

ELEMENTAL EVIL – LEVINAS RE-READING HEGEL

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Abstract

One of the Russian speaking immigrant philosophers in France, Emmanuel Levinas was close to the milieu of the French “Hegel Renaissance” led by Alexandre Kojève and Alexandre Koyré. His reading of Hegel was rather characterized by a radical opposition to the champion of German Idealism, largely under the influence of German Jewish Philosophers like Hermann Cohen and Franz Rosenzweig. In a lecture at the Sorbonne, Levinas insisted that there is paganism of Hegelian philosophy which leads to what he calls elemental Evil. Levinas’ peculiar reading of Hegel is rooted in a critique of the Western philosophy and in a confrontation with the Hitlerian Weltanschauung as a kind of philosophy. Martin Heidegger, one of Levinas’ teachers in phenomenology in Freiburg, had indeed defined philosophy as kind of Weltanschauung in a lecture which the young Levinas attended. Thus, for Levinas, to go beyond the Hegelian paganism as a self-identical philosophy and to introduce alterity in philosophy became a genuine life concern. In this paper, I shall endeavor to confirm it throughout his later reading of Hegel.

Keywords: *Uprootedness, enrootedness, Hegel, Heidegger, Levinas, Simone Weil*

Introduction

In his brief report on the evolution of Hegelian studies in France,¹ Alexandre Koyré pointed that the French reception of Hegel’s philosophy was really weak compared to that in Italy or in U.K. Strictly speaking, there was no Hegelian School in France in the 19th century despite the presence of philosophers regarded as Hegelians (like Victor Cousin). At the beginning of the 20th century, the image of the champion of German Idealism in France was still coming down to a conservative philosopher from Prussia, systematic but with extremely abstract thought that is far from everyday human life. That image was to drastically change, when Jean Wahl published his Study on Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, titled *Unhappiness of the Consciousness in the philosophy of Hegel* in 1929,² which unearthed a more human side of the systematic philosophy of the German thinker.

¹ Alexandre Koyré, «Rapport sur l’état des études hégéliennes en France (Verhandlungen des ersten Hegelkongresses, La Haye, 1930, Tübingen, 1931)» in *Études d’histoire de la pensée philosophique* (Paris: Gallimard 1971), p. 225.

² Jean Wahl, *Malheur de la conscience dans la philosophie de Hegel* (Paris: Rieder, 1929).

Wahl (1888-1974) is also credited with introducing the existential philosophy in France through his *Studies of Kierkegaard*³ at a time when the landscape of the French philosophy was dominated by the Bergsonian philosophy of life and the neo-Kantian epistemological philosophy of Brunschvicg. Before the end of the WWII, the reception and understanding of Hegelian philosophy is also linked with two Russian thinkers, Alexandre Koyré (1892-1964), especially with his study “Hegel in Jena” (1934),⁴ and with his close friend,⁵ Alexandre Kojève (1902-1968), with his famous lectures on *Phenomenology of Spirit*,⁶ which greatly influenced young intellectuals as Georges Bataille, Jacques Lacan, Raymond Queneau, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Raymond Aron, and Jean Hyppolite (1907-1968).⁷ In addition to the works of Wahl, Koyré, and Kojève Hyppolite’s translation of Hegel’s *Phenomenology* (1939-41), as well as his study *Genèse et structure de la Phénoménologie de l’Esprit de Hegel* (1946) will complete the “renaissance” of the French Hegelian studies.

Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995), who spoke Russian in his daily life in his native country Lithuania, was a close observer of this renaissance, as, upon finishing his dissertation on Husserl at Strasbourg and coming to Paris, he became a part of this milieu. Having found no job at university or research institution, Levinas worked for the French Jewish Organization *Alliances Israelites Universelles*, but he stayed in touch with the latest philosophical tendencies in Paris. He participated, for example, in Jean Wahl’s seminar in the Sorbonne and he also wrote book reviews for some philosophical periodicals. Among the latter was *Recherches philosophiques* edited by Koyré, with whom he had already worked for the translation of Husserl’s lecture series given in Paris⁸

– what we can now read as the 1st volume of *Husserliana: Cartesian Meditations*. Levinas, who was a student of Husserl in Freiburg, was one of the two translators of these lectures. And Koyré, who was a student of Husserl in Göttingen, revised this translation.⁹ According to a biography of Levinas, he also attended Kojève’s lectures.¹⁰

Based on these historical facts, one might expect that Levinas’ interpretation of Hegel would be under the influence of the studies of the French “Hegel Renaissance,” because almost all of its main advocates were in close relations with him. But as it is well-known, Levinas’ view on Hegel is characterized by a radical opposition to his systematic philosophy, which has in effect minimized that influence. That said, besides this first general observation on Levinas’ view on Hegel, we must also acknowledge his positive mentions of Hegel’s philosophy, which are recognizable at a closer reading.

³ Jean Wahl, *Études kierkegaardiennes* (Paris: F. Aubier, 1938).

⁴ «Hegel à Iéna» (*Revue d’Histoire et de Philosophie religieuses*, 1934), in Alexandre Koyré, *Études d’histoire de la pensée philosophique*, pp. 147-189.

⁵ In 1924 Kojève meets his future wife Cecile Leonidovna Shoutak in Heidelberg, who is sister-in-law of Alexandre Koyré. Since then the two philosophers became close friends. Cf. Dominique Auffret, *Alexandre Kojève La philosophie, l’État, la fin de l’Histoire* (Bernard & Grasset, 1990), p. 427.

⁶ Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947).

⁷ Dominique Auffret, *Alexandre Kojève La philosophie, l’État, la fin de l’Histoire*, pp. 253ff.

⁸ Husserl Edmond [sic.], *Méditations cartésiennes. Introduction à la phénoménologie*, trans. Gabrielle Pfeifer et Emmanuel Levinas (Paris: J. Vrin, 1947). (Lecture of 23 and 25 February 1929).

⁹ *Ibid.*, VII.

¹⁰ Marianne Lescourret, *Emmanuel Levinas* (Paris: Flammarion, 1994), p. 108.

Hence, here we confront the question, how did Levinas understand Hegel? Surely, this is not a simple question to answer. In fact, Levinas' reading of Hegel shows an evolution, which calls for a more thorough approach to the question. In this paper, we would like to focus on Levinas' later reading of *Phenomenology of Spirit* and its philosophical and political signification, which is directly related to Levinas' lifetime concern with what enabled the rise of the National Socialism.

To search for a relation between Hegel and National Socialism seems to be anachronistic as Hegel is a philosopher of the 19th century and the Nazi ideology itself has nothing to do with the Hegelian philosophy. But Levinas' reading of Hegel in his maturity is characterized by such a perspective, and this is not without reason. Moreover, this reason is not out of date.

In the following sections, we will retrace, in the first place, the general perspective of Levinas' reception of Hegel based on what Levinas says in his first major work *Totality and Infinity* (Section 1). After this work, Levinas focuses on the philosophical anti-Semitism of Hegel, which for Levinas is both political and philosophical concern. To understand Levinas' viewpoint here, we go back to the 1930's when he started thinking about the question of "Hitlerism" as a philosophical problem. We seek the framework of understanding here in Heidegger's only lecture at which Levinas was present (Section 2). Then, we will move on reconstructing Levinas' reading of Hegel based on the critique of anti-Semitism we find in his book review (Section 3) and in his last lecture at Sorbonne (Section 4). Finally, we will discuss Levinas' original reading of Hegel compared to those of the philosophers of the "Hegel Renaissance" in France and will suggest another genealogy offering such a perspective (Section 5).

1. Outline of Levinas' reception of Hegel

1.1 Levinas, critical reader of Hegel

Despite his opposition to Hegel, Levinas also acknowledges the importance of Hegel in the history of the Western philosophy. More specifically, he considers *Phenomenology of Spirit* to be one of the five greatest works in the Western philosophical tradition.¹¹ He devoted much of his spare time during his wartime captivity to books reading, with Hegel occupying his focus of attention. When asked about this by Francois Poirié, the first name Levinas mentioned was Hegel,

Poirié: "What have you read during your captivity?"

Levinas: "I read Hegel of course, but also many philosophical books of all tendencies."¹²

Hence, his opposition to Hegel is not based on ignorance or insufficient knowledge on the Hegelian system but on a serious reading which implies that his critique should be regarded as important and worthy. Actually, Levinas regards his own philosophy as completely opposed to

¹¹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethique et Infini: Dialogues avec Philippe Nemo* (Paris: Fayard, 1982), p. 28. Other four are Plato's *Phaedrus*, Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Bergson's *Essay on the immediately Given* and Heidegger's *Being and Time*.

¹² François Poirié, *Emmanuel Lévinas. Essai et entretiens* (Arles: Acte Sud, 1996), p. 95.

that of Hegel's, which he considers to be representative of the philosophy of totality, which is why it is a fundamental task of his 'ethics as first philosophy' to overcome this totality through the infinity of the Other.

When Levinas, in his first major work *Totality and infinity*, focuses his critique on the totality of the Hegelian system, this totality means first of all the teleological structure of a history described as the development of Reason starting from perceptual certainty and ending up with absolute knowledge. This was the history developed in *Phenomenology of Spirit* and understood as a historical movement toward an End, a history which is embodied in the World History starting from the Eastern (*Morgenland*) and ending in Western (*Abendland*) – just like a day begins and ends. This is how Hegel describes the history of Reason in his lectures on World History. Against this idea of teleological History, Levinas introduces the idea of eschatology which goes beyond totality. "Eschatology institutes a relation with being beyond the totality or beyond history, and not with being beyond the past and the present."¹³ When Levinas introduces this concept, he explicitly refers to Hegel.¹⁴

Still, it is not only this concept of History that Levinas targets in his critique of the Hegelian philosophy; another one is that of self-identical consciousness. Levinas asserts that the idea of the self in Hegel is an expression of the universality of the Same (*Même*) and is identified even with the otherness of the perceived objects. In Levinas' view, the notion of the Same deprives the perceived diverse objects of their otherness. (He quotes here a passage of *Phenomenology* translated by Hyppolite).¹⁵ He further on thinks that, with Husserl and Heidegger, the Hegelian philosophy comes to represent the essence of the Western philosophy, namely, ontology. In Levinas' view, however, this ontology was "a reduction of the Other to the Same, through intervention of an intermediate and neutral term which ensures the intelligence of the being."¹⁶

1.2. Against Hegel

Against ontology, Levinas opposes his principle of separation.¹⁷ This is the leading concept of *Totality and infinity*, which makes it possible to think of the relation of the self with the Other otherwise than through totality. A totalitarian or holistic philosophy reduces the otherness of the Other in a systematic structure by mediation of neutral and intermediate terms, whereas the relation of separation allows us to show another possible relation to the Otherness

¹³ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totalité et infini Essai sur l'extériorité* (Livre de poche, 2000), p. 7; *Totality and Infinity. An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 1998).

¹⁴ "Eschatological idea of judgment (contrary to the judgment of history where Hegel saw by mistake the rationalization of the former) implies that the beings have an identity "before" the eternity, before the achievement of the history, before that the times are developed (...)." Levinas, *Totalité et infini*, p. 8.

¹⁵ Levinas, *Totalité et infini*, p. 25. "The Hegelian phenomenology – where the conscience of self is the distinction of that which is not distinct expresses the universality of the same, identifying itself in the otherness of objects of thought and despite the opposition of self to self. "I distinguish myself from myself and in this process, it is immediately evident for me that that which is distinct is not distinct. Me, the homonym, I reject myself, but that which is distinguished and given as different is, as immediately distinct, deprived for me of all difference" (Translation by Hyppolite). Cf. Georg W.F. Hegel, *Phénoménologie de l'Esprit tome II (1941)*, trans. Jean Hyppolite (Paris: Aubier, 1992).

¹⁶ Levinas, *Totalité et infini*, pp. 34-35.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

of the Other. Ethical situations, where the ego is interpellated by the face of the other, are examples of this relation of separation. However, if the ego and the Other are absolutely separated and without any relation, the interpellation of the Other would have no effect on the ego. It is because the ego already has in itself something enabling the response to the Other that the ego can reply to the Other and the interpellation can be interpellation. This something is what Levinas calls 'the idea of infinity'. The precursor of this concept is Descartes' idea of God's infinity. By ridding it of its original theological implication, Levinas has transformed it into an ethical concept. In this way, he essentially clarifies his own method of philosophy.

This notion of separation constitutes the core of Levinas' own method of reasoning, which he opposes to Hegel's method of reasoning. He articulates his methodological opposition to Hegel by drawing attention to what does *not* belong to Hegel's method,

The whole of this work aims to show a relation with the Other standing out not only against the logic of the contradiction where the other of A is non-A, negation of A, but also against the dialectical logic where the Same participates dialectically with the Other and reconciles with it in the unity of the system.¹⁸

For Levinas, neither the classical (Aristotelian) logic nor the dialectical (Hegelian) logic can account of the relation of separation. For the relation to the Other as separation can be understood only through the idea of infinity.

Levinas thus introduces an ethical situation, which remains beyond the holistic framework of the Hegelian system. To properly respond to it, he needs and essentially constructs a phenomenology of the "intotalisable."¹⁹ This is the general philosophical sense of the theoretical opposition between Levinas' philosophy of alterity and Hegel's system of totality.

2. Philosophical Analysis of "Elemental Evil"

2.1. Hitlerian Weltanschauung as "philosophy"

Our sketch of Levinas' reception of Hegel so far, of course, does not exhaust his reading of Hegel. As Levinas himself regarded Hegel as one of the greatest philosophers, he has inevitably learned and appropriated something from Hegel's philosophy within his own thought. His positive regard of Hegel's early theological writings, and particularly on the identity relationship of parent to child, is well known.²⁰ In line with the Hegel scholars in France, he would have learned much about the Hegelian philosophical intuition. Levinas and Hegel also share the theme of sacrifice, which can be a good subject for comparative study. Thus a characterization of Levinas' view on Hegel's philosophy only in terms of opposition, negative reception, and critique would be utterly incomplete.

In Levinas' lectures at the Sorbonne just before his retirement, we find a peculiar

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 161.

¹⁹ I borrow this word from Philippe Grosos, *Phénoménologie de l'intotalisable* (Paris: Cerf, 2013).

²⁰ Levinas, *Totalité et infini*, p. 299. "In the writings of his youth, Hegel could say that the child was the parents; and in *Weltalter*, Schelling – for theological needs – could deduce the brotherhood (filialité) of the identity of the Being." See also, G.W.F. Hegel; *On Christianity Early Theological Writings* (1948), trans. T.M. Knox (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961), p. 265.

reading of *Phenomenology of Spirit* in his maturity, which also comes on the background of his rediscovery of Hegel's early theological writings. In his later (re-)reading of Hegel, Levinas searches for the roots of anti-Semitism or of what he calls Hitlerism (cf. infra 3.2). In his own words, he was in the search of the "élément," "élémentaire," or "elemental" Evil. The idea for this search comes up already in the 1930's, with his philosophical analysis of Hitlerism, and particularly – of a "philosophical" intuition of the racist and *völkisch* ideology of Nazism, when the young Levinas wrote an article "Some reflexions on the philosophy of Hitlerism" in 1934 and gave a philosophical analysis of the problem, as Hitler was nominated for *Führer* of the Third Reich.²¹

This article begins with a statement, showing scorn for Hitler's thinking: "The philosophy of Hitler is primary."²² His ensuing argument is an attempt to illuminate the terrific power of this "primary philosophy" which carries an "elementary sentiment" of Germans. Levinas' intention is clear: to alert the readers of the basic puerility of Hitler's thought and to make them aware of its potential power to bring people into an imaginary communion, thus providing them with the feeling of being rooted and secured in a time of anxiety. Levinas' warning here was aimed at the roots of the danger drawing attention to its depth and calling for its serious philosophical explanation. Basically, in his view, the elementary sentiment evoked by Hitlerism contained a "philosophy."²³ What he calls "philosophy" here corresponds to a word used widely at the time, namely, *Weltanschauung* (literally, 'world view'). Hitler himself in his *Mein Kampf*, as well as his ideologue Alfred Rosenberg in his *Myth of the 20th Century*, employed this term to designate their "philosophy" in its intuitive form. This term, however, was not used exclusively by the extreme nationalists in Germany; it was also used by French philosophers like Simone Weil, who, for instance, in a letter to Jean Wahl, used the German word.²⁴ It was a widespread, and in fact "normal," but untranslatable German word, which designated a pre-philosophical and intuitive, but also fundamental understanding of the world.

2.2. *Weltanschauung as philosophy in Heidegger*

In the modern German philosophy, Dilthey employed the term in the 19th century in the sense of what is lying at the base of the metaphysics as a "type" of knowledge. He has enumerated several different types of *Weltanschauung*, which have become prominent throughout the history of philosophy (Cf. *Study of Weltanschauung*). In the 20th century, Karl Jaspers gave a detailed psychological analysis of the concept in his *Psychology of Weltanschauung* (the work became the turning point of his interests from psychology to philosophy). Then, Martin Heidegger, a serious reader of this work and a friend of the author,²⁵ introduced this concept

²¹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Quelques réflexions sur la philosophie de l'hitlérisme. Suivi d'un essai de Miguel Abensour* (Paris: Rivage, 1997). The article was originally published in *Esprit*, no. 26 (novembre, 1934).

²² *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²⁴ Simone Weil, *Œuvres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), p. 978. "Letter to Jean Wahl," octobre 1942: "J'aurais beaucoup désiré vous voir, principalement pour savoir si vos expériences personnelles ont modifié votre *Weltanschauung*, et comment."

²⁵ Heidegger wrote considerably long review of this book, which was too long to be published.

into his “metaphysics” of *Dasein* from the late 20’s and 1930s,²⁶ though he would largely abandon this term in his later work. It is clear then that the term was given a serious attention in philosophy from the end of the 19th century and well into the 20th century, something that we need to take into account when reading Levinas’ analysis of the “philosophy” or *Weltanschauung* of Hitlerism.

In the winter semester of 1928-9, Heidegger gave a lecture in Freiburg-im-Breisgau, currently published in *Introduction to Philosophy*,²⁷ where he defined philosophy as a kind of *Weltanschauung*. The young Levinas attended this lecture as a student,²⁸ and curiously, Jean Wahl devoted a lecture to this Heidegger’s lecture just after WWII.²⁹ Wahl’s lecture was based upon notes taken by an attendee today unknown. Given a personal relationship between him and Levinas,³⁰ they are likely to have discussed the contents of Heidegger’s lecture. For us, the important point in the lecture is the place of philosophy in relation to the *Weltanschauung* and the forms of *Weltanschauung*, and we will briefly summarize Heidegger’s argument here.

According to Heidegger’s lecture, *Weltanschauung* is first of all *Halt* (Shelter) for *Dasein* living in the mythological world. At this particular stage, the world appears to *Dasein* as an “overwhelming power” (*Übermacht*), and this *Weltanschauung* (as shelter) offers a way for the *Dasein* to escape from the menace of the overwhelming nature. One such way are the prayers for divinities, magic, rituals etc.,³¹ which offer security in the threatening world. But just as beliefs and rituals provide such a vital security, they themselves become a subject of protection on the part of the believers. In this way, however, the shelter at stake always runs a risk of degradation (*Entartung*).³² and thus becomes a subject of preservation (*Haltung*). Subsequently, prayers and rituals are being observed in order to be preserved, while their initial signification falls into oblivion.³³ However, at the stage after the mythological shelter, *Dasein* becomes also capable of philosophizing.³⁴ By way of philosophy, *Dasein* can transcend itself beyond the self it was in the mythological world. Philosophy is thus a way to get out of the shelter of the mythological representation of the world.

What is important for us in this regard, is that the relation of the human being to the

²⁶ In a conference presentation Heidegger gave in Cassel, he mentions this term and its usage in Dilthey. On Heidegger’s “metaphysics” of *Dasein*, see, François Jaran, *La métaphysique du Dasein: Heidegger et la possibilité de la métaphysique (1927-1930)*, (Zeta Books, 2010).

²⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Einleitung in die Philosophie*, in *GA* Bd. 27, 2, Durchgesehene Auflage, (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2001).

²⁸ For Levinas, this lecture was the only lecture of Heidegger he attended in Freiburg (except seminars). Heidegger has just arrived in autumn 1928 to succeed to Husserl who retired in summer semester of the same year.

²⁹ Jean Wahl, *Introduction à la pensée de Heidegger* (Livre de poche, 1998).

³⁰ Until the publication of *Totality and Infinity* (1961), Levinas was not affiliated to university institution. After the war, he was director of Jewish normal school in Paris (*École normale israélite orientale*). It was Wahl who gave him occasion to give conferences in Collège philosophique which Wahl organized. A dozen of Levinas’ lectures will be integrated into *Totality and Infinity*.

³¹ Heidegger, *Einleitung in die Philosophie*, pp. 357-360.

³² *Ibdi.*, p. 364.

³³ *Ibdi.*, p. 366.

³⁴ *Ibdi.*, pp. 379ff.

overwhelming world of nature is marks the beginning of philosophy. When we define philosophy as transcendence of ourselves embedded in the mythological world, philosophy means the emergence from this world. This is in accordance with the widespread understanding of the beginnings of philosophy in Ancient Greece, which results from the end of mythological thinking with the beginning of the rational explanation of the *kosmos*.

If we follow Heidegger's definition, the Nazi ideology of blood and soil (*Blut und Boden*) can also be regarded as *Weltanschauung* or as *preservation*, which nonetheless does not mean exiting from the world. It is preservation because blood and soil are the *shelter* by virtue of which, on the Nazi view, the Germans can survive in the menace of the world. At the same time, as this is taken to be a precious shelter, its ideologues try to *preserve* it at all costs, even by sacrificing millions of lives at the altar of the *Reich*. Still, this *Weltanschauung* is not philosophy *stricto sensu*. If philosophy is transcendence, it must go beyond both shelter and preservation, whereas the ideological mythology in question remains only a sheer preservation. It is nothing else but a rooting in the material (blood and soil) and in the *ideologically represented* world. On this point, Heidegger's argument is ambiguous, though. According to him, philosophy is also *Weltanschauung* but we cannot say whether it belongs to *Weltanschauung* understood as preservation.³⁵

When Levinas uses expressions like "the secret nostalgia of the German soul," or "the elementary sentiment," he appears to point to the problematic dimension which Heidegger had left open,³⁶ even if Levinas makes no explicit reference to his lecture. This sentiment, says Levinas, expresses "the first attitude of a soul face to the whole of the real and its own destiny."³⁷ This first attitude of human soul, being an instinctive response, calls for a shelter. Thus, those seized by this sentiment remain thoroughly in the world without any transcendence beyond the world. Levinas dares to call their view "philosophy." This choice of the term is understood when we grasp the elementary but profoundly rooted character of the sentiment in question. We cannot underestimate its character and its social and political dimensions. And surely, by calling it "philosophy," Levinas has meant to attract more readers' attention to this matter.

2.3. Philosophical definition of Hitlerism and Judaism

The world immanent character of this attitude is identical with the essence of paganism in a philosophical sense, which Levinas came up with in the next year. In the article "Actuality of Maimonides" (1935), written on the occasion of celebration of the 800th anniversary the greatest Jewish philosopher of the middle Ages,³⁸ he draws an essential lesson of Maimonides' thought. Although this Jewish philosopher is generally regarded as a great contributor to the reconciliation of the Aristotelianism with the Biblical Revelation, the young Levinas, fol-

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 391ff.

³⁶ The way Heidegger related philosophy to *Weltanschauung* remains ambiguous because from his argument also follows that an ideology is also a kind of philosophy. The possible political implications of this lecture, however, require a separate discussion.

³⁷ Levinas, *Quelques réflexions...*, p. 7.

³⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, "Actualité de Maïmonide," in *L'Herne Emmanuel Lévinas*, Catherine Chalier and Miguel Abensour (eds.) (Paris: L'Herne, 1991), pp. 142-144. Originally published in *Paix et Droit*, no.4 (avril 1935), pp. 6-7.

lowing the example of his friend and teacher Jacob Gordin (Cf. *infra* 5.2), highlights the fundamental difference between the Jewish and Greek philosophers.

For Levinas, the difference consists in the distinction of “creation” from “fabrication.” It was Maimonides who separated for the first time “the laws of a thought which takes the world for an object of principles, from a thought which has relation to the conditions of the world.” It is “the distinction between a thought which thinks the world and that which goes beyond it.”³⁹

From this distinction, paganism in the sense of a non-Jewish, including Greek, way of thinking is defined as follows: “Paganism is a radical inability to go beyond the world.”⁴⁰ Paganism is nothing but an “attachment” to the world. In this sense, the elementary “philosophy” of Hitlerism fits perfectly into this definition of paganism. At the same time, Levinas distinguishes Hitlerism from the Aristotelian philosophy, one of the greatest classics of the philosophical thought, by calling the former neo-paganism due to its violent and brutal character. However, he ultimately classifies both of them under the term as paganism, or as the radical inability to go beyond the world.

Quite the opposite, for Levinas, Judaism is a certain form of *Weltanschauung* (even though he does not use this term), which is defined by its uneasiness in the world, in his words, by “an immediate sentiment of the contingency and of the insecurity of the world, an anxiety of being not at home and the energy that comes with it.”⁴¹ It is true that the *Weltanschauung* of *Dasein* was also its first response to the feeling of being threatened by the world, but Judaism does not seek for a shelter in the world, it rather goes beyond the world. In this sense, for Levinas, Judaism is nothing but “philosophy.” He saw a radical division between Hitlerism and Judaism, whereas his interpretation of Judaism is the complete opposite to that of the young Hegel’s (Cf. *infra* 3.2).

2.4. Ineradicability of Elemental Evil Rooted in Human Nature

Over half of a century after this article, in 1990, Levinas recollects an intuition that led him to its writing article,

The article is the product of the conviction that the source of the bloody barbarism of National Socialism is not in some contingent anomaly of human reasoning, nor in some ideological accidental misunderstanding. There is in this article the conviction that this source is due to an essential possibility of *elemental Evil* [Mal élémental] to which ever good logic can lead and for which Western philosophy was not sufficiently prepared to resist.⁴²

What he calls here elemental Evil corresponds to the elementary sentiment that Hitler’s “philosophy” evokes. In the passage following this quote, Levinas finds a possibility of this Evil even in the ontology of Heidegger, “the ontology of Being, caring about being – about Being

³⁹ Levinas, “Actualité,” p. 144.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

⁴² Levinas, *Quelques réflexions...*, p. 25. This part was originally published as additional notes to the English translation of *Quelques réflexions...* as “Post-Scriptum,” *Critical Inquiry* 17. no.1 (Autumn, 1991), pp. 63-71.

“*dem es in seinem Sein um dieses Sein selbst geht.*”⁴³ The phrase quoted in the original German is a part of the definition of *Dasein* given in *Being and Time*. The structure of *Dasein* itself is essentially self-oriented, even if *Dasein* has also *Mitsein* as a part of it. This is the recurring critique Levinas raises against the Heidegger of *Being and Time*.⁴⁴ However, Levinas does not jump hastily to the conclusion that this structure necessarily leads to the cause of elemental Evil. He argues only that the structure of *Dasein* contains its possibility.

Here, Levinas does not claim that Heidegger’s analysis is an error. Levinas makes a critique in a strict sense; he discerns the limit of this analysis when it is confronted with elemental Evil. Far from denying *Dasein*’s legitimacy, in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas deepens the analysis of the structure of *Dasein* through his phenomenology of enjoyment (*jouissance*) and its relation to the “element” (or elemental), which enables the enjoyment. Elements are the things which surround each of us as self-interested ego and offer us a basis for our life: air to breathe, solid ground to walk on, soup to eat etc. These are materials and objects of enjoyment which human beings take for granted in everyday life. But on the other hand, this same kind of element threatens our life because it can become typhoon, earthquake, or rotten food alike. So, the meaning that the element has for the human beings is essentially ambiguous. It enables us to survive but sometimes deprives us of life. Everyone naturally wants to escape from its dangers. Paradise or the Garden of Eden is a symbol of a place where there is no such danger, or labor. But people living with their body and material conditions cannot escape from the element. Thus, people pray to divinities representing nature, so that their daily life not be threatened by natural disasters or by daily misfortunes. In this way, however, people, by praying to the divinities themselves, also forget, ignore, or underestimate the ethical relationship between humans. This is what Levinas calls the “risk of paganism.”⁴⁵ Human beings cannot escape from this risk because human existence contains its possibility in the very heart of its structure. Thus, they are obliged to run it.

This is the outline of the analysis of enjoyment and element, understood as a deeper structure of the ego. It can be noted that Levinas develops his argument first within the lines of Heidegger’s view on *Weltanschauung* as shelter and preservation, then broadens it to the *egological* and ecological conditions along which these phenomena of shelter and preservation emerge. Specifically, Levinas’ notion of element corresponds to that of shelter, whereas his notion of the risk of paganism corresponds to that of preservation. In this way, Levinas finds also the limits of the ego-ecological analysis with regard to the question of the ethical relationship between humans. For him, the ethical relationship *goes beyond* the relationship between humans and divinities.

We need to note here that Levinas assumes that ethical relation does not accord with the pagan religious life where it is intertwined with the sacred relationships to divinities, as this can be seen in Hegel’s interpretation of Antigone’s tragedy (Cf. *infra* 4.2). This is also what Levinas finds in the later philosophy of Heidegger, and especially in the notion of the fourfold (*Geviert*), explained in the article “Building, Dwelling, Thinking” (1951).⁴⁶ Accord-

⁴³ Levinas, *Quelques réflexions...*, p. 25.

⁴⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (1927), Sechzehnte Auflage (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1986), pp. 12, 42.

⁴⁵ Levinas, *Totalité et infini*, p. 151.

⁴⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (1954) Vierte Auflage (Pfullingen: Günther Neske, 1978).

ing to this notion, the unity of Being is constituted by the humans as mortal, the divinities (Göttlichen) as immortal, the sky, and the earth. Here, the humans remain in the world with divinities, which are understood to be also a part of the world,⁴⁷ and Levinas saw in that Heidegger's return to the pagan attitude toward the world, to the *Weltanschauung* as shelter and preservation. Levinas' most virulent criticism on this point is in the article "Philosophy and the idea of the infinity" (1956),⁴⁸ but we can find a toned-down form of its also in *Totality and Infinity*. According to this criticism, Heidegger's philosophy has lost completely its transcendence beyond the world, and in this sense it is no longer philosophy but just a *Weltanschauung*.⁴⁹ On Levinas' view, this "philosophy" is in a position to evoke the same sentiments which led many Germans to embrace the elemental Evil.

Levinas' criticism of the notion of *Geviert* attests to his sensitivity to the source of the elemental Evil. This sensitivity led him to react in the same way to the theological writings of the young Hegel (Cf. infra 3.2) and to his discussion of Antigone's tragedy in *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Cf. infra 4.2).

3. Philosophical Anti-Semitism of the Young Hegel in Frankfurt

3.1. Book Review of Bernard Bourgeois

After *Totality and Infinity*, we find another testament of Levinas' re-reading of Hegel in his book review of Bernard Bourgeois' monograph *Hegel in Frankfurt or Judaism, Christianity, Hegelianism* (1970).⁵⁰ Bernard Bourgeois (born 1929), a great specialist of German philosophy from Kant to Marx, is one of the leading scholars of the French Hegel studies of the generation of students taught by Jean Hyppolite at École normale supérieure. To the same generation belong also Deleuze, Derrida, Granel, Balibar among others. Levinas, himself viewed Bourgeois as belonging to the generation of Hegelians, next to the one to which Levinas was personally close.

Bourgeois' book was published in 1970 and Levinas reviewed it next year in the *Bulletin of the Judeo-Christian Friendship of France (Bulletin de l'amitié judéo-chrétienne de France)*,⁵¹ which is the journal of the organization of the same name. If Bourgeois' book appeared in a book review in this journal, which does not have a philosophical vocation, it was because the book discusses the problematical relationship between Christianity and Judaism in the thought of the young Hegel in Frankfurt. In Frankfurt, the young Hegel wrote theological writings such as "Life of Jesus" and "The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate." Hegel's Frankfurt period precedes his Jena period to which Koyré devoted an article we referred to

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 139-156.

⁴⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, « La philosophie et l'idée de l'infini », In *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*, Edition suivi d'Essais Nouveaux, troisième édition corrigée, (Paris: J. Vrin, 2001), pp. 229-259. Originally published in *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, no.3 (1957).

⁴⁹ The most virulent remarks on this point are in "Philosophy and the Idea of the Infinity," Levinas, « La philosophie et ... », pp. 236-7. See also, Levinas, *Totalité et infini*, pp. 37-38.

⁵⁰ Bernard Bourgeois, *Hegel à Francfort ou Judaïsme, Christianisme, Hégélianisme* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1970).

⁵¹ Emmanuel Levinas, « Hegel et les juifs », in *Difficile liberté*, troisième édition revue et corrigée (Livre de poche, 2003). Originally published in *Bulletin de l'amitié judéo-chrétienne de France*, octobre-décembre, 1971, « à propos du Bernard Bourgeois *Hegel à Francfort ou Judaïsme, Christianisme, Hégélianisme* » (Paris: Vrin, 1970), pp. 352-357.

above (Cf. supra 1). As we saw, Levinas had mentioned the passage of the “The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate” positively in *Totality and Infinity* with regard to the relation of father (God) and son (Jesus) (Cf. supra 2.1). But Levinas could not accept the interpretation that the young Hegel made of Judaism, according to which the latter is the negation of the spirit.⁵² Levinas detects in this claim a philosophical form of anti-Judaism, which on his view remains also in post-Hegelian German philosophers like Marx. We shall briefly look through the review in question.

3.2. Philosophical Anti-Judaism in “Christianity and its Fate”

We have seen above Levinas’ philosophical definition of Judaism vs. paganism from the 1930’s (Cf. supra 2,2). But what he found in the philosophical definition of Judaism by the young Hegel had the character of a *paganisation* of Judaism, which was unacceptable for the Jewish philosopher. For Levinas, the young Hegel’s attempt to analyze philosophically Greeks, Jews, and Christians was equivalent to the beginning of the Western phase in the World History.⁵³ Hegel saw Judaism as playing the role of Anti-thesis of the Greeks: Greeks lived in harmony with nature, whereas Jews lived in complete separation from nature. Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation, represented this separation,

The existence of Abraham is thus that of a being who is separated from nature as object of love and who makes it an object of needs...the Jew is not attached to an idea “but to an animal existence.” (...) Thus, the existence of Abraham was entirely dominated by worrying about the natural vicissitudes...⁵⁴

For Levinas, here Hegel comes up with a definition of Judaism, which is the exact-opposite to his own (supra 2.3). The young Hegel finds in Abraham’s separation from nature an attachment *für sich* (not *an sich*) to nature, which allows the Jews to make of nature an “object” of love and needs. Hegel sees the Jewish existence as defined by caring for their survival in nature, a nature which ensures but sometimes threatens their life. For him, Jews do not care for “ideas” beyond the sensible world and thus remain completely in that world. This definition of the Jewish existence corresponds perfectly to the philosophical definition of paganism that Levinas gave in 1935 as the “radical inability to go beyond the world.”

Hegel’s characterisation of Judaism is philosophical and Bourgeois sees its sense as a “particular anticipation of the universal critique of political naturalism or nationalism, which will be developed in the Hegelian system of his maturity.”⁵⁵ Levinas finds in both Hegel’s argument and Bourgeois’ review “a doctrine which corroborates (...) the arguments which have nourished anti-Semitism until today.” For him, the presentation of the Jewish stage of the Spirit as one, in which “the [spiritual] universality and [natural] particularity are separated” (Levinas quoting Bourgeois), leads to the assertion that the “Jewish spirit is the negation of the spirit,” which is tantamount to an “anti-Semitism based in the System.”⁵⁶

⁵² Levinas, « Hegel et les juifs », p. 354.

⁵³ Levinas, « Hegel et les juifs », p. 353.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 354-355.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 354. Levinas quoting Bourgeois, *Hegel à Francfort...*, p. 117.

⁵⁶ Levinas, « Hegel et les juifs », p. 354.

3.3. Possible Repercussions of Hegelian Philosophical Anti-Semitism

Levinas ends his review with questions about the post-Hegelian consequences of the philosophical Anti-Semitism he finds in Hegel. He asks,

(...) whether the *Jewish Question* of Marx (...) reflects only an ignorance of the real structure of the mass of Jews in the 19th century, or whether it [ignorance] is not due to the knowledge by osmosis of the Frankfurt philosophy of Hegel and the impossible pity which it teaches, whether Hitlerian propaganda itself drew heavily from this mine, which, *without taking the least distance for himself*, an admirable French academic opens for us in 1970.⁵⁷

The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate was translated for the first time into French by J. Martin with a preface by Hyppolite in 1948.⁵⁸ Then, in 1953, Paul Asveld published a monograph on the young Hegel's religious philosophy,⁵⁹ but devoted very few pages to his interpretation of Judaism.⁶⁰ Thus, as Levinas states in the last sentence, the attention given in France to anti-Jewish contents of the Frankfurt philosophy of Hegel seems to have been quasi null at least from the viewpoint of the general public.⁶¹ In addition, Levinas suggests that the philosophical anti-Semitism of the young Hegel of Frankfurt might have been the remote cause of Marx' perceived ignorance about the Jews, as well as one of the hidden sources of the anti-Semitic ideology of the Nazi.

Two years after Levinas' review, in 1973, Elisabeth de Fontenay has enlarged the framework of Levinas' conjecture,

It can never be a question, in this regard, of pointing out some texts of Hegel concerning the Jews, in order to situate them both in [his] system and in [its] beginning. It would be ignoring that Hegel did not fail to inherit from a German anti-Jewish heritage passed down from Luther to Kant; though the invariance of this tradition is still hypothetical, and thus needs to be verified.⁶²

Levinas is one of the first philosophers to have raised this question in France. But Luc Ferry, in a reference to a lecture by his teacher Jacques Rivelaygue at the Sorbonne,⁶³ makes a far more assertive diagnosis of what Levinas was wondering in 1971.⁶⁴

We will return to this problem of a German anti-Jewish heritage in the conclusion.

⁵⁷ Levinas, « Hegel et les juifs », 355.

⁵⁸ Georg W.F. Hegel, *L'esprit du christianisme et son destin*, trans. J. Martin, préface par J. Hyppolite (Paris: Vrin, 1948).

⁵⁹ Paul Asveld, *La pensée religieuse du jeune Hegel. Liberté et aliénation* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1953).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 133-135.

⁶¹ The exception would be Léon Poliakov's monumental work *Histoire de l'antisémitisme, III De Voltaire à Wagner* (Paris: Clamann-Lévy, 1968.), where anti-Semitic discourses of Kant, Fichte, Hegel and others are shown in a section devoted to German philosophy and Jews. According to Léon Askénazi, Poliakov was one of the students of Jakob Gordin, *Écrits. Le renouveau de la pensée juive en France* (Albin Michel, 1995), p. 11.

⁶² Elisabeth de Fontenay, *Les figures juives de Marx* (Galilée, 1973), p. 49. « Il ne peut s'agir, à cet effet, de relever quelques textes de Hegel concernant les Juifs pour les instituer à la fois en système et en commencement. Ce serait ignorer que se transmet, de Luther à Kant, un héritage allemand antijuif auquel Hegel n'a pas manqué de puiser ; l'hypothétique invariance de cette tradition demanderait du reste à être vérifiée. »

⁶³ Jacques Rivelaygue, *Leçons de métaphysique allemande. Tome I De Leibniz à Hegel* (Grasset, 1990).

⁶⁴ Luc Ferry, « Esprit juif, esprit allemand », in *Philosophie Magazine* hors n.13, "Les philosophes face au nazisme" (février-mars, 2012), p. 28.

4. Re-reading of Phenomenology of Spirit

4.1. Nothingness in Science of Logic

In one of his last lectures at the Sorbonne (1975-6), Levinas retraces the concepts of being and nothingness in the history of Western philosophy. In this relation, he examines Hegel's *Science of Logic* and *Phenomenology of Spirit*, though not indeed chronologically (Levinas begins with the former and then goes to the latter).

Levinas reconstructs Hegel's argument on the identity of Being and Nothingness in Becoming. Nothingness means here nothingness itself, not nothing as opposed to something (i.e. nothing as non-existence of something x). The Nothingness in question means that it is not Being at all. That is, Nothingness is understood as opposed to Being in general. In the ancient history of human thinking, Parmenides saw the beginning in Being, whereas Buddhism saw it in Nothing. The reconciliation of this opposition was prepared by Heraclitus who said that the Being is as little as Nothing, but on the whole everything flows, which otherwise put means that everything is Becoming.⁶⁵

Still, on Levinas' view, the unity of Being and Nothing is part of the biblical (Jewish) thinking, which for Hegel was *not Jewish but Christian* thinking.⁶⁶ The doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* philosophically represents the passage from Nothingness to Being. For Levinas, this doctrine is a fruit of Jewish thinking, but for Hegel, it is part of the "Christian metaphysic." In this sense, Hegel leaves no room for Jewish biblical thinking in philosophy, and in this exclusion of Judaic thought from the philosophical or metaphysical tradition, Levinas already sees the Hegelian prejudice towards Judaism.

Levinas also compares the ways in which Hegel understands Nothingness in *Science of Logic* and *Phenomenology of Spirit* respectively. Although Nothingness as described above, is understood as fundamental concept in *Science of Logic*, it still remains abstract and far removed from the actual human life. On the contrary, in *Phenomenology of Spirit* the question of Nothingness is treated in an embodied human context, as death, or as the passage of life from being to nothing. In his discussion of this question, Levinas draws on the Greek family ethics of burial, known from the opposition in the tragedy of Antigone between the law of divinities observed by the family and the law of the state. This Levinas' focus is unique to him. As someone who has heard Kojève's lecture, we might expect Levinas to be more interested in the struggle of servant against his master for recognition, where life and death are at stake. But his reason for focusing on this tragedy is that he detects in it the problem of elemental Evil. We will need to see now in what way for Levinas this problem is related to the tragedy of Antigone.

4.2. Blood and Soil in Greek Family Ethics

Levinas summarizes Hegel's argument on family and state from *Phenomenology of Spirit* as follows. Dialectically speaking, family ethics is a thesis whereas state legislation is an anti-thesis. The family and the state are different in that the family is a "product of what is

⁶⁵ Georg W.F. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik. Die Lehre vom Sein (1832)*, Neu herausgegeben von Hans-Jürgen Gawoll mit einer Einleitung von Friedrich Hogemann und Walter Jaeschke (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2008), S 73.

⁶⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, *La mort et le temps* (Livre de poche, 1992), p. 88.

common” to its members, whereas the state “goes, by universal law, toward what is common” to its members. The members of the state are to be united; the members of the family are already united. The family unity is “natural,” because it is “unity of the blood.” For Levinas, “Hegel expresses this by relating the family to the deities of the Earth (mysticism of soil and blood in the family!).”⁶⁷ For us, it is obvious here that by the expression “soil and blood” Levinas has in mind Hitlerism.

Levinas further points that for Hegel the state is a “product of self-conscious Reason rising up to the universal,” whereas the family remains natural, not self-conscious, immediate, and in itself.⁶⁸ The family is the “under-ground of life [sous-sol de la vie],” from where the “human law,” i.e. the state legislation, is “separated [se détache].”⁶⁹ Nevertheless, the immediate nature of the family is the nature of the Spirit, which “is thus not pure nature” in that it has “an ethical principle.” The ethic proper to the family is to “bury the dead”; that is, carry on inhumation.⁷⁰

In death, the dead person returns to “the elemental of blood or earth.”⁷¹ The term “elemental” here is employed in the sense that Levinas refined in *Totality and Infinity* in terms of the earth. The earth is not a concrete geographical object like a field or mountain. It relates back to “a fundamental *where*” or “a stable ground.”⁷² In this sense, the earth is defined as the stable ground from which things are born, thus giving the basis of our life (Cf. supra 2.3). As it is the source of things, it is also taken for the source of being. In the Greek ethic of burial, the dead person is supposed to return to this source of being, which Levinas also calls “a maternal element,” or a dimension “situated *under* the phenomenological sphere.”⁷³

As suggested by the word “mother,” humans and the elemental earth are bound together from the very beginning. This is not a bond between two things which were originally separate, because, one of the two things (here, humans) is born from the elemental earth. It is not that there is a separation and then the separated things are united but instead there is first the unity and then the separation. Thus, humans separated from the earth at birth finally return to the original unity. This is the relationship of the family and the elemental earth, according to Levinas’ reading of Hegel. In his reading, the relation of the family to its members is the same,⁷⁴ probably by virtue of blood. The ties of the earth with the family and ties of the family with its members represent the unity in the beginning. In other words, this is a relationship between a producer and a product whose material is itself made up out of the producer.

Levinas gives also an account of the sense of burial in Greek family ethics in Hegel. When a member of the family dies, he or she is exposed to a process of natural corruption, or “anonymous decomposition.” On the Greek view, this is a disgrace for the dead. And so, in order to avoid it, the surviving members bury the corpse in the earth. The burial in the earth means that the dead return to their mother, thus recovering the initial union with the producer.

⁶⁷ Levinas, *La mort* ..., p. 94

⁶⁸ Levinas, *La mort* ..., p. 95

⁶⁹ Levinas, *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 102.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

The funeral rites save the dead from their disgrace by providing the dead with honor. At the same time, the surviving family members carry on the dead into the “living memory.”⁷⁵ In sum, the act of burial makes possible the return of the dead to the maternal element, the protection of him or her from disgraceful decomposition, and memorization of the passed-away.

Having reconstructed the Ancient Greek family ethics (divine law) as opposed to the state law, Levinas casts doubt on its “supplementary element,” i.e. on that “the region of death is identified with the earth,” as well as on the notion of “something not grounded,” such as “the relation of the dead and the blood.”⁷⁶ Levinas casts the same doubt in the chapter on religion in *Phenomenology of Spirit*,

In this type of thought, death is not only Nothing but a return into the ground. Is it legitimate to interpret death as such? (...) But in this bringing together of the idea of ground, of final ground, of ground of being and of death, there is a certain phenomenal model [modèle phénoménal], which seems to remain in Hegel.⁷⁷

What Levinas regards here as a “certain phenomenal model” is the “supplementary element.” Supplementary, because it is not essential to philosophy, but is just added to it without justification. It is a kind of impure philosophy, or, in other words, a culturally determined *Weltanschauung* – the material from which philosophy can start but must transcend. The problem of Being and Nothingness, which Levinas treats in his dialectical analysis of Antigone’s tragedy, is thus identified as based upon Greek *Weltanschauung*. In this sense, this understanding is not universal but seems to be common only also to some other nations like Germany.

5. Levinas’ Reading of Hegel after the French Hegel Renaissance

5.1. Hegel and Heidegger

As we have seen above, Levinas reads Hegel and Heidegger in the same perspective. First, he sees them both, as ontologists, as representatives of the ‘Western philosophy’. Second, he identifies traces of ‘elemental Evil’ in the philosophical discourses of both of them as well. The question that arises here is Does Levinas suggest a certain causal relationship between Western ontology and elemental Evil? Here, we have to maintain a clear distinction between Western ontology and Hitlerism, which Levinas sees as carrying the philosophical possibility of elemental Evil. The latter is a *Weltanschauung*, whereas the former is a philosophy in that it transcends the primitive and intuitional understanding of the world. In this sense, one can say that the *philosophy* of Hegel or Heidegger itself is not anti-Semitic in its essence.

Levinas’ reading of the two philosophers is peculiar and quite different from that of other Hegel readers of his generation. However, finding a resemblance in their views was not so uncommon. It was rather a general tendency within the French “Hegel renaissance,” which we will need to briefly discuss here.

The young Levinas’ interpretation of Heidegger is entrenched within the early French reception of his philosophy, which is generally modeled on that of Hegel and can be found throughout the works of, Hyppolite, Koyré, Kojève, as well as Alphonse de Waelhens. As we

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 98.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 99.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 100.

already pointed, Wahl's monumental work *Unhappiness of Consciousness in the Philosophy of Hegel* (1929) had opened a more *human* interpretation of the Hegelian philosophy through a close reading of *Phenomenology of Spirit*. In addition to *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the French interpreters of Hegel "discovered" *Jener Systementwurf*, which also added to this perspective. As a result, they were able to establish a connection between Hegel and Heidegger, which is also perceivable in their approach to their works. In a discussion organized in 1946 for the occasion of the publication of the first issue of *Collège philosophique*, Wahl, De Waelhens, Towarnicki, Hyppolite, Vuia, and Levinas, debated the philosophy of Heidegger.⁷⁸ In fact, De Waelhens was the only person who had published a monograph on the philosophy of Heidegger before the end of WWII (*Philosophy of Martin Heidegger*, 1942), and he had already insisted on the Hegelian character of Heidegger's primacy of the future, as advanced in *Being and Time*. "Heidegger's position on the fundamental problem is not without relation to Hegel's position. They both see Being in terms of progress (déroulement)."⁷⁹ On this point, De Waelhens draws on the work of the German scholar Clemens A. Hoberg who also emphasized this common aspect in the thought of the two philosophers,

Here, Heidegger probably meets the self-revelation (Selbstoffenbarung) of the Spirit of Hegel. The work of Heidegger has the closest affinity with the *Phenomenology of Spirit* of Hegel.⁸⁰

In this sense, this kind of approach to the two German thinkers is not peculiar only to their French interpreters, and it does not come as a surprise at all that at the end of the discussion, Hyppolite, De Waelhens, and Levinas agreed to characterize the philosophy of Heidegger as a resumption (*reprise*) of "Hegelian phenomenology." On the occasion, De Waelhens says, "I would like to agree with Mr. Hyppolite. I think most of these difficulties (...) lead to a return to the Hegelianism (...)."⁸¹ Levinas also agrees with them saying that "Heidegger arrives (...) to a dialectic of time (...)." This is indeed a dialectic of time that is characterized by an emphasis on the primacy of the future, about which Koyré, in his "The Philosophical evolution of Martin Heidegger" (1946),⁸² also says that "On this point [the primacy of future], Mr. Heidegger meets Hegel."⁸³

According to Catherine Malabou,⁸⁴ Hyppolite, Koyré, and Kojève's reading of Hegel consists in uncovering the paradoxical, even contradictory character of his system. She points

⁷⁸ Jean Wahl et al. (De Waelhens, De Towarnicki, Vuia, Hyppolite, Levinas), « Discussion », in *Le Choix, Le monde, l'existence* (Arthaud, 1947), pp. 71-82. See also, Jean Wahl, et al. (Berdiaeff, Gurvitch, Koyré, De Gandillac, Marcel, Levinas), « Discussion », in *Petite histoire de « l'existentialisme »*, Jean Wahl (ed.) (Paris: Édition Club Maintenant, 1947), pp. 65-91.

⁷⁹ Alphonse de Waelhens *La philosophie de Martin Heidegger* (Louvain: L'institut supérieure de Philosophie, 1942), p. 313.

⁸⁰ Clemens August Hoberg, *Das Dasein des Menschen: Die Grundfrage der Heideggerschen Philosophie* (Zeulenroda : Bernhard Sporn Verlag, 1937), p. 107.

⁸¹ Wahl et al., *Le choix...*, p. 80.

⁸² Alexandre Koyré, « L'évolution philosophique de Martin Heidegger », in *Études d'histoire de la pensée philosophique* (Gallimard, 1971), pp. 271-304. Originally published in *Critique*, no.1-2 (1946).

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 255, n.1.

⁸⁴ Catherine Malabou, « Négatif de la dialectique. Entre Hegel et Heidegger: Hyppolite, Koyré, Kojève », in *La chambre du milieu De Hegel aux neurosciences* (Paris: Hermann, 2009), pp. 27-52. Originally published in *Philosophie « Hegel: études »*, no. 52 (1996), pp. 37-53.

that their reading shows the Hegelian philosophy has two irreconcilable aspects: logic and the philosophy of history, which are based on the concepts of, respectively, eternity and time, where the former is understood as the principle of unchanging sameness, while the latter represents change, or becoming other than now.⁸⁵ For Levinas, however, the evolution of the time of the Spirit has a teleological structure which is ultimately reduced to the self-identical totality of the Same, understood as having no absolute Other. This means that when the spirit encounters the other, it brings the otherness of the other to the sameness of the self. Thus, as we already saw, unlike Kojève, Koyré, and Hyppolite, Levinas reads Hegel in a way that highlights the absence of otherness, rather than the inner contradiction of his system. In order to get to the critique of the reduction of Otherness in Hegel, Levinas needed concepts such as separation and eschatology, which were novelties in the French philosophy at the time. Thus, in his approach to Hegel, he does not stand in the line of the French Hegelians but in that of German Jewish philosophers like Hermann Cohen and Franz Rosenzweig.

5.2. Levinas and German Jewish Philosophy – Cohen, Rosenzweig, Gordin

It is well known that Franz Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption* had a great impact on *Totality and Infinity*. As Levinas himself states, this work is "too often present in this book to be cited."⁸⁶ Having also authored in his youth *Hegel and State*, Rosenzweig tried to go beyond the Hegelian totality in search for an absolute alterity based on the Jewish philosophical tradition. This was a philosophical orientation he adopted from his mentor, Hermann Cohen. But when Levinas mentions Cohen (indeed only on several occasions), his understanding of Cohen does not seem to go beyond the widespread image of the founder of the Neo-Kantianism as a project of the philosophical foundation of sciences. Levinas does not indeed seem to have studied Cohen's philosophy in depth but he is likely to have been aware of the basic idea of Cohen's philosophical system as something totally and essentially opposed to the closed system of the Hegelian philosophy, through his colleague and friend in *Alliances Israelite Universelle* during the 30's and the 40's, Jakob Gordin (1898-1947).

A Latvian Jew, Gordin had already finished his research on Cohen's concept of infinite judgement, which was published in 1929 as *Investigation into the Theory of Infinite Judgement*,⁸⁷ prior to his escape from Nazi Germany to Paris in 1933. In this work, Gordin retraces the genealogy of the concept of infinite judgement in the history of philosophy where its two culminating points are found in Maimonides and Kant. As Cohen has tried to reintroduce this concept into the core of his philosophy following these two thinkers, the result is that his philosophical system remains essentially open and not closed as that of Hegel's. Gordin argues that the Hegelian closed system presupposes its absolute Other, and that in this way Cohen's system has a philosophical primacy over that of Hegel's.

After the premature death of his older friend, Levinas dedicated to him an article⁸⁸ in

⁸⁵ Catherine Malabou, « Négatif de la dialectique », pp. 27-52.

⁸⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totalité et infini*, p. 14.

⁸⁷ Jakob (Jacob) Gordin, *Untersuchungen zur Theorie des unendlichen Urteils* (Berlin: Akademie für Wissenschaft des Judentums Verlag, 1929).

⁸⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, "Jacob Gordin," in *Difficile Liberté*, pp. 252-8. The article was originally published in *Les Nouveaux Cahiers*, no.31 (Hiver, 1972-73).

which he made a summary of Gordin's dissertation (regrettably never reprinted since its completion in 1929). In it, Levinas highlights the opposition between Cohen and Hegel.⁸⁹ Moreover, Levinas' article on Maimonides (Cf. supra 2.3) was written just after Gordin's article of (almost) the same title.⁹⁰ (It was in fact Levinas who published this article of Gordin in France in 1934).⁹¹ We need to note here that Levinas' article on Maimonides, in which we found the definition of paganism, was largely written within the framework of Gordin's argument.⁹² It is thus through Rosenzweig and Gordin that Levinas affiliates with the genealogy of the German Jewish philosophers,⁹³ which let him read Hegel differently from the French Hegelians of his time.

Conclusion

Although he was close to the main figures of the French Hegel renaissance, Levinas did not share their orientation in the interpretation of Hegel's philosophy, which focused on the internal contradiction of the Hegelian system (including of its concepts of eternity and time, logic and phenomenology). Instead, Levinas brought the new perspective of otherness which opened a horizon beyond the framework adopted by his colleagues in France. We have all reasons to say that this was the fruit of the influence which thinkers like Rosenzweig and Gordin (and through him, of Cohen) had on his thought.

The motivation of the later Levinas for his re-reading of Hegel was to enter into a peculiar philosophical fight against the Hitlerism as "philosophy" (or *Weltanschauung* as preservation). The problematic of *Weltanschauung* as philosophy, which he encountered in Heidegger's lectures in Freiburg, was a key to his reading of Hegel. Levinas defined the essence of Hitlerism as complete immanence in the world, and he opposed to it the essence of Judaism as transcendence of the world. Nevertheless, through a deepened analysis of the existential structure of the human being as a being in the "elemental" (supra 2.4), Levinas realized and acknowledged that this desire to be rooted in an element of the world was after all an ineradicable aspect of the human existence.

Later on, Levinas was puzzled by the young Hegel's definition of Judaism which was the completely opposite to Levinas' own view of Judaism. For Levinas, Hegel's view of the essence of Judaism is essentially pagan as it is marked by a radical inability to go beyond the world. Upon reading Bernard Bourgeois' monograph on the young Hegel, Levinas wondered whether a certain philosophical anti-Semitism was one of the remote causes for the rise of an anti-Jewish attitude in the German philosophy, as well as of the rise of the Hitlerism itself. His pointed skepticism toward Hegel's view on Judaism becomes apparent in his lecture at the Sorbonne (1976), particularly in his reading of Hegel's interpretation of the tragedy of Antigone.

Levinas is one of the first philosophers in France to raise the question of the genealogy

⁸⁹ Levinas, *Difficile Liberté*, p. 253.

⁹⁰ Jakob Gordin, *Ecrits*, p. 123-144. The articles was originally published in *Les Cahiers juifs*, no.10 (Juin-Juillet, 1934), pp. 6-18.

⁹¹ The original manuscript was in Russian and translated into French by Nina Gourfinkel.

⁹² Tomokazu Baba, "L'actualité de Maïmonide chez Jacob Gordin. Notes de lectures pour l'étude de la genèse de la vision de l'histoire de la philosophie occidentale chez le jeune Levinas," in *Hitotsubashi Review of Arts and Sciences*, no.5 (2011), pp. 380-404.

⁹³ Sophie Nordmann, *Levinas et la philosophie judéo-allemande* (Paris: Vrin 2017).

of philosophical anti-Semitism in the German philosophy. As we already saw, the question was later on discussed with various focuses by Elisabeth De Fontenay (Marx), Sara Kofmann (Nietzsche),⁹⁴ Luc Ferry (Hegel, Heidegger) and Emmanuel Faye (Heidegger).⁹⁵ In the English literature, Michael Mack has given a detailed account of such a genealogy (linking Kant, Hegel, and Wagner), as well as of the German Jewish responses to it.⁹⁶ In Heidegger studies, the publication of his *Black Notes* prompted a debate on his (philosophical) anti-Semitism, which embroiled a number of scholars.⁹⁷ But this question cannot just remain an object of discussion in Heidegger studies. It can and should be examined in the context of the perceived philosophical anti-Semitism in the German philosophy, including in the young Hegel.⁹⁸ It should be noted that Levinas tackled this problem as philosophical. This itself is a point on its own. For, if we treat the question as exclusively political, we will overlook what allowed the problem to arise recurrently in the history of the German philosophy.

In the early 1970's, Levinas raised this question with regard to Hegel, which none of the scholars of the French "Hegel Renaissance" had touched on. However, with regard to other German philosophers, the question remains still open. We conclude with the suggestion that what Levinas called "elemental Evil" is perhaps not the only possible answer this question.

⁹⁴ Sara Kofman, *Le mépris des Juifs – Nietzsche, les juifs, l'antisémitisme* (Galilée, 1994).

⁹⁵ Emmanuel Faye, *Heidegger, l'introduction du nazisme dans la philosophie : Autour des séminaires inédits de 1933-1935* (Livre de poche, 2005).

⁹⁶ Michael Mack, *German Idealism and The Jew – The inner Anti-Semitism of Philosophy and German Jewish Responses* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003).

⁹⁷ For example, Peter Trawny, *Heidegger und der Mythos der jüdischen Weltverschwörung*, 3., überarbeitete und erweiterte Auflage, (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2015).

⁹⁸ Peter Trawny made some remarks about how Heidegger has preserved a Hegelian framework of "Volksgeistern" and "Weltgeist" in *Heidegger und der Mythos der jüdischen Weltverschwörung*, pp. 34-35.