

Nietzsche, Hegel and imperfection on the move

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December 2018

I do not like to engage in philosophy that only gives the umpteenth interpretation of some past philosopher. I like to employ earlier philosophy to build a contribution of my own. Earlier, in a philosophy bookⁱ, my philosophy blogⁱⁱ, and an essay posted on my websiteⁱⁱⁱ, I compared Nietzsche and Levinas. That contributed to ideas in the theme of ‘self and other’. Here, I compare Nietzsche and Hegel. That contributes to ideas about dynamics; change of meaning, identity, ideas and products in the economy. As argued earlier by Kaufmann^{iv} and Beerling^v, there are both similarities and differences between Nietzsche and Hegel. What they have in common is of interest for the analysis of change that plays a central role in my work, and that I explored before in a book^{vi} and my philosophy blog.

A comparison

In the table I summarize similarities and differences between Nietzsche and Hegel.

Hegel	Nietzsche

Contrasts	

system	aphorisms
ponderous	light
history as manifestation of God on earth	God is dead
elevation of the spirit	spirit fools itself
progress of the spirit, increase of truth	aimlessness, break-up, lapse of truth
teleology	eternal return of the same
absolutist	nihilist
state	individual
idealist	pragmatist (?)
reason, logic	feeling, life force

Similarities	

the world as becoming, creative destruction	

Differences

Hegel is a system thinker, Nietzsche condemns any system as relying on outside premises that are left out of discussion. Systems become unaware of underlying ideology. To Nietzsche that is intellectually dishonest. He strives for an unconditional quest for truth, whether useful, agreeable or painful. Hegel sought to develop new forms of reason and logic. Nietzsche denigrated reason to the benefit of forces of life, giving place to feelings as a source of knowing.

Hegel saved God by seeing him as descending on earth, in Christ, and manifesting himself in the march of history. History as a theodicy. Nietzsche pronounced God dead, along with

any other notion of some end, some transcendence of life, and pleaded for a return to the human being as a force of nature, manifesting itself as an end in itself.

According to Hegel, the spirit, as a world spirit, is on a path to ultimate truth. For Nietzsche truth is unattainable, and the striving for it ends in failure, and does not necessarily yield progress. The human being does not possess the truth but is possessed by it (Beerling 1977, p. 98).

Hegel aims for the universal, although, as we will see later, he granted that the particular is primary, originary, in a stumbling progress of the universal. Nietzsche abolished the universal as a mirage. For Hegel the state is primary, transcending the individual. For Nietzsche only the individual counts, and the primary is not culture but nature.

Hegel was an idealist, in the philosophical sense that the world manifests itself in ideas. Nietzsche was a pragmatist in the sense that ideas arise from acting in the world. In the table I put a question mark to the proposition because pragmatism is often seen as proclaiming that the true is the useful, which is anathema to Nietzsche. He is a pragmatist in the sense, proclaimed by Heidegger of 'being in the world', of being 'thrown' in it, and developing itself, and its ideas, from acting in it.

Here, in this essay, I focus on what Hegel and Nietzsche had in common.

Dynamics

Hegel and Nietzsche shared a striving for an understanding of dynamics, change of structures or logics. I quote Kaufmann (p. 234): 'They both posited a frame whose essence it is to manifest itself in diverse ways, and to create multiplicity, out of itself. For both there is no continuous, uninterrupted march of history. It is ongoing creative destruction, but for Hegel this constitutes progress, while for Nietzsche it bites its own tail, with no ultimate outcome, in an eternal return of the same. Hegel's 'Logic' is an attempt at an analysis of creativity (Kaufmann, 1968, p. 240). Nietzsche's will to power is a creative force. While originally, in the development of Man it was oriented towards power over others, Nietzsche develops it into an internal overcoming of obstacles to uplift the self.

All this is hard to stomach, according to traditional thought, Nietzsche granted, but a new Man, the 'Overman' ('Ueberschensch') will deal with it, cherish it.

For Hegel, creative destruction is driven by dialectics: a clash between thesis and antithesis that transcended in a thesis, which in time will gain meet its antithesis. In this way, failure is fruitful, producing progress. For Nietzsche creative destruction has no goal or end.

Western philosophy has been more oriented towards substance than to change, and this goes back to Greek antiquity, in the tension between Parmenides, for whom change is illusory, and Heraclitus, for whom everything is change. Aristotle brought in change of a kind, in 'entelechy', the realization of potential, like a flower from its seed, a butterfly arising from its caterpillar, a human being from its genes. Hegel sought a form of change that in the realization of its potential produces a new potential. It remained a mystery how that would work.

Nietzsche contrasted the Apollonian with the Dionysian, in art and knowledge. The Apollonian stands for harmony, balance, serenity; the Dionysian for creative destruction, disorder, ecstasy. In his early work ('The birth of tragedy'), the two principles were antithetical, but in his later work ('Thus spoke Zarathustra') they became two forms that complement each other, though Nietzsche did not explain how that would work. In other terms, that suggests complementarity between stability and change. That I propose, is a fundamental principle in any theory of change. It is also, I propose, an important issue in politics, concerning change and stability in the economy.

My main problem with Nietzsche is that he got stuck in the subject orienting itself on itself, neglecting the role of the other, even if the aim is individual transcendence of oneself. That was the subject in an essay on the difference between Nietzsche and Levinas.^{vii}

Eternal return of the same?

The most puzzling feature of Nietzsche's philosophy is his claim of 'the eternal return of the same', which, together with the idea of the overman, is what Nietzsche himself was most committed to. There is controversy, in the literature on how to interpret this. It seems very much at odds with his claim of ongoing creative destruction.

I has been proposed that he was motivated to adopt this view as a radical implication of his idea that there is no end to history, no heaven to strive for or end up in. Then, the argument goes, if time is infinite and what can happen is not, then sooner or later what has happened must happen again. This argument does not work, because why would what can happen be less infinite than time? There is no end, for example, to evolution. When Man destroys its world and itself, as it probably will, other life will emerge and adapt to whatever is left.

An interpretation that I favour is not positive, about the world, but ethical, about the good life. The idea there is that one should live in full commitment, surrender to one's fate and love it ('amor fati'), with no regrets, to the extent that one would be willing to go through it again and again.

What I propose, in my view of change, is that there is a basic logic of change that recurs, again and again, though not necessarily for ever, how could one possibly know that?, in a 'cycle of change', yielding ever new, never the same outcomes of structure, of events, ideas, and social structure. This is not a Hegelian progress towards some end, and may well diverge along a branch with a dead end, and is then likely to appear elsewhere. I will summarize the logic later. I claim that it gives an answer to the question, raised but not answered by Hegel, how present potential can realize itself and in the process create new potential.

This leads me to my proposal of 'Imperfection on the move': no existing structure is final, perfection can never be achieved. One cannot look in all directions at the same time, and wherever one's view turns it is partial. Not only that, but a view is shaped by epistemological structure emerging from past practice, in action in the world, which is inevitably biased by that experience and one's ability to conceptualize it. There is always room for improvement, when whatever exists runs into its limitations, as exhibited in action in the world, but there is always a possibility of further improvement, without end. That is basically a Nietzschean view, but without eternal recurrence of the same outcomes.

I sympathize with the idea of a 'new Man' who can live with his, and cherish it. One does not act to achieve a hereafter for oneself. The only hereafter there is, is what you leave behind at death. Yet there is a good life in pursuing one's contribution to what one leaves behind, and if one does that the best of one's talents, it is pleasurable.

Cycles of change

This culminates in my proposal of a 'cycle of change', originally proposed as a theory of innovation, in economics.

It was inspired by reading, as a student, in the 1960's, the work of the developmental psychologist and genetic epistemologist (studying the genesis of intellect) Jean Piaget, who claimed that intellectual development in children is a process of stages in which the same developmental principles occur, of 'assimilating' experience in existing mental frames, and in the process 'accommodating' that structure.

The first stage is that infants need to discover that there is a world out there, independently of what they perceive and think. The most traumatic part of that is that the mother has an existence and will of her own, and cannot be summoned into existence at will. Before that, infants are extreme idealists. The second stage is to learn the conservation of volume of objects or liquid in a container as their shape is changed (water being poured from one container into another of different shape), and of speed of objects moving out of sight. The third, in puberty, is to learn that other people have a will of their own.

Many years later^{viii}, I generalized that into a logic of innovation, as follows. As according to established innovation theory, new novelty emerges in fits and starts, where a novel concept, or product or technology, competing with established ones, and with alternative versions of itself, has to shed its imperfections, converging on a 'dominant design' that 'wins' and is widely accepted. That is fine, but the theory did not tell what the origin of the novelty is.

The logic proposed for that is as follows. The first step, called *generalisation* is to export established practice X from the domain A where it was developed into domain B. There, it encounters new challenges to survival. For a product in the economy, this means export to a new market, with different conditions of demand, labour, organization, institutions, technology, culture. This requires adaptation. For that, the most straightforward is to tap into memory of what one tried before but failed in A but might be considered for B. This is called *differentiation*. If that does not suffice, a logical next step is to consider local practices in B that work where X does not, and see what one can learn from them.

Then, one can experiment with novel combinations of old elements from X and new elements adopted from local practice in B, in hybrids. This is called *reciprocation*. This is important for exploring the potential of novelties. However, the hybrid yields gaps in connection, misfits, inconsistencies, overlaps, duplications, inefficiencies, hobbles that obstruct. That yields an incentive to look for a more fundamental basic design or logic to utilise the potential of the new and old together, and gives hints for directions in which to look for that. This is called *accommodation*.

When that succeeds one arrives at a novel design, which is still encumbered with inappropriate remains from the old that need to be pruned and ironed out, in the development to the 'dominant design', and here we are back at the beginning of the cycle.

Recently, I have generalised the cycle from the economics of innovation to change in other domains: change of meaning in language, and change of personal identity in a shift of environment, such as a new job or emigration.

Conclusion

I propose that the idea of the cycle yields a continuation, imperfection on the move, along the path set out by Hegel and Nietzsche. Beyond Hegel, it shows a logic of how new potential can arise in the realisation of old potential. Beyond Nietzsche, it shows how the complementarity of the Apollonian and the Dionysian might work.

Note that the cycles entails an alternation of relative stability, in the stage of consolidation to a dominant design and relative change in the stages of differentiation and reciprocation. The cycle exhibits a sequence of a widening of context, in generalisation, a widening of content, in differentiation and reciprocation, and a narrowing of content, in accommodation and consolidation.

What are the limits, the imperfections of this theory? The step to a novel logic or basic design, accommodation, merits further elaboration. What are the ways in which this may happen? Second, there is a refinement, as follows: differentiation occurs earlier, before

generalisation, in the home context A, where the dominant design fragments into different forms for different uses. Also, There is a need to develop empirical tests of the theory.

ⁱ Bart Nooteboom, 2012, *Beyond humanism; The flourishing of life, self and other*, Palgrave MacMillan.

ⁱⁱ <http://philosophyonthemove.blogspot.nl>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.bartnooteboom.nl>

^{iv} Walter Kauffmann, 1968, *Nietzsche*, Princeton University Press

^v R.F. Beerling, 1977, *From Nietzsche to Heidegger* (in Dutch), Deventer: van Loghum Slaterus,

^{vi} Bart Nooteboom, 2012, *Beyond humanism; The flourishing of life, self and other*, Palgrave MacMillan.

^{vii} See the essay on that on the page for essays on my website.

^{viii} Bart Nooteboom, 2000, *Learning and innovation in organizations and economies*. Oxford University Press.