

Hegel on Historicity and the Methodology of Philosophy

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Introduction

As a technical term in the humanities ‘historicity’ (*Geschichtlichkeit*) has undergone a shift of meaning over time. In philosophy the term probably occurs for the first time in Hegel’s philosophy. In his lectures on the philosophy of religion Hegel applied it with reference to the theological dogma that truth has come into existence in time and subsequently influenced the course of events significantly. The incarnation of God was an event that marked a new epoch, distinguishing temporal change in the human world by bestowing upon it historical character. As is well known, in Hegel religion and philosophy share the same object but they differ as regards the form in which the object is addressed. Whereas in religion God is addressed through worship and cult, in philosophy the idea of God is transformed into the notion of the absolute (Hegel (1971a) 123). The change of form from worship to cognition distinguishes modernity from the Middle Ages. In this respect historicity refers to the appearance of a new relation of man to himself and to the truth. Denoting here this external influence on the foundations of philosophy, ‘historicity’ comes to characterize a certain condition of philosophical knowledge of the truth: that philosophy from its very beginning in pre-Christian culture had the absolute, the eternal truth, as the object of knowledge, whereas in the age of Christianity it had to seek truth on the conditions of historical changeability. This means that the appearance of truth in history, Revelation, caused a break that separated the history of philosophy into two main epochs: ancient and modern (Hegel: *German*) philosophy. Within these epochs there are phases (*Stufen*) which preserve a basic continuity in the development of philosophy¹.

¹ See Hegel (1971a) 123 ff. for his division of the history of philosophy in epochs, periods and phases.

Even though it originated in Hegel's philosophy, historicity as a technical term in philosophy is predominantly associated with so-called continental philosophy in which it has made tradition. A number of leading currents in the 20th century German and French philosophy integrate the historical aspect in their systematic research. Historicity means that philosophical questions and problems must be addressed with the awareness of the historicity of philosophical rationality. Hegel is both fellow player and opponent in this tradition. Already in the second half of the 19th century, at the time when the criticism of Hegel sat in, not only his notorious 'system' was refuted. A criticism of his history of philosophy was undertaken by predominant figures as Dilthey and Graf Yorck who partly rejected the metaphysics and speculative method of Hegel's philosophy, partly applied his philosophy in a constructive way by developing an ontology on the basis of historicity as an essential feature of knowledge². Nevertheless, it turned out to be Heidegger's analysis of the fundamental temporality of human existence in *Sein und Zeit* (1927) and Gadamer's historical specification of Heidegger's philosophy of existence in *Wahrheit und Methode* (1960) which became central to the hermeneutic tradition of the late 20th century³. Gadamer carried on the project of historicism developed by Dilthey. Combining it with Heidegger's idea of "die geschichtliche Seinsweise des menschlichen Daseins" he founded a theory of the historicity of human understanding on the basis of the temporality of human existence (Renthe-Fink (1974) 405).

This paper focuses on Hegel's idea of historicity and its implications for the connection between philosophy and its history. More specifically, the aim is to examine the primary, i.e. epoch-making, external impacts on the development of philosophy. Hegel holds the view that history of philosophy is based on a development in metaphysics ('metaphysics' in its Aristotelian sense) towards adequate knowledge of the absolute idea. This claim presupposes the autonomy of reason and implies a teleological view of the course of the history of philosophy. However, the idea of philosophy as an immanent process that develops according to internal criteria, makes it interesting to attempt to illuminate the character and significance of the external event which according to

² See *Briefwechsel* (1923/2011)

³ See Renthe-Fink (1974) for a brief but informative account of the development of the concept of historicity.

Hegel has influenced the development of philosophy too. ‘Historicity’ in Hegel’s sense covers exactly this external aspect of the development: the occurrence of radical changes which initiate new departures in the course of philosophy. In this paper two epoch-making events in particular are presented which in Hegel’s view break through the otherwise immanent, problem-oriented development and become an integrate element of what Hegel calls the philosophical science. Concerning the relation of philosophy to its history, Hegel states:

dass unsere Philosophie wesentlich nur im Zusammenhange mit vorhergehender zur Existenz gekommen (...) ist; und der verlauf der Geschichte ist es, welcher uns nicht das *Werden fremder Dinge*, sondern dies *unser Werden, das Werden unserer Wissenschaft* darstellt. (Hegel (1971a) 22).

Finally, I suggest that Hegel seems to overlook that the radical significance of external influences did not just have historical consequences in the form of epoch-making events. It also implied a change in the epistemological conditions of knowledge. Certain new intuitions, a priory principles of arguments, appear in the ‘thoughtful consideration’ which distinguishes philosophical cognition from the beginning of the modern world. Hence philosophy began to operate with ideas and principles which differ more or less from the principles in the pre-modern world.

2. Hegel on philosophy in its history. The ‘old prejudice’.

It is fair to say that Hegel’s concept of historicity can be summed up in the following lapidary statement, “daß das Studium der Geschichte der Philosophie Studium der Philosophie selbst ist” (op.cit. 49). With these words Hegel begins his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* in whose rather extensive introduction he presents his concept of philosophy. Provided – as he states – that the history of philosophy demonstrates the very becoming of philosophical science (op.cit. 22), the beginning of the historical presentation implies a problematic circle that needs a justification. The circle consists in Hegel’s in advance stating and using a concept of philosophy which is not substantiated until the whole following historical presentation is complete. But the circle, while presupposing what is to be proved, is inevitable and necessary, partly in order to delimit the presentation from other scientific fields, partly to be able to discern and retain the

philosophical substance of the often rather varying philosophical systems over time. Otherwise the historian of philosophy risks being led astray in plays of thought (*Gedankenspiel*, op.cit. 50) like in many old, doxographic presentations: Instead of moving forward with the overall idea of philosophy in mind they deliver superficial presentations of a number of arbitrary opinions (ibid.).

With a slightly hidden reference to a widespread sceptic attitude to philosophy in his own age Hegel emphasizes the necessity of commencing the study of philosophy with an a priori concept of philosophy. The pitfall which several early presentations fell into by including tall stories, biographical data and doubtful information, left them with an unscientific outlook. The same holds for presentations which do not distinguish philosophy from other fields of knowledge (op.cit. 15 ff.). Presentations of opinions may pass on historically correct statements without containing truth: Allegorically Hegel says: without being able to master philosophical method and discern the philosophical substance of different texts, one is like an animal which obviously hears the tones of music but does not comprehend the harmony, i.e. the music (op.cit. 17). In order to keep the presentation on the right track and to understand the philosophical substance in its sentences, Hegel suggests the need for an organ for speculative thinking. The concept of philosophy must be stated in advance, at least in a tentative definition, in order to secure from the outset, the safe course through the labyrinthine manifold of texts.

But also, the regular doxographic presentation of a well-defined field of study does not escape the mistrust with which philosophy can be met. The mutually conflicting claims of various philosophical systems concerning the same subject-matter make it difficult to discern a progression in the history of philosophy. If the systems are to be studied not just as a history of ideas that express the personal world views of their authors (*Weltanschauungen*); if, on the contrary, their claims to contain truth are taken seriously, they fail due to the Pyrrhonian argument: several well justified but mutually conflicting claims cannot lead to a positive, epistemically productive, conclusion. Thus, though not without problems it is still necessary to lay a criterion at the basis of the presentation of the history of philosophy. This is not just in order to delimit philosophy from other scientific studies but also to have an epistemic presupposition

for considering the history of philosophy as a progress in knowledge. Faced with the sceptic argument above, Hegel is very well aware that this assumption is problematic. An assumption which is immune to the Pyrrhonian argument can obviously not be a certain doctrine or any dogmatic presupposition whatsoever. The basic assumption must be so minimal that even the sceptic must accept it. And yet it must contain enough method to fulfill the demands necessary for a justification of the possibility of philosophical cognition.

It is not surprising that Hegel finds the necessary criterion at the beginning of philosophy in ancient Greece. It is the minimal rational condition which participants in a philosophical dialogue implicitly accept when commencing to discuss philosophical problems: they acknowledge the authority of ‘thoughtful consideration’⁴. More precisely, it is the Platonic distinction between knowledge (*episteme*) and opinion (*doxa*) worked out through the intellectual struggle fought by Socrates with the relativism and subjectivism of the Sophists (ibid. 32). Undogmatic with regard to metaphysical claims, Hegel is content to appeal to the old prejudice (ibid. 33) that already the insistence *to consider a statement rationally* presupposes the distinction between true and false which makes the basis of a critical examination of that statement. Just this one epistemic principle that truth exists and can be reached through rational thinking, must be a presupposition for all productive philosophical practice. Hegel justifies this claim by referring to the fact that a rejection of this premise would imply a refutation of philosophical discussions. Also, the sceptic is bound to consent to this demand of justification. He must recognise the universal validity of arguments. By rejecting this premise, the sceptic philosopher sticks to subjective vanity and excludes reason and philosophy. Hegel says:

Ich appelliere hierbei vorläufig an das alte Vorurteil, daß im Wissen Wahrheit sei, daß man aber vom Wahren nur insofern wisse, als man nachdenke, nicht so, wie man gehe und stehe; daß die Wahrheit nicht erkannt werde im unmittelbaren Wahrnehmen, Anschauen (...) sondern nur durch die Mühe des Denkens. (ibid. 33).

As historians who aim at the notion of philosophy through a presentation of its history, we must begin without metaphysical foundation. But by virtue of our concept of philosophical reasoning we know at least which areas and

⁴ I translate Hegel’s German words for philosophical cognition, ‘denkende Vernunft’ and ‘begrifendes Erkennen’ into ‘thoughtful consideration’, cf. Hegel (1971a) 20; 30.

problems belong to philosophical science. We also know that there is a truth about the solution to the problems of philosophy and finally that “thoughtful consideration” (ibid. 20) contains a method to judge about them⁵. - However, in order to refute the objections raised by the sceptic, it still remains for us to demonstrate that mutually conflicting systems do not finally lead to a dead end but can be philosophically productive. This must be so if the history of philosophy shall have the status of the becoming of the philosophical science (ibid. 22), of the unfolding of truth in time. But the claim that conflicts between philosophical systems are productive, constitutes the very core of Hegel’s dialectical form of thinking. However, this is developed elsewhere in Hegel’s works.

3. What it means that philosophy has a history. On anachronisms.

If on the one hand the study of the history of philosophy presupposes at least a minimal concept of philosophical rationality, on the other hand philosophy is also historically concrete and thereby subject to change. By defining philosophy as *thoughtful consideration*, Hegel means that it is essential to truth to appear in the activity of the thought, incarnate in an individual subject who belongs to the historical world. Present as the object of thinking, truth is thus not a distant and inaccessible subject matter. On the contrary, it exists always in a specific shape of a philosophical system determined by its age. As a “child of his age” (Hegel (1970c) 26) the philosopher is thus a product of a certain cultural arrangement. His thoughts present themselves on the conditions of his age despite the universal character of its logical form. It is obviously this cultural and relative aspect which gives philosophy its shape of a series of single systems unfolding in time and forming philosophy as history. Hegel’s famous statement in his *Philosophy of Right* that “philosophy is its age conceived in thoughts” (Hegel (1970c) 26) gives it an extra historical twist.

However, despite its historical character philosophy is not just an ideological reflection of political and social interests. Reason is not determined by

⁵ At this place Hegel does not determine the peculiarity of philosophy compared to the empirical sciences though the development of philosophy as the “mother of sciences” from Antiquity until the present age testifies a significant change of the idea of philosophy. The use of the term ‘speculative’ here seems to be a sufficient indication of the difference between philosophy and the sciences, cf. Hegel (1971a) 17.

external circumstances. On the contrary, through its own rational conditions, philosophy grasps the essence of the age and expresses it in concepts. It reflects the culture of the age and follows it – so to speak – intellectually back to its origin in the spirit of the age. The consequence of the double relation which philosophy has to its age is this: As an activity which aims at truth it transcends the historical conditions. But as a particular system it is limited to the age as well. The former rational aspect marks the origin of philosophy in pre-Socratic philosophy which insisted on the autonomy of thought, *logos*. The emergence of philosophy denoted the initiation of investigations in which concepts were formed to replace mythological ideas and images. The elements of nature in pre-Socratic philosophy: water, air, fire, logos, were all anticipations of the universal concept which had not yet quite been liberated from its sensible-mythological robes and achieved a conceptual form⁶. The refutation of and often even hostility towards religion explicit in parts of pre-Socratic philosophy stemmed from the new experience of reason that appeared at the time of the origin of philosophy. ‘Logos’ is a form of cognition essentially different from ‘mythos’.

The historian of philosophy must reflect on the context of his object because it determines which questions are reasonable to pose and which criticism can reasonably be raised against a past philosophy. Hegel rejects his contemporary colleague Flatt for applying the terms theism and atheism to characterise the position of Thales (ibid. 60). The idea of a personal God belongs to a much later period and originates in Jewish religion. Flatt’s consideration is anachronistic and deficient on that point. In defense of Hegel’s indirect emphasis on the significance of the religious and cultural context for philosophical concepts one could also raise criticism against the materialist interpretation of the pre-Socratic philosophy of nature. As mentioned, the concepts formed by the Ionian philosophers had a sensible quality⁷. The sensible feature that clung to the

⁶ Thought had not yet become *for itself*, i.e. aware of itself as such. This only happens in the Socratic period. The transition from pre-Socratic cosmology to ‘logos’, conceptual thinking, this “swing-over to the subject as part of consideration” became essential to philosophy from Plato. Cf. Copleston (1985) 81.

⁷ In Eleatic philosophy, at least in Parmenides and Zeno, the ‘universal’ is freed from sensible shape. But its abstract character as being (*to on*) expresses just the still indeterminate character which is typical for pure thought in its initial phase. The concept still lacks the further reflections that traditions gives it.

universal concepts in the form of the elements of nature, stemmed from the historical fact that reasoning had not yet been purified from mythological features. In accord with Hegel's view it is fair to say that because of the historical and cultural situation of the Ionian philosophers between the mythological and the rational age, the term 'hylozoism' characterises their positions more adequately than the term materialism which has modern scientific connotations.

4. The history of philosophy as tradition and development.

In order to clarify the relation of the history of philosophy to philosophy Hegel finds it necessary to pose the question: "Why does philosophy have a history?" (ibid. 15). It is notable that Hegel thinks that philosophy necessarily has a history. Whereas the experiential sciences are dependent on empirical research, philosophy is the science of "the nature of things, man and God" (ibid. 14). Philosophy is the essential knowledge of the same objects as investigated by the sciences but it is acquired by virtue of a higher, more general and conceptual reflection on the scientific knowledge. The object of philosophy is the knowledge of all things and their interrelatedness⁸. It is *metaphysics* based on, but not identical with empirical *physics*. This distinction allows to say that philosophy as metaphysics has one and the same object throughout its history though the empirical part has more or less been taken over by the sciences. Since metaphysics precedes experiential science both historically and with regard to higher rank, it would be a mistake to explain the development of philosophy as a result of the progress in scientific knowledge. On the contrary, Hegel considers the production of empirical knowledge as a resource to the answer to substantial, metaphysical questions posed by philosophy. Philosophy is historical in the sense that it is a process in which one and the same object is determined more and more substantially by virtue of the scientific facts. The extension of empirical knowledge is one thing. Another thing is that knowledge is only complete when the metaphysical questions are answered completely⁹.

⁸ Dieter Henrich has called metaphysics after Kant "Gedanken eines Abschlusses" just in that respect, cf. Henrich (1987) 13.

⁹ On Hegel's idea of the relation between philosophy and natural sciences, see Hegel (1970a) 15, §246 A. In the introduction to the philosophy of nature he states that philosophical science has empirical physics as its presupposition and condition.

The metaphysical truth is not itself subject to historical change, but the subjective acquisition of this truth is limited to the conditions of the age to which the philosopher belongs. The development of philosophy takes place gradually. Therefore, it appears over time as a unity in the shape of the continuity of its history through which the object, the absolute, becomes determinate. Its history is thus not just an accumulation of material. On the contrary, as Hegel says: “Hier ist das Extensivste auch das Intensivste” (ibid. 47). This means that the conceptuality developed through the progress of increasing complexity makes the object gradually clearer and more substantial as knowledge. The balance between continuity and discretion in history is *tradition* which literally means that philosophical systems are handed down through history (*Überlieferung*). Regardless of the awareness of its practitioners, philosophy always unfolds within a tradition where theories from the past are acquired and exposed to critique and renewed on the conditions of a new age. ‘Historicity’ does not just refer to the past or to the moment of an event. It means that something is perishable as an empirical fact but preserved over time, for example in the sense of exemplary works that make an epoch by setting a new agenda and therefore are present in later works. ‘Historicity’ covers the ambiguity of a piece of work which has entered into the theories of a later age as a constitutive moment. One obvious example is classical rationalism and empiricism. The two mutually conflicting positions or traditions are sublated (*aufgehoben*) in the philosophy of Kant: they belong to the *past* but they are also *preserved* in Kant. Kant’s so-called *Criticism* has unified the two conflicting positions by turning their genuine insights into elements of his new position. His synthesis demonstrates the central point in historicity: that the past is actual in the present.

Philosophy considered from a historical perspective is tradition, but exactly in the sense of the activity in which the past is passed on into the present when new systems are construed. Thus, provided that the philosopher is aware of his role as a communicator of tradition in his work he also contributes to the continuity of the historical movement of philosophy. The historical awareness of this process thus emphasizes the progression in philosophy even in the sense that the philosopher takes part in the ongoing unfolding of the truth, i.e. of the notion of philosophy. Furthermore, as a consequence of this it appears that the

temporal movement – the change of philosophy over time – also contains a non-temporal movement in the very subject matter: History turns out to be a development through which philosophical truth actualises itself, i.e. becomes manifest. History and elaboration of truth are two sides of the same coin.

5. The historical conditions of philosophical thought.

The fact that philosophy is always situated in a context implies that historical awareness is a necessary condition which guarantees that arguments are based on up-to-date principles. For example, it is not evident in a logical sense that slavery is wrong. But the modern age embraces values like universal freedom and human dignity and they must form the basis of a practical philosophy that excludes slavery. According to Hegel the knowledge and recognition of basic universal principles and concepts are historically conditioned. The demand for universal freedom in moral and political respect only makes sense in a modern age. But this view does not lead to sheer relativism. The *knowledge* of universal freedom and dignity as essential features of human nature must have reached a historical level where autonomy in the sense of the ability to administer one's freedom is ready to be accepted as a base for practical philosophy. In Hegel's words: humanity must have come to knowledge of man's essential freedom. There is thus an inner connection between moral concepts and the spirit of a historical epoch. Moral and political philosophy whose problems are formulated without adequate awareness of their historical context are liable to mistake logical, intuitive evidence for the evidence due to the spirit of the particular age.

The history of philosophy conceived as development is an irreversible process. Platonism and Aristotelianism in the modern age are strictly speaking views which express lack of historical awareness and self-knowledge (ibid. 65). Conversely, as already mentioned, philosophical systems of the past are always implicitly at work in the philosophy of the present by virtue of tradition. Every philosophical investigation is not just new. It is a more or less conscious inheritance and further development of the philosophy of the past. To Hegel this means that to practice philosophical research on a high level must imply the highest possible, historical self-transparency. Philosophy must be conducted in awareness of the tradition within which it develops. The double task of working

with historical awareness and being contemporary with one's own age presupposes a correct concept of history. Theories of the past are not definitively brought to an end. Philosophy unfolds in the point of intersection between tradition and renewal.

The awareness of the presence of tradition in philosophical thought implies that philosophical positions and arguments of the past are integrated into the theoretical frameworks of contemporary research. This is important, not only in order to promote continuity and unity in the course of philosophy but also in order to secure a high scientific level of philosophical research. The formulation of a philosophical problem presupposes familiarity with analyses, concepts, theories and arguments that are contained in the tradition. On the philosophical system in this historical respect Hegel says:

In ihr muß alles, was zunächst als ein Vergangenes erscheint, aufbewahrt und enthalten, sie (the philosophical system, pw) muß selbst ein Spiegel der ganzen Geschichte sein (ibid. 61).

Philosophy makes progress when it does not constantly attempt to start all over again but is aware of its historical conditions in tradition. Therefore, it is in the productive conflict between these orientations: continuity and break that philosophy not only changes but *develops*.

As mentioned earlier, the progression in the history of philosophy presents a gradually more substantial appearance of truth. However not in the sense of a step by step approximation to the truth far away in a distant future. Philosophy of the past is not necessarily refuted because it is false. The quality of a significant philosophy of the past consists in the contribution it gives to the common advance in knowledge. As such it possesses a relative truth. As mentioned earlier, Hegel thinks that philosophy has been in touch with truth since its birth in ancient Greece. The notion of being (*to on*) in Parmenides and the notion of 'logos' in Heraclitus' theory constitute conceptual aspects of the essence of all change in the universe. In Hegel's words this means:

die Vernunft erkennt das eine in dem anderen, daß in dem einem sein Anderes enthalten ist, - und so ist das All, das Absolute zu bestimmen als das Werden (ibid. 325).

According to Hegel the absolute or the Notion (*Idee*) already addressed by Heraclitus and Parmenides is indetermined and abstract in the form of their ideas. But the absolute must appear so in the *beginning* of philosophy because it still lacks the conceptual complexity which further systematic elaboration adds to it. And in addition to this: mythology which originated in the mythological mind of images yet incapable of abstract thinking could not satisfy the demands reason makes on a theory which shall count as metaphysical knowledge. Only when reason becomes aware of itself in its reflection in the mind, a field of metaphysical research is established, namely the characteristic level of philosophical conceptuality which gradually, through generations of philosophers, develops to more substantial and adequate knowledge. Hegel says:

Den Anfang macht das, was an sich ist, das Unmittelbare, Abstrakte, Allgemeine, was noch nicht fortgeschritten ist. Das Konkretere, Reichere ist das Spätere; das Erste ist das Ärmere an Bestimmungen (ibid. 59).

6. Temporal and non-temporal aspects of the experience of the historical element in philosophical thought.

The *historical* study of philosophy is obviously a study of thoughts from past epochs. But in the active acquisition of these thoughts the scholar enters into a community with philosophy across time. This is tradition. Sharing a common philosophical problem with tradition he becomes contemporary with his predecessors in thought. The development of philosophy turns out to be a joint enterprise in which philosophy develops by entering into itself - becomes *ein In-sich-gehen* – in line with the production of a more adequate conceptual complexity of the problem in question. The merging which thus happens between the development of philosophical depth and its history gives Hegel reason to state, “daß die Aufeinanderfolge der Systeme der Philosophie in der Geschichte diesselbe ist als die Aufeinanderfolge in der logischen Ableitung der Begriffsbestimmungen der Idee” (ibid. 49). The historical perspective differs from the conceptual development of the problem by an increase of the amount of philosophical systems. Material accumulates in the course of history. The intensification – the growing complexity - of the problem implies that some theories, drafts and inadequate concepts are left to the oblivion of the past while

substantial knowledge is preserved and integrated in later theories. The essence of the subject-matter is thus preserved to form constitutive moments of later theories. Hegel's original word for this, sublation (*aufheben*), means that the extensification which happens through the unfolding of a manifold also becomes an intensification in the sense of an increasing richness of meaning¹⁰.

It turns out that Hegel's concept of the historical element in philosophy leads us beyond the mere external chronological order. The historical object displays a non-temporal element. This element is not just the fix point necessary for the structure of time in general. It also contains the substantial meaning of the subject-matter which manifests along with its unfolding over time. This is because the view of the history of philosophy as a development contains a specific speculative element significant for Hegel's idea of an internal relation between philosophy and its history: When Hegel focuses on the intensification of meaning which is brought about by philosophizing with awareness of tradition, he discovers that the thoughtful consideration through which the scholar connects the past with the present is experienced as an intellectual unification with the living, *universal spirit*. It is fair to say that the historical awareness leads to a recognition of two aspects of the historical experience: a reversal from *object* to *subject* and then to *the universal* in which both are unified: In the discovery that the past object is an essential feature of the present object the subject who philosophises with historical awareness recognises that his *own* thinking is connected with the historical element through the present object. In other words: His speculative absorption in the present object with the awareness of its historical genesis is at the same time his absorption in himself as cognising subject. In this contemplation he recognises his connectedness with the universal essence of philosophy itself. It is the experience which the subject makes of his subject-matter and of himself and of the unification of both by participating in the 'thoughtful consideration' that also constitutes the identity of the whole history of philosophy. The historical character of the past philosophy – in Hegel's speculative sense – has thus the significance for the history of philosophy

¹⁰ It is an essential feature of Hegel's dialectic that development has a substantial meaning. Cf. his *Wissenschaft der Logik* in which he undertakes a dialectical deduction of a complex system of concepts as a process through which the single object of the whole logical investigation, Being, determines itself and finally results in the Notion (*Idee*).

“daß wir in ihr, ob sie gleich Geschichte ist, es doch nicht mit Vergangenen zu tun haben. Der Inhalt dieser Geschichte sind die wissenschaftlichen Produkte der Vernünftigkeit, und diese sind nicht ein Vergängliches” (ibid. 57). What unifies the past with the present is the ‘universal spirit’ in which whoever philosophizes with historical awareness participates. It is thoughtful consideration, not just as formal reasoning but as the conceptual thinking which increases with regard to complexity and depth of intension. In metaphysical respect the aim of the study is to cognise *one and the same* truth, namely the notion (*die Idee*). This truth is not transcendent but it appears vividly present in the external form of thinking (ibid. 52). Whoever studies philosophy with historical awareness, experiences himself as participant in the life of the universal spirit in which absolute truth becomes gradually more manifest with time¹¹.

The chain that links philosophical systems into a chronological order thus reflects the genesis of philosophy. But the study of the history of philosophy is also the way in which human self-consciousness achieves self-knowledge as a rational being and at the same time experiences itself as a historical being. Though this holds good in any possible extension of the historical horizon, our intellectual-spiritual make-up in particular becomes an experience which we have of ourselves through the study of the history of philosophy, insofar as we transcend the merely temporal dimension by reconsidering the thoughts of the past. By participating in tradition, we address the same ‘eternal’ subject-matter as past philosophers did.

The study of the history of philosophy is not simply acquisition of historical knowledge for the sake of scholarship. On the contrary, motivated by a search for knowledge, the study is an existential engagement that provides historical self-knowledge. In Hegel’s words: ‘The ‘self-aware reason’ that characterises modern man:

¹¹ Husserl expresses a similar historical self-experience in *Krisis* where he assigns a certain vocation to the philosopher: He ought to work as a “Funktionär der Menschheit” by raising himself to historical awareness. It belongs to philosophical method to undertake an intellectual historical reflection back to the origin of the rationality of European humanity in order to form a concept of this rationality, so that we – the reflecting subjects – can formulate a clear notion of rational humanity (*Vernunftmenschheit*) and make it an aim for our striving for knowledge, cf. Husserl (1962) 13; 15

ist nicht unmittelbar entstanden und nur aus dem Boden der Gegenwart gewachsen, sondern es ist dies wesentlich in ihm, eine Erbschaft und näher das Resultat der Arbeit aller vorhergegangenen Generationen des Menschengeschlechts zu sein. (Hegel (1971a) 21).

One discovers that the past is not simply not existing. This is because, on the one side as ‘self-aware reason’ we are the result of a *historical* development that contains the work of philosophical spirit across time. On the other side, the philosophers of the past are *our contemporaries*, we are joined with them by considering one and the same philosophical notion which develops through and unifies all epochs in the history of philosophy. For example, reading a dialogue by Plato I become present in the timeless thought of the subject-matter by accomplishing the reasoning conducted by Socrates too when he unfolded his argument. The historical distance sinks below the limit of my awareness when I join the universal reasoning. But historicity is also experienced when dealing with the subject-matter we realise that Plato’s conceptual framework is inadequate when viewed from the perspective of our more elaborate, modern philosophy. The historical distance thus appears on the systematic level as the difference between more and less adequate frameworks of the past and theories formed in present philosophy. One could venture to say: we belong to the past; it is the history of our genesis as intellectual beings. But the past belongs to us too; it is at play in the vivid reasoning in the constantly present philosophical activity. Or in Hegel’s words:

Was wir sind, sind wir zugleich geschichtlich, oder genauer: wie in dem, was in dieser region des Denkens (sich findet), das Vergangene nur die eine Seite ist, so ist in dem, was wir sind, das gemeinschaftliche Unvergängliche unzertrennt mit dem, daß wir geschichtlich sind, verknüpft. (ibid. 21).

7. *Two concepts of historicity: The origin of philosophy and the emergence of the modern age*

In the preceding account I have treated the notion of historicity with reference to the internal chronological coherence between philosophical systems showing how the development of philosophy can be considered a unitary enterprise throughout its history. From this notion I have also extracted some methodological implications for doing philosophy with historical awareness. Below a treatment is given of Hegel’s specific application of the concept of historicity

on two events of substantial significance for the history of philosophy. I suggest there is a conflict in Hegel's theory: Whereas the idea of development in the Aristotelian sense that Hegel subscribes to, i.e. the idea of a change from potentiality (*Ansichsein*) to actuality (*Fürsichsein*), implies that philosophy develops through history according to own internal criteria in problems and method (reasoning), Hegel also applies 'historicity' to denote an *external* influence on the development. The two main epochs, 'die Griechische Philosophie' and 'die Germanische Philosophie', emerge as a consequence of two distinct epoch-making events *outside* the domain of philosophy (ibid. 131)¹².

Hegel applied the term *Geschichtlichkeit* for the first time to explain the origin of philosophy in ancient Greece (ibid. 175). He considered the political independence which the Greek people had won through struggle, i.e. the experience of themselves as a free people on own soil, to be the foundation of the freedom of thought. About the relation between political conditions and the origin of philosophy Hegel says:

... zum Hervortreten der Philosophie gehört Bewußtsein der Freiheit, so muss dem Volke, wo Philosophie beginnt, dies Prinzip zugrundeliegen; nach der praktischen Seite hängt damit zusammen, daß wirkliche Freiheit, politische Freiheit aufblühe. (ibid. 116).

The idea of political freedom as a condition of the emancipation from mythological ideas is thus a particular ancient Greek phenomenon. As is well known, the origin of philosophy in Greece had socio-economic conditions, not just in the sense that certain privileges provided leisure time for the free citizens to devote time to theoretical reflection: After the Persian wars the political autonomy of the Athenian people also became the spiritual emancipation from the authority of religious ideas, mythology (ibid. 115-117; Johansen (1994) 13, 113). The inner life of contemplation (*bios theoretikos*) is an occupation which

¹² Actually, according to Hegel's theory the history of philosophy consists of three periods, but the second, the Middle Ages, does not constitute an independent period. It is rather, according to Hegel, a preparation for the third, the Modern Age. Medieval philosophy presupposed Christianity which brought with it the seeds of a significant change in the European spirit and thus also in philosophy. In the Middle Ages thought was occupied by contemplating this new spiritual substance of Christianity "bis er (der Gedanke, pw) wieder sich als freien Grund und Quelle der Wahrheit erkennt" (ibid. 131). This means that only from the break-through of the Modern Age has philosophy regained its previous freedom. And forming the modern world it brings the Christian truth with it into its own fields of research. This changes the foundations of philosophy significantly. More about that below.

only recognises and follows the authority of reason. 'Historicity' refers to the internal connection which the Greek drew between philosophical activity and the remembrance of their freedom on own soil, their domestic life:

in dieser existierenden Heimatlichkeit selbst (...) in diesem Geiste des vorgestellten Beisichselbstseins in seiner physikalischen, bürgerlichen, rechtlichen, sittlichen, politischen Existenz, in diesem Character der freien, schönen Geschichtlichkeit (...) liegt auch der Keim der denkenden Freiheit und so der Character, daß bei ihnen die Philosophie entstanden ist. (ibid. 175).

Though well aware that ancient Greece is an epoch of the past Hegel still emphasized the philosophical awakening of the Greeks as a metaphor for the idea of self-aware, philosophical reason: To do philosophy is exactly to be at home in oneself; it is the independent and free engagement of thought with itself: "Wie die Griechen bei sich zu Hause, so ist die Philosophie eben dies: bei sich zu Hause sein, heimatlich bei sich" (ibid.). - And one could add: accordingly, the historian recognises that the decline of philosophy in late Antiquity is connected with general scepticism. Because the city state had lost its political autonomy in the Hellenist age the possibilities of philosophy had been reduced considerably¹³. But it is Hegel's point that once originated in the Athenian people philosophy continued to live forth in history and became a common property of humanity. To us who belong to a much later epoch homeliness in relation to philosophical activity means that thought is at home in its own sphere. It is *self-aware* reasoning.

The second time Hegel applies the concept of historicity is in relation to Christianity. The emergence of the Modern Age, the second great epoch in philosophy, is related to a religious event. Revelation marked a radical change in the self-understanding of man. But not until the Protestant Reformation did

¹³ For example, the highest principle in Stoic philosophy is *abstract* freedom: The loss of 'ethical life' (*Sittlichkeit*) in the previously autonomous city state forced the individual back into his own mind in order to preserve at least his personal integrity on the ground of own ethical principles. The particular elements in the 'ethical life' of the city state had disappeared (Hegel (1971b) 293-294). Roman Stoicism was based on the experience of an outer dead world, a state of despair which forced the philosopher to withdraw into the inner life of his own thoughts. The connection in late Antiquity between outer political conditions and the reduction of the possibility of philosophy is expressed by Hegel thus: "Das Denken ist abstrakt bei sich als totes Erstarren und passiv nach aussen" (ibid. 402). A similar refuge to the inner life of the mind was also prevalent in the Epicurean philosophy. However, Epicureanism based its wisdom on sensation and man's sensual nature.

this substantial significance of Christianity become manifest. Only in Luther's renunciation of the authority of the church was Christianity expounded as the messenger of the "free spirit" that founded the Modern Age (Hegel (1970d) 496-497). "Im modernen Prinzip wird so das Subjekt für sich frei, der Mensch als Mensch frei" (ibid. 127). According to Hegel's philosophical framework the appearance of God in the shape of man was an objective, historical event whose idea had radical consequences for the self-understanding of the individual who appropriated it. The incarnation, God's descent to man, raised man to a knowledge of his higher dignity. Whereas to the Greeks the object of philosophy was conceived of as the notion of the cosmic order, in the Modern Age philosophical reason is considered that which distinguishes consciousness as *spirit* (ibid. 123-124). This means: modern consciousness is based on the conviction that thought *as* thought contains the divine principle. Due to its divinity this principle is the basis of human freedom because it expresses itself in man's experience of himself as substantially different from and independent of nature. The incarnation of God thus initiated the historical development of modern self-consciousness. This knowledge which the Greeks according to Hegel did not have, implied furthermore that the individual gradually came to understand himself as subject, as carrier of freedom.

The new knowledge spread to become the general conviction that freedom should constitute the basis of an active shaping of history towards more freedom. In Hegel's word, modern self-knowledge consisted in the Christian idea "den Begriff der wahrhaften Freiheit nicht nur zur religiösen Substanz zu haben, sondern auch in der Welt aus dem subjektiven Selbstbewußtsein frei zu produzieren" (Hegel (1970d) 413). This means that Christianity marked the opposite movement compared to the Neoplatonic ideal of knowledge as a spiritual ascent and identification with the divine, in which ancient idealism reached its climax (Hegel (1971a) 126-127). By contrast, historicity in the modern sense meant, "das Christus ein wirklicher, dieser Mensch gewesen (ist), womit der Geist eben in dieser Geschichte expliziert sei, als innige Vereinigung von Idee und geschichtlicher Gestalt" (Renthe-Fink (1974) 405). Transformed into philosophical form, the epoch-making religious event had the substantial consequence that for the first time in history the individual began to understand his

freedom and eternal dignity (Hegel (1970b) 302), and that this truth, revealed to him, is meant to be realised in the world. The fact that the individual thus became subject, autonomous, was expressed as the peculiar self-consciousness of modern man. On the connection between external religious event, philosophical principle and the emergence of the Modern Age Hegel declares:

Es ist ein großer Eigensinn, der dem Menschen Ehre macht, nichts in der Gesinnung anerkennen zu wollen, was nicht durch den Gedanken gerechtfertigt ist, - und dieser Eigensinn ist das Characteristische der neueren Zeit, ohnehin das eigentümliche Prinzip des Protestantismus. (Hegel (1970c) 27).

It is not quite clear whether Hegel also ascribes to Christianity the honour of the turn to the subject which characterises the epistemological foundationalism emerging in early modern philosophy. The explicit demand that science must be based on self-evident principles is in Descartes connected with the notion of the subject. The idea “*I think*” as principle was absent in Greek philosophy. This novelty expressed the new knowledge of the actuality of the indubitable, inner reality of the I as subject. It is implied by this theory that the mental as a self-contained sphere is divided from the external world. As a substance it exists independently of the world, though not of God who is its formal cause. But regardless of foundationalism and the historical roots of idea of the subject, there is a coincidence between the origin of modern epistemology and the Christian impact on the practical philosophy which began to develop from the beginning of the modern age: The new idea of freedom became the basis of the new leading, classic theories of natural law and political contract theories as well as of the later moral philosophy of Kant.

8. The continuity in the history of philosophy and the Modern Age as a break.

Hegel’s view of the relation between philosophy and religion attracts interest, partly because the impact of Christianity on philosophy seems to imply a break with the otherwise continuous development of philosophy, partly because the principles of individual freedom and human dignity do not spring from reason itself, but originated in an external historical event. More precisely, the question is whether the Christian revelation had simply been the necessary input for the development of the modern world. As mentioned, in Hegel’s view religion and

philosophy share the same object – God, the absolute or the Notion – but they differ as regards the form in which it is approached in the two fields (Hegel (1971a) 81-82). The Christian idea of the appearance of the eternal in finite human shape corresponds to philosophy striving to bring about the identification of the divine with man by appropriating the truth through rational thinking. Faith must be transformed into knowledge in order to complete the process. Consequently, the historical movement conceived of as the development of the knowledge of truth in history should be comprehended as the mediation of the eternal with the finite consciousness. Hegel considers the progress in the knowledge of freedom and human dignity in the form of the Reformation and the French Revolution as testimonies that this mediation has taken place (Hegel (1970d) 539-540); (1969) 88). The Christian paradox is not incomprehensible, it imposes a task on the philosopher to mediate the eternal with the finite by virtue of dialectical thought. The history of modern philosophy is the decisive demonstration of the historicity of this truth.

It is up to theological research to decide on Hegel's claim that the history of philosophy will do as a proof of the reconciliation of the world with the divine being (Hegel (1971a) 127). But the significance Hegel ascribes to philosophy in this respect raises the problem how the history of philosophy can be considered a process that evolves due to internal conditions of reason when – at least partly - it is driven by external influence. As demonstrated, it was the political consequences of a historical event which lay the foundation of philosophy in ancient Greece. And furthermore, basic principles of modern reasoning in at least the moral and political philosophy of the Modern Age cannot be explained without reference to the Christian revelation. This relation of philosophy to external historical events needs a clarification through Hegel's notion of revelation. To Hegel revelation means an essential truth about man which cannot be reached by philosophical reasoning alone. But even so, transformed into philosophical form Revelation as a historical fact has achieved the status of an a priori knowledge which functions as the foundation of practical philosophical reasoning. Revelation is not just the transcendent object of religious faith. Correctly considered it is a knowledge which had profound significance for man's view of himself and his existence. Revelation in general means an

immediate appearance of truth (ibid. 92). In pre-Christian religions it was given as natural phenomena, e.g. the burning bush, but finally it has appeared in the 'word', *logos*. This is the complete revelation since a truth about man, a spiritual truth, only finds its complete form in linguistic form, i.e. when spirit communicates with spirit.

It is significant for the communication of the truth through revelation that by the thoughtful appropriation of the Word – logos - the individual does not just know of God. He also *reflects himself* in the message of Christ. The Word provides man with a new and deeper self-knowledge in accordance with the higher origin of Christ. This identification with the divine being¹⁴ is the purpose of the revelation and it establishes the foundation of the reconciliation of the eternal with the finite being. The individual – 'subjective spirit' – is then called upon to accomplish the reconciliation by shaping a secular world on the basis of the truth revealed to the world. To be specific, it is in the spirit of revelation that humanity should liberate itself from all external worldly authority, including the power of the church, and shape a new world – the sphere of 'objective spirit' – from the philosophical reason which is renewed by revelation. Man must actualise his freedom and dignity in accordance with his essence thus known. - It is a difficult but decisive point in Hegel that Christianity does not lead to submission and humility. On the contrary, the self-reflection of the individual in the God-man is a knowledge which liberates the mind from suppressive authorities by providing new ideas for modern practical philosophy. Hegel states this complex conception clearly in the following sentence:

Wenn in der Religion als solcher der Mensch das Verhältnis zum absoluten Geiste als sein Wesen weiß, so hat er weiterhin den göttlichen Geist auch als in die Sphäre der weltlichen Existenz tretend gegenwärtig, als die Substanz des States, der Familie usw. (Hegel (1970b) 302).

Thus, man is known as essentially infinite, free, and autonomous. The establishing of the individual as *subject* which follows from this process has far-reaching consequences. It implies that man must shape his freedom in the world through political institutions in which he can educate and reflect himself, his

¹⁴ Hegel speaks about the unity of man and God. He remarks that it belongs to the concept of 'God's son' that man, the individual, is already contained in God; hence the possibility of the identification, cf. Hegel (1970d) 392)

freedom and dignity (Hegel (1791a 127)). From the perspective of modern philosophy, it is not difficult to see the effect which the Christian principles, freedom and dignity, have had on the shaping of the foundational principles of practical philosophy. And the change it brought about is exemplary for Hegel's idea of the historicity of truth.

The break with which the modern age commences confronts Hegel with the question of how to substantiate the claim that systematic philosophy and its history form a unity. One may expect that the entry of the idea of freedom on the scene of philosophy did not just initiate a manifold of new philosophical beginnings. It also brought an unruliness with it which threatened the idea of continuity and development. The rest of this paper is dedicated to the discussion of this problem. In an attempt to save the continuity Hegel draws implicitly on the dialectic inherent in the metaphysical object of philosophy. As mentioned earlier, he names the ultimate object of philosophy God, the absolute idea or the Notion. As the quintessence and the principle of *all* beings this object must be absolute. Furthermore, conceived as an abstract idea as the absolute was in the first scattered and vague conceptions in pre-Socratic philosophy it had the character of universal being, purely and simply. It was abstract, without specific content. But the object of philosophy conceived of as the universal being is not truly *absolute* until it exists both as an idea and as reality. To be precise: it only completes itself as absolute if it can be shown that the outer reality, the world, is not a limit but rather the condition of its reality. Consequently, it follows from the concept of the absolute that it confirms its all comprehensive reality as an active principle in the world by mediating the universal with the particular. As eternal the principle must specify by unfolding in the medium of time. It must leave off its originally abstract character, go down into the finite world, only in order to rise again in the process whose purpose is the realisation of the idea. In other word: it must make history.

It follows from Hegel's theory that a kind of freedom is at play in the manifold of the philosophical systems. It shows in the independence which the philosopher achieves when he thinks *for himself*. Each philosophical system is a free product of an individual intellect. But given the autonomy of the individual as subject, the possibility arises that a manifold of systems can develop into

mutually conflicting systems and movements based on more or less arbitrary assumptions and agendas. This was the situation in the philosophy after Hegel. In the light of the loss of unity which philosophy experienced after Hegel, his confidence in a unitary development of its history does not seem quite convincing. Hegel substantiated his idea of a unitary philosophy in the manifold of its expressions by applying the principle of organic development in nature to his idea of history. In historical retrospect he considered the history of philosophy one of several manifestations of what he calls:

eine Idee im Ganzen und in allen ihren Gliedern, wie im einem lebendigen Individuum *ein* Leben, *ein* Puls durch alle Glieder schlägt. Alle in ihr hervortretenden Teilen und die Systematisation derselben geht aus der einen Idee hervor; alle diese Besonderheiten sind nur Spiegel und Abbilder dieser einen Lebendigkeit (...) (ibid. 47).

More precisely, the variety of philosophical systems, often even mutually irreconcilable, are necessary for the manifestation of absolute truth in the minds of human beings. As stated previously, metaphysical truth is not a distant and inaccessible object of knowledge. It appears, lives and confirms its reality in the mind of the individuals who provide it with a certain shape and a specific epochal character.

Hegel's confidence that reason governs history needs further justification. In fact, it is a weakness that he seems to fasten only on one aspect of the thought, namely that reason unites the individual with the universal reason which binds the variety of philosophical systems together over time. He does not ascribe sufficient significance to the consequences of the simple fact that to think is to think *for oneself*. When reason becomes aware of itself it loosens the individual subject from tradition and centers it in itself. Self-consciousness implies detachment. I suggest that Hegel's idea that philosophical work reflects and preserves its whole history together with his idea of 'self-conscious reason' resulting from the laborious work of the predecessors should therefore rather be considered as *a call* on the philosopher to show historical awareness than be taken as a convincing argument for the necessary historical coherence in history. It is a false alternative either to accept the 'thoughtful consideration' and conceive oneself a participant in the "holy chain" of history (ibid. 21) or to deny truth simply and purely like Pilatus did vis-à-vis Jesus (ibid. 32-33). The denial

of tradition in favour of an insistence on thinking for oneself is not necessarily an expression of “subjective vanity” as Hegel thought it was. On the contrary, pluralism is a real possibility even though the integration of tradition in systematic philosophy can only qualify the conceptual content in philosophical reasoning. Our contemporary age which displays a diversified landscape consisting of mutually more or less independent traditions and movements within philosophy can easily live up to the demand of integrating tradition without displaying a unified philosophy.

It may seem too easy to criticize Hegel’s idea of a unitary history of philosophy in the light of a 20th century characterised by a diversity of movements and single trendsetting philosophers. But also, an immanent criticism might be directed against Hegel when he applied his metaphysics of organicism on historical matters (ibid. 30-40). It is reasonable to doubt that the necessity of natural organic development pertains to the historical process as well. Certainly, both nature and history share the essential property of life. But history is furthermore distinguished by freedom. It can give rise to wonder why Hegel did not draw a clear distinction between the realms of nature and of spirit here when he did elsewhere by emphasizing the distinction of the human world as the sphere of freedom. History – the living developing world of mankind – is an expression of *Geist* and thereby based on the free will (Hegel (1970c) 46-48). By contrast, necessity governs the natural world.

However, according to Hegel freedom is not in conflict with necessity. The course of the world history is governed by the *law* of the realisation of freedom. And as a subdivision philosophy keeps its unity in its historical change by virtue of the temporal development of man’s cognition of the absolute. Hegel’s presentation of the history of philosophy thus becomes a variant of the theodicé by virtue of which he elsewhere defends his teleological view of the world history (Hegel (1975d) 35, 540). Freedom does not amount to anarchy and irrationality. Freedom in philosophical thinking too is necessary for the universal truth to become concrete, living and actual in the mind of individuals. Truth descends to man by becoming the living presence of the driving force in the course of history. Just like the world history is a slaughter (ibid. 540) on which the happiness of individuals and people are sacrificed for the sake of

progression in the awareness of freedom, so, strictly speaking, Hegel considers the history of philosophy the history of philosophical mistakes when as isolated systems they make claim to contain absolute truth. But in historical retrospect they can be considered relative truths which constitute moments in the progress of philosophy's overall striving to reach and express an adequate notion of the absolute. - Yet this presupposes that the life of philosophy is essentially similar to an organism, whose parts all unify to form one and the same individual organism which actualises itself through these same parts. However, it could be objected that a crucial difference pertains between on the one side an organism and its parts and on the other side the eternal truth and its single dedicated practitioners.

9. Historicity and teleology. The beginning and the end.

Hegel's teleological-metaphysical historiography implies that the history of philosophy metaphorically spoken forms a circle. Its development is complete when the end unites with the beginning and marks the actualisation of a potentiality. Regardless of the unanswered question of how philosophy will develop in the future, it follows from this theory that all present philosophy presupposes the tradition. To do genuine philosophy thus demands accounting for parts of the history of philosophy which are relevant to the subject matter. Hegel demonstrated historical awareness in his political philosophy by considering the emergence of the notion of universal freedom in history not just a break with tradition but a necessity for the development of absolute knowledge. His political philosophy is based on the idea that the modern world is characterised by a divide (*Entzweiung*)¹⁵, a separation of the individual from the community as a necessary step towards more freedom and individualism. As is well known, Hegel considered it a substantial task for practical philosophy to form a theory that unified individual freedom with the life in the community (Hegel (1970e) 20-

¹⁵ In his early writings Hegel explained the origin of his contemporary philosophy from the divide that characterised his age. The loss of the 'power of social coherence' in the modern world gave rise to a need for a philosophy capable of reconciling the oppositions of for example the individual and society, cf. Hegel (1970e) 21-22 ff.). In his *Philosophy of Right* he calls civil society the *divide in ethical life*. Nevertheless, civil society is relatively justified as an integrate sphere of the state. The latter administers the interests of both individuals and the community, cf. Hegel (1970c) 87, § 33).

22). What was needed was a change of the traditional concept of freedom as independence to mean *self-realisation* in communion with others. The unification of individuals implied an idea of society where the others are not limits but positive conditions of the fulfilment of one's own freedom. Thus, negative freedom must be weighed against a positive aspect¹⁶. Hegel's modification of the concept of freedom testifies of the influence which the ethical spirit of Greek philosophy had on his philosophy. The integration of the ancient notion of cosmic order as a positive, unifying aspect was supposed to be the constructive element in Hegel's diagnosis of his own age which he considered threatened by social atomisation. This critical theory thus presupposed a historical perspective in which the present age was seen in the light of its development from the ancient Greek spirit. The divide in modern ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) was a break with tradition which was justified because it brought about the emancipation which distinguishes the modern world.

The application of ancient Greek political spirit to solve the problem of the divide in the modern world is a double reflection. It forms a circle where the end has united with the beginning once the reunification is complete. In methodical respect the dialectic of the unity-in-the-divide ascribes to the philosopher the task of addressing a philosophical problem with historical awareness and of integrating the past in his present attempt to solve the problem. Having the ancient Greek spirit in view and on the basis of the principle that a present philosophy must be a mirror of the whole history of philosophy, Hegel laid the foundation of his well-known criticism of the classical, liberal concept of negative freedom. He attempted to reestablish the ancient notion of cosmic order on the conditions of the present age. - However, it is worth noticing that Hegel formed his theory of 'ethical life' (*Sittlichkeit*) by virtue of an original analysis of the modern civil society. Apart from the dividing tendencies of the free market, modern society must show inherent socially unifying features as well. In view of the drawbacks of modern individualism and with the ancient Greek city state as a model, Hegel's theory of the modern state is built on an examination of elements of freedom and community in the civil society of his age.

¹⁶ In the introduction to his *Philosophy of Right* Hegel develops his concept of freedom as a unity of a negative and a positive aspect.

Both elements are unified to form the dialectical moments in his notion of the “actuality of freedom” as self-realisation. It is not wide off the mark to say that the circular movement between history and the present age which Hegel undertakes to complete in order to deal with practical philosophy, is unfolded as an attempt to renew Aristotle’s notion of the good life in the community as the ultimate purpose of man’s endeavour, combined with Kant’s doctrine of the autonomy of reason¹⁷.

Regardless of the productive potential in Hegel’s metaphysical notion of the history of philosophy and his insistence on historical awareness, given the significance of the two previously described external influences the question of the internal development in philosophy ought still to be addressed. As we have seen, historicity seems to mean *markings* in the continuous stream of historical change due to the driving force inherent in the philosophical reason itself. Hegel’s history of philosophy belongs to the category of problem-oriented presentations which explains the development of philosophy from a core of relatively stable questions and arguments¹⁸. However, it is a problem that Hegel himself stresses the dependence of the new beginnings on an external geo-political and on a spiritual (religious) event. The Christian Revelation in particular is explicitly a radical transcendent intervention which brings with it a change in philosophical reasoning as such, at least at the foundation of practical philosophy.

It can hardly be denied that Hegel’s view of the radical influence of a religious event does have relativistic consequences for the relation between the history of philosophy and the external historical conditions. According to Hegel, God’s appearance in history was an *objective*, epoch-making event which influenced the individual as *subjectivity*. Man’s renewed self-knowledge as a subject which arose from the personal appropriation of the doctrine of revelation, namely the knowledge of the idea of man’s infinite freedom and dignity, was meant to emancipate mankind from the authority of theology. It exposed the new reality of modern institutions which should be based on practical reason renewed by the spirit of Christianity. From a modern perspective, the knowledge of this significant change implied the new epistemic condition that

¹⁷ Cf. Wood (1993) 21 ff.

¹⁸ Cf. Passmore (1967) on the historiography of philosophy, especially his categorisation of Hegel’s work.

modern man can no longer approach truth in a 'naïve' objectivistic way like the ancient Greeks did. Man, as cognising subject does not unite with the highest, divine being through abstract thinking alone. An attempt to do so by imitating the Neoplatonic realisation of bliss by merging with the divine by virtue of the intellect would probably have the abstract character which the divine has for the subject, who simply contemplates the divine principle in thought. It becomes nothing more than thought. It is more likely that an authentic approach to the truth in the modern world consists in the intellectual *and* personal acquisition of the truth in the ethical life in institutions which are just and based on the notion of man's freedom and dignity. Thus, in a further historical view, the reconciliation of the secular world with the new spirit (Hegel (1971a) 127) through the realisation of freedom would be the triumph of the idea in history, the confirmation of its absolute power. Not as an ascent to the absolute, rather only as the unification of the eternal being with the finite world can what the Greeks addressed as universal 'being' be known in its concrete shape, i.e. as the truly absolute.

It is obvious to ascribe the conviction to Hegel that the truth of philosophy can only be known through the history of philosophy by means of Christianity. It is precisely the incarnation that takes away the abstract, intellectualistic character from the idea of the universal being in Greek philosophy. Through the incarnation the divine being appears in the historical movement and manifests as the progress in the awareness of freedom and in appropriate innovations of political institutions. At the same time, it is the historical movement which according to Hegel's historiography of philosophy confirms the absolute character of the universal being which the Greeks only could approach intellectually. However, as argued I think this questions Hegel's theory of the history of philosophy as an immanent philosophical development. One could defend Hegel by referring to the often cited statement that the development of the awareness of freedom happens *in phases*: "Im Orient ist nur ein einziger Frei (der Despot), in Griechenland sind Einige frei, im germanischen Leben gilt der Satz, es sind Alle frei, d.h. der Mensch als Mensch ist frei" (ibid. 122). Furthermore, *historicity*, which was first applied to denote the birth of philosophy in ancient Greece refers, as it were, to the political freedom won through struggle.

It constituted the basis of the freedom of thought, self-aware thinking. Different cultural spheres demonstrate different degrees of freedom.

However, the defence does not seem to hold. This is because elsewhere Hegel points to an *essential* difference between the idea of freedom in different cultural spheres. The adequate and true notion of freedom is only connected with the Christian spirit in the historical fact that man becomes free as man (ibid. 127) and not just by means of citizenship, social status or ethnic origin (Hegel (1970b) 301-302) as in other cultures, including the ancient Greek city states. It follows that Hegel stuck to the idea of an external influence. The concept of freedom of the Modern Ages differs radically from the ideas of freedom in other cultures. In the Orient, for example, where only the monarch enjoyed political freedom, only negative freedom of the mind existed in general. Hegel even warned against cultivating the tendency inherent in the Indian, negative freedom to degenerate into political fanaticism. The rejection of all physical institutions can deteriorate into annihilation of the established societal order (Hegel (1970c) 50, § 5A).

The modern notion of true freedom is essentially positive; it is active and contains a potential for political change. It consists in a confirmation of the infinite dignity of every single human being and the right to realize one's freedom in the community. Freedom is no inner, passive state of distance to the external world. On the contrary, it is an outwardly directed movement, a shaping of a society in which the individual can realize itself: become *for-it-self* what it is *in-itself* (Hegel (1970b) § 482A). Hegel calls the totality of political institutions "das Reich der verwirklichten Freiheit" (Hegel (1970c) 46 § 4). The notion of freedom in the modern world weighs both the negative and the positive, active aspect; together they form the conception of self-realisation in a world based on freedom. The freedom of the modern world is thus historically unique.

10. Hegel and radical historicity.

Hegel's claim of historicity with regard to historical events that changed epistemic conditions was not inconsistent with the idea of the universal validity of philosophical reason. But the historicity of metaphysical truth implied a productive new departure for modernity, according to which truth could no longer

be known adequately on the conditions of ancient Greek intellectuality. More precisely, from the perspective of the Modern Age we know that the highest object of philosophical knowledge, the absolute idea, cannot be grasped adequately as eternal, immutable being. It is implied by the dialectical structure of the development of the absolute in the historical process that it must unfold as self-aware reason in the individual person. The philosopher himself as individual subject is involved in the theoretical self-completion of the absolute which shows gradually in the series of systems that constitute the history of philosophy. It is the divinity which must renounce its own transcendent status by descending to the temporal sphere in the incarnation and next complete the historical process by conveying the principle of freedom to the world.

Historicity in the sense which it received later in Heidegger and Gadamer is devoid of the metaphysical foundation and teleology which it had in Hegel. But this refutation was not new. Already the criticism of Hegel in the late 19th century rejected Hegel's teleological idea of history. The idea was this: if all human phenomena must be considered on the basis of their historical context, this must also pertain to man as a subject of cognition. As a consequence, knowledge is historically conditioned. If cognition thus means "die geschichtliche Seinsweise des menschlichen Geistes" (Renthe-Fink (1974) 405), the historiography of philosophy must include the historian's reflection of himself as a "geschichtlich wissendes existierendes" (ibid.). This means that Hegel's idea of philosophical cognition is relativised to what its historical conditions permits it to know. Instead of 'thoughtful consideration' (*denkende Vernunft*) historical facticity becomes the fundamental epistemic condition. This radical, epistemological shift implies limitations, but also new possibilities¹⁹ explored in the philosophical hermeneutics and its tradition.

By contrast, Hegel did not question the universality of philosophical reason. But even on Hegel's own premises it must be evident that the external influence on philosophy which distinguished the Modern Age from Antiquity had substantial implications, at least for the foundation of practical philosophy. The 'free spirit' in which the modern world was proclaimed did not base moral

¹⁹ Dilthey who was the first to launch a theory of historicity reduced the history of philosophy to a typology of world views that express the personality of their authors and their historical experiences.

and political philosophy on a cosmological or theological order but on the essential freedom of man. As we have seen, in modern philosophy reason works from other principles than in Antiquity. - However, it is possible to point at a problem, probably unnoticed by Hegel himself. It appears in his attempts to integrate the history of philosophy in his own philosophy: Strongly aware of the historicity of philosophy, Hegel considered the modern age an integrated phase in the whole history of philosophy. As shown above, in this historical perspective the age is characterised by a 'divide' (*Entzweiung*) which calls for a unifying countermeasure inspired by the ancient Greek notion of community. Nevertheless, Hegel construed his theory of community on the basis of the principles of the modern world itself, namely on the idea of freedom in *modern* ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*). Justice in modern age differs significantly from Plato's cosmological notion. In Hegel's political philosophy which is based on the idea of the realisation of freedom there is not much left of the spirit of the Athenian state. The primary task which Hegel undertook to solve in his political philosophy was to investigate the specifically modern notion of ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) in the modern state which has the civil society (the free market) as a relatively independent sphere. It was crucial for him to demonstrate that modern civil society was not just a sphere of divide but also contained socially unifying relations. Thus, in Hegel's political philosophy modern society turned out to be not a total break with but rather a completion of the idea of a comprehensive community since it integrates freedom as a principle. Hegel's idea of *Sittlichkeit* thus differs significantly from the ethics of the ancient Greek city state which had no place for the idea of universal individual freedom²⁰.

With Hegel's appropriation of the idea of the ancient Greek community in view, it is obvious that the change which the notion of a past age must undergo through the interpretation from the perspective of a later age on the historical conditions of the later age, happens on a hermeneutic condition that follows from the historicity of the scholar. With this epistemic limitation in mind Hegel says that the individual cannot 'transcend' its own world, the horizon of its thinking, just as the individual cannot jump over its time (Hegel

²⁰ In his comparison of the modern state with the ancient Greek city state he considered Plato's *Republic* an exemplary expression of Greek 'ethical life' (*Sittlichkeit*). See the "Preface" of the *Philosophy of Right*.

(1970c) 26). This statement would be a confession to the philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer. However, Hegel weighed the historical relativity of the subject against the relation which the subject has to the absolute truth by means of reason. Thus, it must be kept in mind that Hegel's concept of historicity does not pertain to the 'thoughtful consideration' which philosophy performs. Hegel never questioned the universal validity of reason. 'Historicity' here refers to the idea of freedom and its objective manifestation in time as a history-making event. This is inconsistent with philosophical hermeneutics, i.e. with Gadamer's existential-ontological foundation of historicity, since the latter implies a radical historicity which claims substantial new conditions for philosophical thought.

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