

## History, Forgetfulness and Remembrance in Hegel and Nietzsche

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**Abstract:** Despite the evident distance between Hegel's and Nietzsche's philosophical projects, there is a shared terrain from which both authors respond to the excesses of Enlightened modernity, which reacted against history and tradition in the name of a subjective consciousness perceived as the unconditioned nucleus of reality. This paper wants to show how close these alleged antagonists are when it comes to sharing an intuition about the fundamental temporality which underlies existence and human experience. From this common vantage, which is, in both cases, hinged on the notions of "remembrance" and "forgetfulness", we strive to generate a vivid –if strained– exchange between Hegel and Nietzsche as critics of modernity.

**Key words:** Hegel, Nietzsche, memory, Modernity

New strains in philosophical reflection seem to have brought Hegel's and Nietzsche's thought into convergence in an unsuspected way. Despite Karl Löwith's<sup>1</sup> famous study on the communicating vessels between both authors, the grounds have only recently been readied for addressing the real extent of this convergence. The genesis of this favourable juncture has coaxed a renewed interest in Hegelian philosophy which, by fueling its theoretical potential in thematic horizons as diverse as the philosophy of consciousness<sup>2</sup> or the discussion on contemporary ethics<sup>3</sup>, has also sketched out the image of a non-dogmatic and indeed, "non-metaphysical"<sup>4</sup> Hegel, in

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<sup>1</sup> Löwith, Karl, *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche. Der revolutionäre Bruch im Denken des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1964.

<sup>2</sup> For example, in the works by the so-called Pittsburg School. Cf. Brandom, Robert, *Articulating Reasons*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000; McDowell, John, *Mind and World*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994.

<sup>3</sup> Especially as regards the concept of recognition, bridges have been built between Hegel's work and current issues in moral philosophy. Cf., for example, Honneth, Axel, *Leiden an Unbestimmtheit*, Stuttgart: Reclam, 2001; Siep, Ludwig, "Die Bewegung des Anerkennens in der Phänomenologie des Geistes", in: Köhler, D. and O. Pöggeler (eds.), *G.W.F.Hegel, Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Berlin: Akademie, 1998, pp. 107-127.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Hartmann, Klaus, "Hegel: A Non-Metaphysical View", in: MacIntyre, A. (ed.), *Hegel: A Collection of Critical Essays*, New York: Anchor, 1972.

striking contrast to the traditional portrait of the great systematizer of absolute reason. But just as decisive to the new constellation between these authors is the influence of recent looks on Nietzsche that distance themselves from the facile label of the dogged postmodernist, highlighting non-polemical aspects in the relations between his philosophy and the metaphysical tradition of Occidental thought<sup>5</sup>. In this way, a merely mildly metaphysical Hegel and an only moderately metaphysical Nietzsche can finally launch a long delayed dialogue. The great “boa constrictor of the spirit unto-itself”<sup>6</sup> and Zarathustra’s snake thus glide upon a common ground, in such proximity that it allows us to suspect some intertwinings<sup>7</sup>.

The present paper deals with one of these embraces, namely, the one pertaining to the question of the historicity of human existence. We here intend to show that Hegel and Nietzsche achieved a profound intellection of the fundamental historical essence of existence and human experience, which coincides in its most distinctive features, despite the different paths that each decided to traverse in order to attain this understanding, and the clearly opposed results thus derived.

This affirmation can appear surprising to anyone who, being acquainted with Nietzsche’s work, remembers the general –and not entirely just– tone of contempt with which he tends to refer to Hegelian thought on account of his philosophy of history, that is, his attempt to spiritualize the historical process by virtue of a dialectic reason which self-fulfills upon penetration of its own movement. A more careful look, however, lets us glean –side by side with those innumerable attacks on Hegelianized history– a Nietzschean recognition of Hegel’s positive influence in the unfurling of the most authentic German thought. Nietzsche tends to note two aspects in this sense, the first of which is featured in the prologue to *Daybreak*, and deals with the “famous fundamental dialectic principle with which Hegel collaborated to the victory of the German spirit over the rest of Europe”–

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<sup>5</sup> In this sense, Alexander Nehamas’, “Nietzsche, modernity, aestheticism”, in: Magnus, B. and K. Higgins (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 223-251, is paradigmatic. The effort to conduct a hermeneutical reading of Nietzsche can only succeed if the unblinking idea that he performed a critical dissolution of the metaphysical tradition is previously dissolved. Cf. Schrift, Alan, *Nietzsche and the Question of Interpretation. Between Hermeneutics and Deconstruction*, New York: Routledge, 1990; Vattimo, Gianni, *El fin de la modernidad*, Barcelona: Gedisa, 1985 (especially, Chapter X).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Nachlaß 1885*, 43[3], in: *Kritische Studienausgabe*, edition by G. Colli and M. Montinari, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1999, vol. 11, p. 703. From now on, cited as KSA, and followed by the number of the respective volume.

<sup>7</sup> A survey of the most recent bibliography on the Nietzsche-Hegel relationship is offered by Patrick Wotling in: Wotling, P., “Nietzsche et Hegel. Quatre tentatives pour faire dialoguer deux frères ennemis”, in: *Nietzsche-Studien*, 24 (2005), pp. 458-473.

‘the contradiction moves the world: all things contradict themselves’<sup>8</sup>. The second appears in *The Gay Science*, there where Nietzsche recognizes, in terms of becoming and change, one of the constitutive elements of the human spirit, mentioning Hegel as he who raised this instinct to the level of a philosophical accomplishment: “We Germans are Hegelians” –Nietzsche says– “even if there had never been a Hegel, in the measure in which (and, as opposed to Latins) we instinctively bestow on becoming, on development, a deeper sense and greater value than to what ‘is’”<sup>9</sup>. So it is that, beyond the evident repugnance towards certain concepts of Hegel’s doctrine, Nietzsche admits to the innovative nature of a reflection that introduced that which was most typically ‘German’ into the history of metaphysical dogma, by opposing the notion of Being to a renewed sense of Becoming and its corresponding logic. The metaphysical-Christian tradition severed reality into two unreconcilable planes when it postulated a perennial realm of Being which would constitute the true selfness of things beyond the unsubstantial sphere of the senses. Consubstantial to this system of oppositions is a type of logical thought that rejects the contradictory, and apprehends change and the contingent by only referring to universal schemes and a language of eternal and immutable truths. Hegel, instead, rejected the idea of Being as an unmoveable and eternal substance beyond history, postulating change and becoming as integral dimensions of the essence of reality. As a consequence of this, he developed a form of logic that not only found contradiction to pose no obstacle to reflection, but to be a fundamental moment in the movement of being itself. Nietzsche is clear to the effect that, despite these innovations, Hegel did not abandon the course of metaphysical thought, but the texts cited above allow us to intuit that, as pertained these aspects of Hegelianism, he did perceive a fundamental veer in their course, in a direction which came very close to his own thought.

That said, we have only gained one perspective from which an approximation between these authors makes sense. In what follows, we shall strive to examine this relationship in greater detail, from the announced outlook of the historical conformation of human existence. With this in mind, we shall take Nietzsche’s juvenile text *On the Use and Abuse of History for Life*, and highlight some elements in it that serve as a point of departure for a dialogue with Hegelian thought.

## I

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<sup>8</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Aurora*, Prologue, §3, Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2000; KSA 3, p. 15.

<sup>9</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich, *La gaya scienza*, §357, Caracas: Monte Ávila, 1985; KSA 3, p. 599.

As is well known, the 1874 text *On the Use and Abuse of History for Life* is the second in a series of writings that Nietzsche collected as the *Untimely Meditations*, the joint purpose of which was, the most evident purpose of which was the critical denunciation of certain cultural phenomena or processes that were perceived as great achievements of modern civilization in the Germany of his time. The *Untimely Meditations* were thus presented as a series of critico-cultural reflections through which Nietzsche wanted to undermine the tranquil self-evidence of certain modern ideologies in which his own time basked, leveling the ground for the eventual construction of an authentic culture. As for the text with which we are particularly concerned, the attack is aimed at the famous “historical sense” of a time that turned upon the whole of its past, so as to pry it in its every detail with the media of modern historiography. Nietzsche’s general thesis affirms that this history-cum-science, namely, this objective investigation of the past, results in a reality that is noxious to cultural health, to the extent that it perverts the natural way in which every nation relates to its past in a dynamic and creative way that is in concord with its vital needs, replacing it with an impersonal study on past facts, which are reduced to mere historical data and divested of their transformative powers.

The better part of commentaries on this text focus on this critico-cultural aspect, and there is no doubt that Nietzsche himself found it to be one of the main contributions of the *Untimely Meditations*. At the start of the text, however, Nietzsche performs a deeply insightful reflection on the historical character of human being, which had been generally overlooked by scholarship<sup>10</sup>. It is a very sharp analysis, of a seemingly anthropological or psychological kind, on the phenomena of remembrance and forgetfulness

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<sup>10</sup> The most brilliant exception to this norm was Heidegger, who doubtlessly intuited the full philosophical weight of the initial reflections of the *Second Meditation*. To his eyes, Nietzsche had seen that every form of historiography (*Historie*) has the historicity (*Geschichtlichkeit*) of the *Dasein* at its basis. “The beginning of his ‘Meditation’ – Heidegger states – allows us to conjecture that he knew more things than he let know” (Heidegger, Martin, *Ser y tiempo*, México: FCE, 1988, §76, p. 427). Also for Fink, what is essential to this text lies “less in its display of the danger that the exaggeration of the historical sense poses for a human culture, than in its interpretation of human existence from the vantage of temporal structures, of the dimensions of the past, the present and the future” (Fink, Eugen, *La filosofía de Nietzsche*, Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1976, p. 44). Neither Heidegger nor Fink developed the point in depth. More recently, Volker Gerhardt has lucidly mined the wealth of the introductory analyses to the *Meditations*, by furthermore relating them to Hegelian theses. His article on the matter has been a great inspiration to the present study. Cf. Gerhardt, V., “Geschichtlichkeit bei Hegel und Nietzsche”, in: Djuric, M. and J. Simon (eds.), *Nietzsche und Hegel*, Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1992, pp. 29-47.

as fundamental aspects of existence which determine the relationship of man with his past. Let us carefully survey the analyses included in this chapter.

At first, the text can be read as Nietzsche's attempt to ascertain the fundamental difference between man and beast without recurring to those aspects that the rationalistic philosophical tradition has tended to underline: rational thought and language, or a sense of perception for the ethical or political nature of human communities. Faced with these elements, Nietzsche points out the innately human skill to recollect the past as the decisive boundary separating us from animals. As in other texts, the argument is displayed from the premise of an instructive fiction: "Observe the herd which is grazing beside you. It does not know what yesterday or today is... its likes and dislikes [are] closely tied to the peg of the moment, and thus [it is] neither melancholy nor weary. To witness this is hard for man, because he boasts to himself that his human race is better than the beast and yet looks with jealousy at its happiness.... One day the man demands of the beast: "Why do you not talk to me about your happiness and only gaze at me?" The beast wants to answer, too, and say: "That comes about because I always immediately forget what I wanted to say." But by then the beast has already forgotten this reply and remains silent, so that the man wonders on once more. But he also wonders about himself, that he is not able to learn to forget and that he always hangs onto past things. No matter how far or how fast he runs, this chain runs with him"<sup>11</sup>.

Nowhere in Nietzsche's work is the distance between man and animal as markedly accented as here. The physiological language of the instincts that will become predominant as of *Human, All Too Human*, will, contrarily, tend to close the breach between the two, signaling the continuity of human culture with the prehistory of the organisms that was initiated with the first configurations of life. The differentiating component of remembrance (*Erinnerung*) should not, in any case, be misinterpreted as an activity belonging to conscious intentional life. The remembrance that distinguishes man from animal cannot be reconducted into the realm of consciousness, and Nietzsche's analysis merely reformulates the age-old specification of man as a rational and conscious animal. In all truth, the remembrance to which we

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<sup>11</sup> *CI 2*, pp. 56ss; *KSA 1*, p. 248. Translation slightly modified by the author. *CI 2* refers to the text of Nietzsche's *Second Meditation* in the Spanish translation by Joan Llinares, in: Llinares, J. (ed.), *Nietzsche: Antología*, Barcelona: Península, 1998. It also notes the German version featured in the first volumen of the *Kritische Studienausgabe (KSA 1)*. The author has generally followed Llinares' translation, occasionally introducing slight modifications.

here allude should be understood less as a deliberate exercise in consciousness than as something that befalls humans, and before which they come to experience the limits of their willingness to forget: "...the moment, in one sudden motion there, in one sudden motion gone, before nothing, afterwards nothing, nevertheless comes back again as a ghost and disturbs the tranquillity of each later moment. A leaf is continuously released from the roll of time... and suddenly flutters back again into the man's lap. For the man says, "I remember," and envies the beast, which immediately forgets and sees each moment really perish, sink back in cloud and night, and vanish forever."<sup>12</sup>.

In this way, the ability to recall which separates us from exclusively animal life does not *prima facie* represent a positive feature of the human species, a major faculty of some kind meant to ground the superiority of man over all other creatures. Quite the opposite, it is a capacity the activity of which generates pain for the most part, as it confronts us permanently and unexpectedly with the weight of a past we would gladly leave behind. Now, that which makes itself so painfully present through remembrance is not this or that particularly disagreeable event of the past, or even a sort of clairvoyance of the fugacity of moments lived and the nonsense of the present, nor the futility of every human undertaking. The pain comes, rather, from learning, through remembrance, what the core of existence is: an *imperfectum* that is no more than "an uninterrupted living in the past, something which exists for the purpose of self-denial, self-destruction, and self-contradiction"<sup>13</sup>. The animal inhabits a perennial obliviousness that chains it to the immediacy of the instant, and hence appears at all times to be "entirely what it is"<sup>14</sup>; man, on the other hand, is always committed to remembrance, and has thus broken the immediacy of an immanence in being, distending himself between present, past and future. Oblivion plunges the animal irreflexively into an ever punctual present into which it is unwittingly fused; remembrance, instead, tears the instant in which humans live into the temporal dimensions of the past and future. Human life thus never has a place within the absolute immediacy of a now that will reiterate once and again into a seamless fulfillment, rather, each now is mediated by past nows that are dragged like a chain; the now occurring at this very instant is "denied and consumed" by the upcoming now; it is not destroyed, but incorporated in such a way that it goes on to determine all of the ulterior in-

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<sup>12</sup> *CI 2*, p. 57; *KSA 1*, p. 248.

<sup>13</sup> *CI 2*, p. 57; *KSA 1*, p. 249.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*.

starts. Thus, with every new now, the chain lengthens and the weight that's borne by existence is made to increase. The animal dwells in the flippancy of the instance, being reborn into every new now; whereas man introduces, with every lived moment, a new element which will come to bear in his subsequent existence. The leaf which floats in from the past, bringing us remembrance, confronts us once again with that fundamental truth of human existence: that every instant that happens is, in turn, mediated for us by those that have already been; that the moment that is lived just now will itself come to mediate all of those to come. Understanding this is what stirs up the pain, for that is when we learn that we have no hope of irresponsibly and gayly casting ourselves into the immediacy of the instant: as our fate is to remember, we are destined to exist, dragging the burden of the past –which settles both our present and our future- in our wake. The pain is not, thus, one that is provoked by the remembrance of any given past event, or one that grasps the absurdity of an existence that is doomed to disappear –an outlook that's more fitting to the vantage Nietzsche terms “superhistorical”<sup>15</sup>-. In this sense, this has less to do with reediting the tragic-pessimistic vision overpowering the *Birth of Tragedy*. The pain does not come from an external, merely contingent, memory, or from a knowledge that has tired of becoming: it is constitutional to the existence of man, a pain inherent to the fact of being human and of having to assume existence in the temporal dimension that is central to it, a dimension in which every now will lose its fullness as a horizon bounded by the mediations of the past which, itself, narrows the future hopelessly. This is what it means, in essence, for man to be a historical being, unlike the animal that lives “unhistorically”<sup>16</sup>. In brief, for man to be essentially historic does not mean that he is the only being capable of making history because he has the ability to remember; instead, it means that he is distended in that “uninterrupted having-been” that is time, and that's the only reason why he can remember.

Nietzsche does not afford this extremely profound intuition with a more explicit development in this text. The discovery of time as an essential dimension to existence will reappear later in the doctrine of the “Eternal Return”, but this is a matter we shall not discuss in this paper. The Nietzsche of the *Second Meditation* is, however, so focused on the critical analysis of the culture of his time that he does not perceive –or chooses not to do so, yet- the deep impression of these earliest considerations. This is why all of these introductory ideas seem to be more set onto the elucidation

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<sup>15</sup> *CI 2*, pp. 60s; *KSA 1*, p. 254.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

of the natural relation that man establishes with his past, which, according to Nietzsche, has been perverted by the objectifying behaviour of the scientific historiography that was the vogue at the time.

As has already been noted, remembrance belongs foremostly to that natural relation with the past. But this remembrance, that is manifested as a *pathos* that befalls the individual, like the leaf of the past that returns and takes us by surprise, finds its active side in *memory*. The narrow connection between remembrance and memory arises from these terms, which appear to describe the same phenomenon, albeit in opposite directions: through remembrance (*Erinnerung*) as an external impression that becomes interiorized; or through memory (*Gedächtnis*) as an interiorized event that is brought, by thought, into the light of conscience. In the first case, something comes to us spontaneously; in the second, conscience becomes active in order to render its merely latent content more explicit<sup>17</sup>. It is true that Nietzsche does not make the distinction explicit in these terms, but it is evident that he distinguishes between remembrance –which is experienced as something that happens unexpectedly and without our being able to control it–, and the active functioning of memory –that is very close or part of an intentional and conscious thought– which deliberately strives to preserve certain contents, that are thus placed at the disposition of the consciousness. This becomes glaring in the context of the *Second Meditation*, because, next to the phenomenon of a remembrance that overwhelms us by revealing the temporality of our existence, Nietzsche is going to thematize remembrance as an active function of a memory constructing history. In fact, it is this last aspect that will become dominant for the rest of the text, with the characterization of the three types of history man scripts. In this way, remembrance is not just something that befalls man as an indication of his temporal being, it is also something that the human species can learn to control, if only to some extent. This dominion and discipline of remembrance, this education of memory, is what makes history possible and what creates culture<sup>18</sup>. Indeed, the emergence of culture and human history are

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<sup>17</sup> This nuance is not as perceptible in ordinary Spanish, where the two terms are frequently exchangeable. The German names, however, do preserve something of this distinction: *Erinnerung* is related to the verb *erinnern*, which literally means to interiorize; *Gedächtnis*, in the meantime, comes from the general term *gedacht* or *gedanc* of medieval German, which is also the root for *Gedanken* (thought), with which the relationship between memory and active thought becomes clear.

<sup>18</sup> Also at the start of the Second Treatise of the *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche speaks of a “memory of will” (*Gedächtnis des Willens*) as a human faculty used to express the active “not-wishing-to-be-freed from an impression”, and not merely the passive fact of “not being able to free” oneself from it. In the context of this work, this form of memory is what allows us to keep our words, that is, to meet our promises



simultaneous and are both functions of memory, of that remembrance that's been disciplined by consciousness. Memory intervenes in the creation of rites and languages, in the primitive artforms or in the establishment of customs and other social norms, by opening and fixing the historic space for culture to blossom in. The anthropological vision that makes man a cultural creature by opposition to animals falls short. It does not perceive that the root of this difference is found in the ontological determination of temporality as an exclusive feature of the human species. The remembrance of it that reaches us unleashes the rest: the dimension of time that is intuited in a spontaneous remembrance which transforms into a horizon of historical action when we learn to dominate this remembrance. Memory is what renders remembrance urbane, lending sense and a narrative structure to remembrances that are merely chaotic or unpredictable.

It follows that, according to Nietzsche, the natural relation with the past corresponds not only to remembrance, but also -and yet more fundamentally- to the phenomenon of forgetfulness. It is also possible for us to identify a passive aspect -a forgetfulness that plunges into us unvoluntarily- and an active one -forgetfulness as the faculty for the shutting down of consciousness- to it, or, in Nietzsche's term, "the faculty of feeling ahistorically"<sup>19</sup>. The first of these aspects, forgetfulness as *pathos*, appears in this context merely as an animal experience, but it is evident that human life is itself surrounded by a halo of forgetfulness that occasionally lets us feel the brunt of its uncontrollable force. Of course, this perception of obliviousness does not imply our turning it into a positive experience; the mode of being of oblivion is withdrawal, not presence, and to this extent, knowing that we have forgotten something is a phenomenon that already belongs to remembrance. It follows that we only have a negative experience of oblivion when we become aware that we are unable to remember. That is why Nietzsche will later write in *Daybreak*: "It has not yet been proven that anything like oblivion exists; all we know is that it is not in our power to remember again.

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and, thus entailing the emergence of something like a moral consciousness. The idea that this active remembrance is found at the base of every manifestation of conscious life and at the origin of the diverse realms of culture is thus ratified. The memory of will, as the origin of morals represents, in any case, and in agreement with the genealogy that Nietzsche presents us with, a more advanced state of this faculty, one which presupposes a memory that is capable of retaining causal links between events (*cf.* Nietzsche, Friedrich, *La genealogía de la moral*, Madrid: Alianza, 1994, II, §1, p. 66; *KSA* 5, p. 292).

<sup>19</sup> *CI* 2, p. 58; *KSA* 1, p. 250.

Provisionally, we have bestowed this gap in our power with the name of ‘oblivion’, accounting for it as if though it were a registered ability”<sup>20</sup>.

In other words, forgetfulness as *pathos* can only be intuited as the hereafter surrounding the ability for remembrance, at the very time in which these boundaries become perceptible to us. A positive apprehension of the phenomenon is impossible, because once we become aware of it, that is because it is retreating. On the other hand, it should be noted that this forgetfulness that befalls us turns out to be the ground from which the leaf of the past spontaneously arises. Both, in fact, belong to a mode of being of human existence and not to the subjective abilities with which any given intentional conscience is invested. In this sense, both express themselves as something that occurs to us, and not as the byproducts of a faculty being exercised: the *pathos* of forgetfulness is best defined as a “being unable to remember”, just as the *pathos* of remembrance is a “not being able to forget”. But insofar as oblivion can only be gleaned as the other side to remembrance, we are stricken by a more profound dimension to it: the unsayable dimension of what cannot be remembered, of the unthinkable, which is never brought forth to the consciousness. In this way, the leaf from the past that reaches us makes the temporal dimension –where it moves with the necessity of human existence– visible, even as it allows us to intuit the mystery underlying forgetfulness as a dark, enveloping atmosphere. The dimension of time, which fulfills itself as history and culture, also pinpoints to oblivion as the abyss –or as the ultimate lack of grounding– for this visible being of the historical.

The *Second Meditation* does not develop the ontological reflection we have just presented; the merely incipient characterization of the phenomena of oblivion and remembrance that it performs proves to be in all ways insufficient for that purpose. And even as Nietzsche’s observations let us see that he was clear on these matters<sup>21</sup>, the interest in denouncing the perversions

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<sup>20</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Aurora*, §126, p. 139; KSA 3, p. 117. Translation by the author substantially altered.

<sup>21</sup> Perhaps this explains Heidegger’s quotation above (footnote 9) to the effect that Nietzsche’s *Second Meditation* spanned more than it let on to. That said, the analysis of oblivion and remembrance we have here construed on the basis of the Nietzschean theses give away an undeniable proximity with the results of Heidegger’s philosophy. In *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik*, Heidegger notes, for example, that the comprehension of being –that is to say, the hermeneutical thinking of its fundamental ontology– is presented as a recovery from oblivion, or a remembrance (*cf.* Heidegger, Martin, *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik*, Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1994, p. 233). Stemming from this idea, Heidegger is able to establish a relationship between the *oblivion* and *remembrance* binomial, and the dual nature of the being of *concealment* and *unconcealment*.

of scientificist historicism becomes so dominant in the text, that the discussion focuses primarily on the recovery of the genuine human relationship with a past that has been transmogrified by the objectivating conduct of modern historiography. As a central element to this relation, we have identified the role of active memory that takes hold of remembrance in order to establish landmarks and erect the pillars of both history and culture. But with equal –or greater- importance, the active ability to forget, that is, the “faculty of feeling ahistorically”, also belongs to this authentic behaviour of the individual when faced with the past. The concise considerations at the start of the text only make room for a rather metaphorical description of this power of forgetfulness: “The person who cannot set himself down on the crest of the moment, forgetting everything from the past, who is not capable of standing on a single point, like a goddess of victory, without dizziness or fear, will never know what happiness is. Even worse, he will never do anything to make other people happy...Forgetting belongs to all action, just as both light and darkness belong in the life of all organic things...For this reason, it is possible to live almost without remembering, indeed, to live happily, as the beast demonstrates; however, it is generally completely impossible to live without forgetting”<sup>22</sup>.

The “happiness” that’s here ascribed to forgetfulness is no more than the counterpoint to this pain that is made to arise from remembrance. The pain of the individual for whom the present dissociates into the temporal dimensions of the past and future, the pain of a consciousness that knows itself to be decentered by nature, and incapable of collecting itself fully in its essence, that is the pain for which oblivion is a soft balm: for an instant, man is like beast, free from the weight of the past and the responsibility of the future. Without that clouding of consciousness life would be unbearable<sup>23</sup>. In any case, the power of oblivion that Nietzsche wishes to underscore is not only restricted to the reactive opposition of memory, nor is it altogether understood if it is merely equated with a psychological ability. The joy of oblivion hails also from the fact that with it comes the onset of a new beginning; oblivion snaps the accumulated chain of recollections

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<sup>22</sup> *CI 2*, p. 58; *KSA 1*, p. 250.

<sup>23</sup> Doubtlessly, Freud’s psychoanalytic school touches on the same point when it underscores the central role of forgetting in the psychic life of the individual. The Freudian thesis according to which “no one believes in his own death” can be interpreted as the fundamental oblivion that permanently accompanies existence: forgetting that we are going to die. This assertion highlights the conditional nature of life which Nietzsche attributes to forgetfulness precisely (cf. Freud, Sigmund, “Consideraciones de actualidad sobre la guerra y la muerte”, in: *El malestar en la cultura*, Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1988).

and returns us briefly to immediate joy, renewing us for future experience. In another text, Nietzsche has illuminated this point yet more clearly: “To close the doors and windows of consciousness for a time; to remain undisturbed by the noise and struggle of our underworld of utility organs working with and against one another; a little quietness, a little *tabula rasa* [clean slate] of the consciousness, o make room for new things... –that is the purpose of active forgetfulness, which is like a doorkeeper, a preserver of psychic order, repose, and etiquette: so that it will be immediately obvious how there could be no happiness, no cheerfulness, no hope, no pride, no *present*, without forgetfulness”<sup>24</sup>.

Oblivion’s openness towards the new, the jovial hope that springs therein, makes this ability a genuine power for culture: forgetfulness is the precondition for the revitalizing and renewing action that bestows history with fresh forces. While memory is settled at the basis of culture’s constitution, as a strength preserving the points of reference which configure a socio-historical totality, oblivion –as an active faculty- allows for the renewal and transformation of these contents, opening new spaces for the evolution of their historic force. The conformation of a culture, its admission to the realm of history, is a function of memory; but beyond that moment –which is conservative per se- a people can only fulfill its human essence if it is able to keep itself perpetually revitalized. And this transformative power requires an instant for the suspension of remembrance, in which the historical action that can open new perspectives to the future can occur. Without memory, there can be no history or culture, but without forgetfulness, culture would crystallize into a fixed configuration, incapable of reacting and readjusting to new situations. Both of these faculties are thus equally necessary for the fulfillment of human existence in history. It is up to each individual and culture to determine and upkeep the point of equilibrium between these two moments at all times and in each epoch: a middle path that’s placed between a memoristic overload that blinds us to the new, stifling experience; and an excess of oblivion and unconsciousness that dilutes the stable references in life in an unceasing and shapeless becoming. The heart of the matter lies in tracing the “horizon” for each culture with memory, and using it to establish those elements which confer identity to existence and continuity to history; while remaining capable of deleting them through forgetfulness, as soon as these forms have become rigid and dead, compromising the vitality of the culture by clotting the historical action that opens up new, future, possibilities for blossoming.

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<sup>24</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich, *La genealogía de la moral*, II, §1, pp. 65ss; KSA 5, pp. 291ss.

We come to obtain a supremely complex outline of the phenomena relating to remembrance and forgetfulness. Both aspects initially comprise a constellation we might designate as ontological, insofar as it conveys dimensions of being determining human existence: the horizon of time in which our immediate self becomes inevitably split, and which the *pathos* of remembrance –of our *not-being-able-to-forget*– painfully underscores; and the mystery of being that casts itself around this horizon, reaching our experience only negatively as the hidden face of the remembrance which we know as forgetfulness: a *not-being-able-to-remember* that is not a lack or a weakness of absence of a visible grounding for that which remembrance shows in time. Furthermore, and side by side with this ontologic constellation, remembrance and oblivion also align themselves into a historic constellation in which human life, understood as cultural life, takes place. We are dealing with that space in history that our ability to recollect (our *wanting-to-remember*) construes by submitting ephemeral remembrances to a structure of sense that can persist through time; but, besides our active power to forget (our *wanting-to-forget*), from which that unconscious ahistoric moment springs, disavowing all the voices of the past and suspending what's established and reknown, the transformative historical action that blows new winds into a limp tradition is invited in.

These distinctions should not, however, make us lose sight of the underlying unity of these phenomena. Because we are not, in fact, being faced with two different constellations, as if the historical dimensions were settled upon another, ontological, dimension of time. In this sense, there is no empty time that humankind will later fill with history; rather, the human essence –that which ultimately sets us apart from animals–, consists in the immediate experience of time as history. There is no single passive remembrance that will make conscience arise from temporality, nor an active remembrance that will eventually arrive to configure a narration in time; the passive and active aspects of remembrance belong indivisibly to the same unitary phenomenon, since all remembrance –whether it emerges passively or is intentionally kept by memory– always partakes of a history. Time and history are, thus, equally original to man, and the instant in which they constitute themselves as such is also the instant in which human consciousness is rendered as human proper, exiting a state of animality which, having been sunk into oblivion, does not have history or time<sup>25</sup>. Time is not,

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<sup>25</sup> Without going deep into the analysis of forgetfulness and remembrance, Volker Gerhardt reaches a result quite similar to ours. According to him, the “co-originality of man and time” represents the most significant novelty in this *Meditation*: “Human self-awareness and the full dimension of time emerge in one same act. Action con-

hence, a metaphysical dimension that is alien to the human experience, it only earns a visible reality in the historic performance of man, and through the active use of his memory and forgetfulness. This does not mean, however, that time can be Kantianly reduced to a mere form of the subjective consciousness, insofar as its final nature will always be inapprehensible to it, as evidenced by the *pathos* of remembering and forgetting.

The few pages which comprise the initial section of the *Second Meditation* turn out to have a profundity and wealth of content that the usual commentaries to them –mostly from a critico-cultural vantage– fail to glean. Beyond the corrosive attack on the cultural fetishes of his time, beyond the lucid anthropological analysis of human nature, in contrast to its merely animal variant, Nietzsche’s meditation is a powerful and genuinely philosophical reflection on the temporality that determines what being human is, on the sense of history as the place for the realization of this temporality to its existence, and, finally, on the ultimate impenetrability into which any ontologic grounding that should wish to serve as the primordial basis for all this comes to recoil and sink.

## II

The general purpose we are here pursuing now leads us to confronting the results obtained from Nietzsche’s analysis with correlative elements hailing from Hegelian thought. That notwithstanding, the task is rendered all the more difficult because there isn’t a specific passage in all of Hegel’s work that studies this constellation of temporality, historicity and consciousness in depth, as is the case with the *Second Meditation*. That the philosopher who fully integrated thought, reason and history in his impressive system did not commit a few explicit lines to this matter should not surprise us, either: the starting point for his considerations of history is almost always the universal spirit as the true subject of the latter, and not the fortuitous consciousness of the particular individual. This observation is fully confirmed by the Introduction to his *Lessons on the Philosophy of History*, where Hegel includes –amongst the manners of considering history– the philosophical one, the principle and guideline of which is: “the simple conception of *Reason*; that Reason is the Sovereign of the World; that the history of the world therefore, presents us with a rational process. This conviction and intuition is a hypothesis in the domain of history as such. In that of Philosophy it is no hypothesis. It is there proved by speculative

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tains the model of time. The timeline unravels in action...Action thus offers the blueprint of time, according to which all events succeed each other” (Gerhardt, V., *o.c.*, p. 40).

cognition, that Reason...is *Substance*, as well as *Infinite Power*; its own *Infinite Material* underlying all the natural and spiritual life which it originates, as also the *Infinite Form*, –that which sets this *Material* in motion...It supplies its own nourishment and is the object of its own operations”<sup>26</sup>.

Of course, this reason that reigns in the world and through history should not be understood as an immutable and eternal substance located on a plane that’s different from that of human history and actions. It is best understood as *spirit*, that is to say, as an infinite self-awareness that progressively comes to display its own determinations and know itself in a process that unravels in the course of history itself. This is why, Hegel says, the history of the world is nothing but the “representation of the spirit in the form in which the latter comes to obtain the knowledge of what it is itself”<sup>27</sup>. Now then, insofar as throughout this process the spirit remains within and gaining its unity from itself, its essence is freedom, that is, not having its substance outside itself; from which it follows that the course of universal history –as a theatre of the spirit– is determined by a “progress in the consciousness of liberty”<sup>28</sup>, which Hegel may ascertain in the succession of cultures that comprise historical becoming. The spirit ends up penetrating all the *matter* in history and this pressing the *form* of its movement therein, until full self-awareness, which also corresponds to the full realization of this liberty, is reached.

All of these are brief, if well-known, observations that we have presented only to show how the Hegelian philosophy of history –at least as presented in the *Vorlesungen* that have reached us– is prioritarily developed from the vantage of the universal reason of the spirit in its realization, and that he is thus not greatly concerned with the question on the temporality and historicity of human existence as such, as experienced by the concrete individual. When, as a preparation to his *Second Meditation*, Nietzsche returns to the Introduction to the *Vorlesungen*, the predominance of this aspect could not pass unperceived by him –confirming the judgment on Hegel which had, in great part, been owed to his masters Schopenhauer and Jacob Burkhardt, in the process–. This is why Nietzsche’s text will point out that Hegelian philosophy constitutes one of the foremost dangers for German education, since that admiration for the power of history can easily become a “naked admiration of success” and an “idolatrous worship of the

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<sup>26</sup> Hegel, G.W.F., *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, in: *Werke*, Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (eds.), Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1986, tomo 12, pp. 20ss.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

factual". With acerbic irony, Nietzsche refers to that "God on Earth" that history is for Hegel, which "has already ascended all the dialectically possible steps of His being right up to that self-revelation. Thus, for Hegel the summit and end point of the world process coincided with his own individual existence in Berlin"<sup>29</sup>.

It is not, thus, from Hegel's reflections on universal history that we may cast a bridge connecting us to the Nietzschean theses on the temporality and historicity of existence, but this does not, however, imply that such bonds fail to exist. What happens is that the elements that could serve such a purpose are disseminated through the body of the analyses of other issues, notably at the heart of certain moments of the experience of consciousness as described by the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

Let us begin by revising the figure of sensible certainty, which is the first experience to be performed by the consciousness. Hegel determines consciousness in this initial state as the most immediate knowledge of its object, a knowledge which, despite having the richness of all the sensible contents of reality, turns out to be the poorest in terms of thought, as it can only say what its object "is" and hence refer to it exclusively as a "this", or a "something", or an "entity" to which ulterior determinations cannot be ascribed. But what is this sensible certainty? The question seems to be legitimate, because not all the forms of historical and cultural human experience appear to be so poor in their knowledge, limited to affirming that "something", which is offered to sensation, simply "is". In effect, and even in the more elementary forms of consciousness –let us say, as in the conscience of a child– that of which one has a certainty is, at the very least, a "thing", some of the properties of which can be acknowledged. An effort has been made to answer this question by indicating that Hegel had wished to allude, with this figure, to certain theoretical positions inscribed within modern philosophical trends such as empiricism; or that we are here dealing with a philogenetical hypothesis, relating to a form of consciousness that corresponds to the more primitive stages in the evolution of the spe-

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<sup>29</sup> *CI* 2, pp. 96ss; *KSA* 3, p. 308. Nietzsche could not find support in his struggle against history transmogrified into objective science even in the Hegelian affirmation that it is the human instincts and proclivities that realize history, and that "nothing great has ever been accomplished in the world without passion" (*Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, p. 38), for in fact, behind those passions operates what Hegel terms that "sharpness of Reason" (*ibid.*, p. 49) thanks to which the spirit places the actions of the passions at its service, attaining its realization by way of them. I openly disagree with Gerhardt, who fails to admit that power of universal Reason acts behind the affective moments propelling individual action, on this point (Gerhardt, *o.c.*, p. 45).



cies. My first point, which does not conflict with any of these explanations, is that the figure of sensible certainty represents a merely artificial form of consciousness, a fiction without any real historical referent, the function of which would be only to embody the most immediate –and poorest imaginable– level of experience so that we can see, from that point onwards, how the effect of dialectic movement comes to unravel the knowledge of consciousness. My second point, which may provoke adverse reactions, affirms that this fictitious form of consciousness essentially has the same structure as another fictitious consciousness that Nietzsche describes at the start of his *Second Meditation*: an individual's consciousness that looks upon the animal with envy, and strives to remain anchored to the immediacy of the moment. In each case, we are faced with a consciousness that wants or claims to keep itself inside an instant immanence of being, without reflective mediation with its object, and hence, without any more knowledge than that it "is". Of course, the argumentative schema is different for each of these authors: Hegel embodies this fiction in a sort of consciousness the very experience of which shall instruct it in the unsustainability of its position; whereas in Nietzsche, the desire for immediacy with being is not even contemplated as an attainable possibility for human beings, naturally distended as they are by their remembrances within the realm of time. This is precisely the point where another resemblance between both analyses is disclosed, because the experience that finally crumbles that alleged truth of sensible certainty is also, even if partially, an engagement with temporality. Let us see this in some detail.

Sensible certainty claims to immediately know that its object is a "this", and that it "is". Now then, if it wanted to communicate what that thing which is, is, it finds itself being compelled to pinpoint it by saying that it is made up by a "here" and a "now", by something like a coordinate between a point in space and an instant in time which it immediately apprehends with the senses, and of which it cannot absolutely affirm anything else. Experience, though, shall make it exit this immediacy. And because we are fundamentally interested in the dimension of time that shall arise from this experience, we shall proceed to examine it only from the dialectic of the now. With the determination that what it knows immediately is that instant in now, sensible certainty cannot, however, accurately ground its object, and that is why it further specifies it by stating something such as "now is night". To understand the sense of this affirmation, it is necessary to recall the form of consciousness that is sensible certainty; it is a consciousness that has latched onto the absolute immediate of now, and that

is time and time again renewed with every passing instant, but without establishing continuities between those nows. Seen this way, every now appears to be singular and irrepeatable, and with each of them, consciousness always attains a new immediacy. That is why, when sensible certainty says “now is night”, it uses the term now to refer to that immutable point in time the immediacy of which entirely fulfills its consciousness; in other words, the “now” functions as the proper name it bestows on its immediate object (this instant at night). But this effort to fix the specificity of its object with proper names (“here” or “now”) fails, because these are merely private communications that cannot be conveyed: the “now” as a name for an instant-night does not make this sense transmissible to another that’s specific to another instant, let us say at midday, because in saying “now” at midday, the object that one wants to signal –“now-night”– is no longer named. Sensible certainty thus learns that it cannot apprehend its immediate object and transmit its punctual knowledge of it via names such as “now” (or “here”), but it does not, because of this, renounce the conviction that its object is just this punctual instant and its knowledge just immediate knowledge of it. So it is that, in this first, described experience, the figure of sensible certainty has not yet been dissolved, but the consciousness has been forewarned that the strategy of adscribing proper names to an object is not enough to make that object patent<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> This is how I interpret the first dialectic of the “now” that is presented between ¶6 and ¶7 (Hegel, G.W.F., *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, in: *Werke*, edited by Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1970, volume 3, pp. 84ss. From now on, cited as *PG*. For quotations in Spanish, I have used the unpublished translation by Jorge A. Diaz, indicating the page number in the German edition, with the symbol ¶ standing for the paragraph’s number). I am aware that most commentaries to this section do not coincide with the exegesis here provided. Generally, there is a notion that sensible certainty collapses at this point because it perceives that the “now”, as all terms of language, is a universal, and, as such, incapable of expressing the immediacy the consciousness wishes to show. Now, it is true that this is the focus granted us by Hegel from the second sentence of ¶7 and the paragraph throughout, but this overlooks that this perspective applies only “to us”, and not to the consciousness that is steeped in experience: for it, only “the now that is night is *preserved*, that is, treated as that for which it passes, as an entity, but it shows itself rather like a non-entity” (*ibid.*, p. 84; ¶7). It becomes clear that experience up to this point only shows that the entity that was wanting for a signal (the night) has vanished despite the name of “now” the consciousness was trying to fix it into place with, but that the intellection of the universality of the “now” –and of the universality of language, no less– has not been reached yet. Furthermore, and as I shall demonstrate later, this universality of language is not remotely what corrects sensible certainty. On this particular point, Graeser has afforded us with a most enlightening commentary (cf. Graeser, A., “Zu Hegels Porträt der sinnlichen Gewissheit”, in: Köhler, D. and O. Pöggeler (eds.), *o.c.*, pp. 51-33).

The experience that Hegel here describes is later sieved through various, complex, dialectical movements we shall not expound on. Generally speaking, they are more or less refined attempts by the sensible certainty to convey its object in the immediacy that is essential to it. At the end of this process, the consciousness believes that it can fully account for its knowledge through a triple movement: (1) the immediate sensible entity it knows becomes determined by indicating the “here” and “now” –that is, the space-time coordinates of the object–, (2) indicating that the “I” serves as the point of reference for that here-now while also (3) ostensively showing the referred entity from the I-here-now axes.

Sensible certainty thus presumes that with the movement of showing an object from well-disposed coordinates it shall succeed in apprehending and communicating that object’s immediacy. But experience shall teach it otherwise. As we are interested only in the temporary aspect of this immediacy, we shall revise the dialectics of showing only from the vantage of the “now”. Hegel says: “In thus pointing out the Now we see then merely a process which takes the following course: *First* I point out the Now, and it is asserted to be the truth. I point it out, however, as something that *has been*, or as something cancelled and done away with. I thus annul and pass beyond that first truth and in the *second* place I now assert as the second truth that it *has been*, that it is superseded. But, *thirdly*, what *has been is not*; I then supersede, cancel, its having been, the fact of its being *annulled*, the second truth, negate thereby the negation of the Now and return in so doing to the first position: that *Now is*”<sup>31</sup>.

A “now” is shown, a point in time, let us say it’s the hour that’s marked by a clock: up until here, we are in the Hegel’s first stage; but this now-1 that has been shown already passed an instant later, it has already been. In order to maintain the immediacy of its object in this new instant (now-2), the conscience should proceed to indicate that it refers to now-1, conveying something like “my showing refers to now-1 that has been, not to the now-2 of the moment I am speaking in”. This is stage 2. And with this observation the now-2, which denied the now-1, is in its turn denied, returning to the now-1 that is the object. End of movement. However, in all of these movements the immediacy of the object was lost, because showing is not an action that immediately apprehends the object; instead, it requires successive clarifications: the apprehension that is made of the now-1 is not a direct one, either; it is reinforced by other mediations and hence, is no longer a non-inferential treatment. The now that is attained is not identical

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<sup>31</sup> PG, p. 89; ¶18.

to the now-1 of the beginning, but reflected from the vantage of a now-2. That is why showing does not show a simple and immediate now, but “the very process which expresses what the Now in truth really is: namely a result, or a plurality of Nows all taken together. And the pointing out is the way of getting to know, of experiencing, that Now is a universal”<sup>32</sup>.

This is where sensible certainty finally attains the decisive influence that will lead it to abandon its object and truth: the alleged immanence in the immediacy of the moment. What it experiences is that the now is universal, but: what is properly the content of this experience? What is experienced in the universality of the now is nothing other than the character of temporality itself<sup>33</sup>. By pretending to show the now and fix it in its immediacy, it hopelessly slips inside the flow of time; the same occurs to Nietzsche’s man, who yearns to forget and to focus on the instant, when he is irrevocably reached by remembrance, which distends him into the past. Like this man, who envies the oblivious animal bound to the “peg of the moment”, sensible certainty also vied to shut out temporality and absorb its consciousness in an absolutized immediate instant. But, after multiple attempts to sustain this position by attempting to communicate its purported object, it is made to acknowledge –thanks to experience– that remaining in the instant is impossible, because of the temporal dimension to existence. Nietzsche had already shown that the remembrance which reaches man spontaneously confronts him with that *imperfectum* of existence that consists in understanding that every now is denied and subsumed (or should we say, consumed) by other nows in an uninterrupted sequence. The whole, complex experience of the sensible consciousness attains the same result, warning us that one cannot live by jumping from one immediate now to another, but that the now is universal, that is to say, mediated (or “denied and consumed”, in Nietzsche’s words) by other nows; it comes to perceive that every instant that “is”, is mediated by the one before it and will mediate the one that follows; it comes to notice, in the end –as in Nietzsche– that its existence is grounded, whether it likes it or not, within that mediated continuum of instants that is time.

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Not only temporality but also spatiality complete the experience of sensible certainty, as follows from the dialectic of the “Now”, but this is a matter that does not concern us now. According to our exegesis, sensible certainty crumbles because its object shows itself as an abstraction cut out from the space-time weave that’s now discovered. As a consequence of this, the new object in the following consciousness configuration –the thing– will take its place on this space and time horizon. It is not, thus, an experience with the universality of language, as is usually affirmed, that determines the transit to the new figure.

There are evidently significant differences between both of these analyses. Given the purpose of the *Second Meditation*, Nietzsche the frame of what will be a genuine relationship of man with the past derives from this experience with time, in opposition to the nefariousness of a positivized historical knowledge. Hence, the demand for every culture to permanently constitute a renewed vital relation with its history. In Hegel, on the other hand, the experience of sensible certainty represents the starting point for a movement that does not disperse itself into a myriad cultural realizations, but that follows only one path, leading to absolute knowledge. But different purposes aside, the experiences conveyed by these texts bear the same general meaning. In both cases, they sustain that the signaling of a beginning for human experience is marked by the severance with the immediate, which is marked by the irruption of time; they claim that human consciousness can only be considered as such –and place itself beyond its pure animal version– when it has abandoned the immediacy of the instant and come to acknowledge the timely dimension that, perforce, crosses the entirety of its being. In both of these cases, this acknowledgement is painful to reach, like the pain that is felt by whomever realizes he must carry the weight of the past for the rest of his life, or like the pain of sensible certainty when it sees its object dissolved and expelled from its presumed reality. Thus, the metaphysical Hegel, who shall later come to identify time with the concept, also gave serious thought to temporality from the vantage of concrete human experience; he furthermore identified it as one of the first experiences in the consciousness' process of self-conformation, and in this sense, his proximity to Nietzsche is undeniable.

As has already been indicated, to Nietzsche's eyes, the openness to the dimension of time represents the start of human history itself. We do not have two parallel horizons, as if an initially empty time had to be eventually filled with man's historical endeavours; in reality, time only reaches concretion for human beings when it is lived as the chaining of events that we call history. That is why there aren't two kinds of remembrance; rather, the event that is spontaneously remembered is immediately interpreted by memory as partaking of an historical narrative line. What we must ask ourselves now is if this co-originality of time and history is also posited from Hegel's vantage: is it possible to detect a convergence between both authors at this point? Where does history begin for Hegel? How is the experience that consciousness makes of this very moment determined? Within sensible certainty, it is impossible to verify this point; in the argument that is advanced by the *Phenomenology*, however, the crumble of this starting form of

consciousness gives way to other abstract configurations for which no historical experience is available. It is through the figures of the “Spirit” –the experience of which also depends on historical conditions– that the forms of consciousness are thematized, and it is only in the final stage to “absolute Knowledge” that consciousness gains a clear view over the horizon of the history that determined it. This does not mean that historicity comes into action as a determining element of human existence at the end; what happens is that the structure of experience itself, which conditions the architectonics of the *Phenomenology*, implies that consciousness slowly seeps into the spiritual reality conforming it, so that the historical dimension as a fundamental axis of the spirit’s reality is only made evident later, even as it has been present from the very start. Properly speaking, there is a clear correspondance with Nietzsche’s thought here: the consciousness that Hegel describes does not initially apprehend time, and only later start to fill it with historic action; the emergence of human consciousness, its exit from the realm of animal immediacy –as shown through the experience of sensible certainty– simultaneously implies the consciousness of time and the commencement of history, even if the sensible consciousness is not aware of it just yet<sup>34</sup>. In a passage of the *Phenomenology*, we read the following: “Thus, the *consciousness* between the universal spirit and its singularity or sensible consciousness, finds its middle point in the consciousness’ system of configurations, like a life of the spirit that is set towards an all: it is the system that is here considered and which has its objective existence as world history. But organic nature *has no history at all; it falls immediately from its universality, which is life, to the singularity of existence*”<sup>35</sup>.

The animal’s organic life falls out of history, and even as its “singular vitality” does generate a “becoming”, in this case it is only a “contigent movement”, the activity of which ends up by being “limited to just one point”<sup>36</sup>. Human consciousness, on the other hand, is such as soon as it abandons this immediate certainty and leaps to its own conquest by way of the successive configurations it acquires, which also comprise the whole of history. Thus,

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<sup>34</sup> Hegel will later speculate on the historic ground from which a figure such as sensible certainty could spring. It could be found in the spiritual world of the Enlightenment, and more concretely, in its sensualist and empirical epistemology, which finds the sole foundation for knowledge in the immediacy of sense data (cf. PG, p. 414; *Fenomenología del espíritu*, from this point onwards, cited as FE, translation by W. Roces, México: FCE, 1985, p. 329).

<sup>35</sup> PG, p. 225; FE, p. 178. In another text, that same absence of history is pointed out for inorganic nature (cf. Hegel, G.W.F., *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, p. 81).

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

sensible certainty that exits this immediacy through the experience of temporality casts itself immediately into historic action. As in Nietzsche, time experienced is immediately revealed as history in progress.

### III

The analysis here provided has shown outstanding likenesses between our authors. As concerns the aspects under study, both Hegel and Nietzsche seem to place themselves in a same sphere of thought, presenting a common front when faced with certain notions and presuppositions that were essential to a considerable part of modern philosophical thought. Against the substantialization of time into an absolute dimension, or its subjectivization as a form of intuition of consciousness, they both uphold its total interpenetration with the horizon of human historical experience. Against the notion of an ahistoric universal reason from which all of the truths and criteria for action should be derived, the two point out the inherent historicity of experience, action and human knowledge. In this way, both thinkers place themselves at the common crossroads of a modernity that gazes back upon itself by taking a critical distance with relation to its very groundings.

If we are to be fair, though, we should also note --putting convergences aside-- the point where their respective projects take such opposite directions. To do this, we shall hail to the notions of remembrance and forgetfulness which, as we already said, proved central to the Nietzschean determination of human historicity. We shall then proceed to note how these aspects are also crucial for the realization of experience as understood by Hegel, but that, even as they here partake of the dialectical movement of the spirit, they also operate in a sense that's quite antonymous to that advanced by Nietzsche, thus leading, necessarily, to very disparate conclusions.

As with the question of time, the parallel between both authors can only be drawn obliquously. Hegel does not perform a thematization of remembrance and forgetfulness analogous to the one gleaned from the *Second Meditation*. It is, however, possible to affirm that the integrity of the dialectical movement of experience described by the *Phenomenology* is propelled by a dynamic generated between these phenomena. And to the extent that this experience moves from its beginning in the historical realm, we are allowed to try and establish a confrontation between it and Nietzsche's reflection on the matter. Let us take on the question from the Introduction to the *Phenomenology*, at the point in which Hegel describes the structure of

the movement of experience. In a decisive passage, Hegel illustrates the moment in which the consciousness that has attained an experience deserts its previous truth and moves onto the elaboration of its new object. This is no more and no less than the moment in which a vision of the world and the self-conception that had dominated consciousness to that point are overwhelmed, and it finds itself driven to plot out a new conception of reality, from new truth criteria. At this point, Hegel affirms: “this [latter] is the new object, whereupon there appears also a new mode or embodiment of consciousness, of which the essence is something other than that of the preceding mode. It is this circumstance which carries forward the whole succession of the modes or attitudes of consciousness in their own necessity. It is only this necessity, this origination of the new object—which offers itself to consciousness without consciousness knowing how it comes by it—that to us, who watch the process, is to be seen going on, so to say, behind its back. Thereby there enters into its process a moment of being *per se*, or of being for us, which is not expressly presented to that consciousness which is in the grip of experience itself. The *content*, however, of what we see arising, exists for it, and we lay hold of and comprehend merely its formal character, i.e. its *bare* origination; *for it*, what has thus arisen has merely the character of object, while, *for us*, it appears at the same time as a process and coming into being”<sup>37</sup>.

Hegel clearly distinguishes between the consciousness’ perception of experience—that is, the consciousness that’s steeped in reality, and subject to the motions of history—and the viewpoint of the *us*, which corresponds to the phenomenologist’s perspective, wherein this whole movement is seen from the “outside”. Now then, the particular output of each of them can be taken as a function of oblivion and remembrance respectively, which, in their combined action, come to fully constitute what Hegel deems to be a genuine experience. In the first case, the consciousness, immersed as it is in experience—or the *natural consciousness*, in Hegelian terms—observes how its alleged truths fall apart as soon as they clash with a reality that fails to adjust to them; it then proceeds to elaborate a new object, which it takes, once again, for the true description of reality, but it immediately *forgets* that this new notion merely arose as a retort to the insufficiencies of its prior approach. It is thus “met” with the new object, but it does not know “how this came to be”; “for it”, this is nothing but the content of its new vision of the world, but it forgets the “becoming” of the reason that predated this new figure, the spirit’s “movement” which, in a deeper unraveling of its

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<sup>37</sup> PG, p. 80; ¶18.



essence, manifests itself more staunchly. What Hegel wishes to convey with this oblivion that befalls the consciousness is nothing other than the natural proneness of human consciousness to once and again positivize the perception it has of reality, assuming that it stems from the true essence of things; even as it cannot consider the historical necessity that pushed the reason to elaborate it, and thus failing to perceive the subjection of this “truth” to a becoming which shall, once again, require new amendments and reformulations<sup>38</sup>.

But this natural consciousness that forgets does not consume what Hegel properly terms as experience. It lives and performs the concretion of a universal reason or spirit that gradually penetrates reality and concrete historical action, even as it, itself, cannot apprehend this spiritual grounding, but moves, between oblivion and oblivion, from one alleged truth to another, without perceiving the connections in between them. What sustains this link and warrants the “continuity of the figures of the consciousness in their necessity” is the phenomenologist’s consciousness. It is only in him that the merely contingent change of the configuration of one reality into another –which the natural consciousness suffers in the flesh– is presented in the guise of a “movement or becoming” of reason. It is only in him that the *remembrance* of the historical and reflexive experience of consciousness which antedates the postulation of all truth is sustained, so that it should never appear as an eternal and unchecked foundation, revealed to us with no further ado. This glance that preserves and recalls is, properly speaking, the philosophical vantage from which the experience comes to be fulfilled now: “in that manner of seeing things, the new concept shows itself to have come into being by way of an inversion of consciousness itself. This manner of seeing the matter is our contribution (*Zutat*), by means of which the series of experiences of consciousness raises itself to the level of a scientific process”<sup>39</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup> It is true that, in the paragraph cited, Hegel does not expressly speak of forgetting, but it is also clear that this is just what happens to a consciousness for which the becoming of its object happens “at its back”. According to this, all the figures of experience are threatened by this forgetfulness that absolutizes a merely particular truth and stalls the dialectic movement. In some of these figures, Hegel speaks explicitly of forgetting, i.e., in the cited dialectic of sensible certainty, Hegel foggily alludes to some philosophical positions that defend the immediacy of the sensible as cases of a sensible certainty that has forgotten its experience “and begins anew again” (*PG*, p. 90, ¶20). The figure of “Revealed Religion” is also explained as a stronghold for the representations of good and evil posited by a “forgetfulness of thought” (*PG*, p. 568; *FE*, p. 452).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

With the figure of “absolute Knowledge”, Hegel affords us with a more precise expression of this phenomenological “asset”, which is ultimately what bestows experience with scientificity: “what we have here contributed (*hinzugetan*) is only, in part, the reunion (*Versammlung*) of singular moments, each of which presents at its start the life of the total spirit and, in part, the maintenance (*Festhalten*) of the concept in the form of a concept, the content of which in the guise of a *figure of consciousness* had already taken place in those moments”<sup>40</sup>.

“Collecting” and “maintaining”, as mentioned here, can be interpreted –without straining things– as shapes of remembrance: firstly, in the more usual sense of remembrance, where the individual stages of experience in their succession and becoming are collected and stored by the consciousness; later, with remembrance as interiorization (*er-innern*), in the sense of transposing this seemingly external and contingent historic change to the interior of the movement of a reason that becomes self-determining through necessity. It is this “maintenance of the concept” in the seeming arbitrariness of becoming that confers experience with the level of scientificity. In the closing lines of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel tightly shows the superior ontological function of this remembrance: “*The goal, absolute knowledge or the spirit which knows itself as such has the remembrance of the spirit as they are unto themselves and how they go about the organization of their realm as its path. Their conservation as seen from the side of free existence which appears in the form of contingency is history, but on the side of their conceptual organization, it is the science of knowing that manifests itself; together, as history conceptualized, they conform remembrance*”<sup>41</sup>.

The relationship between forgetfulness and remembrance can then – and according to the above– be driven back to two opposed forms of behaviour by the consciousness. In its natural attitude, the consciousness forgets the spirit, that is, it positivizes its own reality, and conceives history as a merely happenstance event that is alien to it, insofar as it does not impinge on its truth; from the superior vantage of philosophy, however, a truly single form to the manifestation of the spirit can be seen, noting the necessity of becoming that precedes and conditions its truth, and acknowledging the structure of concept therein. It is only then that history becomes “history conceptualized” and experience, authentically scientific. It thus involves a consciousness that forgets the spirit that is shown in history and which

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<sup>40</sup> *PG*, p. 582; *FE*, p.466.

<sup>41</sup> *PG*, p. 591; *FE*, p. 473.

sees time only as an externality that is foreign to it; but also a consciousness that has collected itself within the spirit, recalling all its history as a history of the spirit, and knowing time not as an empty dimension but as a concept precisely<sup>42</sup>. In any case, oblivion and remembrance are both essential moments to experience. The former represents the moment of alienation from the spirit, the non-manifestation of becoming in its conceptuality thanks to which an historical form of life can consolidate itself and expand its determinations. In this fixation of consciousness to a configuration of reality, the historical movement grows slow, so that the selfness “can penetrate and digest all the wealth of its substance”<sup>43</sup>. But the latter proves to be yet more fundamental, as it brings to light the real dimension of history, of that general reason that presides over becoming, representing the return of the spirit that recovers itself from alienation.

If we were to contrast these phenomena of forgetfulness and remembrance with their Nietzschean counterparts in the *Second Meditation*, our attention is piqued, for starters, by the joint positioning of these elements in a dual historical-ontological realm. By this we mean to say that, for both authors, oblivion and remembrance cease to be considered as merely psychological abilities of a subjectivity, and are presented as the forces which determine the movement of history, and –even further– as aspects from which the deeper dimensions of the human being, and the ways in which it realizes its existence and experience, are revealed. That notwithstanding, if we take a closer look at things, significant differences between the two can be found, especially because, in each case, the articulation between both of these realms –that is, between the historical and ontological ones– occurs in a different manner. For Nietzsche, it is ultimately the individual, with his active faculties of memory and forgetfulness, who construes the culture and mobilizes its becoming; for this individual, who is the forger of history, the ontological horizon of his existence is never expressed as a visible foundation, rather, it retracts permanently and can barely be intuited in the *chiaroscuro* of presence and absence that is oblivion. For Hegel, remembrance and forgetfulness are also means of consciousness’ behaviour by means of which the different cultural configurations spring in their historical succession, but these phenomena are ultimately remitted to the foundation of a general reason or spirit, which turns out to be the true subject of historical

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<sup>42</sup> “Time is the *concept* itself that *is there* and that represents consciousness as empty intuition; that is why the spirit necessarily manifests itself in time, and manifests itself there for as long as it has not yet *apprehended* its pure concept, that is, until it has not cancelled time” (PG, p. 584; FE, p. 468).

<sup>43</sup> PG, p. 590; FE, p. 472.

becoming. For Nietzsche, remembrance and oblivion are plastic forces that a superior individual dominates, to constantly shape the fluid horizon of action where culture can flourish through them; for Hegel, oblivion and remembrance lack this plasticity, but they serve to normalize the dialectic of the spirit as alienation and recollection of itself in such a way that history does not branch out, as in Nietzsche, into multiple paths of fulfillment, but integrates itself into the continuity of the progressive line for the display of reason.

Earlier, we showed the common constellation of thought wherein Hegel and Nietzsche were placed as critics of modernity; a constellation the referential axes of which were constituted by the discovery of the essential historicity of human existence and the ontological horizon of temporality, as the dimension human beings attain through historical action. The main divergence between Hegel and Nietzsche could now be condensed by appealing to the language of oblivion and remembrance in the following terms: for Hegel, what's fundamental to history's, as a horizon of the reality of time, is the *remembrance* of the spirit that takes place there, the full penetration of becoming by a general reason, the interiorization of the external and the contingent in the heart of the concept. For Nietzsche, instead, being, as the ultimate foundation for historic change, is primordially *oblivion*, absence, non-manifestation, with which the individual is burdened with the supreme task of leveling the path through which his own culture will make its way. Of course, for Hegel forgetfulness too characterizes the modern unhistorical reason that is a precondition for that final remembrance with which an epoch is surpassed; for Nietzsche, the recollection of the origin and the becoming of metaphysics is the assumption of its gradually being forgotten. What is decisive for the latter, in the last term, is that being is remembrance which, only in its mediation, estranges itself from oblivion while, for the former, being is oblivion, and it is only over the abyss left by its absence that remembrance can assemble history.

(Translated from Spanish by Monica Belevan)