

Dialectics in the Work of Rodolfo Kusch

La dialéctica en la obra de Rodolfo Kusch

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Abstract

The article aims to clarify the meaning of dialectics in the work of Rodolfo Kusch. To do this, it is vital to demonstrate both the author's reception and application of Hegel's thought. Based on archival research and a bibliographic review, this work guides us along a path within the texts of the Argentine philosopher, where an original resignification of dialectical thought is displayed.

Keywords. dialectics; Hegel; America; Kusch; -phagocytation

Resumen

El artículo tiene como objetivo aclarar el significado de la dialéctica en la obra de Rodolfo Kusch. Para ello, es fundamental demostrar tanto la recepción como la aplicación que el autor hace del pen-

samiento de Hegel. A partir de una investigación de archivo y una revisión bibliográfica, este trabajo nos guía por un recorrido dentro de los textos del filósofo argentino, donde se muestra una resignificación original del pensamiento dialéctico.

Palabras clave: dialéctica, Hegel, Estados Unidos, Kusch, fagocitación

Introducción

As a partial result of the research project conducted at the National University of Jujuy, this article aims to address the dialectics mentioned by the Argentine philosopher Rodolfo Kusch. The paths that have been followed for this task have to do with clarifying both the introduction of *dialectics* into his philosophical formation and its subsequent absence from his written production. The structuring presence of dialectics in his first systematic works, along with the complex discrepancies he maintains with Hegel throughout his work, leads us to question the origins, reception, and scope of dialectics in Kusch's philosophy.

Thus, in order to resolve these doubts, this text has been organized as follows. First, the aim was to determine Kusch's reception of Hegel. For this purpose, the background of this search was investigated in the available bibliography. At the same time, the *Kusch Archive* was visited to verify the sources of Hegelianism that the author had at his disposal, and finally, his education at the University of Buenos Aires (UBA) was reviewed to determine what type of Hegelianism he may have learned. The pedagogical work of Carlos Astrada stands out, especially the emphasis on the introduction of *dialectics* in the national intellectual field.

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Secondly, we followed the evolution of Kusch's *dialectics* throughout his work, emphasizing the texts where dialectics structures the textual argument or where the polemic with Hegel takes on greater prominence. Therefore, we began with *La Seducción de la Barbarie* (Kusch, 2007a), a juvenile text in which Kusch, drawing from literary sources, tries to outline a dialectics of the mestizo continent between vegetal *demonism* and *civic fiction*. Then, we addressed the American dialectics outlined by the author in the exordium of *América profunda* (Kusch, 2007b), a work in which ethnography already appears as a support for his argumentation and dialectics already found its definitive categories in being and being, together with the notion of *fagocitation*, which awakens the first conceptual discussions with the father of modern dialectics. Finally, we devoted special attention to *El Pensamiento popular desde el punto de vista filosófico* (Kusch, 2007c), a late article that clearly conveys a synthetic vision of his thought. There, the polemic with Hegel is clarified to the point that Kusch's own *dialectics* shows its novelty and true scope.

Kusch's Reception of Hegel

This research ascertained the reception of Hegelianism by the author's thought in several ways. An updated bibliography was consulted to trace the antecedents of this type of search. The *Kusch Archive* was visited to corroborate the sources of Hegelianism accessible to our thinker, and we reviewed what kind of Hegelianism he may have learned during his academic training through the texts of his mentor, Carlos Astrada.

Firstly, we found an entire exegetical line that Kusch's *dialectics* has been working on, ranging from Carlos Cullen to Cesar Pafundi. There, we could identify an early reception of Hegelian dialectics by Kusch, his discrepancies with the German philosopher, and prospective suggestions that made their way in the work of the philosophers we have mentioned.

Secondly, the visit to the Kusch Archive in the town of Maimará allowed us to verify the sources of Hegelianism that our philosopher had at his disposal during the years of essay production. There, we found a great abundance of primary and secondary sources on Hegel, both in German, French, and Spanish. All

the classics of Hegelianism were in his personal library, except for the *theological texts of his youth*¹, which, due to historical issues of edition, it was logical that he did not get to know them.

Finally, we reviewed his academic training at the UBA in the 1940s and what kind of Hegelianism he might have encountered there. Then, we came across Carlos Astrada's years as a teacher and director of the Department of Philosophy at the UBA (1936–1956). During this time, the translation of *La conciencia infeliz* (1949), an edition revised by Astrada and published by the said department, was commissioned by the First National Congress of Philosophy. The special relationship that Astrada established with the philosopher in question would greatly influence his reception of Hegel. Astrada's obsession with Hegelian dialectics would be fully imparted to his disciple, although with very dissimilar ends. Astrada would culminate his intellectual journey in Marxism, and Kusch himself would elaborate his own version of *dialectics*, as we shall see.

In summary, we traced the influences of *Hegelianism* in the life and work of our thinker, yielding results that provide us with a solid foundation for the debate that Kusch seeks to establish with Hegel himself. We also observed the reception of Hegel mediated by Astrada, the primary inspiration for the appropriation of a dialectics that became an obsession for the young Günter and that would bring novel ideas about the reality of the American at the end of his career.

¹ *Early Theological Writings* is the last published text of Hegel himself, long after his death. They were first edited by Herman Nohl, followed by Lasson and Hoffmeister from 1907 to 1936, and were published in their entirety. They were translated into Spanish only in 1978 and published by Fondo de Cultura Económica in Mexico.



Figure 1. Books by Astrada on Hegel's *Dialectics* in the Kusch Archive
Source: Author's archive.

Dialectics of the Mestizo Continent

Dialectics in the work of Rodolfo Kusch first appears in *La Seducción de la Barbarie*, a text from his youth published in 1953, which compiles the first works prepared by the author for *Sur* magazine, *La Nación* newspaper, and *Colección Quetzal*. In this first systematic work by our philosopher, dialectics emerges as the structuring logic of the text. This expresses the American drama that is investigated by the author, both in literature and philosophy, foreseeing a possible but painful prophetic solution. Kusch (2007a) says that this text recounts the tortuous episodes in which the demonic sentiment clashes with the civic fiction and deforms it. It also references its painful but inevitable triumph (p. 23).

The *dialectics* of *being* and *being* is already in gestation. In turn, the *regressive fagocitation* of his last texts is announced as the painful triumph of the autochthonous dimension of our personality over the citizen fiction.

Kusch expresses the divide that represents the American reality in opposing terms such as city and landscape, fiction and demonism, conscience and unconsciousness. The indigenous is explored through *Mayan-Quiché* literature, and from there, confronts a civic reality that simulates a foreign and imported order. The city in the text is associated with the arrival of the conquistador, who spreads the European *being* along the American coasts, withdrawing its demonic truth into the interior. The tension between these two realities is correlated with a feeling of ambivalence, doubt, fear of ridicule, and the impossibility

of realization due to a contradiction that cannot be fully resolved. Hence, Kusch chooses the symbol of the *feathered serpent*, which, according to his terms, is understood as an ambivalent sign, typical of a mestizo mentality (p. 38). This symbol frames the reality of the American continent and extends beyond the conquest into the biological mestizo, finally moving into the cultural sphere of all America.

The negative overcoming of this American self-splitting would find its possibility in *mental miscegenation*. The continental integrity that the author is looking for has so far shown only glimpses of conciliation: the popular revolts, the caudillo, a tango, but has not yet achieved its own *logos*. Günter adds that there is a lack of great expression, of a national style that translates into all orders of social and spiritual life, a conscience of authenticity (Kusch, 2007a, p. 94).

The *heretical* conclusion of his *dialectics* seems to indicate a path that is not yet clearly glimpsed. This was intuited in the 1950s and expressed almost prophetically as that step in ridicule that we still do not dare to take.

The American Dialectics

América profunda was published nine years after *Seducción*. This second systematic work of our author emerges under the same dialectical mantle as the first, but now with greater precision in this regard. Kusch says that he seemed to find the basis for an American dialectics there (Kusch, 2007b, p. 9) and that his intuition sketched in the text will oscillate between *being someone* with European roots and being someone with pre-Columbian roots, both deep roots of our mestizo mind, of the psyche of our environment (Kusch, 2007b, p. 9). However, the conquest of America begins the *fagocitation*, which is the result of that encounter and accounts for the negativity that eats the American city away, even in our times.

The 1962 text, we said, was presented with a dialectical tone, and there, Günter spoke of an intrinsic opposition between *being (ser)* and *being (estar)*. Our philosopher will say that one will act as thesis and the other as antithesis, in such a way that the resulting synthesis (Kusch, 2007, p. 193) arises from these two. The moment of mere being, the first moment of his dialectics, was depicted in the drawing by the Indian

Joan de Santa Cruz Pachacuti (Figure 2). This cosmic reredos reflected an existence besieged by the diverse subjectivities that inhabit the world—the gods, the stars, the elements, the ancestors, the plants, the animals, all entities imbued with personality that interact with the human in the midst of the folds of *pacha*.

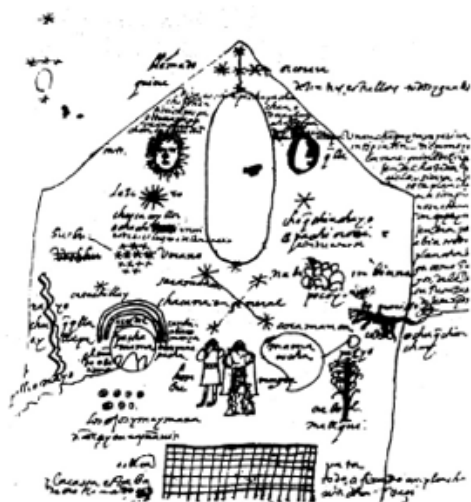


Figure 2. *Cosmological Drawing by Joan de Santa Cruz Pachacuti in Relación de antigüedades deste reyno del pirú (1789)*

The second moment corresponds to *being someone*, the man who, from the Roman city, constitutes the prehistory of European modernity, a state of humanity that implies an existence torn away from nature and the communitarian bond, isolated from the old vital cycle, enclosed in large walled enclosures that leave behind the contact of the human with the rest of the natural and spiritual personalities with which he used to dialogue in the past—a subjectivity that closed in on itself and named everything that surrounds it with the name of object. However, 1492 opens consciousness to the encounter of these two hemispheres of the human brain, and in their recognition, they undertake a phagocytic synthesis, provoking *reminiscence*.

Indeed, it would seem that the advance of capitalist modernity was disseminating acculturation in

each of the peoples through which it expanded. This, naturally, implied a loss of the proper and an opening towards the imperial culture in areas such as science, technology, industry, consumption, etc. However, Kusch (2007b) observes that acculturation occurs only at the material level, such as architecture or clothing, while in other areas, there may have been an inverse process, we could say, of *phagocytization* of the white by the indigenous (p. 179).

Perhaps there were always two simultaneous processes, but our progressive ideals prevented us from seeing the latter. That is to say, the globalizing deployment of the culture of capital would be accompanied by an inverse logic, a hidden face of this modernity, which in the symbolic sense is signaling a return to the ancient knowledge of humanity—knowledge buried by positive science, but zealously guarded by the Indigenous peoples of the American continent, so much for *phagocytization*.

On the other hand, the polemic with Hegel finds an important approach by our philosopher in the text. Kusch (2007b) himself says that a dialectical interpretation could not be thought of in the way Hegel did. For Hegel, the synthesis is an *Aufhebung* or, literally, an elevation above the finite. This supposes seeking an improvement in the European sense and would lead to justifying what we call *being* in America (p. 194).

For Kusch, fagocitation differs from Hegelian *Aufhebung*, since elevation can only be assumed from the angle of mere being, that is, from the indigenous, and in this way, he sets up the polemic with the father of modern dialectics.

Indeed, for Hegel, the superiority of European culture over the other cultures of the globe was as indisputable as the superiority of reason over the other figures of consciousness. *Empiricism*, imagination, faith, as well as myth or poetry, were left behind in the unfolding of a consciousness that in its odyssey is negatively directed towards self-knowledge. It is the achievement of an eminently conceptual science that tolerates neither ecstatic intuition nor divination in its discovery. Through this long intellectual exercise that *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Hegel, 1966) meant, the German philosopher leads us to the realized truth. This unfolding will only be possible through rational

argument. Reason is the substance that becomes the subject from the recognition of its own itinerary.

In this sense, Kusch's argument is quite different. By the middle of the twentieth century, according to the time in which our thinker wrote, the West was experiencing an unprecedented crisis of meaning. In this context, what Hegel had called ancient figures of consciousness are, for Kusch, emerging languages of great value for the self-knowledge of the American. The symbols of the Amerindian cultures gave account of the validity of the ancient language of humanity, and their exegesis began to awaken a movement of *departure* from Western reason, which, more than an epistemic evolution, seemed an enlightening return to the very origins of meaning. That is where the phagocytic dialectics begins to be woven. It is there where semantic knowledge once again shines with respect to a devalued intellectual knowledge, where ritual removes the obsolescence in which it had fallen to show itself as a founding act of collectively valued meanings. The Hegelian *Aufhebung*, a century and a half after its debut, begins to suffer curvatures imprinted by the soil that welcomes it and thus changes its direction.

Regressive Dialectics

Hence, a regressive dialectics, what I once called fagocitation, which implies considering what is from being, that is, nothing more than a success in the game of oppositions, and always linked to a subject that must be constituted.
(Kusch, 2007c, p. 550)

The quote we have just read appears in one of the last articles published by Rodolfo Kusch during his lifetime. It was entitled *El pensamiento popular desde el punto de vista filosófico* (Kusch, 1978a), written in Maimará in 1978 and published that same year by *Revista Strómata* in San Miguel, Province of Buenos Aires. This text will be reprinted later, at the end of the third volume of his *Collected Works* (Kusch, 2007c) under the same title, and constitutes, according to Luciano Maddonni (2023), one of the sections that would make up the book *Expectativas* del propio Kusch, which was never published due to his sudden death. The content of this book is twinned with two books published by the author shortly before and under the same thematic context. We are talking about

Geocultura (Kusch, 1976) and *Esbozo* (Kusch, 1978b). There, a synthetic character of his thought prevails, where his most elaborated categories and the ethnographic journey of more than two decades on American soil converge in a masterly manner. However, something fundamental stands out for the purposes of this paper, which is the reference to dialectics and its link with the preceding texts in which it is explicitly addressed. The reference to *phagocitation* and the regressive nuance that accompanies his dialectics ends up clarifying his historical discrepancies with the father of modern dialectics.

The article was written sixteen years after *América profunda*, but it establishes a special connection with that one because it takes up again with determination a discussion with Hegel that had not been fully clarified. In this sense, then, the polemic with the German philosopher becomes clearer now than in the 1962 text. With almost exclusive references to *Science of Logic* (Hegel, 1956), our philosopher confronts the Hegelian dialectics by proposing that from *being* there is not so much room for reflection on the constituted being, but rather the originating experience of being from a *logic of the center*, that is to say, from the *semantic knowledge*. Kusch argues that, as Hegel puts it, it is a dialectical play between being and nothingness that leads to a becoming, which in the end reiterates being (p. 539). The Hegelian approach would suppose a dialectical sequence always within the rational plane, where the negative merely drives the deduction and permanently actualizes the presence of *being*. In contrast, the Kuschian *dialectics* emphasizes the divinatory character of its salvific mediation, which extends beyond the limits marked by "*the rupture of the rational*." This would question dialectics as *Aufhebung*, that is, one thing is the Hegelian dialectical overcoming and another, mediation in the sense of locating the center between oppositions (Kusch, 2007c, p. 539).

The being-being dialectics would suppose, then, a field of greater scope, where from *being*, the previous or originating enclosure of the consolidated *being* would be illuminated—a field where there is no room for the *conceptual logos* as mediation but a *salvific logos*, that which occurs before the sign itself, in the silence of language, where only the ritual gesture occurs (Kusch, 2007c, p. 540). The Kuschian dialectics

tics, then, would occur in a relationship between the pre-ontological and the ontological itself. The latter would correspond to the plane of *being* or *being someone*.

In addition, it is worth highlighting Kusch's conception of *negativity*, whose sense also expresses a point of discordance with Hegel. For the German philosopher, *negativity* participates in a certain way of *being*, within a "philosophical sequence that demands that the negative be, for which the negative is relegated to a problem of the cunning of reason, according to which it is constituted" (p. 467). The negative is understood from the option for the rational and subjected to the empire of the *Same*, always pushed by the small cunning of reason that wants to assert itself. Faced with this, Kusch refers to *being* as *absolute negativity*, which extends beyond "the rupture of the rational." There is only room for a ruse, or a magic spell that allows the subject to encounter the Absolute. There, a great ruse is imposed, and true sapientiality of the *sonqo* is assumed, which implies assuming the radical dissolving negativity in the middle of the game to facilitate success.

Regressive, then, seems to be the final adjective that accompanies his *dialectics*. Here, the *being* is illuminated from its gestation in the enclosure of *being*. From there, *being* is understood as just one symbol among others that allows the subject to balance his existence in the midst of the absolute *negativity* of the sacred. It is there that the *being-nothing dialectics* in Hegel reveals itself to be indebted and secondary to the *being-being dialectics*. An open formula that goes from constitution to deconstitution and vice versa, in a seesaw that never culminates. Two existential moments or instances of the human separated by *the rupture of the rational*. A dialectical conception in which the ritual or the *ch'alla*, far from being seen as primitive figures of consciousness, already surpassed by history, reveals a permanent regression, as a sphere of foundation and deformation of all rational constitution.

Final Considerations

The text led us to the clarification of *dialectics* in the work of Rodolfo Kusch. To do so, it was necessary, first of all, to verify how Kusch himself received Hegel's thought. This question found, through

his exegetes (*Cullen-Pafundi*), his readings of sources (*Kusch Archive*), and his academic training (*Astrada*), that the main interest of the author and his fundamental apprehension were centered on his *dialectics*.

Secondly, the text set out to investigate the use and resignification of *dialectics* throughout his work. There we glimpsed an increasingly novel application of *dialectics* in his texts, and a polemic established with Hegel from the beginning of his career, but that would be clarified only at the end of his life. Kusch's youthful obsession with *dialectics* as the interpretative logic of the American drama and his profound disagreements with the author of *Phenomenology of Spirit* would lead him more and more towards the elaboration of his own version of *dialectics*—that which extends beyond the rational plexus, capable of regulating the link between *being* and *being*, and of giving movement to the flow between subjective constitution and deconstitution. The Kuschian dialectics ends up far from the Hegelian dialectics.

Günter visualizes a Hegel still very much imprisoned within the canons of modernity, postulating a dialectical sequence that always takes place within the rational, argumentative, and conceptual planes. But for that, Kusch would say, the subject must already be constituted and at peace with his own identity in the world. *Negativity* in the account of the spirit is a mere memory of its own conscious self-positioning. There, being appears as a completely ignored human dimension. For this reason, Kusch would say, it is possible to think even of a dialectics of greater scope, previous to the dialectics of the *logos*—the dialectics between *being* and *being*, a dialectics of mantic mediations, that which occurs between the original sphere of identity deconstitution, that of cosmopolitical negotiation, that of the rationality of *sonqo*. This pre-ontological sphere founds and makes it possible a humanity constituted, then, on the plane of being.

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