



Beyond Hegel and Nietzsche

Philosophy, Culture, and Agency

Elliot L. Jurist

Beyond Hegel and Nietzsche

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Elliot L. Jurist

The MIT Press
Cambridge, Massachusetts
London, England

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Set in New Baskerville by The MIT Press.
Printed and bound in the United States of America.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Jurist, Elliot L.

Beyond Hegel and Nietzsche: philosophy, culture, and agency / Elliot L. Jurist.

p. cm.—(Studies in contemporary German social thought)

Includes bibliographical references (p.) and index.

ISBN 0-262-10087-8 (hc.: alk. paper)

1. Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, 1770–1831. 2. Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, 1844–1900. 3. Culture—Philosophy—History—19th century. 4. Agent—History—19th century. I. Title. II. Series.

B2948.J865 2000

193—dc21

00-038681

for my father, Sumner Jurist,
and for my mother, Hilda Braurman Jurist (in memoriam)

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Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have contributed to this book. First, I would like to thank three teachers who guided my interest in philosophy as an undergraduate at Haverford College—Dick Bernstein, Aryeh Kosman, and the late Paul Desjardins. Dick Bernstein continues to be an important interlocutor and remains for me the embodiment of a life devoted to philosophy. I also would like to note my appreciation of two professors who inspired me in graduate school at Columbia University, Arthur Danto and Robert Cumming.

Tony Dardis, Terry Godlove, Bob Holland, and Pat Mann, my colleagues at Hofstra University, gave me valuable feedback on early drafts. I owe a note of special gratitude to Kathleen Wallace for taking time to read and comment upon the manuscript more recently. I would also like to thank Hofstra University for giving me a sabbatical in 1996–97, during which I revised the manuscript.

Early versions of portions of this book were delivered as papers at several meetings of the Social Sciences Seminar in Prague. Thanks to Jean Cohen, Maeve Cooke, Peter Dews, Alessandro Ferrara, Axel Honneth, Martin Jay, and Joel Whitebook for their helpful comments. Kitty Ross's editorial suggestions helped to improve an early version. My friend Cliff Simms and I had many conversations about this book as well as about other pressing issues of life. Both of these sorts of conversations were necessary, and I would like him to know how much I have valued them. Thanks, too, to Dorothea von Moltke

for her help. I would also like to thank my family, Andra Jurist, Bruce Stewart, Marney Jurist-Rosner, and Lindsay Jurist-Rosner, for their discretion in the way they probed the question of when this book might be completed. Thomas McCarthy and Larry Cohen have my appreciation for their generous support of this project.

My wife, Ruth Ben-Ghiat, contributed enormously to the successful completion of this book. Her fearless but gentle determination—as we both completed books—deserves more than an enthusiastic thank you. I feel grateful for her love and intellectual companionship.

This book is dedicated, with love, to my parents, Sumner Jurist and the late Hilda Braurman Jurist. Sadly, my mother died before I was able to complete the book. I know that she would have enjoyed seeing it. Her memory remains a strong presence in my life.

Editor's Note

The abbreviations used to cite works are shown in boldface in the bibliography.

Beyond Hegel and Nietzsche

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Introduction

From the perspective of mainstream philosophical culture, Hegel and Nietzsche both exemplify the superfluousness of nineteenth-century philosophy. Within the Continental tradition, on the other hand, Hegel and Nietzsche are typically juxtaposed as opposites in terms of their basic philosophical commitments, their styles, and even their life experiences. Indeed, one could argue that Hegel and Nietzsche are the two foundational figures of Continental philosophy, and, furthermore, that their legacy endures in that twentieth-century Continental philosophers can be classified, more or less, as Hegelians or Nietzscheans.¹

One can discern the opposition between Hegelians and Nietzscheans by comparing critical theory, which has a strong Hegelian influence, and poststructuralism, which has a strong Nietzschean influence. Critical theorists and poststructuralists alike, however, affirm the juxtaposition of Hegel and Nietzsche as philosophical opposites. For instance, Habermas (1987, p. 120) claims that Hegel is Nietzsche's "great antipode" and warns against "Nietzscheanisms of all kinds" (1983, p. 253), while Deleuze (1983, pp. 8–9, 195) asserts that "there is no compromise between Hegel and Nietzsche" and Derrida (1985, pp. 23, 59) refers to "hand-to-hand combat between Hegel and Nietzsche."² The ready acceptance of a fundamental difference between Hegel and Nietzsche constitutes, ironically enough, a rare point of agreement between Habermas and these contemporary French thinkers.

This book has its origins in a certain uneasiness with the conception of Hegel and Nietzsche as philosophical opposites. There are

clearly grounds for contrasting Hegel and Nietzsche, but this should not lead us to neglect the areas of consensus between them. Nor should we ignore the possibility, where their views seem to be at odds, of finding a way to render their views as complementary. My aim, simply stated, will be to place Hegel and Nietzsche in conversation with each other. This will entail paying attention to where they disagree as well as to where they agree, though the business of establishing differences and likenesses is not what is ultimately important. Resisting the customary antinomy, I aspire to probe their deepest philosophical motivations and to reassess their relationship in a way that preserves rather than diminishes its complexity. To a large degree I will be immersed in the exploration of nineteenth-century texts, yet I will be mindful of how the works have been read and used. Therefore, I will be as concerned with interpretations of Hegel and Nietzsche as with specifying their views.

Before articulating my perspective further, let me briefly describe some of the reasons why Hegel and Nietzsche have been perceived as opposites.

A major divide between Hegel's and Nietzsche's philosophies is found in the legacy of the Enlightenment: whereas Hegel valorizes reason and knowledge, Nietzsche gives primacy to the irrational and exhibits some skepticism toward knowledge.³ A closely related issue is whether modernity is worth salvaging, as Hegel believed, or whether it is to be despaired about, as Nietzsche contended. Hegelians assess modernity as problematic and oppressive but not hopeless; Nietzscheans tend to see it as dislocating and pathological, and thus to raise the specter of a new (postmodern) era.

Another perceived contrast between Hegel and Nietzsche has to do with Hegel's communitarian sympathies and Nietzsche's preference for an "aristocratic radicalism" in which individuals hold themselves above any community and have the strength to create values for themselves. All Hegelians—regardless of whether they are in the tradition of right or left Hegelians—exhibit serious concern about society and its institutions. Nietzscheans gravitate to the edge of society and are tempted by what lies below and beyond. Nietzsche's perspectivism is designed in part to undermine or at least to question the value of any kind of communitarian vision.

Hegel and Nietzsche are often understood, too, as holding contrasting views about the relation between philosophy and art. Hegel defends philosophy as a superior form of articulation, devaluing art for its reliance on an external and sensuous medium. While Hegel acknowledges that art and philosophy are both valid as human efforts to represent Spirit [Geist], he does not hesitate to conclude that philosophy accomplishes its end in a way that has rendered art less necessary. Nietzsche celebrates art as providing justification for life itself, condemning philosophy as clumsy and intrusive in comparison. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche illustrates the harmful effect philosophy had on art, especially on tragedy. Yet Nietzsche does not simply reject philosophy. He seeks to transform philosophy to have a new, playful incarnation. Therefore, it is most perspicuous to think of Nietzscheans as attempting to remake philosophy in the image of art.

Certainly, Hegel and Nietzsche exhibit radically different philosophical styles. Hegel beckons us to endure “the strenuous labor of the concept” in order to complete the journey to knowledge (PhS, p. 35).⁴ Nietzsche hypothesizes that the best way to deal with the deepest philosophical problems is like taking a cold bath: “quickly into them and quickly out again” (GS #381; BGE #295). There is something predictable and obsessive about Hegel’s philosophy: propagated in systematic form, it shows the subject struggling, but marching inexorably to attain certainty. Nietzsche invites philosophers to become followers of Dionysus and to learn how to dance (GS #381). His aphoristic style is marked by spontaneity, unconventionality, and even contradiction: it is an appropriate vehicle for displaying the decentered subject.

Hegel does not speak of himself in his philosophical works. He excludes himself as a matter of discretion, but also because of his wish to identify with the ideal of a universal subject. No doubt, too, Hegel, the person, might have diminished the system, revealing, so to speak, the Wizard of Oz behind the curtains. Nietzsche maintains that the realm of the personal is present, but usually concealed, within a philosopher’s work. He argues, therefore, that we ought to contend with the personal (more precisely, the relationship between the personal and the theoretical) as a bona fide philosophical topic. Nietzsche’s last work, *Ecce Homo*, is unnerving in part because of how

intensely personal it is. As Nietzsche declares in one of his *Nachgelassene Fragmente*: “My writings speak only from my own experiences [Erlebnissen]—happily I have experienced [erlebt] much—: I am in them with body and soul.” (SW 12, p. 232)

The notable contrast in the styles of Hegel and Nietzsche has a parallel in their respective lives and careers. Hegel’s career got off to a slow start; he was considered inferior to the younger Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, and he spent a number of years without a university position. Eventually, Hegel became a renowned philosopher, occupying Johann Gottlieb Fichte’s chair of philosophy in Berlin, growing more conservative politically, joining the company of the elite in Prussian society, and enjoying his family and a large circle of friends and students. Nietzsche, on the other hand, began his career in a blaze of glory, becoming a professor at the age of 24. Nietzsche’s work as a philologist became controversial with his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, and as his health problems mounted he began to remove himself from his academic position at the University of Basel. Nietzsche’s fate was to become a lonely, itinerant philosopher. When he went mad, his philosophical works were just starting to become known throughout Europe; however, Nietzsche was deprived of recognition such as Hegel ultimately received in his lifetime.

In one of the most influential writings on the contrast between Hegel and Nietzsche, the 1941 book *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, Karl Löwith concludes that Hegel was the last great metaphysician and Nietzsche the first anti-metaphysician.⁵ According to Löwith, Christianity is the crucial divide between Hegel’s affirmation of the metaphysical tradition and Nietzsche’s new beginning. This point of view is plausible, but it does not necessarily allow for the most fruitful exploration of their respective philosophies. Other scholars, including Walter Kaufmann, Daniel Breazeale, and Stephen Houlgate, have made valuable contributions to our understanding of the relationship between Hegel and Nietzsche by articulating parallels in their metaphysics and epistemology.⁶

My treatment of the relationship between Hegel and Nietzsche builds on these predecessors, but I pursue a new direction. I focus on the psychological sensibility that informs Hegel’s and Nietzsche’s

philosophical projects, and I pay especially close attention to the theme of agency, which is crucial in their respective attempts to imagine satisfied human lives. In taking this angle, I have been inspired by those philosophers who have shown reluctance to accept Hegel and Nietzsche as opposites. On the critical-theory side, Horkheimer and Adorno (1986, p. 44) argue that “Nietzsche was one of the few after Hegel who recognized the dialectic of enlightenment.” Even though Hegel and Nietzsche might occupy different poles in the dialogue of reason and unreason, Horkheimer and Adorno appreciate that both thinkers engage that dialogue. Indeed, they try to incorporate both Hegel and Nietzsche in arguing against vindicating rationality by forsaking irrationality. For Adorno in particular, philosophy must benefit from the example of psychoanalysis, which affirms the inescapability of irrationality without dismissing rationality

On the French side, Georges Bataille (1985, p. 219) writes that “Nietzsche is to Hegel what a bird breaking its shell is to a bird contentedly absorbing the substance within.” Bataille’s point, it would seem, is that Nietzsche is an advance over Hegel—quite literally, a birth takes place with the shattering of the protective but enclosed and confining (metaphysical) egg. Yet, in intimating that Nietzsche’s philosophy represents progress over Hegel’s, Bataille acknowledges the period of gestation as well as the birth, thus confirming a developmental, organic link between Hegel and Nietzsche.⁷ I infer that it is misguided to look back to Hegel by displacing Nietzsche (as Adorno emphasizes), but that it is equally undesirable to embrace Nietzsche by ignoring that his philosophy unfolds from Hegel (as Bataille reveals).⁸ This insight serves as a guide for my study.

In chapter 1, I develop the idea that according to Hegel and Nietzsche philosophy is integrally related to culture. More specifically, I contend that both thinkers agree that philosophy is a product of culture and also that philosophy ought to be a response to culture. Hegel and Nietzsche distance themselves from the foundational myth of modern philosophy, the Cartesian myth, which (unwittingly or not) places a wedge between philosophical culture and the rest of culture. Although Hegel does not revile philosophy, as Nietzsche does, we can uncover a parallel between them in terms of what I call “the psychology of knowledge.” The psychology of knowledge offers an alternative

paradigm to epistemology in demanding that we concern ourselves with the confluence between knowledge and human well-being.

In chapter 2, I engage the philosophical conceptions of culture in Hegel and Nietzsche. I delineate three senses of culture: as customs, as *Bildung*, and as self-fathoming. Hegel and Nietzsche concur that customs represent an antiquated sense of culture that is at odds with individual self-expression, although Hegel is characteristically less vehement than Nietzsche on this subject. Both thinkers also use the nature/culture distinction in order to affirm that culture ought not be regarded simply as the negation of nature; culture moves beyond nature by being inclusive of it. Hegel and Nietzsche regard *Bildung* as a necessary form of training which is directed to our subjective experience. They distinguish true and false versions of *Bildung*, endorsing the former in terms of fostering a dynamic kind of agency. Yet both philosophers also express reservations about the ideal of *Bildung*. As they see it, there is a need to conceptualize a new meaning of culture, which I term “self-fathoming.” While the first two senses of culture are well-grounded in Hegel’s and Nietzsche’s writing, the third sense is admittedly more speculative on my part. Self-fathoming denotes our particular plight in modernity where a disparity opens up between the objective space of customs and the subjective space of *Bildung*. This places a new and difficult burden on us. Self-fathoming is not a matter of looking within; it involves a more elaborate inquiry regarding how we have come to think of ourselves in the way we do. In particular, self-fathoming requires that we face up to self-misunderstanding, self-deception, and self-thwarting. Self-fathoming is prompted by the wish to confront the dissatisfaction of modern culture and coincides with the philosophical challenge of embracing the psychology of knowledge.

In chapter 3, I address Hegel’s and Nietzsche’s views of ancient Greek culture. As they see it, Greek culture represents a contrast to modern culture in being healthy and providing satisfaction to its citizens. Yet neither Hegel nor Nietzsche is content with idealizing the Greeks. Both affirm that we can and should learn from the Greeks but warn against nostalgically looking to the past as a way to absolve ourselves from dealing with the present. My chapter turns upon Hegel’s and Nietzsche’s distinct perspectives on Greek tragedy as a means of

grasping Greek culture. Hegel sees tragedy as affirming the institutions of society, whereas Nietzsche views tragedy as affirming life in the face of the abyss of meaninglessness. For Hegel, the spectator is addressed qua citizen; for Nietzsche, the spectator is addressed qua human being. Nonetheless, both Hegel and Nietzsche regard tragedy as the means by which Greek culture raised fundamental questions about itself. Tragedy is equally compelling for Hegel and Nietzsche; not only do both see it as a source for the psychology of knowledge and self-fathoming, but they incorporate it in their respective philosophical projects.

In chapter 4, I examine Hegel's and Nietzsche's critique of modern culture and consider their influence on Horkheimer, Adorno, Habermas, and Heidegger. I argue that there are some significant points of convergence between Hegel and Nietzsche in the analysis of what is wrong with modern culture: the failure to provide satisfaction is a result of a division in self-identity, and the corresponding premium that comes to be placed on subjectivity leads to the devaluing of what lies outside it. Furthermore, Nietzsche follows Hegel in noting the ascension of usefulness as a dominant criterion of value in modern culture. For Nietzsche, though, usefulness is linked to the ascendance of science as a cultural ideal. This reminds us that any account of the differences between Hegel and Nietzsche must acknowledge changes that took place in their respective eras. Nietzsche's conclusions about modern culture are more negative than Hegel's: alienation has turned into despair. Yet his despair must be contextualized. It is true that Nietzsche refrains from any global solution to the crisis of modern culture. His sense of disappointment is keener, and he is more insistent that we ought not avoid negative affects, such as anger and sadness, that are generated by modernity. Nietzsche assesses modern culture as hopeless, but he is not hopeless about agency as a means of resisting it. Like Hegel, Nietzsche offers a rescription of agency as a way to overcome the dissatisfaction of modern culture.

In part II of the book, Hegel and Nietzsche have more of an opportunity to speak without interruption. The main focus is on their respective understandings of human agency. The chapters in this part are shorter than those in part I. In chapter 5, I begin with some general reflections on the meaning of human agency. I distinguish

between persons and agents, and I turn to Charles Taylor's genealogical account of the latter. I pay special attention to how Hegel and Nietzsche fit within Taylor's schema. Using Taylor's terms, I argue that Hegel attempts to integrate both "self-objectivation" (the scientific project of self-investigation) and "self-exploration" (the artistic project linked to expressivism), whereas Nietzsche affirms the latter but is ambivalent about the former. Although Nietzsche is dubious about utilizing the language of science and objectivity, he does value "self-control." In subsequent chapters, I explore in more detail what Hegel and Nietzsche mean by agency: in chapters 6–9 I take up Hegelian agency, and in chapters 10–13 I pursue Nietzschean agency.

Chapter 6 concerns Hegel's concept of recognition. The concept of recognition serves as Hegel's proposed solution to the crisis of modern culture; it also provides a basis for clarifying his theory of agency. Recognition is conceived as specifying a bond that deepens the sense of connection among members of society and thereby heals the split between the individual and society. Recognition harks back to the bond fostered by the polis, although it sustains rather than eclipses individuality. I distinguish the socio-political and epistemological functions of recognition, and I demonstrate, in particular, that recognition must be linked to the main theme of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*: self-knowledge. As I see it, it is crucial to appreciate that recognition includes self-recognition. Two specific aspects of self-recognition are distinguished: the self as socially constituted and the self as self-identical. The latter contains a further distinction between "being-for-itself" and "being-for-another." Hegel's theory of agency hinges on the integration of our self-concern (being-for-itself) with our concern for others (being-for-another). Borrowing psychoanalytic terms, one could say that human agency entails an integration of narcissism and relatedness. For Hegel, such an integrated sense of agency is a prerequisite for social integration. In that chapter I also discuss the relation between recognition and several other basic Hegelian concepts: cognition, satisfaction, experience, and desire.

In chapters 7 and 8, I offer a close reading of Hegel's concept of recognition in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Hegel's declaration in the Self-Consciousness chapter that self-consciousness attains "satisfaction" only in relating to another (PhS, p. 110) is a demand for a fun-

damental revision of epistemology and thus of modern philosophy itself. I trace the failed initial attempt at modernizing the concept of recognition in the Self-Consciousness chapter to the “internal” recognition in the Reason chapter, and then on to socio-historical developments, such as “natural and ethical” recognition in ancient Greece, “legal” recognition in ancient Rome, and the hope for “mutual” recognition that emerges from the Enlightenment and from Kant’s moral philosophy. I show that Hegel’s psychological discourse is sustained throughout PhS, coexisting with the louder voices of science, system, and the authority of reason. Hegel revises philosophy in order to contend with the dissatisfaction he detects in modern culture; the project of recollecting the vicissitudes of agency culminates in an ameliorated sense of agency that is designed to foster satisfaction in the future.

In chapter 9, I explore Hegelian agency more broadly. I reflect on Alexandre Kojève’s appropriation of recognition, which distorts Hegel’s actual view but which encourages us to reflect on what Hegel means by satisfaction and agency. In particular, Kojève’s reading highlights desire as the backdrop to the concept of recognition. Next I examine recent reinterpretations of Hegel in the works of Axel Honneth and Jessica Benjamin, both of whom recast recognition to emphasize the intersubjective basis of agency and introduce psychoanalysis in this connection. Finally, I offer my own reading, which is indebted to Honneth and Benjamin but which gives more expression to some of the tensions between narcissism and mutual recognition. A psychoanalytic reading of Hegel brings out the crucial intersubjective element in his conception of agency and helps us to discern what remains viable in his thinking about recognition.

In chapter 10, I begin to unpack Nietzsche’s idea of agency. I argue that his regarding agency as comprising multiple components does not negate the possibility of integration. I maintain that four factors delineate what Nietzsche means by integrated agency: accepting narcissism as the source of motivation, acknowledging the demands of the body (especially instincts), avowing affects, and defining oneself in relation to the past. Ultimately, Nietzsche regards integrated agency as entailing coherence and determination, but not transparency or unity. Since it is obviously controversial to ascribe to

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