

*Alberto Giacomelli*

## Introduction: Hegel, Nietzsche, and Japanese Thought

“Thinking is common to all (*xynòn esti pasi to phronein*)”<sup>1</sup>, writes Heraclitus, and Aristotle takes up this theme in the *Metaphysics*: “All men (*hoi anthrôpoi*) naturally desire knowledge” (*Metaph.* I,1, 980 a, 1). A little further on, Aristotle points out that “it is through wonder (*dia to thaumazein*) that men now begin and originally began (*kai nun kai to prôton*) to philosophize” (*Ibid.*, 2, 982, 12-13). Already Plato, Aristotle’s teacher, had Socrates say to Theetetus: “For this feeling of wonder shows that you are a philosopher, since wonder is the only beginning of philosophy, and he who said that Iris was the child of Thaumias made a good genealogy” (*Thaet.* 155 d). It remains problematic to establish whether, according to Heraclitus, Plato and Aristotle, philosophy, understood as the desire for knowledge that springs from wonder, actually involves in the broadest and most inclusive sense all human beings, not only free Greek and male, but also women, strangers, freemen and slaves. If, today, it seems to be taken for granted that philosophy is no longer defined by gender or class, the current prevailing opinion is that philosophy is not universal, but uniquely European. From this point of view, “thoughts of the East” would seem to have something to do with “mythology”, “religion”, “meditation”, but not with the peculiar form of rational thought that is exquisitely Greek. Heidegger, who was so successful among Japanese thinkers<sup>2</sup>, does not seem to be immune from this Eurocentric prejudice: “The style of all Western-European Philosophy”, claims Heidegger, “– and there is no other, neither a Chinese nor an Indian philosophy – is determined by this duality ‘beings-in being’”<sup>3</sup>.

Concerning Hegel, he has been too hastily characterised by Western historiography as an outstanding exponent of Eurocentrism, while some

<sup>1</sup> DK B116, from Stobaeus Selections 3.5.6

<sup>2</sup> See M. Ghilardi-G. Gurisatti (ed. by), *Arte, poesia e linguaggio. Da Heidegger al Giappone*, “Scenari”, 9, pp. 7 ss.

<sup>3</sup> M. Heidegger, *What is called Thinking*, R.N. Anshen (ed. by), transl. by J. Glenngray-F.D. Wieck, Harper & Row, New York, Evanston, London 1968, p. 224.

important articulations of the Hegelian discourse towards the East have been overlooked<sup>4</sup>. As for Nietzsche, although he had some vague and often stereotypical knowledge about India and China, he shows how the roots of European thought lie in both Greece and Asia, and he often uses “Oriental” types as a means to critique European decadence and degeneration<sup>5</sup>.

In order to contribute to the fields of aesthetics and intercultural philosophy from a new viewpoint, this issue of *Scenari* aims at collecting several papers that investigate the stratified and complex relationship between the European and the Japanese perspectives, starting from the reflections of Hegel and Nietzsche. In this dialogue between worldviews, the two German philosophers are indeed essential reference points for understanding the process of assimilation of the Western philosophical tradition in Japan. In addition, this comparison also seems crucial to bring to light the original theoretical reworking of Western tradition by Japanese culture, as revealed, for example, by the historical heritage of the Kyōto School. Starting from Hegel and Nietzsche, to reflect on direct or indirect affinities, rather than on a irreducible discontinuity between the West world and the Japan world, means to question the very possibility of a symmetrical “translation” of civilisations, practices and forms of knowledge. It is therefore about inquiring a “threshold” as a peculiar place that at the same time connects and divides. As mentioned above, while Hegel devoted ample space in his courses to the interpretation of the civilisations of India and China, and in general terms to the “Buddhist world”, Nietzsche only showed a vague knowledge of Indian thought, Brahmanism and Buddhism, as well as a feeble interest in China. The knowledge of Japan of both philosophers was marginal or almost zero. Although personally unknown to Hegel and Nietzsche, various aspects of traditional forms of Japanese artistic experience and thought legitimise comparative research based on links and consonances or on caesuras and divergences. The topics of nihilism and Buddhist nothingness, subjectivity and non-self, artistic creativity and natural spontaneity, as well as the themes of the dialectical development of the spirit and the psychosomatic process of contemplation, teleological time and impermanence, are some of the issues developed in the essays of this section.

<sup>4</sup> See D. De Pretto, *L'Oriente assoluto. India, Cina e “mondo buddhista” nell'interpretazione di Hegel*, Mimesis, Milano 2010.

<sup>5</sup> See T. Brobjer, *Nietzsche's Reading About China and Japan*, “Nietzsche Studien”, 34, 2005, pp. 329-36. D. Large, *Nietzsche's Orientalism*, “Nietzsche-Studien”, 42, 2013, pp. 178-203; G. Parkes, *Nietzsche and Asian thought*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press 1991.

Ryōsuke Ōhashi's essay, *Hegel e i Giapponesi Un'implicazione della logica Hegeliana*, is a valuable example of a comparative approach between Western metaphysical thought as developed in the Hegelian *Logic* and Buddhist thought. The paper thus highlights the complex relationship between Hegelian "reason" (*Vernunft*) and the Buddhist notion of *prajna* as analysed by Keiji Nishitani. Equally complex and fruitful is the comparison between the Hegelian notion of "transparency" (*Durchsichtigkeit*) and the expression *soku* (即) in Buddhist logic. Francesca Greco's essay *Kann man in Japan von Nihilismus sprechen? Über die Rezeption Nietzsches bei Nishitani* addresses another possible "point of intersection" between Japanese thought and Western philosophy, questioning the meaning of nihilism in Keiji Nishitani. The reconstruction of the reception of Nietzsche's thought in Japan, and in particular in Nishitani's work, is fundamental for understanding whether and in what terms one can speak of nihilism in Japan. Enrico Fongaro's essay *Nishida tra Hegel e buddhismo – Sull'opportunità di una filosofia interculturale* highlights the problematic nature of Heidegger's statement that Kitarō Nishida's thought is in every way akin to Hegel's. Although Nishida's thought in many respects takes up the Hegelian heritage, it is at the same time in a critical relationship with Hegelian philosophy starting from a different evaluation of the role of language. Raquel Bouso's essay *Neither I nor other. Dialectical formulations of the experience of consciousness in Hegel and Buddhism* proposes a comparison between the itinerary of consciousness that Hegel develops in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the journey of self-awareness suggested by the dialectic of the Five Ranks in Zen Buddhism. In both cases, the role of a dialectic in which the "absolute" and the "relative" coexist in a constant and unresolved tension is crucial. Lorenzo Marinucci's essay *Poetry and Decadence: Reading Nietzsche with Karaki Junzō* provides a cross-cultural interpretation of Nietzsche's thought through the book *Shi to dekadansu* (詩とデカダンス) by Karaki Junzō. What emerges is a peculiar interpretation of temporality and nothingness, as well as an image of Nietzsche as a *décadent* that also has to do with a particular atmosphere linked to the sense of smell. Alberto Giacomelli's essay *Sympathie mit dem Tode. On Nietzsche, Mishima and the "free death"* highlights some of the similarities and differences between Nietzsche's thought and Yukio Mishima's literary work, starting from the theme of suicide. The Japanese practice of *seppuku* (切腹) thus reveals an aesthetic, bodily and spiritual nature that makes it possible to reflect interculturally on the theme of "free death" between heroism, nationalism and existentialism.

Quotations in English of passages by Hegel and Nietzsche are taken from Cambridge University Press editions. All essays in Italian and English contain footnotes to the original German passages from the works

of Hegel (Suhrkamp Verlag) and Nietzsche (De Gruyter Verlag, Kritische Studienausgabe [KSA]). I would like to thank Enrico Fongaro and Paolo Livieri for their precious cooperation in translating Ryōsuke Ōhashi's essay from German, as well as Francesca Greco for her help in editing the essays.