

Marcos Lutz Müller (1943-2020)

On August 12th 2020 the levels of relative humidity in the air of Campinas reached an alarming low of 19%. The very long dry season in that region worsens in winter, due to industry and automobile pollution, but in August particularly, because the sugar cane fields in the area are set on fire – an illegal but usual practice to prepare for the crop. Starting last year this scenario has dramatically worsened in virtue of extensive increase in field burning all throughout the Brazilian *cerrado* and the Amazon rainforest. On August 19th 2019, in the city of São Paulo the afternoon turned into night at 2 p.m. This year's fires in Pantanal have shocked the globe.

On August 12th 2020 Campinas reached also the alarming – and noticeable underreported – number of 49,838 confirmed cases and 1,705 fatalities of Covid-19, being thus one of the new pandemic epicenters in the country after the city of São Paulo reached a certain plateau.¹ Late at night, the philosopher Marcos Lutz Müller showed the first symptoms of a stroke. The city hospitals were running over capacity due to the pandemic, he had thus to be hospitalized in the near city of Valinhos, in the early morning of August 13th. He never recovered consciousness. Still, the urge for life was so strong in him that he resisted for the next 33 days in the ICU: he passed away on September 15th, at 5 pm.

More than once he confided me that lately the dusk deeply saddened him. Maybe that was the reason why he scheduled his phone calls or office hours at this time. It was a way not to notice the twilight thanks to long, attentive, affable conversations. He was an extremely demanding supervisor, but his requirements were set out with such a respect and thoughtfulness – he cultivated with sincere care the friendship and dialogue with all his students – that we have become orphans of a very rare and loving philosophical fatherly figure. I read through the emails we have exchanged over the past decade. None was written in a hurry or with impatience. They are rather all exquisite jewels, flashes of light in times of darkness, little prose-poems even when the matter at hand were the numerous bureaucratic demands of funding agencies, or similar things. I talk to my fellows orphaned brothers and sisters and they all tell me the same. Somehow each of us has got from him a little form of farewell to keep.

According to a classical definition, philosophy is the pursuit of a happy and just life and the preparation for death. Marcos fulfilled both these two characterizations. On the one hand, he never kept it a secret that he came to study Hegel via Marx, and that such an interest was not at all restricted to theory. This started in the troublesome years right before 1964's military coup, which is a first sign of his deep ethical-political sensibility. On the other hand, from an early age Marcos had to face the barriers – and he sought to configure theoretically and practically the limits – of finitude. In 1982 a minor stroke totally ruined his left ear hearing – certainly a reason for anguish for a professor, and still more for someone who took great pleasure in music. It was nonetheless only later that Marcos came to know that he had a serious congenic malformation on the left ventricle mitral valve and that he would inescapably have to undergo a complex cardiac surgery to correct it. He prepared himself carefully for it and in April 2017 he came face to face with death for the first time. But let us take a few steps back.

Born in 1943 in the very south of Brazil, in the city of Porto Alegre, to a simple family of descendants of the German immigrants that had settled into the rural villages in that state since

¹ <https://g1.globo.com/sp/campinas-regiao/noticia/2020/08/12/coronavirus-prefeituras-da-regiao-de-campinas-confirmam-novos-casos-nessa-quarta-12-de-agosto.ghtml> (acesso em 19/09)

mid-19th century, at an early age Marcos started to study piano, at the hands of his mother, who studied the instrument and gave him lessons. He was an excellent student, and at the age of 15 he earned a music prize and was invited to play the Beethoven sonata *The Tempest* at the Radio Nacional in Rio de Janeiro. Although he never ceased being deeply passionate about music, it was in contact with the Jesuit priests that he came to discover his philosophical vocation. He graduated in 1965 from the Federal University of the State of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), both in Philosophy and Law – the first of his own choice, the second due to paternal obligation. The excellent monograph treating the concept of experience in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, later published in 1967, opened him up the prospects of an academic carrier. However, the infamous military dictatorship that took to power in 1964 blocked his path unequivocally and Marcos had to search for opportunities outside of Brazil. Helped by professors and friends he was able to transfer to the Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg, where he was initially planning to develop a thesis concerning Husserl's concept of pre-predicative experience. But after a short time, he moved to the Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg, where he attended the seminars of M. Theunissen, D. Henrich, H.-F. Fulda and E. Tugendhat, who became his supervisor. In a rally against Iran's Shah – as he was fond of saying – he met his future life-long partner, Prof. Jeanne-Marie Gagnebin.

In Heidelberg and later in Berlin, Marcos took part in the outstanding intellectual movement that resulted in a deep and radical renewal of the research concerning Hegel and Marx. He concluded his PhD in 1975 with a thesis entitled "Sartre's theory of negation" (*Sartres Theorie der Negation*), a very demanding work which treats systematically not only the various phases of Sartre's philosophical work, but also the concept of negation in Hegel, Marx, Husserl and Heidegger. In this study Marcos established his long term interest on the various aspects of the "relationship of identity and not-identity" contained in the "originary event of a negation that negates itself" – a topic that unfolds throughout his entire career.²

Back to Brazil in 1978, right at the dawning of our political reopening, Marcos began his path as a philosophy professor at the State University of Campinas (Unicamp). On the year before, the Center for Logic and Epistemology (CLE) had been founded in that university, a key moment for the establishment of a system of post-graduate research in philosophy in Brazil. Although he was not directly associated with CLE, Marcos actively collaborated with it during the first years, seeking to build bridges between epistemological and political discussions. Under the title "Epistemology of Economy" he taught then a series of courses on Marx's *The Capital*, in which he sowed the first seeds for a significant renewal of the Marxian studies in Brazil. The article "Exposition and Dialectical Method in *The Capital*"³ made him nationally known and is still read today as an inescapable point of departure for the newest discussions.

Marcos and Jeanne-Marie had two daughters, Rafaela and Cristina. It was during these years that he also spent time in France and Germany during two research stays in Konstanz, with F. Kambartel (1986) and in Paris, with J. Labarrière (1987).

From this point on, Marcos started to study intensively the philosophies of Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Hobbes, Rousseau, but especially Kant, Hegel and the dialectical tradition. In the early 90's he began the project that would become his greater contribution to the field: the annotated translation of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. For two decades Marcos taught highly demanding courses, which he prepared to exhaustion, about this fundamental Hegelian work.

² Müller, M.L., *Sartres Theorie der Negation*, Frankfurt-am-Main/Bern: P. Lang & H. Lang, 1976, p. 18.

³ Müller, M. L., *Exposição e método dialético em 'O Capital'*, in: Boletim da Sociedade de Estudos e Atividades Filosóficas Seaf, Belo Horizonte, v. 2, 1982.

More than 30 articles – renowned for their intricacy and depth, but also for their clarity and didactical focus⁴ – testify the various phases of Marcos’ translation/commentary, establishing thereby not only an unavoidable parameter for the interpretation of this Hegelian work, but also setting the highest standards for the Portuguese translation of German philosophical texts. Given that he had been publishing large extracts of his translation in a collection called *Textos Didáticos* (IFCH/Unicamp), and since his goal was to establish the highest standards within the philosophical debate in Brazil, he did not hurry to publish a complete version of his great undertaking before it had been indeed completed. Marcos swam against the tide of the largely hegemonic, and sadly demeaning, academic productivism of the neoliberal era. He did so not in his theoretical work, but especially in his institutional performance – which brought him to face notorious conflicts throughout his path, which he handled sometimes with a harsh tone, but always with unnegotiable integrity. Sweetness and affability, he reserved to friends.

Also from that period are the three research stays: in Berlin, with W. Jaeschke (1994), in Urbino, with D. Losurdo (1998) and at the *Hegel-Archiv*, in Bochum, once again with W. Jaeschke (2002). In the last two years of teaching at Unicamp, 2007 and 2008, Marcos devoted a series of courses to Hegel’s *Science of Logic*. Once again, he established the basic standards for the interpretation of this work, which only recently has indeed been reinvented in the international debate. More than once he declared his wish to translate it after his *Philosophy of Right* was finished. His articles concerning the “absolute commencement” and the “dialectical contradiction”, published in the following years, are substantial contributions to the recent international literature concerning Hegel’s *Logic*.⁵

Without teaching obligations, he dedicated the following 12 years to the creation and institution of a pioneering research group devoted to the study of Japanese, Chinese and Indian philosophies. From this phase I highlight the articles concerning Kitaro Nishida, which aimed at explaining the theoretical means by which this Japanese philosopher – also a keen interpreter of Hegel – had attempted to turn upside down some key elements in western philosophical thought, that is, by means of a renewed analysis of pre-reflexive experience and the prioritization of the category of place (“a predicate which cannot become subject”) over that of substance (“a subject which cannot become predicate”).⁶

⁴ Of which I enumerate only the few which impacted me the most: Müller, M. L., *Paz Perpétua ou Tribunal do Mundo: a aporia jusnaturalista da saída do estado de natureza inter-estatal*, in: Revista Eletrônica de Estudos Hegelianos, v. 10, 2013; Müller, M. L., *A Liberdade Absoluta entre a Crítica à Representação e o Terror*, in: Revista Eletrônica de Estudos Hegelianos, v. Ano 5, 2008; Müller, M. L., *O idealismo da soberania e a idealidade de toda legitimação particular*, in: Revista Eletrônica de Estudos Hegelianos, v. 1, 2005; Müller, M. L., *A crítica de Hegel aos postulados da razão prática como deslocamentos dissimuladores*, in: Studia Kantiana, v. I, n.1, 1998; Müller, M. L., *A Tensão entre liberdade negativa e liberdade positiva no conceito especulativo de liberdade e na sua efetivação na sociedade civil-burguesa moderna*, in: Stein, S. I. A. (Org.), *Ética e Política*, Goiânia: Universidade Federal de Goiás, 1998; Müller, M. L., *A Estrutura lógico-conceitual da sociedade civil-burguesa e a dialética da liberdade negativa*, in: Felipe, S. T. (Org.), *Justiça como Equidade. Fundamentação e interlocuções polêmicas (Kant, Rawls, Habermas)*, Florianópolis: Insular, 1998; Müller, M. L., *A Gênese Conceitual do Estado Ético*, in: Revista de Filosofia Política, v. 2, 1998; Müller, M. L., *A Gênese Lógica do Conceito Especulativo de Liberdade*, in: *Analytica*, v. I, n.1, 1993.

⁵ Müller, M. L., *A negatividade do começo absoluto*, in: Gonçalves, M.C.F. (Org.), *O pensamento puro ainda vive. 200 anos da Ciência da Lógica de Hegel*, São Paulo: Barcarolla, 2014; Müller, L.M., *A contradição dialética e sua resolução no fundamento*, in: Helfer, I., *Lógica e Metafísica em Hegel*, São Leopoldo, Editora Unisinos, 2019.

⁶ Müller, M.L., *Experiência Religiosa e a Lógica Tópica da Autodeterminação do Presente Absoluto (Kitaro Nishida)*, in: *Analytica*, v. 12, 2008.

Many people thought that by leaving the *Philosophy of Right* and the *Science of Logic* and plunging into the historical formulations of the Buddhist-Mahayana thought, Marcos was taking a leap in the dark. But this was not the case. This “other path” had been prepared for decades. It dates back from his late years in Berlin, when Marcos had his first contact with the practice of *tai-chi*. And as soon as he established himself in Campinas, he took part in the very first tai-chi group in Brazil, under the guidance of master Liu Pai Lin, a retired Chinese military officer exiled in Brazil since 1975. Marcos practiced *tai-chi* for almost four decades and had become, in his own fashion, a master in this art.

Thanks to a series of lucky events which brought me a great amount of joy, I was able to accompany him in his early morning *tai-chi* practice twice a week, for around 18 months. With immense patience and the already acknowledged pedagogical skills, my philosophy professor was now teaching me not only concepts, but bodily postures, not only rigorous philosophical argumentation, but the gentle and concatenated flow – syllogistic in its own fashion – of what he called the *long tai-chi*. Only later I came to know that he was thus preparing his body and soul to face the cardiac surgery adjourned for over a decade.

The surgery took place in April 2017, and on this occasion I could witness to what extent his research into pre-reflexive experience was not only a theoretical matter, but a sign of a strong and fundamental will to live and fight against the bodily barriers – or finite’s *Schranken*, to use Hegel’s terminology. Marcos had more life in his chest than his heart could offer. He sought to sort things out by means of a plastic surgery of the mitral valve and resisted with courage for 21 day of ICU internment. The hopes of coming to know Helena, his soon to be born granddaughter, reinvigorated him.

When he got back on his feet, he resumed work with passion and took out of his archives one of the articles that still waited for the craftsman’s final touch. This is the scenario in which he gave final form to an illuminating text on how the young Marx came across a powerful concept of democracy by means of interpreting the *Philosophy of Right* according to the rational criteria set forth in the *Science of Logic*. This article was published only a year later⁷ – sadly enough, already in the disastrous context of Bolsonaro’s presidential election. Marcos’ article on democracy came to light, thence, when our politics descended once more into the netherworld, that is, to the “ideals” rooting back to the *porões da ditadura*.

There was no time to lose. In 2019 he visited regularly the editor of his great oeuvre and revised one last time his translation/commentary – which, by that time, with its 596 explanatory notes, had far surpassed the limits of an annotated translation, assuming now the shape of a complete course in political philosophy from Aristotle to the contemporary discussion. The last time we met, at the beginning of February 2020, Marcos was enjoying a little break from this work. He read with enthusiasm the latest Hegel biography by K. Vieweg, as well as J. Habermas’s latest book on the history of philosophy and a ponderous volume dealing with Nagarjuna. But he also experienced a great deal of anguish by the daily newspaper reading. From his apartment, which is located near the Army Preparatory School of Cadets – where Bolsonaro himself got his first military “education” – one could hear the cadets vociferating three times a day Brazil’s beautiful, but thus so sadly abused national anthem. During the pandemic this school’s gates became soon the stage for Sunday gatherings of dictatorship lovers, barking out for the ending of isolation measures, the liberation of chloroquine, the dismantling of Brazil’s Supreme

⁷ Müller, M. L., *A democracia em Marx: contexto de surgimento e ambivalência do conceito*, in: Revista Eletrônica de Estudos Hegelianos, v. 26, 2018.

Court... Marcos saw it all through the window, horrified. He felt his strength rapidly dimming, which would not suffice for a second exile. The end of the afternoon acquired an additional tone of sadness every day, despite – or due to – the marvelous colors resulting from the dimming light' refraction through pollution in the horizon...

Last May, Marcos took part in four virtual sessions of our *Science of Logic* reading group at the University of Brasilia. We read together and discussed his article concerning the concept of contradiction in the *Logic of Essence*. The students who did not know him yet were fascinated by the wide-open wings of his crystal-clear thinking, but also with the sweetness and tenderness in his gaze. Starting in June, in virtue of repeated insistence from his editor, he wrote a powerful Presentation to his life-long work, in which he indicated the theoretical nexus connecting the *Philosophy of Right* with the systematical – but open – undertaking contained in the *Encyclopaedia*. He also showed the unequivocal progressive character of Hegel's political views, focused on the concept of social freedom. His work had been thus completed. He sent off the final version of this presentation a few hours before feeling ill, on that very August 12th.

Within the hearts of Jeanne-Marie, Rafaela, Cristina and Helena and also of his brother, sons in laws, of his many friends, students and admirers, Marcos left an unsurmountable empty space. But he dignified – as very few were able to do – the universe of philosophical literature and the institutional system of Brazil's public university. His legacy, therefore, has the kind of concreteness which does not perish. Or, to say it with Hegel: a concreteness whose perishing also perishes, thence partaking of infinity.

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