

# The End of History and Hegel's Conception of Modernity

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## Resumen

Este artículo ofrece una interpretación de la historia universal según la cual el fin de la historia es la concepción filosófica de la modernidad y no el concepto de la historia total incluyendo el futuro. Por esta razón, el concepto del fin de la historia se debe liberar de concepciones demasiado naturales del tiempo y de los procesos históricos. La historia universal es la historia de los estados soberanos que llega a su fin cuando la filosofía comprende la pluralidad misma de los estados como el medio en donde la libertad racional se puede realizar a sí misma. Este es un final espiritual que se ha liberado de una cultura o historia particular.

## Abstract

This article offers an interpretation of Hegel's philosophy of world-history in which the end of history is conceived of as the philosophical conception of modernity, not as a concept of total history including the future. Therefore, the concept of the end of history must be freed from too natural conceptions of time and historical processes. World-history is the history of sovereign states that comes to its end when philosophy can grasp the actual plurality of states as the medium in which rational freedom can realise itself. This is a spiritual closure that freed itself from a particular culture or history.

History, for Hegel, is the process during which spirit realises itself. From a modern perspective on the science of history, Hegel's ambitious attempt to develop a total concept of world-history seems to be almost unbelievable arrogance. I doubt if this reproof of Hegel's concept of history is based on an adequate understanding of his undertaking. Against the idea that Hegel's philosophy of history aimed to determine the total, and, therefore, also the future course of history, one can emphasise that, for Hegel, history is about the past. History has only to do with what has been or is, with events and facts (*VPG* p. 20).<sup>1</sup> Hegel's comment that philosophy is always interested in the present, even when it is dealing with the past, does not change this understanding of 'history' (*VPG* pp. 105, 106). It is only through knowledge of the real course of history that philosophy can arrive at a concrete concept of how reason can realise its ends. Thus 'the end of history' must be taken as a retrospective concept and read in connection with a philosophical concept of the past.

It can, I think, be said that, for Hegel, every episode and period of history has its own end or aim in itself, notwithstanding the fact that the present can conceive the past as the necessary path and a moment of its own development.

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<sup>1</sup>. 'VPG' is an abbreviation of: G. W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, Hegels Werke in 20 Bänden, Frankfurt 1971 (Suhrkamp), Bd.12.

Every historical period is and was to some degree present to itself and cannot adequately be considered as a mere passage towards a future end. If that is true, we can state that any philosophy which involves an adequate concept of its contemporary world *virtually grasps time* 'in its end', i.e. seen from its finishing post in history. But not every period knows what it knows in this explicit manner because the philosophical systems of past periods lack the philosophical logic in which this knowledge can become absolutely clear. I will elaborate this interpretation in the first section of this paper. According to it, Hegel's philosophy of history would not be a mere supplement of his philosophical system or an application of philosophical concepts to history as an external object, but precisely that part of the system in which it conceives itself as the *adequate* conception of the *modern* world.

The notion of the 'end of history' is an ambiguous one. Firstly, it means the ultimate goal at which rational activity is directed. As such, it could be a transcendent ideal or a merely regulative idea. That is the manner in which Kant conceives the end of history. The end of history can, secondly, be thought of as a moment or a period in time. Detached from the first meaning, the second would be a contamination of history with a pure contingent end of natural time, which would be, I believe, at least for Hegel, a paradoxical conception. The solution of this paradox is the concept of the end of history as the fulfilment of its ultimate goal in time. The life of organic beings can be thought of in this way. But this life of natural organic beings is repeated endlessly, and how could the history of the spirit end in an endless tedious repetition of the same? The concept of the end of history as a product of the spirit must involve *another* concept of time, a change of natural time into 'spiritual time'. Hegel's concept of history can be seen as the concept of the permanent execution of this change by reason itself. The end of world-history is the moment in which reason *recognises* itself in its objective products as this spiritual power over natural time. The second section of my paper goes into this relation of spiritual and natural time.

The world of modernity Hegel inhabits believes itself to be a rational world. But it believes this in a lacerated or alienated way, which drives it away into illusions, utopias, despair and scepticism. The key to understand the rationalism of the modern world, for Hegel, is not an abstract norm of rationality, but the concept of its objective reality as the end of a rational product or process. Hegel's particular philosophical concept of modernity conceives of itself as the product of reason as a historical reality. But if a historical period can understand itself in this way, it does not change the merely particular experience of itself, as an end in and for itself, into an absolute end, but discovers the concept

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<sup>2</sup>. I borrowed this expression from K.R. Meist, *Differenzen in Hegels Deutung der 'Neuesten Zeit' innerhalb seiner Konzeption der Weltgeschichte*, in: H.-C. Lucas and O.

of reality as such, as 'the presence of eternity in the temporal transition'.<sup>2</sup> Not so much the subjective-historical conviction that modernity could understand itself as the end of history, but the objective insight that the end of history as such, which was considered until then as transcendent or non-existent, can be understood as present reality, appears to be the subject of Hegel's philosophy of world-history, of his project to conceive of the absolute spirit in its historical existence. Does this mean that, for Hegel, absolute spirit and the concept of world-history coincide? I do not think so. I will try to characterise their relation in the third and the last part of this article.

### 1. THE END OF WORLD-HISTORY AS A PHILOSOPHICAL CONCEPT

In the Preface of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel states that the historical period he is living in is a period of transition.<sup>3</sup> What he had primarily in mind was that the formal concepts and ideas of contemporary science and philosophy about rationality were not adequate for a true self-understanding of the spirit of the modern world, but that they could be conceived of as the last dark moments from which, at a bound, dialectical thinking could move to absolute knowledge. Only from this standpoint of absolute knowledge could a true concept of modernity be developed. The *Phenomenology of Spirit* had to show that the Enlightenment's formal concepts of rationality and freedom, in their opposition to religious belief, were merely a last passage to the concrete dialectical concept of knowledge. The assertion that modernity could be understood in this way, as a passage and not only as a negative result of scepticism, remained to be proved in a positive concept of history. I think that Hegel's *Philosophy of History* can be considered in some way as the counterpart of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, insofar as the former intends to conceive of modernity as the positive result of the development of rational freedom in its concrete reality, rather than as a product of reason in an abstract form, as developed by the Enlightenment in the shape of the French Revolution and of liberalism.

Especially in the later versions of his *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte*, Hegel emphasises that the philosophical reflection on history is fundamentally different from other forms of historical knowledge.<sup>4</sup> History is

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Pöggeler (eds.), *Hegels Rechtsphilosophie im Zusammenhang der europäischen Verfassungsgeschichte*, Stuttgart 1986, pp. 465-501.

<sup>3</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, ed. J. Hofmeister, Hamburg (F. Meiner) 1952 p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Franz Hespe, 'Die Geschichte ist der Fortschritt im Bewusstsein der Freiheit', Zur Entwicklung von Hegels Philosophie der Geschichte, in: *Hegel-Studien Bd. 26*, Bonn 1991, pp. 177-192.

the way in which people express the spiritual principle that governs them. The spirit of a particular people is, as a finite form, subordinate to the history of the *universal* spirit, whose history is called world-history by Hegel, and whose principle is the free development of the idea of the spirit as such. Hegel's philosophy *presupposes* that the history of the world can be understood as the *self-realisation* of spirit. The idea of spirit as freedom is not only the key concept for understanding the end of modernity in itself, but also of its history. History can be conceived of not by the laws of nature, but by the way reason succeeds in expressing its own principles in objective reality. This self-expression *is* the freedom of reason, although it was not understood as such until Hegel's days. So the spiritual history of the world must be ultimately comprehensible as a rational totality.

That reason realises itself in its end as freedom is not a judgement that could be the conclusion of empirical knowledge and historical experience alone. The conviction that world-history must be understood as the work of reason is a *philosophical a priori*. In a religious mode of thinking, it is the belief that history in its entirety is a matter of divine providence. Thus, for Hegel, philosophical history means that the great events of the past and the general course of history can be understood in the light of this idea. Hegel asserts that the rationality of this presumption is given in his *Logic* and is, as such, not a matter of the philosophy of history itself. The philosophy of history can demonstrate the truth of this concept by understanding real history in its concrete development as a rational whole. But this concept of history and its relation to logic is itself a historical conception that first became clear in Hegel's philosophy. A philosophical concept of world-history can only be developed from the moment that world-history itself has reached the spiritual result that can be conceived of as its rational end. Therefore, world-history is itself a special or concrete *totality* of time; it is time that has come to its end.

World-history has come to its end as soon as a world or *plurality* of sovereign states, each of them with its own historical end, can be grasped, retrospectively, as a rational *unity* that must and can be conceived of as the product of spiritual activity. From that moment, world-history is a concept by which modern Europe can understand itself as the rational end-product of the long and laborious history of the Ancient World. Thus, Hegel's concept of world-history is the counterpart of the more abstract idea of a federation of republican states, developed by Kant in his *Zum ewigen Frieden*. This Kantian idea is a moral product of his philosophy of law, an abstract ideal to which nation-states are morally committed. In his own philosophy of law, Hegel denied that, at the level of world-history, the ultimate concept of public law could be translated into such an ideal of a republican worldstate. In his philosophy of history, Hegel seems to replace the Kantian ideal of a utopian state of eternal peace by the

free development of a plurality of sovereign constitutional European states as the key concept for understanding *actual* history as an end in itself.<sup>5</sup> But, as I hope to show in the last section of this paper, this is not the ultimate position from which philosophy conceives of history, for Hegel either.

World-history, for Hegel, is the time that begins with the rise of the Persian Empire in Mesopotamia (*VPG* pp. 215-216). The territories around the Mediterranean are the first stage of this spectacle, which later on moves its centre towards Western Europe, where world-history comes to its end: 'Eastern Asia and the land beyond the Alps are the extremities of that mobile centre around the Mediterranean Sea - beginning and end of world-history, its rise and fall.' (*VPG* p. 116). Apparently, world-history, for Hegel, is just like an individual person and a nation-state, a particular figure of spirit that realises itself in a determinate area of time-space. We can characterise this period of history as the time that was needed by the universal World-spirit for realising its end - its rational self-development in freedom - from the moment that this end can be recognised as the ruling principle of history. Therefore, world-history is a retrospective matter. It can only be conceived of as the concept of the development of world-spirit until the present, as the philosophical self-conception of the world-spirit in its process of becoming. For Hegel, the 'end of world-history' is the *present* in which the freedom of spirit has reached such a general and objective worldly shape in political forms and institutions that the *past* can be conceived of as the process and work of freedom itself.

Some authors have drawn the doubtful conclusion that, for Hegel, there would be no more history after he had thought world-history to its end. Hegel's words do indeed suggest that world-history came to its end in Hegel's time. Does the end of this history imply the possibility of another world-history, namely, one of the New World? As such, the conception of end does not say anything about the real future in the sense of determining the concrete course of the future. What we know is that, for Hegel, the future of our western world as a rational one can only be a matter of the free thinking of future generations and peoples. Could philosophy anticipate such a new path of world-history? Hegel himself does not give clear answers to these questions but remains somewhat ambivalent. An answer presupposes that we can free the notion of history from the notion of natural time and can determine more specifically the relation between time and absolute spirit.

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Hegel's criticism of Kant in G.W.F. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, §§ 333-337, Hamburg (F. Meiner) 1955, pp. 285-287.

## 2. TIME OF SPIRIT AND NATURAL TIME

By characterising history as the work, or labour, of spirit, Hegel underlines that the plurality and abundance of cultural figures and national differences are themselves a product of spiritual activity and do not stay in an external relation to spirit itself. Therefore, in history, this plurality must have a totally different meaning than the rich multitude of species and specimens in which organic nature appears to exist. At the top of its development, in the concept of life, nature falls asunder into a mass of individuals and processes ending in death, so that none of them can express themselves as an actual totality. Individuals die for the survival of the species, which seems to be their internal, conceptual, destiny.<sup>6</sup> But the species cannot exist for itself; it can express itself only in the plurality of finite individuals, in which it seems to lose its inner unity or identity.<sup>7</sup> In the *Encyclopedia* Hegel speaks of *die Ohnmacht der Natur*, the impotence of nature to maintain the severity or discipline of the concept, for which the multitude in nature means a fall into decay. In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* he speaks of *die Ohnmacht des Lebens*, the impotence of life to take together in one individual figure the beginning and the end of its process of development. Spirit, on the contrary, is able to return into itself and is thus the result of its own activity (*VPG* p. 104).

Spirit provides its reality for itself insofar as it succeeds in forming a particular individual entity that breaks the circular course of nature. This means that this individuality has the capacity to gain the victory over death in a particular spiritual way. In a certain sense, the victory over death is the *end of (natural) time*. Many religions, therefore, imagine the life of spirit as a living on after death. But the end in which spirit comes to life cannot be thought of as a moment of natural time that rolls on in an endless continuity. Spirit brings this time to an end by mastering it, by integrating it into its own being. For Hegel, this mastering of time is not a static moment or a rigid eternal present in which time and history would have come to a standstill, but is itself a process in time, now conceived of as the time of spirit.

In general, we can characterise the time of the spirit as the duration of the process whereby an individual spiritual entity forms itself in the objective, external world. It is a time that is in itself directed towards an end, a time of awakening, development, maturation, and completion of a whole, that asserts itself as an individual spiritual value in and for itself. The time of the spirit has as its end the coming to full self-consciousness of spirit, which is only possible in a world that is not alien to it and that it has to recognise as such and thus to make

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<sup>6</sup>. G.W.F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften* (1830), §§ 374-375, Hamburg (F. Meiner) 1959, pp. 308-309.

<sup>7</sup>. *Phänomenologie*, p. 220.

into its own property. The spirit needs a world for its real existence and it *needs time* for the appropriation of this world and for the realisation of itself as a free, self-conscious spirit.<sup>8</sup> The awakening and maturation of a spiritual principle, according to Hegel, is mostly a tiresome and extended process. But as soon as the principle has fully developed itself, when it has recognised itself and asserted itself as such, natural time has become in a certain sense *superfluous*. For a human being getting old is like a gradual breaking free from time: the body, which is tied to the natural time, petrifies, but the spirit delivers itself from limited interests.<sup>9</sup>

Peoples and nation-states, which also constitute spiritual totalities for themselves, endure, like individuals, a natural death when they have realised their aim and only stay to continue their existence according to custom. In that case, they conduct a life from which every interest of spirit has withdrawn, a lifeless existence of boredom and without any political interest (*VPG* p. 100). In contrast, sovereign peoples, forming a state which plays an active role in world-history, mostly die in a more dramatic and vehement way, often soon after they have reached the culmination of their flourishing. For such a people, 'the fruits of its labour do not fall into its own lap, but rather become for it a bitter draught.' The taste of it is its destruction, from which, nevertheless, a new principle can arise that will, in turn, guide world-history (*VPG* p. 104).

Not everything that happens to the spirit is part of its history proper. History is confined by the interests of the spirit in its ends. The philosophical conception of history, in particular, must be arrived at by that interest and must be able to put aside all fortuitous and unimportant circumstances. The essential characteristics of the spirit and its time, according to Hegel, are always caught in the great events with important consequences. A people does not make history until it makes itself free and organises itself as a political state. Therefore, a stateless people, which is but a nation, is not yet able to make history. The history of a people is the realisation of its own particular spiritual principle, its own '*Volkgeist*'. Such a people tells and transmits its genuine history in *prose*, which Hegel calls the language of the state (*VPG* p. 83)<sup>10</sup>. The time which precedes that period is the people's pre-history, which is remembered in myths and epic poetry. Notwithstanding the fact that India and China had already developed forms of imperial states, they are considered by Hegel as empires that properly belong to pre-history, or at any rate, not to world-history because they do not show decisive episodes of progress towards freedom (*VPG*

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<sup>8</sup>. Cf. G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen zur Geschichte der Philosophie I*, Hegels Werke in 20 Bänden, Frankfurt 1971, Bd.18, pp. 54-55, 123.

<sup>9</sup>. *Enzyklopädie*, § 396, p. 323.

<sup>10</sup>. Also *Vorlesungen zur Geschichte der Philosophie I*, pp. 108, 116-117.

pp. 136-137, 178). In these empires, the spirit is petrified into a system of rigid customs, as it is in China, or exhausts itself in a gay multitude of forms without inner consistency and rational order, as in India.

If one may draw a parallel between what Hegel says about the life of individuals and peoples on the one hand and the development of world-history on the other, Europe would sink after the full realisation of its principle into a period of obsolescence, petrification, or destruction. Such a prospect would not be a particular prediction of the future, but the conclusion of a more general conception of history. Even if this view is implied by Hegel's philosophy of history, it is not a messenger of calamity; rather, by presenting itself as the consciousness of the past culminating point, it was the chalice from which the western world would taste its own finiteness. Would there, according to this line of thinking, be no more history and development after Hegel? Or may we conceive of the future course of history - in contrast to what Hegel seems to say himself - not as a period of decay but as one of eternal youth or maturity in which freedom will realise itself in a continuously more rich and universal way, as Ernst Bloch asserted from a utopian-Marxist point of view?<sup>11</sup> I think we do not have to choose between these opposites.

Hegel's own writings do not offer clear starting-points for an answer to these questions concerning the future. He characterises Europe as the last part of the 'Ancient World'. Europe itself in its turn has three parts: the territories around the Mediterranean, which embody its youth; the heart of Europe with France, England and Germany as the most important states in respect of world-history; and finally, the north-eastern part of Europe, which, through its narrow connection with pre-historical Asia, is beginning to flourish only recently and does not yet possess stable political constitutions. How Europe would develop on at that eastern side remains unclear for Hegel. But he does not exclude the possibility of interesting developments on that side.

Next to the Ancient World, a New World is emerging on the continents of Australia and America, where big empires are forming new states (*VPG* p. 107). It is clear that Hegel connects these countries with a future history. Apparently, he sees here a total new domain for the realisation of the principle of freedom, which, in those areas, will be less burdened by the laborious historical course of its development and will probably meet totally new tasks, challenges and problems. To what extent their history will be comparable with the history known to us remains unspoken. From a political, cultural and religious point of view, Hegel does not think much of the way America had, until then, developed, as an effect of the European desire for renewing. Nevertheless, he calls it the land of the future that has yet to prove its world-historical importance, for example, in a struggle between North and South America. But as land of the

<sup>11</sup>. Ernst Bloch, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, Frankfurt 1959, p. 1055.

future, it falls outside the scope of Hegel's interest because his philosophy of history 'has to do only with the *past*, insofar as it is history, and with what is *present and eternal*, insofar as it is philosophy' (VPG p. 114).

It therefore remains unclear whether we have to speak, here, in Hegel's terms, of a new *period* of world-history (which thus would not come to its end) or whether his remarks give rise to a 'New-World-history' of which we know the point of department but not the particular principles of development. It seems sensible to me to detach Hegel's conception of the end of history and of the closing of a historical period, more than he does himself, from the organic metaphors of growing, flowering and withering. Hegel himself already gives an important pointer in this direction by his way of connecting the end of an old with the beginning of a new historical period.

### 3. ABSOLUTE SPIRIT AND PHILOSOPHY AS THE CLOSING OF HISTORY

A well-known passage in the preface of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* states that philosophy always comes too late to teach a lesson to its contemporary world: 'The owl of Minerva starts its flight only at the coming of dusk', when time has ripened and exhausted, in its flowering, its power for rejuvenation and cultural development.<sup>12</sup> Only then is philosophy able to hold up the concept of the contemporary world in its rational form like a mirror to the real world. The philosophical concept is like a mirror in which the real world can recognise itself as an intellectual realm, but it is not a prescription for making the world new and youthful. So, for Hegel, philosophy does not have a direct role in the process of renewing. Philosophy is not the stimulant that the world needs for the realisation of reason in its historical form as objective spirit.

Rather, the impetuosity by which history is made and pressed forward is found outside of philosophy. Hegel thinks, in the first place, of historical individuals, great statesmen and generals like Alexander, Caesar and Napoleon, whose passions and desires are used by the cunning of reason for the realisation of its ends behind their backs. Philosophy only plays its role when the cunning of reason has reached its end and the blaze of history has passed over. To be sure, Hegel also characterises a philosopher like Plato as a historical individual.<sup>13</sup> He does this not so much because Plato had such a good conception of his own contemporary world, as because Plato's philosophy already presents the concept of the end of world-history according to which the ancient Greek world had to pass away. Plato's struggle to save Greek culture, by eternalizing it through the exclusion of *subjective* freedom and individuality, became a mo-

<sup>12</sup> *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, p. 17.

<sup>13</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen zur Geschichte der Philosophie II*, Hegels Werke in 20 Bänden, Frankfurt 1971, Bd. 19, p. 12.

ment of its downfall as a particular culture.<sup>14</sup> The essential task of philosophy, however, is something different from playing such a historical role. Genuine philosophical insight is, in a certain sense, *withdrawn* from history.<sup>15</sup> For philosophy, world-history is not the ultimate reality, as it is for peoples and nation-states, whose place in history is determined by world-history in its form of '*das Weltgericht*', the 'world's court of justice'.<sup>16</sup>

This '*Weltgericht*' must not be seen, I think, as the ultimate concept within which the end of history is conceived of. World-history is a history of sovereign states, which, in their mutual rivalry, shape a historical form for the universal spirit as '*Weltgeist*' and confine the individuals to their particular places in history. To a certain degree in contrast to this, art and religion withdraw the individual from this historical totalisation. So, they are figures of the absolute ('untied') spirit, although their forms of understanding are themselves closely tied to their historical environment. *Philosophy's* task is to develop the conceptual understanding of this relation between the objective and the absolute spirit. Thus, it is the expression of the moment at which the objective spirit unbinds itself from its particular historical world and *recognises itself* in this world as a moment of the absolute spirit, as expressed by art and religion. From this point of view, a mature philosophy is always that moment of spiritual reality at which history *closes itself*, the moment at which the objective spirit, as historical reality, in full self-consciousness passes over into the sphere of the absolute spirit. From the standpoint of that sphere, even world-history itself can be seen as but an appearance (*Erscheinung*) of the idea of the spirit. This view of reality closes the history of the world, but without the necessity of being understood as its *historical* end, that is to say, as an end-point in time.

Hegel says that the philosophy of history only has to do with what is *present*, because the spirit counts as eternal truth. Therefore, we can say that, according to him, the philosophy of history considers history as the proper expression or objective form in which the *absolute* spirit comes into *appearance*. Philosophy recognises in the past its truth and that which remains present: 'Nothing has been lost for it in the past because the idea is present, the spirit immortal, that means: the spirit is neither bygone nor not yet but essentially now' (VPG p. 105). In the periods of cultural or world-history philosophy seems to be a transhistorical moment in which the eternity of spirit is conceptually understood. In this sense, *every* philosophy closes a particular historical period or totality. But not every ending is epoch-making. Seen from the standpoint of the history of philosophy, there exist, for Hegel, only *two* epochs that actually suc-

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<sup>14</sup>. *idem*, pp. 114, 123, 127.

<sup>15</sup>. *Vorlesungen zur Geschichte der Philosophie I*, p. 74.

<sup>16</sup>. *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, § 340, p. 288.

ceeded in making such a closure in a philosophically *original* way, namely the periods of Greek philosophy and of modern philosophy since Bacon and Descartes. These are special periods within the history of *philosophy*, periods in which philosophy itself plays a role of historical importance. Between these two there is a third philosophical period in history, which, however, is not closed by a philosophical system of its own, namely the transitional period of mediaeval christianity, during which the christian thinking strives to find a philosophical expression of its principle.<sup>17</sup> Hegel seems to consider his own philosophy as the second period in history in which a world-historical epoch of philosophy comes to an end. Apparently, we also must not see this closure in too narrowly historical a way. Rather, the expression of the end of world-history counts as a philosophical concept, referring to what Hegel calls, at the end of his system, '*den dritten Schluß*' or the third form of closure, i.e., the philosophical concept in which nature and spirit are united.<sup>18</sup>

I think that, actually, history could be closed at *each* moment, because it is *always* form and work of the spirit, which can be conceived of as such, in its totality. But the spirit would not recognise in each moment a new total figure of world-historical importance. When we grasp the real world within the spheres of art, religion and philosophy, that is to say, in the sphere of the absolute spirit, reality appears in its totality, as closed in its end. This sphere of the absolute spirit is not bound by history, because history is merely its objective reality, to which spirit stands in a free relation.<sup>19</sup> It is at great moments in history that a particular people or period acquires consciousness of this relation in such a way that it can find a proper language and way of expression for representing it in images or concepts. In that sense, art, religion and philosophy are historical too. Because philosophy is the highest and latest stage in this process of becoming conscious, the maturation of a great philosophy expresses the notion of the *end* of history in its most historical and pregnant form. This is so because art and religion are more closely connected with a *particular* cultural, social and political form than philosophy. When philosophy brings this particular culture to the insight of its own rational principle, it presents it in the figure of its ultimate goal as its *end*, in regarding to which particular cultures appear as individual and finite entities. In its philosophy, a culture *disengages* itself from its particular history; it can no longer contain itself in this particular form. But this conception of a

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<sup>17</sup>. *Vorlesungen zur Geschichte der Philosophie I*, pp. 123, 131-132.

<sup>18</sup>. *Enzyklopädie*, § 577, p. 463. The different ways of considering the place of the philosophy of history in relation to the whole of Hegel's philosophy are described in: Timo Bautz, *Hegels Lehre von der Weltgeschichte. Zur logischen und systematischen Grundlegung der Hegelschen Geschichtsphilosophie*, München 1988, p. 28.

<sup>19</sup>. *Enzyklopädie*, § 552, pp. 430-439.

historical end, as it can be conceived of from the standpoint of the absolute spirit, must not be identified with the image of an end-point of a concrete historical period.<sup>20</sup> Hegel's philosophy of history, which conceives world-history in the perspective of its end, or its actualised destination, is that part of the system in which his philosophy proves itself as the concept of the *real* world in which Hegel and his contemporaries are living as *actual* spiritual beings. Speaking more technically: the end of world-history is the real and actual moment at which the objective spirit knows itself philosophically as the adequate expression of absolute spirit in its temporal transition. It is the period in history in which the state, religion and philosophy recognise each other in a form of perfect harmony.

#### 4. THE END OF HISTORY AND (POST-)MODERNITY

The absolute spirit cannot turn against reality or put itself in opposition to it as the totally different. The absoluteness of the spirit, or its detachment from time, does not mean that it has disengaged itself from the world. The absolute can only realise itself *within* the world and its history; it is working at every moment, even if it does not always appear as such. Because of its eternal presence, the absolute spirit does not necessarily involve the concept of the realisation of its ends as an end within or at the end of time. We must, probably, say, in the spirit of Hegel's philosophy, that the concept of the end of world-history makes clear the *possibilities* of a real history that is more adequate for a spirit that has come to a philosophical concept of itself. Many philosophers think that Hegel's concept of the dialectical closure of philosophy excludes a real future development of spirit. This opinion seems to me based on too simple a conception of what spirit means for Hegel. Karl Löwith, for example, asserts that modern historical thinking, in so far as it no longer believes in a history directed by divine providence, has broken with Hegel's *metaphysical* concept of spirit. Apparently, he identifies Hegel's concept of spirit with some complex and abstract representation of a subsistent entity, separated from our conception of ourselves. He thinks that history can go on because Hegel's philosophy of history appeared to be not realistic, but only the secularised version of a Christian belief in salvation. Löwith says that it was only after Hegel's death that our own particular history of spirit (*Geistesgeschichte*) started. *Geistesgeschichte*, for Löwith, means history of ideas, a way of historical thinking based on positive scientific research concerning the development of concepts and ideas.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup>. More about this in: Bernard Bourgeois, *Éternité et historicité de l'esprit selon Hegel*, Paris 1991, p. 104, and T. Bautz, *o.c.*, pp. 140 ff.

<sup>21</sup>. K. Löwith, *Hegel und die Aufhebung der Philosophie im 19. Jahrhundert - Max Weber*, (= Sämtliche Schriften 5), Stuttgart 1988, p. 45; also pp. 249 ff.

But these concepts of spirit and history do no justice to the philosophical subtlety by which Hegel himself connects spirit, nature and freedom in a concept of historical development.

We must acknowledge that the realisation of freedom as the end of history has not been completed in any way. It is absurd to consider the will and the belief in the possibility of realising this end as something that has been definitively left behind in the history of ideas. The concept of the end of history as the end of reason itself in its freedom opens a time of concrete political tasks that are totally adequate to the reality of spirit and cannot but awake its interest. According to Hegel, such a conception of time breaks through historically in the way in which the Lutheran version of Christianity started to consider the relation between the church and the state. Religion (or the church) can no longer place itself, within this relation, as a separate institute in opposition to the ethical world of the state, with all the risks and dangers of both a merely external and a fanatical religiousness. The divine spirit must penetrate the world in an *immanent* way. It seems that the truth of this identity of spirit and world has become, according to Hegel, a substantial certainty of the modern world, which it does not have to learn from philosophy. Modernity knows itself as this identity, and philosophy can only clear up this conception of modernity for itself. Therefore, there is also no longer any need for philosophy to withdraw from the world, because within the world it is in its own element.

Hegel's notorious statement about the identity of actuality and reason sounds unbelievable to most of our contemporaries and even as blasphemy for some. Fifty years after the Second World War, it has almost become a commonplace to confront the pretensions of the Hegelian philosophy of history with the 'truth of Auschwitz'. Auschwitz would be the absolute refutation of Hegelian thinking of totality, with its identification of history, reason and providence. Notwithstanding Adorno's statement that poetry would be impossible after Auschwitz, there exists an impressive poetry and art trying to give expression to the paradoxes of this real experience of a God-forgotten world. But why should it be *philosophically* reasonable or necessary to associate Auschwitz with the 'death of God' or to consider it as a proof of God's 'withdrawing from the world'? Why anyway should we make God in some form make co-responsible for our sins? Rather, I think that an adequate understanding of the Hegelian concept of reality and freedom makes us conscious of the truth that the modern human being *himself* is totally responsible for his world and cannot conceal this responsibility by speaking of withdrawing or waiting gods.<sup>22</sup> Not the history of violence and evil, but only the (pre)history of myths has come to an end. It is not

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie (vom Ereignis)*, Frankfurt am Main 1989 (Gesamtausgabe Bd. 65), pp. 409-417, 437 ff.

the task of philosophy to repair a postmodern mythology, but rather to free religion from its mythological ties. Philosophy and politics can meet each other in the same prose without generating fears that any sincere religion would be robbed of its right to exist or that individuals should feel menaced in respect of their freedom.