

## INTRODUZIONE

### *Subversion and resistance in Hegel: paradigms, figures, resonances*

#### Abstract

How to intend the action of the concepts of resistance and subversion within and departing from Hegelian Philosophy? This introduction aims to highlight the different semantic nuances of these concepts and how they have been read and interpreted. The notions of ‘subversion’ and ‘resistance’ refer to an ideologically marked universe, and for this reason, especially during the twentieth century, they have been articulated in different ways, expressing sometimes radically opposing interpretations. The overall goal of issue 9 of *B@belonline*, *Hegel between subversion and resistance*, is to take a post-ideological look at such concepts and their unexplored potential within and from the Hegelian system.

**Keywords:** Antigone; Feminism; Freedom; Politics; Revolution

Resistance and subversion refer to two broad semantic domains. While the former recurs in Hegel, especially beginning with his reflections on the *Philosophy of Nature*, the latter remains foreign to the Hegelian vocabulary, to occur instead, with some frequency, in twentieth-century readings of Hegel’s thought, particularly within Feminism and in the wider context of deconstruction.

On the term ‘resistance’, Hegel first reflects in the pages devoted to inorganic physics, in particular with reference to Newtonian mechanics and the reformulation of it that had been given by Lagrange. Resistance appears in Hegel’s conception as the effect produced by an external force that did not involve the body. According to this conception, matter is impenetrable and lends resistance; that is, resistance is the reaction of bodies to an extrinsic force. In this formulation, the limit of mechanical physics, which fails to introject the dialectical dimension, becomes clear in the philosopher’s eyes. The Hegelian critique extends to the Kantian «*notion of matter*»<sup>1</sup>, according to which forces (of attraction and repulsion) are regarded as foreign to each other and matter is «assumed it to be complete in itself»<sup>2</sup>.

The point here is not to delve into the merits of the Hegelian critique of the Newtonian conception, nor of the Lagrangian view, but rather to critique the non-dialectical perspective of classical mechanics, which lacks a dynamic perspective. «We habitually regard it [motion] as a predicate or state, but it is in fact the self, the subject as subject, and the persistence, even of disappearance»<sup>3</sup>.

Resistance, then, is among those categories of analysis that still lack a conceptual approach. It is therefore not surprising that in the treatment of the little *Logic* it appears

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1 G.W.F. HEGEL, *Philosophy of Nature: Volume I*, ed. by M. J. Petry, Routledge, London-New York 1970, § 262, p. 241.

2 *Ibid.*

3 Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature, I*, cit., § 261, p. 239.

in the pages dedicated to mechanism, wherein Hegel reasserts the connection between the notion of resistance and an atomistic, reflexive perspective. «As the unity of differences, it is thus something *composite*, an aggregate, and the effect on another remains an external relation: *formal mechanism*». In this relation and lack of self-sufficiency, the objects remain equally self-sufficient, resistant, *external* to one another<sup>4</sup>. It was presumably this interpretation that authorized Hegel to be portrayed, even in political terms, as an opponent of resistance. In fact, unlike Foucault or Deleuze, Hegel still continues to be stereotypically considered an «advocate of restoration»<sup>5</sup>, despite the fact that Joachim Ritter, several decades ago, had already considered Hegelian Philosophy as a Philosophy of Revolution<sup>6</sup>. Nevertheless, in the *Hegel-Forschung* itself, there has been no shortage of voices of skepticism, such as those of Domenico Losurdo<sup>7</sup> or Ludwig Siep<sup>8</sup>, for whom Hegel, as we have seen, even on the basis of a more comprehensive reading of his Philosophy, admits no right to resistance or even rejects it.

However, as Klaus Vieweg has convincingly demonstrated in some of his recent studies<sup>9</sup>, as well as in his monumental biography *Hegel. Der Philosoph der Freiheit* (2019), Hegel, as a Philosopher of freedom, was interested from a very young age in supporting and defending the right to resist against all despotism and tyranny<sup>10</sup>. In fact, Dieter Henrich went so far as to admit that in the Berlin period Hegel supported «the right to revolt against the order that denies every realization of the will of free people»<sup>11</sup>.

Recently, therefore, there has been an increasing sensitivity and receptiveness to possible new interpretations of the topic of resistance and dissent<sup>12</sup> in Hegel's Philosophy, first of all involving the Hegelian philosophical method<sup>13</sup> and dialectics as resistance to positivity<sup>14</sup>. A stimulating collection of essays titled *Hegel and Resistance. History,*

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4 ID., *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline Part I: Science of Logic*, transl. and ed. by K. Brinkmann and D.O. Dahlstrom, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2015, §195, p. 270.

5 See K. VIEWEG, *Elements of an Inversive Right of Resistance in Hegel*, in R. Comay, B. Zantvoort (eds.), *Hegel and Resistance: History, Politics and Dialectics*, Bloomsbury, London 2018, pp. 157-176, here p. 157.

6 J. RITTER, *Hegel und die französische Revolution*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a.M. 1965, p. 40.

7 D. LOSURDO, *Hegel e la libertà dei moderni*, Editori Riuniti, Roma 1992, p. 223.

8 L. SIEP, *Widerstandsrecht zwischen Vernunftstaat und Rechtsstaat*, in D.P. Schweikard, N. Mooren, L. Siep (eds.), *Ein Recht auf Widerstand gegen den Staat? Verteidigung und Kritik des Widerstandsrechts seit der europäischen Aufklärung*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 2018, pp. 99-131.

9 VIEWEG, *Das Denken der Freiheit. Hegels Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, Fink, München 2012, pp. 448-461.

10 ID., *Hegel. Der Philosoph der Freiheit*, Beck, München 2019, pp. 52-54.

11 HENRICH, *Vernunft in Verwirklichung*, in Hegel, *Philosophie des Rechts. Die Vorlesung von 1819/20 in einer Nachschrift*, ed. by D. Henrich, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a.M. 1983, pp. 9-39, here p. 20.

12 K. DE BOER, *Freedom and Dissent in Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, in Comay, Zantvoort (eds.), *Hegel and Resistance: History, Politics and Dialectics*, cit., pp. 137-155.

13 F. RUDA, *Hegel, Resistance and Method*, in Comay, Zantvoort (eds.), *Hegel and Resistance: History, Politics and Dialectics*, cit., pp. 15-33.

14 R. ZAMBRANA, *Dialectics as Resistance: Hegel, Benjamin, Adorno*, in Comay, Zantvoort (eds.), *Hegel and Resistance: History, Politics and Dialectics*, cit., pp. 59-77.

*Politics and Dialectics*<sup>15</sup>, focused on the concept of resistance by and in Hegel, the traces of which were outlined methodologically and dialectically, as were the forms it takes in some parts of the system. Starting from the challenging results that arose from that research, which highlighted the possibility of reading a more adequate and inspiring Hegel for our time, not only on the historical-political, but also on the speculative level, the present issue of *B@bel* intends first to address the concept of resistance. It was decided, however, to place the concept of subversion alongside that of resistance. Foreign, as mentioned, to Hegelian language, the term ‘subversion’ refers to an overturning that as such does not seem to take into account the dialectical process of mediation; however, it was perhaps this aspect that made the revival of Hegel’s philosophy particularly fertile, especially in the last sixty to seventy years.

Therefore, one could perceive in subversion the attempt to resist, but in this case *to* Hegel. As Bart Zantvoort writes: «The history of modern philosophy can be read as a history of resistance to Hegel»<sup>16</sup>. More precisely, we believe that together with resistance, feminist readings have expressed a way of subverting the Hegelian dialectic – and in particular the servant-master dialectic – that certainly deserves further reflection<sup>17</sup>. Both the concept of resistance and that of subversion can indeed make clear the way in which the Hegelian dialectic has been taken up, often in a critical sense, by later thinkers – despite the fact that they have often been marked by the intent to decree its end – who have instead demonstrated the capacity of Hegelian philosophy and in particular of the various interpretations of its dialectic to always be reborn to new life.

The aim of issue 9 of *B@belonline – Hegel between subversion and resistance* – is therefore to investigate potential openings, paradigms, interpretations of resistance, as yet unexplored; to analyze in what terms the value of subversion can be identified in the Hegelian corpus and in subsequent re-readings; to identify possible relations of alliance or conflict between elements, motifs, figures of resistance and subversion; to delve into the contribution that feminist thought in particular has made on these topics, as well as to explore in what ways the Hegelian legacy has continued to act, between subversion and resistance, even in philosophers who are not considered direct heirs of Hegelism, and whether indeed the revitalizing capacity of the dialectic does not make it still today, or especially today, a form of philosophical reflection that needs to be reconsidered.

The present issue is thus organized according to three main thematic sections: in the first, *Resistance, subversion and system*, the possibility and value of resistance and subversion in the Philosophy of the Objective Spirit and, in particular, in Hegel’s Philosophy of Right are analyzed. Indeed, it is precisely within the latter that the right to resistance is justified as an «inversion of injustice»<sup>18</sup>, which makes it possible to distinguish cases of

15 COMAY, ZANTVOORT (eds.), *Hegel and Resistance: History, Politics and Dialectics*, cit.

16 See B. Zantvoort’s *Introduction*, in Comay, Zantvoort (eds.), *Hegel and Resistance: History, Politics and Dialectics*, cit., pp. 1-11, here p. 1.

17 On this see first of all J.-B. VUILLEROD, *Reading Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit. A Feminist Issue*, in S. Achella, F. Iannelli, G. Baptist, *et aliae* (eds.), *The Owl’s Flight: Hegel’s Legacy to Contemporary Philosophy*, De Gruyter, Berlin-Boston 2021, pp. 497-506.

18 VIEWEG, *Elements of an Inversive Right of Resistance in Hegel*, cit., p. 160.

‘legitimate’ resistance from cases of illegitimate and arbitrary rebellion and subversion against the existing order.

Tijana Okić’s essay, *The line and the circle: the Family and the ‘Dialectics in Institutions’ between subversion and resistance*, focuses on the family as an institution in the sphere of the objective spirit. In what is identified as ‘the two bodies of the family’, the author shows the contradictory nature of the concept of the family, which resists change, but which also expresses the need to subvert the order in order to ensure the satisfaction of its needs. Resistance and subversion are shown as two fundamental components in the dialectic of the family, highlighting not so much the ambiguity as the ambivalence (*Zweideutigkeit*) of it in the Hegelian legal and ethical system.

In the contribution *Notwehr e Rache: quale possibile ‘diritto’ alla resistenza nell’abstraktes Recht?*, Chiara Magni aims to examine whether in the *Grundlinien*, already at the level of the *abstraktes Recht*, there are sufficient elements to identify a ‘right’ to resistance as *Notwehr*; that is, as self-defense, or whether a Hegelian justification of self-defense can be identified only from a higher level, as some exponents of the Hegelian school of law argue.

In the essay *Fondamenti del diritto alla resistenza a partire da Hegel: tra seconda coercizione, diritto di necessità e vulnerabilità*, Giulia Battistoni focuses on the relevance of Hegelian reflections on the right to resistance, situating them against the backdrop of a political system that oppresses freedom and personal rights and reconnecting with some suggestions recently offered by Judith Butler, in order to proceed ‘with Hegel, beyond Hegel’ up to the dissonances of our own day. In doing so, the conditions of the right to resistance in Hegel are integrated with Butler’s proposal for a ‘mobilization of vulnerability’, which is seen as inherent to resistance itself and aimed at the subversion of a condition that does not respect law in the broad sense (i.e., that does not promote freedom, guarantee human rights or even the well-being of the individual).

In the second section, titled *Figures of revolt and resistance*, a series of figures are investigated, both ideal and historical, that embodied an emancipatory spirit in the Hegelian philosophy and in his contemporary history: these are the phenomenological figures of the slave and the master as well as the revolutionary instances of the slaves of Saint-Domingue (1791), who, although they did not explicitly inspire the *Herrschaft-Knechtschaft* dialectic, constitute its inescapable historical-cultural background of reference, as Caterina Maurer points out in her essay *L’ombra della rivolta di Haiti sul pensiero di Hegel*. The celebrated and paradigmatic figure of Antigone is analyzed by Erzsébet Rózsa in her essay *Da Antigone alla donna perbene. L’immagine hegeliana della donna nella dialettica tra la Fenomenologia dello spirito e la Filosofia del diritto del 1820*, from which it emerges how Hegel slowly distances himself from the exceptionalism of the rebellious figure of Antigone. Because of their uniqueness, the great characters cannot provide adequate behavioral models to guide the practical attitudes and daily practices of acting individuals in prosaic modernity, particularly of the typical female figure of the early 19th century; that is, of the ‘respectable woman’,

the protagonist of Berlin Hegel's speculative conception, who, though less glorious and subversive than Antigone, is nevertheless more realistic and in harmony with the anti-heroic 'spirit of the time'.

The third section, *Resonances of subversion and resistance in contemporary thought*, intercepts further resonances of subversion, resistance and revolt in feminist thought, more specifically in the production of Simone de Beauvoir and Luce Irigaray, as well as in the Philosophy of deconstruction.

Some important reflections on the reinterpretation offered by Beauvoir of the slave-master dialectic, in her now classic *Le Deuxième sexe* [1949] – valuable for thinking about the singular experience of women in our patriarchal societies can first be found in Jean-Baptist Vuillerod's essay, *Femmes en révolte: la dialectique du maître et de l'esclave chez Simone de Beauvoir*. Antigone is also still at the center of Viola Carofalo's contribution *Il corpo resistente di Antigone: Hegel, Weil, Irigaray*, which, starting from the rereading of the Hegelian interpretation proposed by Weil and Irigaray, identifies in the feminine the presence of the 'margin', which worries and unsettles. It is Irigaray, in particular, who points the way for a subversive reading of the Sophoclean heroine, highlighting the anomaly and potential of Antigone's character, rather than her subordination, and shedding light on the fragility of power.

Finally, in the essay *Le sovversioni della decostruzione e le resistenze della Aufhebung. Hegel tra passato e futuro in Jacques Derrida e Catherine Malabou*, Gabriella Baptist confronts Jacques Derrida's *Glas* (1974) and Catherine Malabou's *L'avenir de Hegel* (1996) to examine in what terms these two great interpreters rework the question of the legacy and future of Hegelian philosophy in contemporary thought, drawing attention to the speculative and dialectical force of the *Aufhebung* understood as resistance.

The plurality of perspectives and analyses of the essays presented in this issue of *B@belonline* highlight once again the vitality of Hegelian thought, whether it is understood as the bearer of an implicit subversion just waiting to be revealed, or seen as a canon to be subverted; whether one finds in the speculative dialectic a logic of formative resistance, or whether one feels the need to resist that same logic by considering it as the bastion of conservativeness. There is no doubt that the twentieth century, particularly thanks to Feminism<sup>19</sup>, has been the century that has maximally confronted the ambivalence of the Hegelian dialectic, finding in it sometimes a reason to reclaim it and sometimes to reject it, but in any case always refusing to deny the subversive power of that thought.

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19 For further insights on Feminism and the Hegelian Philosophy, but not only, please refer to J.-B. VUILLEROD, *Hegel féministe. Les aventures d'Antigone*, Vrin, Paris 2020 as well as to *The Owl's Flight: Hegel's Legacy to Contemporary Philosophy*, cit., to *Feminist Metaphilosophy*, «Verifiche», 2, 2021, ed. by V. Bortolami and G. Miolli, and to *Hegel y lo femenino*, «Antítesis–Revista iberoamericana de estudios hegelianos», 3, 2022.