings as misunderstandings. In the context of anglophone Hegel scholarship this is fairly harmless, because the Anglo-German culture wars have become merely academic. In Latin America, indeed in any context in which the very right to philosophize might come under threat, the matter could become more serious.

The bigger flaw in assimilationism, however, rests in the conflation of relevance *simpliciter* with attributional relevance. There are in fact many ways for one thing to be relevant to another, and so many ways for Hegel's philosophy to be relevant to us. The assimilationists presume that a thinker is relevant if and only if that thinker believed things that it would be good in our context to believe. *Relevance to us* is conflated with being ideologically aligned with us, with believing what we believe or should believe. And *this* rests on the same error as the distinctivist thesis - hence it bolsters the anticolonial argument. The assimilationist thinks, implicitly, that the only ideas relevant to us are the ones we hold. And if too many of us in the Americas take such an approach to the dead European philosophies, the consequences become more significant. The colonial subject would be forced, on this approach, to identify with the philosophies of Europe.

On the other hand, Hegel has tremendous *historical* relevance in both the anglophone and Latin Americas. And interpretive assimilationism has come, almost inevitably, at the expense of acknowledging his actual historical influence. We happen to operate in a world in which everyone has taken up various Hegelian ideas, but we do not well enough understand the relationship between Hegel and these ideas. To take just one example, though there are many more, we live in a world in which seemingly everyone pledges allegiance to standpoint epistemology. What is the relationship between these views and Hegel's thesis that self-consciousness is inherently social? If we try to answer such questions by reformulating Hegel's view in a manner that makes him sound like a contemporary feminist (no doubt many are working on this right now!), we would frame the whole picture backwards. Hegel is the beginning, not one of the ends, of the relevant historical trajectory. Similar claims could be made about dozens of other issues: what was Hegel's impact on the founding of social psychology? How did his logic pertain to the development of formal sciences? How did various understandings of his politics affect the development of welfare states? The questions go on and on, and a genuinely historical approach to his philosophy - one that would forsake the obsession with attributing to him avant garde views in our context - would produce works of much greater value than the customary parochial efforts to make him less foreign.

In contrast to these parochial tendencies of interpretation - the effort to make foreign philosophers sound like one of us - an historical approach to Hegel's philosophy, *and* its reception could actually have a positive impact on both the relevant communities and the status of Hegel in our academies. While this last point is, as I stated at the beginning, not an inherent good, it might well be a good for us. European ideologies such as Hegel's have framed, for better or worse, much of the world in which we live. And we can only comprehend the extent of this if our view of him is not obscured by the need to make him too much like us. That would more likely make us, in turn, too much like him. And that is the worry rightfully underlying the anticolonial argument.

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