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The imaginary term in readings about modernity: Taylor and Castoriadis' conceptions

Marcela Tovar*

Introduction

Many different theoretical positions have been taken on the phenomenon of modernity, attempting to explain this complex epochal consciousness that builds its bases on the future by opposing antiquity, and which has brought about transformational processes from the dissolution of feudalism to the emergence of capitalism in the West.

Among these diverse social and philosophical theoretical proposals for understanding modernity, and more precisely for understanding the issue of "what makes contemporary societies different from its forebears", Charles Taylor describes two main categories in which to classify them: the "cultural" and "acultural" theories of modernity. The cultural theories conceive cultural diversity as existing differences between civilizations. The change from a traditional to a modern society is seen as the rise of a new culture, it is just one culture among the others.

Acultural theories, on the other hand, understand the modern changes as cultural-neutral transformations that any traditional culture could, —or in some views, must— undergo. In this sense, the different types of typical modern phenomena, such as secularization, the rise and spread of instrumental reason, urbanization, industrialization, etc., can or will occur in every culture. In other words, modernity is understood as issuing from a rational operation which is culturally neutral, an operation defined as a general function that can take any specific culture as its input¹.

Taylor further argues that this second type of theory has been predominant over the last two centuries, carrying with it three main "errors": two referring to judgment, and one about the whole framework in which human history unfolds². These errors have caused acultural theories to misrepresent our forebears and distort the process of transition from traditional to modern societies. The result is a covering-up of the great differences in background understandings and in the social imaginary of different ages and at the same time, an encouragement of ethnocentric views of society³.

Moreover, Taylor feels that such theories miss the original vision of good that was implicit in the process of Western modernity and underestimate the nature of the transformation that brought about modernity⁴.

Taylor attempts to critically analyze why acultural theories have been dominant and what premise underlies the interpretation of the unfolding of history within them, distinguishing among three levels in the discussion of what he calls "the background understandings" against "explicit beliefs" or what has been used by the acultural theories to explain the main difference between traditional and modern societies⁵: for him, there are the following levels: the explicit doctrine (about society, the divine and the cosmos); the habitus or embodied understanding (the ways we are taught to behave, which become unreflecting, second nature to us); and the symbolic (not merely gestures or appropriate action but also that which has a mimetic or an evocative dimension and hence appoint to something they imitate or all for). Taylor writes:

...below the doctrinal level are at least two others: that of embodied background understanding and that which while nourished in embodied habitus is given expression on the symbolic level. As well as the doctrinal understanding of society, there is the one incorporated in habitus, and a level of images as yet unformulated in doctrine, for which we might borrow a term frequently used by contemporary French writers: the social imaginary⁶.

Having as a point of departure the suggestive proposal made here by Taylor, and more specifically, his use of the category of the social imaginary, it is the purpose of this essay to analyze how this same category of the social imaginary, developed by Cornelius Castoriadis (a contemporary philosopher inscribed in the current French thinking), enables us to have a cultural theory of modernity. Unlike Taylor, Castoriadis develops a theoretical framework where the category of social imaginary has a distinct meaning. For

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¹ Charles Taylor, "Two Theories of Modernity", en *Public Culture* No. 11, V. 1, Duke University Press, 1999, págs. 153-156.

² Ibid., pág.159.

³ Ibid., pág.171

⁴ Ibid., pág.168

⁵ This vision sees the "rise of modernity in terms of the dissipation of certain beliefs, either as its major cause (rational explanations), or as inevitable concomitant (social explanations)" (Ibid., pág.165).

⁶ Ibid., págs.167-168 In relation to this general statement made here by Taylor, it is important to note that the use of the category of the social imaginary or even of the concept of imagination itself has had different meanings among French and other philosophers, as Cornelius Castoriadis illustrates in his text "Imagination, Imaginary, Reflection", published in *L'Inconscient et la Science*, edited by Roger Dorey, Paris, Dunod, 1991.

Castoriadis, who bases his work on the ontological status of imagination, the interpretation of modernity is centered on the principal categories of social institutions and imaginary social significations. These categories are the product of the human faculties of the radical imagination and the social imaginary, the latter being its collective dimension.

This essay is divided into three parts. The first will approach the theoretical developments of Castoriadis, emphasizing his concept of imagination in order to derive from it a cultural theory of modernity in Taylor's terms, but pointing out the theoretical differences between the two authors. The second part will present some examples within the modern Hegelian discussion, giving slightly more emphasis to the notion of the State. Through this we can see how Taylor more profoundly engages (using Castoriadis' terms) principal social imaginary significations of modernity. Finally, the essay will conclude by summing up the main theoretical differences between the authors.

The Social Imaginary in Cornelius Castoriadis' Framework

In Castoriadis' theory there are two constitutive and indissoluble elements in the human being: the "radical imagination" of the psyche and the "social instituting imaginary of society". Through these two categories, Castoriadis gives a new ontological status to imagination, differentiating it from the position it traditionally holds in the Western philosophical tradition, from Plato to our days, where, in his opinion, there reigns a deterministic ontology. In order to achieve this goal, he will conceptualize the radical imagination⁷ of the singular human psyche as a permanent flux of representation, affect and intention not subject to determinacy⁸, and the social instituting imaginary of society

as its collective dimension. His elaboration of this conceptualization proposes a new ontology, where the human subject is conceived as a not totally determined being. Here, imagination is creation of and not image or copy of, as other theoretical schools in philosophy or social sciences have interpreted.

Castoriadis explains, based on his *anaclysis* doctrine, how the emergence of the radical imagination or creative imagination, which constitutes the conscious and the unconscious universe in humans, is a breaking-off of the animal imagination, the generic, stable and repetitive imagination. The human psyche is for Castoriadis a creation of a complete new order, or a complete new and different being who is autonomized from its biological functionality. It is also what made possible the creation of culture.

As noted, the social instituting imaginary, as the collective dimension of the radical imagination, produces the social institution⁹, which in turn socializes the singular psyche. It is indispensable for the creation of socio-historic reality. It provides sense to the singular psyche, enabling its existence as a social subject throughout the internalizing of the social imaginary significations of society¹⁰. The institution of society is in each case the institution of a magma¹¹ of social significations, a world of significations. That is, society institutes *the* world in each case as *its* world or *its* world as *the* world. In other words, the process by which a society institutes itself and the process by which it institutes what it understands as its own world, are one and the same process¹². Following this logic, society cannot then be thought as a summation of individuals or singular psyches. It is a new ontological level which makes possible the existence of the human being.

⁷ The use of the term "imagination" is justified by Castoriadis because of its two main connotations: connection with the image in its most general sense (not only in the visual sense), that is, the form, and its connection with the idea of invention or creation. Furthermore, the use of the term "radical" is also justified by the author to differentiate it from what he will also call "secondary" imagination, which refers to the most common meaning given to this term in the philosophical history. The secondary imagination is defined as a simple imitative, reproductive and/or combinatory imagination. On the contrary, radical imagination is theorized by Castoriadis as the faculty that precedes the distinction between "the real" and "the imaginary" or "the fictitious"; as a necessary precondition for the existence of "reality" for the human being as well as the condition for reflective thought to exist. (Cornelius Castoriadis, "Psychoanalysis and Philosophy" in *The Castoriadis Reader*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1997, pág. 133).

⁸ Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institutions of Society*, Cambridge, The M.I.T. Press, 1987, pág. 274.

⁹ A social imaginary institution is defined by Castoriadis as "a socially sanctioned, symbolic network in which a functional component and an imaginary component are combined in variable proportions and relations (*La Institución Imaginaria de la Sociedad*, Barcelona, Tusquets Ed., 1975, pág. 132).

¹⁰ These are defined as creations of the individual psyche, of the instituting radical imagination, and are constituted as such when they are socially instituted, embedded in the effective thinking and doing of any society, or materialized in multiple and diverse forms, from rituals to the configuration of a city. These significations establish in every society what that society is and what is not, what is valuable and what is not. Every society is a system of interpretation of a world that it is, at the same time, creating out of new social imaginary significations produced by the social instituting imaginary (*Ibid.*, págs. 283-290).

¹¹ Castoriadis defines "magma" as a sui generis mode of coexistence with an "organization" that contains fragments of multiple logical organizations but which is not reducible to a logical organization (Castoriadis, "The State of the Subject Today", en *American Imago* 46 (Winter), Trad. David Ames Curtis, 1989, págs.391).

¹² Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institutions...*, pág. 359.

In this sense, Castoriadis' proposal reveals an original way of conceiving the psychic and the social poles of the human being, where a radical opposition between the two is excluded: Society fabricates the individuals who, thanks to the radical imagination, are nothing different than society. As said, this is developed throughout his idea of *anacsis*, or explanation of the stratification of the being, where not only is a new conception of the human being exposed, but also the totality of existing being. The social individual will be explained through the new creations that emerge from stratum to stratum of the total existing-being. Moreover, those are not theorized as "ordered consequences" but as new creations or strata of the being which have new and different determinations¹³, and are not reducible to previous ones. In this sense, the social subject for Castoriadis is a fragment of the world instituted each time.

The totality of existing-being in Castoriadis

Castoriadis conceptualizes the totality of the existing-being throughout a leaning-on interpretation of its different strata or regions. Those strata (the physical or natural, the living-being, the psychical, the social-individual and the social-historic¹⁴ are postulated as heterogeneous and irreducible¹⁵ to each other, and their existence is necessary to enable the emergence of the other as a completely new creation.

¹³ Castoriadis illustrates this point: "The fact of creation also has weighty ontological implication... it entails the abandonment of the hypercategory of determinacy as absolute... but it is a logical error to think... that due to this fact one must replace this hypercategory by the idea of absolute and complete indetermination. My philosophy is not a 'philosophy of indetermination'. Creation means, precisely, the positing of new determinations -the emergence of new forms, *eide*, therefore ipso facto the emergence of new laws -the laws appertaining to these modes of being. At the most general level, the idea of creation implies indetermination uniquely only in the following sense: the totality of what is never so totally and exhaustively 'determined' that might exclude (render impossible) the surging forth of new determinations". Cornelius Castoriadis, "Done and to Be Done" en *The Castoriadis Reader*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1997, págs. 368-369.

¹⁴ Castoriadis, "The State of the Subject...", pág. 377.

¹⁵ The Castoriadian use of the terms "heterogeneous" and "irreducible", have to be understood in relation with and to his concept of creation, where a "creation" is thought of as a completely new thing, whose existence was neither pre-determined by nor a logical consequence of the existence of another strata. However, the author establishes a relation between the different strata, where the existence of the first enables the existence of the other. Castoriadis talks about a "creation ex-nihilo" which does not imply creation cum-nihilo (without means and conditions) or in-nihilo (without any point of origin). The creation leans on what is given, which conditions and limits it but does not totally determine it (Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institutions...*; "Subjetividad e Históricasocial" en *Zona Erógena* No.15, 1993, Año IV, Buenos Aires, pág. 5; "Radical Imagination and the Social Instituting Imaginary", en *The Castoriadis Reader*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1997, pág. 321).

The totality of the existing-being is intrinsically regulated in its first natural strata by ensidic logic¹⁶ as well as in its other strata, though with lacuna and fragmentarily. The ensidic logic is present in every thing that exists; this dimension is in the biological, psychical and human, as well as social-historic. However, as said before, it is not totally or exhaustively determined or reducible to this logic¹⁷. Castoriadis theorizes the similarities and differences among the physical, biological, psychical and cultural manifestations, focusing particularly on the distinction between the physical and the living-being strata and, within them, the specificity and distinctions between animals and humans.

For him each strata, from the living being to the social historic, can be defined as a "for-itself" —meaning that it creates its "own world", that it is being its own end, including auto-reference and reflexivity. In other words, the "for-itself" can take itself not as an object but as something that, by operating its imagination faculty, can make representations and so create its own closed world. A for-itself as such possesses three essential determinations (otherwise it would not exist as a living being): intention (intention of conservation, reproduction and the consequences that this pair entails); affect (pleasure/displeasure, signal of attraction/repulsion); and representation. This last does not mean a perfect copy of the external world, but the presentation through which the living being creates its own world, starting from what are mere external shocks¹⁸.

Dealing then with a multiplicity of regions of the being, all of which can come under the title of the for-itself, they can be generally characterized as follows¹⁹:

- i) The living-being (from the cellular level on) can be considered as a for-itself that cannot represent itself outside of its own interior nor conceive itself except from

¹⁶ Castoriadis, "Logic, Imagination, Reflection", en *American Imago* 49, 1992, pág. 15. Castoriadis defines the ensemblistic-identitary or ensidic logic as the logic that structures mathematics and is realized in set theory. This logic concerns everything that can be constructed and built up from the principles of identity, contradiction and the excluded third, and organizes anything given by means of univocally defined elements, classes, relations and properties. It is a determined logic that is present in everything humans say or do, and is instituted and sanctioned by society (Castoriadis, "Imaginación, Imaginario, Reflexión", en *Ontología de la Creación*, Bogotá, Ensayo y Error, 1997, pág. 352).

¹⁷ Castoriadis postulates that the magmatic logic (undetermined logic) is also present in every stratum.

¹⁸ Castoriadis, "Psychoanalysis and philosophy", pág. 180; "Logic, Imagination, Reflection", pág. 16.

¹⁹ Castoriadis, "The State of the Subject...", pág. 377.

within. It exists in and through a permanent closure. However, its closure does not mean that there is nothing "outside"; certainly there is. There is an X (shock)²⁰, which does not mean "information" in its strict sense, it only informs that "there it is". Nature does not contain "information" waiting to be gathered. This X becomes something only by being formed by the for-itself that forms it. This can be called the cognitive function of the living being.

- ii) "The psychic, both as such and its plurality, namely through its various 'instances' or 'for' each of the 'psychical persons'""²¹. The specificity of the human psychic consists in its de-functionalization of psychical processes relating to the biological component of the human being, which means the predominance of representational pleasure over organ pleasure in the human psyche. It is in the human psyche where the radical imagination and its quid pro quo faculty are present, enabling the not fixed representations and canonical responses. The human psychic will suffer its own stratification process from a closed monad to a social individual.
- iii) The social individual, meaning the socially constructed individual or the product of society's transformation of the psyche. Society "produces" social subjects through its imaginary institutions, which provide sense to the human psyche. As already said, both society and psyche are irreducible but also indissociable.
- iv) The society or social-historic that appears when there is an anonymous human collective making a type of creation that no other instance would be able to make. The human being is a creation, and at the same time it "creates itself" and continues doing so throughout history. In this context, the singular psyche becomes socialized through the imaginary institutions. It is the social-historic which permits a society to stay together and reproduce itself under certain symbols.

Through this last exposition it is possible to see how the human subject, as well as its society, are explained as cultural auto-creation. The emergence of culture in the human being is theorized here based on the fragmentation of the totality of the existing-being, where every strata intervenes. The human being creates and socializes him/herself in the culture created by him/her; through what Castoriadis calls social imaginary

significations (*sis*) and social institutions, humans give sense to their self and the surrounding world. Accordingly, it is possible to pose that any society, whether traditional or modern, is the product of the radical imagination and the social instituting imaginary, where constituted and articulated social institutions and *sis*, give sense and content to the socio-historic world of the human subject.

In contrast to what Taylor proposes, in Castoriadis' theory the social imaginary is a constitutive category in his proposed ontology. It is at its bases. For Taylor, even though it is posited as a constitutive element of culture and society, it is still kept within a complementary character. For Castoriadis the instituting social imaginary is a human faculty that, along with the radical imagination, established the difference among humans and the rest of beings. In Taylor's proposal, the social imaginary does not have the same ontological weight; it is a substantive part of human culture, but it is reduced to the status of a *level*. Defined as such, and with that theoretical distinction, we are able to understand it as part of the culture itself.

In effect, the distinction of levels posed by Taylor suggests that the social imaginary is relevant to the other two levels proposed (doctrinal and habitus) but still has its independence. On the contrary, as seen, what Taylor defines as the contents of the doctrinal or habitus levels, for Castoriadis is embraced in the same product of the social imaginary and the *sis*. In this sense, for Castoriadis there are not different levels such as the doctrinal, the habitus or the symbolic posed by Taylor.

The term social imaginary in Taylor's work is closely related to the concept of images or not yet formulated features in the doctrinal and habitus levels and to the symbolic realm in its evocative sense: In Castorian theory, on the other hand, it requires a totally different theoretical proposal and posture before the creation of culture (including its symbolic dimension) and the subject's socialization in it, as well as the social change.

However, it is true that Castoriadis' theory and its conceptual elements do enable us to elaborate a cultural type of reading of modernity as Taylor has characterized it. In a sense, and making the necessary theoretical distinctions between the two authors, modernity and its changes can generally be conceived in Castoriadis' terms, as moving from some social institutions and *sis* to different ones. In Taylor's terms these changes would be described as

moving us from one dense constellation of background understanding and imaginary to another, both of which place

²⁰ Castoriadis interprets shocks in the Fichtean sense of "antos" (Ibid., pág.384).

²¹ Castoriadis, "Imaginación, Imaginario, Reflexión", pág. 377.

*us in relation to others and the good. There is never atomistic and neutral self-understanding: there is only a constellation (ours) which tends to throw up the myth of this self-understanding as part of its imaginary*²².

In this sense, it is important to point out that while still keeping common perspectives with reference to the noted distinction between acultural and cultural theories of modernity, these two authors also have different theoretical perspectives from which modernity and its changes are totally differently theorized.

Modernity in Castoriadis and Taylor

As stated previously, modernity for Castoriadis means the institution of a magma of *sis* instituted by society as its world, and manifested in its social institutions. In his view²³, development, economy, and instrumental rationality are only worried about the relationship between means and ends, and not about the rationale of the ends itself. They are important *sis* that have dominated the social and cultural dynamics of the modern Western capitalistic societies. The symbol of modern society is made up of fragments of economic rationality, science, and technology where its conjugation is associated with these postulates: i) the omnipotence of technique, ii) the asymptotic illusion relating to scientific knowledge, iii) the rationality of economic mechanisms, iv) assumptions about society that imply that society is predestined to progress and growth, or that it can be manipulated by various means in order to lead it to progress and economic growth.

Taylor, on the other hand, underlines as well other important *sis* (using Castoriadis' terms) to characterize modern societies. Some of the main ones are: the fall of social hierarchies based on the idea of honor being replaced by the notion of dignity; the emergence and importance acquired by the public sphere and public opinion with consensus achieved out of face-to-face relations; the sense of collectivity framed in a legal context, and the right of autodetermination.

Furthermore, Taylor embraces the emergence and institutionalization of these *sis*, along with other social institutions, in a larger discussion about modernity. Analyzing

what is for him a central modern debate —that of identity and recognition²⁴— this author presents a characteristically modern discussion around modern *sis* held between typical atomistic and dualistic Cartesian theorizations, and the Hegelian proposal which represents an attempt to challenge it. Throughout this discussion, it is possible to observe main and principal instituting *sis* of modern societies as Taylor presents them.

Taylor understands the enlightenment as meaning²⁵, for Hegel, fragmentation and partialization. In any given level it is possible to distinguish things and separate them, but it is not possible to see the inner connections which link all separate realities, the dialectic life which engenders them all in a chain. It distinguishes men as independent individuals but it loses sight of the community. In other words, enlightenment is atomistic in its political theory and utilitarian in the value theory. In a general sense, this is what Taylor believes Hegel tries to overcome, constituting in this way a discussion that would characterize the encounter of what in Castoriadis' terms would be modern *sis*.

Some of the modern problems that were elaborated and questioned by Hegel in his theoretical proposal could be mentioned as examples. The notions of reason, history, the State, and the subject, as well as common oppositions such as nature-spirit or individual-community, constitute only some of the modern problems that Hegel approached. In order to illustrate briefly this point, it is our purpose in the following section to point out certain problems as central issues rather than explain them exhaustively, naming what in Taylor's view are Hegel's inputs.

Some Points in the Modern Hegelian Discussion

A number of theoretical approaches appear as influences on Hegel's elaboration of his proposals. Some of the most significant influences that Taylor underlines are²⁶: i) Expressivism and the contributions of Herder, who sought to contest both the common views of enlightenment rooted in the utilitarian and atomistic traditions, and the analytic scientific views on humans and society; ii) Kant's proposal of radical freedom, which opposed the utilitarian view that what is morally right is determined by desire; iii) Fichte's philosophy, which centered on the subject and freedom (leaving aside the

²² Ibid., págs. 173-174.

²³ Castoriadis, "Reflections on 'Rationality' and 'Development'", en *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy: Essays in Political Philosophy*, New York, Oxford University Press, pág. 33.

²⁴ Charles Taylor, *El Multiculturalismo y la Política de Reconocimiento*, México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1993.

²⁵ Taylor, *Hegel*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1975, pág. 401.

²⁶ Ibid.; *Hegel and Modern Society*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979.

discussion about object and substance); and iv) a general nostalgic feeling for Greek society²⁷.

In the context of the general intellectual environment and historical events such as the French Revolution, the ideas of expression and radical freedom were enhanced. The unity of two modern ideals —radical freedom and expressive freedom²⁸— was being sought²⁹. Hegel attempted to synthesize these oppositions by posing the idea of cosmic spirit. In order to keep the aspiration of radical autonomy, Hegel posits the notion that human consciousness reflects the order of nature and at the same time perfects it. The cosmic spirit which unfolds in nature strives to complete it-self in conscious self-knowledge, and the locus of this activity is the subject's mind. The subject achieves its fulfillment in a form of life which is also an expression of self-awareness, so the power underlying nature, as spirit, reaches its fullest expression in self-awareness. Spirit reaches this self-awareness in man in the form of self-consciousness. In this view, while nature tends to realize spirit, man as conscious being tends towards a grasp of nature in which he will see it as spirit and one with his own spirit. In this process, men see themselves as individual fragments of the universe but also as vehicles of cosmic spirit, thus achieving unity with nature. With the notion of cosmic spirit,

men can achieve at once the greatest unity with nature, that is, with the spirit which unfolds itself in nature, and the fullest autonomous self-expression. The two must come together since man's basic identity is a vehicle of spirit....[it] can provide the basis of a union between finite and cosmic spirit which meets the requirement that man be united to the whole and yet not sacrifice his own self-consciousness and autonomous will³⁰.

Taylor points out that Hegel discussed the notion of reason in his attempt to achieve the synthesis between the above mentioned rational autonomy and expressive unity. Hegel questioned the notion of reason not only to the ones that gave it an instrumental meaning -strongly rooted in the

modernist tradition- but also to those who sought to distinguish the finite with the infinite subject. That is, the Romantic generation interpreted reason as the means to analyze and segment reality and therefore to divide and mark distinctions. By posing his notion of understanding, Hegel differentiated rationality, meaning division and distinction, from reason, meaning a higher mode of thought that permits the incorporation of division as well as unity³¹. Likewise, he did the same with the modern notion of freedom, contesting its meaning as an endlessly original power, as a constant creation of new forms — a belief held by some Romantics. Postulating the notion of infinity, he reconciled as well freedom as infinite activity and as ordered activity³².

Hegel developed other lines of questioning in pursuing his theoretical endeavor, questioning as well the Cartesian dualistic notions of the subject. As Taylor explains, Hegel was able to explain the subject without relying on dualism. Hegel's notion of subject was grounded on the Aristotelian expressivist idea of seeing man as realizing a certain form, to which is added seeing this realized form as an expression of what the subject is and which cannot be predicted. In this framework the subject attains self-realization, with the dualistic presupposition of the subject as a center of consciousness. The perception of outside world as separate from it-self, with a now immaterial center — one heterogeneous from the world of body— is swept away³³. Hegel moved away from Descartes by establishing that the living being is not only a functioning thing made up of a sum of parts, but that it is also something in the nature of an agent, placing it in a line of development of which the apex is the human subject³⁴. In this way, Taylor adds, Hegel restored the continuity of living things damaged by Descartes, opening not only a continuity between ourselves and animals, but a continuity between life and consciousness³⁵.

In the same line of thinking, Hegel also proposed a new meaning of history and its development, the culmination of which would be the modern ideal of the State. The synthesis Hegel sought is also elaborated throughout his ideas about the development of history, in which (as Taylor points out) "it is possible to see how oppositions such as freedom and nature or individual and society initially are sharper as man develops, but when they reach their fullest development the terms come to reconciliation of themselves"³⁶.

²⁷ Ibid., págs. 3-8.

²⁸ The oppositions that expressed the division between these two ideals were: "the opposition between thought, reason and morality on one side, and desire and sensibility on the other; the opposition between the fullest self-conscious freedom on one side, and life in the community on the other; the opposition between self-consciousness and communion with nature; and beyond this separation of finite subjectivity from the infinite life that flowed through nature" Ibid., pág. 8.

²⁹ Ibid., pág.6.

³⁰ Ibid., págs. 10-11.

³¹ Ibid., pág.12-14

³² Ibid., pág.14

³³ Ibid., pág.16

³⁴ Ibid., pág.19

³⁵ Ibid., pág.19

³⁶ Ibid., pág.14

In *The Philosophy of History*³⁷, Hegel posited the development of human history and its expression in the form of the State as the materialization of what for him was the modern symbol of freedom—in other words, history is the development of the consciousness of freedom in the world.

In his conception of history, Hegel presented a path where cultural formations or cosmo-visions of certain cultures were to follow congruently a logical and inevitable succession: Medieval Christianity, Enlightenment, Terror. Thus history is a process of emancipation and enlightenment, the aim of which is to arrive at a certain type of society where people are free and autonomous by virtue of their own rationality. Hegel writes:

*World history is the progress in the consciousness of freedom - a progress that we must come to know in its necessity.... The final goal of the world, we said, is Spirit's consciousness of its freedom, and hence also the actualization of that very freedom*³⁸.

*The simple social instinct of human beings already involves the conscious goal of securing life and property; and insofar as this life in common has already come into being, that goal is extended further...that goal is the inner, indeed the innermost, unconscious drive; and the entire business of world history is the work of bringing it to consciousness*³⁹.

History is the development of the world spirit of reason. Reason manifests itself in the world and is realized in two senses: by fulfilling its own standard of rationality; and in the self-consciousness that constitutes its freedom. The highest fulfillment of human life would be the synthesis of reason and society, so that the one principle shapes the other: man as rational and social animal. This is the human struggle throughout history⁴⁰ Hegel states:

Reason rules the world, which means that it has ruled history as well. Everything else is subordinated in relation to this universal and substantial reason, in and for it-self, it serves that reason as its means. Moreover, this reason is immanent in historical existence, and fulfills itself and through it. The union of the

*universal, existing in and for it-self, with the individual subjective aspect, so that the union alone is truth*⁴¹.

As mentioned, for Hegel history would manifest differently throughout the different cultural formations. He presents the Oriental, the Greco-Roman and the Germanic cultural complexes, which are formally related, and in which there are different "levels" of freedom. In the Oriental world only one person is free, in the second only some, and finally, in the German world everyone is free by the virtue of the spiritual identity accorded to all human individuals, the inherent capacity of self-determination. This is intimately related with the existence of the State within a society, where, as Hegel posited it, The State is an ethical totality:

*The state is well constituted and internally strong if private interest of the citizens is united with the universal goal of the state that each finds its fulfillment and realization in the other*⁴².

*This essential being is the union of two wills: the subjective will and the rational will. This is an ethical totality of the state.... The laws of ethics are not accidental, but are the rational itself. The proper goal of the State is to make this substantiality count in the actual doings of human beings and their convictions, making it present and self-sustaining there...The State is the realization of freedom, i.e., of the absolute end-goal, and that exists for its own sake*⁴³.

The State, in Hegel's view⁴⁴, is the form that Spirit takes to complete realization of its existence. This conception is built upon different theoretical principles from the typical modernist conceptions of the State (i.e. French tradition). As Taylor puts it, history and its arrival to the State, has at be understood teleologically, as directed toward the realization of the Spirit. In this sense, what happens in history has sense and justification; it is good and incarnates the plan of God⁴⁵.

This short and fragmentary review of some of the problems at the core of Hegel's discussion serves to illustrate how his work embodies central modern topics and *sis*. For Taylor, this represents a theoretical milestone in the world of the modern social science and philosophy. The previously

³⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Company, [1955] 1998.

³⁸ Ibid., pág.22

³⁹ Ibid., pág.27

⁴⁰ Rauch,1998, en Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., pág. 28

⁴² Ibid., pág. 27

⁴³ Ibid., pág.40

⁴⁴ Ibid., pág. 57

⁴⁵ Taylor, *Hegel*, pág.389.

enumerated *sis* and social institutions, such as the State, the subject and reason, constitute in modernity central problems in Western instituted modern societies, giving sense and content to our socio-historic world through its articulation and institution, as Castoriadis would interpret it. Neither Castoriadis nor Taylor follows literally Hegel's teleological conception of the State, for example. For Castoriadis, as repeatedly stated, the State would have to be examined as a social institution that emerges in the modern context along within its historical and contextual particularities, and the subject would have to be examined within his *anaclysis* doctrine. Taylor, standing in a middle point—not with Castoriadis, and not literally with Hegel—still defends a “Hegelian way” of approaching both problems, since he finds it useful to question modernist-Cartesian constellation of understanding social phenomena such as the State. Taylor is more interested in how these Hegelian concepts enable a cultural theory of modern society⁴⁶. It is clear then the different emphasis that the authors do as well as the different conceptual frameworks they are referred to.

Conclusions

Taylor's attempt to critically approach acultural theories of modernity using the term of social imaginary as one of his

⁴⁶ Even though it is necessary to deal more profoundly with this issue, the extent of this essay makes it impossible. However, the main purpose of the Hegelian examples is accomplished in the sense that they enable the reader to identify conceptual differences among the authors.