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# Hegel and the *Hatäta Zär'a Ya'äqob*: Africa in the Philosophy of History and the History of Philosophy

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## Abstract

This article explores an episode in the reception of Hegel's philosophy of history and historiography of philosophy with reference to the question of the possibility of non-Western philosophy, in particular African philosophy. Section I briefly outlines the contents of the *Hatäta Zär'a Ya'äqob* and the controversy over its authorship, focusing in particular on the argument of the Ethiopianist and scholar of Semitic languages Carlo Conti Rossini that 'rationalistic' philosophy was impossible in Ethiopia. In section II I suggest that a major component of the intellectual background to this notion of the impossibility of philosophy in Africa can be traced to Hegel's philosophy of history. To substantiate this claim I begin by providing an account of the broader historiographical shift between 1780 and 1830, in which Africa and Asia came to be excluded from the history of philosophy, and I suggest that Hegel's philosophy of history was decisive in this process. I examine how Hegel's account of history as the realization and actualization of freedom goes together with the development of cultural production culminating in philosophy, and how both of these processes (if they are really separate processes at all), can be mapped onto particular historical-geographical populations and cultures. I suggest that, even though this was not Hegel's intention, by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries this served as a cultural justification for political domination: those who are unfree are unfree because they are unthinking (unphilosophical), and those who are unthinking cannot be free. Finally in section III I connect this Hegelian conception to Conti Rossini's work, both his article on the *Hatäta* and as apologist for Italian imperialism. I conclude by reflecting on what this under-explored connection between Hegel and early twentieth-century theorists of culture might mean for attempts to construct global histories of philosophy.

This article has two interconnected aims. On the one hand it explores an episode in the reception of Hegel's philosophy of history and historiography of philosophy with reference to the question of the possibility of non-Western philosophy, in



particular African philosophy. On the other, it aims to show how attention to works of African philosophy can help us reconsider Hegel's historiography of philosophy and its intellectual legacy outside of philosophy narrowly construed. In particular, it aims to demonstrate that close attention to an Ethiopian work—the *Hatäta Zär'a Ya'əqob*—and the subsequent century-long debate over its authorship can help to understand (a) how Africa came to be excluded from histories of philosophy, and how the justification for this exclusion was bound up with logics of colonial domination, (b) what this process of exclusion had to do with Hegel's philosophy of history and the role he saw for Africa in this narrative, and (c) to use this discussion to re-evaluate some key components of Hegel's philosophy of history, and to think about the historiography of philosophy in a global orientation.

I begin in section I by briefly outlining the contents of the *Hatäta Zär'a Ya'əqob* and the controversy over its authorship, focusing in particular on the argument of the Ethiopianist and scholar of Semitic languages Carlo Conti Rossini, that 'rationalistic' philosophy was impossible in Ethiopia. In section II I suggest that a major component of the intellectual background to this notion of philosophy's impossibility in Africa can be traced to Hegel's philosophy of history. To substantiate this claim I begin by providing an account of the broader historiographical shift between 1780 and 1830, in which Africa and Asia came to be excluded from the history of philosophy, and I suggest that Hegel's philosophy of history was decisive in this process. I examine how Hegel's account of history as the realization and actualization of freedom goes together with the development of cultural production culminating in philosophy, and how both of these processes (if they are really separate processes at all), can be mapped onto particular historical-geographical populations and cultures. I suggest that, even though this was not Hegel's intention, by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries this served as a cultural justification for political domination: those who are unfree are unfree because they are unthinking (unphilosophical), and those who are unthinking cannot be free. Finally in section III I connect this Hegelian conception to Conti Rossini's work, both his work on the *Hatäta* and as an apologist for Italian imperialism. To do so I examine the legacy of Italian Hegelianism via de Sanctis and Spaventa, before turning to the self-proclaimed 'philosopher of fascism' Giovanni Gentile. I conclude by reflecting on what this underexplored connection between Hegel and early twentieth-century theorists of culture might mean for attempts to construct global histories of philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

## I. The *Hatäta Zär'a Ya'əqob* controversy

In 1854 an Italian Capuchin monk named Giusto da Urbino discovered an unusual manuscript in the highlands of Ethiopia. This manuscript contained the *Hatäta*

[inquiry] *Zār'a Ya'əqob*, an autobiography, a religious meditation and a philosophical treatise that was unlike anything else da Urbino or his patron Antoine d'Abbadie had encountered in Ethiopian literature. It also provides an unusually detailed portrait of the personality of the philosopher, his life and tumultuous times, in which Ethiopia experienced a brutal religious civil war, and during which the eponymous *Zār'a Ya'əqob* was forced to flee his hometown of Aksum. Hiding in a cave, he sat down and meditated on God and the conflicts of men that had led him there. The philosophy, expounded in a lengthy middle section of the text sandwiched between an account of his early life and a shorter section on his later years, is couched in the form of a prayer, and outlines a system of metaphysics, epistemology and ethics, structured around a central principle of 'the goodness of natural creation' that undergirds an account of moral-epistemic 'vision': we can 'see' what is right and what is wrong, what is true and what is false.

In the century and a half since its discovery, the work has been the subject of some striking claims. Indeed, noting that it was composed almost exactly contemporaneously with Descartes's *Discours de la méthode*,<sup>2</sup> Claude Sumner, the greatest scholar of Ethiopian philosophy, has suggested that 'modern philosophy began in Ethiopia at the same time as in England and France' (1976: 42). If this is the case, not only will many old assumptions about the history of philosophy in Africa have to be revised, but one of, if not *the* pivotal moment in the birth of modern philosophy will be an African as much as a European event. Why then is the *Hatāta Zār'a Ya'əqob* so little known in Anglo-American philosophy?<sup>3</sup>

On d'Abbadie's death in 1897, his collection of Ethiopian manuscripts was bequeathed to the *Académie des Sciences*, and in 1902 these were deposited in the Bibliothèque Nationale.<sup>4</sup> The *éthiopiants* of Europe who flocked to the Bibliothèque Nationale to consult this unprecedented collection were struck by this unique text: Boris Turayev gave a talk at the St Petersburg Academy of Sciences on 'two Abyssinian freethinkers', soon to be followed by an edition and Russian translation, and at the same time *Zār'a Ya'əqob*'s name was becoming known in the academic centres of Western Europe through the work of a German philologist Enno Littmann, who translated the text into Latin.

However, just as the *Hatāta* began to receive broader scholarly interest, an Italian orientalist named Carlo Conti Rossini sought to demonstrate that the text could not possibly have been composed by an Ethiopian in the seventeenth century. But if *Zār'a Ya'əqob* did not compose the *Hatāta*, who did? Conti Rossini's new hypothesis was that its true author was none other than its supposed discoverer, Giusto da Urbino. Conti Rossini presented a number of arguments, based on eye-witness testimony, internal and external philological considerations and more speculative arguments about the supposed incompatibility of rationalistic philosophy and seventeenth-century Ethiopian culture. We will not dwell here on his more technical arguments, many of which were subsequently elaborated in greater detail

by Mittwoch (1934), Kropp, Wion and others,<sup>5</sup> but rather on the historical-philosophical speculations motivating his arguments.

In addition to philological considerations, the most powerful argument, noticed by Turayev, Littmann and Conti Rossini alike, was the supposed singularity of the text. There was, in their view, nothing else remotely like it in Ethiopian literature. Turayev and Littmann tried to account for this singularity by identifying external influences, but Conti Rossini was the first to suggest that the text had to have come from outside the Ethiopian tradition entirely, from the influence of a more ‘civilized’ agency. Ethiopian culture, Conti Rossini claimed, was deeply authoritarian and dogmatic, without any space for the kind of free, critical thought that was essential for the rationalistic philosophy contained in the *Hatäta*. Philosophy of this sort—real philosophy—was impossible in Ethiopia:

Ideas such as those of Zär’a Ya’əqob would not be expected in Ethiopia, where blind faith and Byzantinism of the interpretations of the Holy Scriptures seemed to oppose an insuperable barrier to free thinking, whose blossoming over there we would not even know, as it were, how to imagine. (Conti Rossini 1920, trans. Cantor in Egid, Cantor and Merawi (forthcoming))<sup>6</sup>

His argument was not simply that the *Hatäta* was a fake, but that no philosophy, properly speaking, could have been produced in Africa. Why did Conti Rossini think this? It was certainly not taken for granted by the other philologists like Turayev and Littmann, who had worked on editions, translated the texts and provided interpretations of the philosophical content of the works and suggested external philosophical influences. Indeed, by the early twentieth century, Conti Rossini’s assumptions about the impossibility of philosophy in Africa had only recently come to seem like the kind of evidence that might be *prima facie* plausible in the case against the authenticity of the *Hatäta*. We now turn to the historiographical shift that formed a significant part of the discursive background of Conti Rossini’s rejection of the Ethiopian authorship of the *Hatäta*, and the very possibility of African philosophy.

## II. Africa in the philosophy of history, Africa in the history of philosophy

The period of intense philosophical ferment between the publication of the first edition of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* and Hegel’s untimely death in 1831 saw the proliferation not only of new metaphysical systems and metaphysical self-conceptions, but also of alternative approaches to the history of philosophy and to the question of the status of non-Western philosophy. This section will provide an account of this fundamental shift in the historiography of philosophy before

turning to the most significant figure in determining the subsequent structure of the history of philosophy: Hegel.

II. i. *The Historiographical Shift 1780–1830*

The classic treatment of this historiographical shift is Peter J. Park's *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy: Racism in the Formation of the Philosophical Canon, 1780–1830* (2013).<sup>7</sup> Park traces the evolution of the debate over the possibility of non-Western philosophy in the period that was perhaps most crucial for the establishment of what came to be the dominant *long durée* conception of the history of philosophy: the grand Hegelian teleology of the development of philosophy, and history itself, as the self-actualization of *Geist*. Park conceives of the debates over the history and geography of philosophy as proceeding along two lines, reflecting the newfound status of the German university as the European centre of both philosophy and oriental scholarship, presenting two 'challenges' to existing models of philosophy.

The internal challenge was the battle between various schools over the identity and direction of philosophy within German universities. One particularly widely used tool in these polemics was the construction of historical narratives about the past of philosophy that would serve to legitimize their particular system, either by demonstrating the adherence of the history of philosophy to the architectonic requirements of some system, or in showing how the development of philosophy culminated logically in the system of their preferred philosopher. Kantians like Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann formulated a method of *a priori* construction in historical writing<sup>8</sup> according to a systematic definition of philosophy, showing that all previous philosophers had been preparing the way for Kant's Copernican Revolution. This method of *a priori* construction provided a (Kantian) definition of philosophy that could serve as a neat criterion for the inclusion or exclusion of a given text, as those that did not fit the necessary dialectical development of systems of thought could not be included in the history.<sup>9</sup>

The external challenge was the appearance in European scholarly circles of works such as the *Upanishads* in Sanskrit, the *Zend-Avesta* in Old Persian and Confucian texts from China. How were philosophers to engage with these texts, and what was their relation to similarly ancient works, and to the classical thinkers of European modernity? Were these the sort of texts that philosophers could fruitfully study at all, or were they perhaps for scholars of other emerging disciplines: the question was whether these texts constituted 'real' philosophy according to their prior definitions, or were they something else, mythology perhaps, or folk wisdom?

Two early approaches to this question moved in very different directions. On the one hand, 'Kantian'<sup>10</sup> historians of philosophy took their lead from some (admittedly tangential) remarks in Kant's late *Lectures on Logic*: 'it is said that the Greeks learned their wisdom from the Egyptians [...] the Egyptians are children

compared to the Greeks. They have various cognitions, but not sciences. The Greeks first enlightened the human understanding' (1992: 340). 'Science' (*Wissenschaft*) here meant something like a coherently systematized body of knowledge of some determinate subject matter, related architectonically according to *a priori* principles, whereas 'cognition'<sup>11</sup> (*Erkenntnis*) referred simply to any individual representation of any subject whatsoever. Proto-racialist thinkers like Christoph Meiners correlated this distinction to racial or national characteristics, claiming that it was only 'white' men, such as the Greeks who were capable of science (of which philosophy is not only an example but the paradigm), while non-whites like the Egyptians were capable merely of cognition.<sup>12</sup> The science/cognition distinction, combined with emerging ideas of essential racial difference grounded for the first time the dismissal of all African and Asian thought as unphilosophical, 'the mere poetry of times still half-brutish' (Tiedemann 1791; cited in Park (2013)).<sup>13</sup>

A notable counter-tradition to the Kantian legacy and its racialist elaborations is provided by the less-studied works of Joseph Marie de Gérando and Friedrich Schlegel, who in the first decades of the nineteenth century independently proposed a comparative approach to the history of philosophy. In his 1822 *Histoire comparée des systèmes de philosophie, considérés relativement aux principes des connaissances humaines* ("Comparative history of philosophical systems, considered in relation to the principles of human knowledge"), de Gérando rejected both the pretensions of earlier historians of philosophy like Brucker and Tiedemann to present a 'total history' of philosophy, viewing the subject matter of a global history of philosophy as simply too large and unwieldy for a single comprehensive analysis; as well as any *a priori* criteria for organizing a history, opting instead for a version of 'the experimental method' that would consider each putative system of philosophy, Western or otherwise, first on its own terms, then also in relation to other systems, and finally in relation to the 'practical effects' of those systems.

Similarly, Schlegel pioneered a comparative, cross-cultural history that incorporated Asian (but not yet African) philosophical systems into a general history of philosophical thought. His studies were, unlike those of de Gérando, grounded in a knowledge of oriental languages (Schlegel read both Sanskrit and Persian), and operated with a theoretical framework that owed much to Fichte and other post-Kantian thinkers, and engaged more substantially with the thought of both Kant, and later on Hegel. These thinkers not only affirmed the reality of philosophy beyond Europe, but also insisted on treating them alongside European philosophy.

## II. ii *The history of philosophy in the philosophy of history*

I now turn to the most influential single contribution to this historiographical shift, and perhaps the most enduring historical account of the historical development of philosophy ever composed: Hegel's grand teleological account of history as the

self-actualization of *Geist*. Schlegel is a good place to pick up this thread, as there is a strong argument to be made that Schlegel was the major impetus behind the particular form that this system took with regards to the possibility of non-Western philosophy. Like many of his contemporaries, Hegel was preoccupied not only with developing and critiquing Kant's system, but also with the challenges posed by 'Eastern philosophies' as presented by Schlegel and others. Hegel's reaction to Kantian metaphysics is a well-worn topic, but Hegel's relation to contemporary debates on the 'external problem' is less well explored.<sup>14</sup> Park argues that Hegel's views about the possibility of non-Western philosophy changed over time, not, as we might imagine, in response to new manuscript discoveries and translations (though there was an explosion of both during this period), but in response to more local theological debates that played out at the tail end of the so-called *Spinozastreit*, the Spinoza, or the pantheism controversies.<sup>15</sup>

Hegel's history merged the conceptual development of philosophy with the historical development of society: history is a rational process that unfurls according to the same logic as the development of philosophical systems.<sup>16</sup> Philosophy as 'the owl of Minerva', looking backwards from the present, aims to apprehend its movement. The subject of history is spirit (*Geist*), and it tends towards its essence, freedom. Human societies are to be judged according to the degree to which they have apprehended the essence of spirit, that is, the degree to which they actualize their freedom.

As with many Hegelian distinctions, the levels or stages of freedom are three-fold, and fundamentally historical. In the first, associated with 'oriental despotism', only one individual, namely the despot, is free; the rest are unfree. In the second, associated with the classical world of Greece and Rome, some are free. In the third, achieved only by the Christian-Germanic peoples, all are free.<sup>17</sup> There is thus a hierarchy, or a progression of freedom, associated with particular historical-cultural stages. This one-some-many progression belongs to what Hegel calls 'objective spirit'.

This hierarchy is intimately linked to a hierarchy of cultural production: the most 'primitive' (because most closely connected to sensuous, material form) form of cultural production is art, followed by religion, and finally philosophy (the most pure and abstract discipline, its form of expression disconnected almost entirely from the sensuous and the empirical). Civilizations at an earlier stage of development, according to Hegel, are characterized by their art and religion, advanced societies by their philosophy. Properly 'primitive' societies may lack any of the three.<sup>18</sup> Unlike the one-some-many progression, the art-religion-philosophy progression belongs to 'absolute spirit', which does not map neatly onto the progression of objective spirit. This lack of direct correspondence between the two hierarchies is connected to Hegel's understanding of the content of art, religion and philosophy: all share common insights into truth, which

they present in different forms.<sup>19</sup> As a result, the truth proper to the final stage of the progression of objective spirit, namely that ‘all are free’, can be discovered by the second stage of absolute spirit, i.e. religion (Hegel does in fact claim that it is Christianity that first discovers this truth), while the third and final stage, i.e. philosophy, simply presents this same insight in a different, ‘conceptual’ form.

Nevertheless, the two progressions are aligned, such that for Hegel, philosophy is more culturally, socially, *spiritually* (in the sense of *Geist*) advanced. Further, the more independent philosophy is from other cultural forms, the purer it is, and the sign of a more advanced, mature society. Hegel’s account was elaborated, and then gained widespread acceptance, as philosophy in Europe became professionalized and specialized, siloed off from those other intellectual and cultural activities with which it was traditionally connected, with its autonomy from other professions, and other academic disciplines, seized on as a defining characteristic. As Justin Smith-Ruiu notes:

one of the most serious consequences of this emergence [of philosophy as a profession] is that it will make it increasingly difficult for Europeans to recognize non-European intellectual traditions, which are integrated with their cultural beliefs and practices in unfamiliar ways, as philosophy. (Smith-Ruiu 2016: 25)

Philosophy, on this view, is supposed to stand alone, separate from, and in a sense even opposed to, culture at large. Any system of thought alloyed with a cultural practice like astronomy, calligraphy or ritual worship is all the less philosophical for it. This meant that any expression of philosophical ideas intertwined with a cultural form, such as the haikus of Basho or the Vedic rituals, are properly speaking not philosophical. And if the philosophy is made hybrid, if it loses its purity, it is not really philosophy in the sense of a marker of world-historical progression, as it can then offer ‘no degree of liberty, no measure of dignity [...]’. The admixture does not so much preserve philosophy like a chemical element in an ore; rather, it dissolves philosophy like water dissolves sugar’ (Smith-Ruiu 2016: 25).<sup>20</sup>

### II. iii. Hegel and ‘the land of perpetual childhood’

We have seen how the basic progression of the philosophy of history is tied to the geographical movement from East to West: from the Orient to Greece to Europe. How does the rest of the world, and in particular Africa fit in? Famously Hegel characterized Africa as ‘the land of childhood, which lying beyond the day of self-conscious history, is enveloped in the dark mantle of Night’ (*LPWH*: 91). What does it mean for Africa to lie beyond the day of self-conscious history? ‘The characteristic point’, Hegel writes of African life, ‘is the fact that consciousness has not yet attained to the realization of any substantial objective existence’ (*PWH*: 93), and



without such a realization, any understanding of the separation of spirit from nature is impossible. Without such separation, everything remains static: there is no way of ‘kick-starting’ the dynamic, dialectic processes that constitutes history and culminates in universal freedom. It is not that there is no capacity for freedom whatsoever, but that there is no way to begin the dialectic by which freedom is achieved: ‘the possibility of human freedom is thus also present in negroes, but it does not lie in them to get out of their naturalness’ (*PWH*: 338).<sup>21</sup> This inability to separate nature from spirit means that history cannot get off the ground. Without the separation of nature and spirit, the African remains ‘natural man in his completely wild and untamed state’ (*PWH*: 93). But why should this be the case for the African and not for the European? Hegel’s reasoning here is primarily geographic and climatic, reminiscent of earlier Enlightenment theories of climatic determinism in Montesquieu or Hume:<sup>22</sup>

the frost which grips the inhabitants of Lapland and the fiery heat of Africa are forces of too powerful a nature for man to resist, or for the spirit to achieve free movement and to reach the degree of richness which is the precondition for a fully developed mastery of reality. (*LPWH*: 155)

This kind of geographic-climatic grounding has important consequences for the capacity for freedom and for entering into history—some peoples are simply unable, because of their environment, to exercise ‘a fully developed mastery of reality’. In a section of the Introduction to the *Philosophy of History* entitled ‘Geographical Basis of History’, Hegel distinguishes three geographic-climatic types:

- (1) The arid elevated land with its extensive steppes and plains.
- (2) The valley plains—the Land of Transition permeated and watered by great Streams.
- (3) The coast region in immediate connection with the sea. (*LPWH*: 155)

These types, which are to be understood as ‘essential, rational distinctions, in contrast with the variety of merely accidental circumstances’ are associated with the three continents of the ‘Old World’: ‘Africa has for its leading classical feature the Upland, Asia the contrast of river regions with the Upland, Europe the mingling of these several elements’ (*LPWH*: 75). Each of these geographies has its own historical destiny: whereas Europe is ‘a land [...] penetrated throughout by water and so open to the infinity of the sea, which is none other than that of the Spirit’, ‘Africa is a mass folded in on itself and closed up into a veritable night of the Spirit, like the oblivion of sleep’ (Diagne 2013: 5; a paraphrase of Hegel’s aforementioned discussion). This particular geographic type produces

climatic conditions unsuitable to human flourishing and people unsuitable to all but the meanest intellectual development.

This points to an important difference between Hegel's account of Asian and African history, and between Asian and African thought. In both the *Philosophy of Right* §355 and the *Philosophy of History*, Hegel presents the oriental world as static and 'unhistoric', but as nevertheless playing a role in the development of Spirit as its 'birthplace'. If Hegel thinks of India and China as in some sense pre-philosophical—that is, potentially if not actually in possession of real philosophy<sup>23</sup> (and thus also the potential for real freedom)—he seems to exclude this possibility altogether for Africans.

To return to the one-free, some-free, all-free formulation of the development of human freedom, Hegel includes Oriental civilizations in world history—though in an admittedly preliminary role that parallels the preliminary status of Oriental philosophy—because he sees them as having attained at least a separation of spirit from nature and a minimal level of consciousness of freedom, i.e., as belonging only to the emperor (China), highest caste (India), or members of the empire (Persia). 'Unhistorical' Orientals are in this way opposed to ahistorical Africans and indigenous Americans<sup>24</sup> who, given their ahistorical status, lack any awareness of their own freedom.<sup>25</sup>

The ahistorical nature of Africa and the unhistorical nature of Asia are both grounded in geography, implying an interesting dialectic between temporality and spatiality in the philosophy of history. As Alison Stone has argued:

In Africa, indigenous America and the Orient, time unfolds without history. Consequently, the advancement from Africa to the Orient and from China to India to Persia occurs purely spatially, in that each region in turn grasps freedom to successive—all highly inadequate—degrees. Conversely, historical development (in Europe) takes place in space as well as time, not only in space (*HG*: 156–57). Where advancement occurs only spatially, its motor is not human reason and agency but geographical variation. Because we are natural, spatially embodied as well as rational beings, we are inescapably located in natural surroundings that divide into continents: America, Asia, Africa and Europe. The continents' features affect how their inhabitants live and so what level of civilization and consciousness of freedom they can reach by their own efforts. (Stone 2020: 253–54)

'Asians' exist at a historical stage before *Geist* has attained the stage of self-actualization that can properly be called philosophical—'Africans', lying outside history altogether, can never attain this self-actualization, can never be

philosophical. Africa, according to Hegel, is static, without past and without future. The fullest human capacities can be developed only historically, and Africans are outside of history. It is hard to overstate how dehumanizing a picture this presents from the philosopher of historicity.

As Stone goes on to argue, it is also not difficult to see how this critique fed into justifications of slavery and colonial paternalism.<sup>26</sup> If enslaved people lack a consciousness of freedom, they are not capable of freedom. It is only through colonization (understood as the broad world-historical process which includes chattel slavery, missionary work and later full-blown colonial projects<sup>27</sup>) that enslaved peoples can gain such consciousness and thereby claim freedom. Although colonization and slavery are freedom-depriving in and of themselves—and therefore in the abstract should be condemned by an ethics as focused on freedom as Hegel's—they can be justified because they are a necessary part of a teleological history that moves towards freedom for all. Indeed, on this account freedom is not possible for Africans *without* slavery and colonialism. It is a precondition of proper, historical self-consciousness of freedom.

As Olufemi Táíwò (1998) has noted, Hegel's picture of the darkness of Africa was to an extent a reflection of his own, and contemporary European scholarship's, ignorance of its subject. Whether we can attribute this to simply the lacunae in the science of his day, or to a wilful distortion of available sources is a question addressed by both Robert Bernasconi in *Hegel at the Court of the Ashanti* and Tom C. McCaskie in *Exiled From History: Africa in Hegel's Academic Practice*.<sup>28</sup> Bernasconi argues that Hegel goes far beyond the factual content of the narratives given by his sources—for example the works of his Berlin colleague Karl Ritter, and James Bruce's famous multi-volume account of his journey to the source of the Nile—exaggerating accounts of fetishism, violence and cruelty, far beyond what was necessary to make Africa fit into his system. In Bernasconi's view the only explanation of this distortion of his sources is an indefensible racism which cannot simply be explained as typical of his time (Bernasconi 1998: 62).

Perhaps a more serious problem than empirical misrepresentations are the conceptual distinctions involved in the geographical basis for his philosophy of history. According to Hegel:

Africa must be divided into three parts: one which lies south of the desert of Sahara – Africa proper—the Upland almost entirely unknown to us, with narrow coast-tracts along the sea; the second is that to the north of the desert—European Africa (if we may so call it)—a coastland; the third is the river region of the Nile, the only valley-land of Africa, and which is in connection with Asia.<sup>29</sup> (*Aes*: 91)

Africa is split into three parts corresponding to a geographical-climatic type, two of which play a role in history by being assimilated to either Europe or Asia, with the remaining part—Africa proper—serving as the ahistorical foil. This distinction was necessary because of the obvious historicity of Egypt and North Africa—Hegel could not very well deny the existence of the pyramids—and so he is forced to gerrymander the ‘real’, supposedly ahistorical Africa from the world-historical African cities of Carthage and Alexandria, in which thinkers like Plotinus, Philo and Augustine were very much capable of philosophizing.

Had he been more interested in Ethiopia, Hegel might well have included Ethiopia in the same category of Asiatic Africa as Egypt, drawing the line between that region and ‘Africa proper’ somewhere near the borders of the Ethiopian Empire rather than at the Nile Valley. Precisely this was the move made by a number of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Ethiopianists. Ethiopia, like Hegel’s Egypt and Maghreb, was ‘in Africa but not of it’, distinguished by its long traditions of Christianity, literacy and plough-based agriculture. Ethiopia was described in many of these works in words that could have come from Hegel’s evocations of the Orient as ‘un-historical history’, remaining always ‘the repetition of the same majestic ruin’ (Teshale Tibebe 1996: 419): according to Toynbee Ethiopia was a kind of ‘living fossil’, frozen in time, incapable of change.

### III. From Hegel to Conti Rossini via Cousin, Spaventa and Gentile

If history is understood as the progressive self-actualization of the human spirit, the unfolding of freedom exemplified by the development of philosophy, then there is a very important connection between philosophy and freedom. It is a cornerstone of Hegel’s history of philosophy and significant for his philosophy of history. Nevertheless, this same picture of the relation between society, freedom and philosophy could serve as a useful justification for colonial domination: cultures that are unfree are unfree because they are unthinking (unphilosophical),<sup>30</sup> and those who are unthinking cannot be free (see Buck-Morss 2000). Cultures of civilizations that philosophize will rule over those that do not, and this is justifiable because this rule will bring about progress in the teleological development of spirit which would make possible not only freedom for all on the level of objective spirit, but the possibility of philosophy on the level of absolute spirit.<sup>31</sup>

This final section proposes a possible line of intellectual influence that ran from Hegel to Victor Cousin, de Sanctis, Spaventa and Gentile that transmits to Conti Rossini the use of philosophy as marker of civilization and connects his denial of an Ethiopian authorship of the authorship, with his pro-colonialist assessment of Ethiopian politics. The evidence is circumstantial, and would require further research to conclusively demonstrate direct influence at every stage, but I

argue that it is the most plausible explanation of the parallels in Conti Rossini and Hegel's views, and of the connection between Conti Rossini's attempted debunking of the *Hatāta* and his political writings. If the argument succeeds, it is thus also a testament to the prevalence of Hegel's influence over a century after his death in disciplines far removed from philosophy.

Over the nineteenth century, the new uniquely European history of philosophy was enlisted in arguments for the primacy of 'the West'. Philosophy became one of the most important markers of civilization and European exceptionalism, and shortly afterwards was to become a global cultural commodity, to be claimed by various societies as a way of demonstrating their high level of cultural progress and sophistication.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, as the century progressed, the stakes of these academic debates about the geographical scope of philosophy, once confined to a generation of German philosophers in small polities, became ever higher. In the capitals of global empires, claims of the invention of philosophy (which in these debates was still closely associated with the invention too of natural science) became a major component of arguments for the superiority of European peoples, and of their right to rule over the rest of the world.<sup>33</sup>

As the century went on, teleological conceptions of historical progress and arguments for the unique cognitive character of European peoples were joined up to a 'scientific' form of racial essentialism far beyond anything Meiner and Tiedemann had imagined. Their notion that philosophy was the preserve of European peoples came to be grounded in evolutionary theory, physiognomy and craniometry, rather than Hegel's geographic-climactic account. Whether as a means of justifying already-existing European domination—as in the colonization of the Americas and the Atlantic slave trade—or pre-emptively justifying further colonial expansion,<sup>34</sup> the connection between the progressive development of philosophical thought and political freedom (and the further assumptions about *whose* thought and *whose* freedom) had become an important, if often-unacknowledged, part of colonial ideology.

This proposed line of intellectual influence between Hegel and Conti Rossini's work on the *Hatāta Zār'a Ya'əqob* passes through the remarkable blooming of Hegelian philosophy in Italy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>35</sup> The Italian reception of Hegel began in earnest shortly after Hegel's death, transmitted to Italy by followers of Victor Cousin's philosophy of 'eclecticism'. In 1832 Giandomenico Romagnosi published a savage critique of the *Philosophy of History*, prompting a defence by the famous revolutionary Giuseppe Mazzini five years later. Gallo and Körner (2019) have suggested that:

What the first Italian Hegelians found so attractive about Hegel's philosophy of history was the notion of freedom as the liberation of humanity through the struggle of the spirit in its historical

existence, combined with an idea of progress addressed to all nations. Recognizing the revolutionary potential of Hegel's thought, Italian intellectuals during the Risorgimento found in his philosophy of history the certainty of Italy's future liberation. (2019: 12)

Hegel's philosophy of history was immensely popular in the turbulent intellectual-political world of Risorgimento Italy, and especially in Napoli fell on the fertile intellectual ground prepared by Vico's historicism.<sup>36</sup> It was two figures associated with the University of Naples—Francesco de Sanctis, a literary critic, Hegel scholar and militant patriot, and Bertrando Spaventa—who more than anyone else helped establish Hegelianism as one of the dominant intellectual trends of post-unification Italy with his *Studi sull'etica di Hegel*. Spaventa was especially important for the philosophical fusion of these two trends, being both an expert on Vico and one of the only Neapolitan Hegelians to study Hegel's works in German.<sup>37</sup>

It was one of their intellectual descendants who was to become the most significant thinker in the development of Hegelianism in the early twentieth century: Giovanni Gentile, the man who, according to his famous contemporary and political nemesis Benedetto Croce 'holds the honor of having been the most rigorous neo-Hegelian in the entire history of Western philosophy and the dishonor of having been the official philosopher of Fascism in Italy' (Croce 1965: Translator's Introduction).

Gentile's system of 'actualism' was a *ne plus ultra* of the subjectivist or even solipsist tendencies of the idealist tradition, but he also wrote important work on aesthetics, educational reform and the history of philosophy, including two works on Hegel.<sup>38</sup> Gentile was a proponent of an *Altbegelianer* interpretation of Hegelian Idealism, emphasizing a theological and solipsistic account of the Absolute Idea, along the lines of Gabler or Göschel. He was working on a book outlining a systematic philosophy of history adequate for the world-historical events of the twentieth century when he was assassinated by Communist partisans in 1944.<sup>39</sup>

Like Conti Rossini, Gentile was a kind of scholar-functionary, serving as Minister of Education (from October 1922 until July 1924) and the final president of the Royal Academy of Italy (from November 1943 until his death in 1944). He was also influential in providing an intellectual foundation for Italian Fascism, ghost-writing part of *The Doctrine of Fascism* (1932) with Benito Mussolini. Most significantly for our purposes, he was the director of the *Enciclopedia Italiana di Scienze, Lettere e Arti*—better known as the *Treccani*—and in this position commissioned Conti Rossini for a number of articles on East African topics between 1929 and 1938.<sup>40</sup>

In 1935 Mussolini launched his invasion of Ethiopia. Forty years earlier an Ethiopian army had famously defeated an Italian invasion force at the battle of

Adwa, but against a twentieth-century army fighting with planes, tanks and mustard gas, the remarkable victory was not to be repeated, and Ethiopia was subject to a brutal six-year occupation. Shortly before the invasion, Conti Rossini published an article entitled 'Ethiopia is incapable of Civil Progress', arguing that Ethiopia's manifest incapacity for civilizational progress meant that it could, indeed should, be colonized by a 'civilizing' power. It formed part of a coordinated programme of fascist imperial propaganda in the sciences and humanities, and in 1937, midway between the Italian conquest of Ethiopia and the beginning of World War II, Conti Rossini received the Mussolini award from the Accademia Nazionale delle Scienze, for his services to 'history and moral sciences'.<sup>41</sup>

Much of the phrasing of that essay is reminiscent of Hegel's characterizations, not of Africa, but of Asia, writing that Ethiopia 'became stagnant, it did not progress, and did not reach greater heights; rather, it crystallized, or, as was much more often the case, it became barbarous and decadent' (Conti Rossini 1935: 171).<sup>42</sup> Further evidence of cultural stagnation is given in an extended section expounding the static 'unoriginality' of Ethiopian literature, where Conti Rossini makes special reference to the *Hatāta Zār'a Ya'āqob*:

the only philosophical work, which constituted the jewel of Abyssinian literature, and which had been the object of numerous learned publications in Russia and in Germany, was demonstrated by me to have been forged by an Italian friar, who in Ethiopian form vented the feelings of his ulcerated heart, [tormented by] the isolation of the mission and his bitter religious scepticism. (Conti Rossini 1935: 172)

It is only one strand of his argument, but it is an important one. By enlisting his debunking of the *Hatāta Zār'a Ya'āqob* for his overall argument, Conti Rossini suggests that the inability to philosophize is related to the incapacity for civil progress. Again, it is worth emphasizing that Conti Rossini does not argue in the 1935 paper that Ethiopia should be invaded *in order that* Ethiopians might philosophize, but rather that the lack of philosophy suggests a lack of capacity for civil progress. Philosophy is a mark of civilization, and his supposed demonstration that it never existed in Ethiopia is all the more reason to think that Ethiopia is at an early stage of civilizational development and requires external assistance to progress in both the one-some-many and art-religion-philosophy triads. That is to say, Conti Rossini holds that a) Ethiopia lacks philosophy; b) this is due to a lack of civilization; c) colonial rule is justified in so far as it brings civilization to that culture; but does not necessarily hold, and d) colonialism is justified *because* it enables the colonized to do philosophy. Which, it seems to me, is precisely the same package of views as Hegel, whose explicit defence of colonialism is

that it delivers the freedom within objective spirit, this is inseparable from the freedom of absolute spirit that comes with the ability to philosophize.

When he turns to the explanations of this incapacity for civil and philosophical progress, Conti Rossini is caught between the language of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century climatic determinism ('As inhabitants of bare mountains [*montagne povere*], the Abyssinians were always compelled'; 'the jagged nature of the country favoured and continues to favour the accentuation of local sentiments and characteristics') and twentieth-century racial typology ('The Abyssinians speak Semitic languages, [but] aren't Semites [...] they ended up being overwhelmed, as an ethnic type, by the overpowering number of their subordinates; the Abyssinians undoubtedly belong to the Cushitic race [*razza cuscitica*] [...] no branch of this race, from the origins of the world to the present day, has ever been able to elaborate a satisfying degree of civilization on its own'). After summarizing the political stagnation of the Ethiopian state in terms of developmental stages ('we remain firmly in the Middle Ages'), Conti Rossini surmises that 'the causes [of this] are in part ethnic, and in part derive from historical conditions, which are themselves in turn the fruit of geographical conditions' (Conti Rossini 1935: 172). His conclusion:

if from the past our gaze can direct itself to the future and draw auspices from it, one is impelled to think that only constant, sensible and solid external intervention could durably correct and eliminate adverse factors, extract good qualities from the Abyssinian people, which today are weighed down by bad ones, and obtain from the country as much as what civilization in the rest of the world has a right to require from it. (Conti Rossini 1935: 177)

Are Conti Rossini's two articles, the 1920 refutation of the authorship of the *Hatäta* and the 1935 denial of Ethiopia's capacity for civil progress connected in this way?

Seeing as racialized notions of civilizational hierarchy were widespread in this period, it is certainly possible that Conti Rossini's arguments were influenced by a source other than Hegel, perhaps from the writings of John Stuart Mill or racialized developments of Vico's distinction between civilization and barbarism. Nevertheless, the prevalence of Hegel's thought in Italian universities in the second half of the nineteenth century, and the special importance of philosophy to Italian political thought, along with Conti Rossini's personal proximity to the major figure of late Italian Hegelianism seems to suggest it as the most likely source. This is of course not demonstrative proof. More work would need to be done to demonstrate conclusive textual evidence at each stage of the process of transmission. But it is not hard to see how, in Hegelian terms, the denial of philosophy to Ethiopia went hand in hand with the denial of its freedom and the justification for colonial



domination: a society that had produced the *Hatāta* would be a society that had attained a significant level of universalism and self-reflection of spirit, and thus would on these terms have a highly developed capacity for freedom. It would not be a society 'incapable of civil progress'.<sup>43</sup>

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Abbreviations used

- Aes* = Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, Vol. 1, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).
- Enc 1* = Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, trans. T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting and H. S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991).
- Enc 3* = Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, trans. W. Wallace and A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
- GW* = Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Rheinisch-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften (Hamburg: Meiner, 1968–).
- LHP* = Hegel, *Introduction to the Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. T. M. Knox and A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).
- LPWH* = Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).
- PR* = Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. A. W. Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
- PWH* = Hegel, *The Philosophy of World History*, ed. and trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover, 1956). (First published 1857.)

<sup>2</sup> Significant also because it is with Descartes, 'a bold spirit who re-commenced the whole subject from the very beginning and constituted afresh the groundwork on which Philosophy is based, and to which, after a thousand years had passed, it once more returned' that Hegel himself locates the birth of modern philosophy in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*.

<sup>3</sup> For a comprehensive survey of the historical reception of the text, see the introduction to the forthcoming edited volume by Egid, Cantor and Fasil Merawi ([forthcoming](#)), which notes the multilingual reception of the *Hatāta* in Russian, Latin, German, French, Italian and Amharic, and provides translations of the most significant moments in this reception. I note that the *Hatāta* is little known in Anglo-American philosophy specifically because there is a lively discussion of the text in Ethiopia itself, including Teodros Kiros (2005), Teshome Abera (2016), and

Fasil Merawi and Sertagew Kenaw (2019) in English, and Daniel Kibret (2016) and Brooh Asmare (2018) in Amharic.

<sup>4</sup> See the first 1859 catalogue of these manuscripts by d'Abbadie himself, later catalogued by Chaîne and Conti Rossini, both in 1912.

<sup>5</sup> See Wion (2013) for an excellent summary of the debate and the philological evidence.

<sup>6</sup> English translation by Lea Cantor in Egid, Cantor and Fasil Merawi (forthcoming).

<sup>7</sup> Though also see Johannes Ulrich Schneider's (1990, 1999) German-language works on the topic.

<sup>8</sup> On the model of the *a priori* approach to history that Kant proposes in the early sections of his 1784 *Idea for a Universal History with Cosmopolitan Intent*. For an argument that connects *a priori* philosophy of history and history of philosophy in Kant, see Park (2013: 7).

<sup>9</sup> The question of how much these 'Kantian' elaborations actually conformed to Kant's own thought is addressed by Park in (2013: Chapter 4).

<sup>10</sup> In scare quotes because, as far as I can tell, Meiners in particular seems to have shared little with Kant save his questionable views of racial hierarchy and the history of thought.

<sup>11</sup> Caygill (1995) is helpful on the ways in which Kant's English translators have obscured the important distinction between *Erkenntnis* (cognition) and *Wissen* (knowledge).

<sup>12</sup> It is worth noting that, whilst there is a strong case to be made for a reciprocal relationship between Kant's racialist ideas (as expressed for example in *On the Different Races of Man* of 1777) and these philosophical exclusions, Kant does *not*, as Hegel later would, make any explicit connection between racial groups and the *capacity* to philosophize. This distinction is perhaps to be located in the fact that, whilst he saw the races as having significant differences owing to their separate histories and environments, Kant remained a committed monogenist, unlike the polygenist Meiners. Hegel himself thought the monogenism/polygenism debate utterly irrelevant to philosophy, emphasizing always that thought is the common essence ('concept') of humankind (for example in *GW* 25.1: 33f.).

<sup>13</sup> Tiedemann (1791) 1: xviii quoted in Park (2013).

<sup>14</sup> Though see Heurtebise (2019), Teshale Tibebe (2011), Park (2013: Chapter 7 *passim*).

<sup>15</sup> A rival named August Tholuck accused Hegel, along with Fichte, Schlegel and others of 'Spinozism', Hegel on account of systematic affinities with, and a professed admiration of Spinoza, Schlegel due to his elaboration of supposedly pantheistic doctrines developed from the Upanishads. Park argues that in order to distance himself from Indian-inspired 'Spinozist' notions promoted by Schlegel, Hegel took an ever more strident position against the possibility of non-Western philosophy, steadily incorporating this position into his broader system.

<sup>16</sup> The summary I present here is primarily based on *the Introduction to the Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, along with *Hegel's Introduction to Aesthetics* and *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*.

<sup>17</sup> 'The Orientals do not know that the spirit or man as such are free in themselves. And because they do not know that, they are not themselves free. They only know that One is free [...]. The consciousness of freedom first awoke among the Greeks, and they were accordingly free; but, like the Romans, they only knew that Some, and not all men as such, are free [...]. The Germanic nations, with the rise of Christianity, were the first to realize that All men are by nature free, and that freedom of spirit is his very essence' (*LPWH*: 54).

<sup>18</sup> Both Africa and the Americas are excluded from the *Lectures on Aesthetics*, and, Hegel seems to argue that African ‘fetishes’ do not attain the status of artworks. For Hegel it seems, art requires a level of cultural development that is no longer ‘primitive’. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for bringing this point to my attention.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. the opening paragraphs of *Encyclopaedia*, and also the last part on Absolute Spirit (*Enc* 3: §§553–77).

<sup>20</sup> Although I find Smith’s line of argument very persuasive, it is worth noting that his characterization of Hegel’s insistence on philosophical purity may be in tension with Hegel’s understanding of the relation between philosophy and the empirical sciences, e.g., in §9 of the *Encyclopaedia*, or with the passages in which Hegel describes philosophy as one of various inter-related ways in which the cultural specificity of a *Volksgeist* gets manifested, e.g., *SW* 12: 87. I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for references to these passages.

<sup>21</sup> *GW* 25.1: 36; cf. *Enc* 1: §93. See also *LPWH*: 125.

<sup>22</sup> See James and Knappik (2022) for the argument that Hegel’s geographic and climatic claims here are in fact inseparable from his racial theory, and that this racial theory, though grounded in empirical claims, in fact ‘turns racism from an anthropological into a metaphysical doctrine’, in so far as his division of humanity into racial categories is no mere empirical fact but ‘follows a “higher necessity”’ (2022: 1).

<sup>23</sup> Hegel does of course refer to both Chinese and Indian philosophy *as* philosophy, including in an 1827 piece occasioned by Humboldt’s essay on an episode from the Bhagavad-Gita, in which he even locates a ‘complete philosophical system’ (*SW* 11: 136). However in his overarching account of the development of philosophy, oriental thought is always a precursor to the development of real, spirit-progressing philosophical thought. Though Hegel certainly changed his mind on the precise status to be accorded to Indian thought in particular, he remains clear that ‘what we call Oriental philosophy is much more the religious manner of representation of the Orientals—a religious world view, which it makes more sense to take as philosophy’ (*LHP*: 134). For an in-depth treatment of Hegel’s changing positions, see Park (2013: Chapter 6).

<sup>24</sup> African and America are often lumped together in such discussions on tenuous racial and climatic-geographical grounds. On this assimilation, see Hoffheimer (2001: 35–37).

<sup>25</sup> If space was not an issue, we might further probe these differences between Africa and Asia by examining the role of Africa in the philosophy of history with respects not only to the history of philosophy but also the history of religion, especially the second volume of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, on ‘finite religions’, where Hegel explains that Africa is caged in a dark religion of ‘magic’ devoid of any comprehension of spirit. Although the oriental world is pre-philosophical, it is still ‘inside’ the dialectical progression of freedom because it has some kind of spirituality in its natural religions (especially the near East), while, according to Hegel, the Africans have only unconscious rites, without even the freedom of the singular god-like despots of the oriental cultures that marks the origin of the one-some-all progression.

<sup>26</sup> On the connections between historicity, rationality and racism in Hegel, see Moellendorf (1992).

<sup>27</sup> For an interesting interpretation of the legacy of Hegel's justification of colonialism with reference to contemporary Africa, see Purtschert (2010).

<sup>28</sup> Bernasconi (1998), see also Bernasconi (2003). And for the same examination of Hegel's sources on China, see Bernasconi (2016). McCaskie presents a view not dissimilar from Bernasconi, from the perspective of a scholar of West African society, writing that 'Hegel's treatment of Africa—historically, empirically, interpretively—is negligent and slipshod. He read haphazardly in an adventitious array of sources both old and new, and selected passages from them that either fitted with his apriorism or might be made to fit with it by misreading, elision or invention' McCaskie (2018: 187).

<sup>29</sup> The nature, motivation and consequences of this geographic distinction is examined at length in Diagne (2013), Táíwò (1998) and especially Teshale Tibebu (2011).

<sup>30</sup> Though there are forms of thought—and freedom—that an individual or culture can possess without engaging in philosophy. Failing to philosophize does not mean failing to think at all.

<sup>31</sup> To be clear, the claim is not that colonialism was justified in either Hegel or Conti Rossini in the name of bringing about philosophy, but rather that the progress in objective spirit that was Hegel's justification for colonialism would also bring about progress in absolute spirit that enabled philosophizing, and that the one was not possible without the other. Hegel's own view seems to be that he denies philosophy and its mental/civilizational preconditions to various cultures who became colonized by Europeans, but when he addresses the legitimacy of that colonial rule (*PR*: §350f.), he does so not in terms of the possibility of philosophy, but in terms of the social and legal institutions as well as technological improvements to the mode of subsistence that it may bring. What makes colonialism legitimate on this view is the freedom within objective spirit that it allegedly brings to the colonized, not the freedom of absolute spirit that humans can achieve in philosophy.

<sup>32</sup> One treatment of this process which pays particular attention to the professionalization of philosophy is Smith (2018).

<sup>33</sup> See the examples arrayed in and critiqued by Ben Kies's *The Contribution of the Non-European Peoples to World Civilisation* (1953), admirably summarized in Platzky Miller (2023).

<sup>34</sup> Stone (2020) suggests that in writing about Africa, Hegel had the French invasion of Algiers in 1830 firmly in mind.

<sup>35</sup> The classic work on the history of Italian Hegelianism is Vitiello (2018). As Moggach (2019) suggests, 'the Anglophone literature has been relatively neglectful of the specific contributions made by Italian readings of Hegel, from his earliest reception onward' (2019: 234), and Gallo and Körner (2019) push the point further still, arguing that while studies have paid attention 'to the study of Young Hegelians, to British Idealism, and the American, German and French reception of Hegel [...], the Italian reception is almost completely missing from this recent debate' (2019: 216). There are, however, contributions on Italian Hegelianism in Herzog (2013: esp. 223–38) and Nuzzo (1998). More recently, the special edition of the *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* on *Hegel in Italy: Risorgimento Political Thought in Transnational Perspective* includes valuable contributions on Neapolitan Hegelianism and political thought. This edition generally focuses on the reception of Hegel at an earlier period, and in connection to a rather

different political moment than interests us here. Indeed a major avenue for future research would be extending this renewed study of Italian Hegelianism to the twentieth century, especially in connection to the colonial projects of the new Italian state. We should finally mention Peters's (2013) *History as Thought and Action: The Philosophies of Croce, Gentile, de Ruggiero and Collingwood*, which offers an excellent summary of Croce and Gentile's thought and its subsequent influence, especially on the 'idealism' of Collingwood.

<sup>36</sup> Indeed, it is important to note that the Vico side of this influence may have coloured Conti Rossini's views too: 'profane nations were human-made, constituted by the tension between barbarism and *mondo civile*' (Mali 1992: 78ff.), which meant that 'in the modern world this contrast placed Italians on the side of civilization, whichever their present state of crisis' (Gallo and Körner 2019: 215).

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Gallo and Körner (2019).

<sup>38</sup> The *Hegelian Controversy* of 1902 and the *Reform of Hegelian Dialectics* of 1913.

<sup>39</sup> The most comprehensive treatment of Gentile's philosophy in English is Harris (1960).

<sup>40</sup> As found from a search of the Treccani database at: <https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/ricerca/carlo-conti-rossini/1/>.

<sup>41</sup> Indeed, the provisional catalogue of the *Fondo Carlo Conti Rossini* (his unpublished papers) notes a letter from Mussolini dated to 1929, congratulating Conti Rossini on the publication of his *Storia d'Etiopia* and noting its contribution to Italy's burgeoning 'colonial culture'. Many thanks to Professor Alessandro Bausi for pointing me towards these collections at the Accademia de Lincei.

<sup>42</sup> English translation by Lea Cantor in Egid, Cantor & Fasil Merawi (forthcoming).

<sup>43</sup> I would like to thank Martina Barnaba, Robert Stern and Franz Knappik for reading earlier drafts of this paper, and Lea Cantor for allowing me to use her forthcoming translations of Conti Rossini's essays. Thanks also to the librarians at the Accademia dei Lincei for their assistance during archival work.

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