Bratislava International School of Liberal Arts

Empiricism Strikes Back: An Inquiry Concerning the Nature of Hegel's Absolute Truth in World-History

BACHELOR THESIS

Alex Nemec

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Declaration of Originality

I hereby declare that this bachelor thesis is the work of my own and has not been published in whole or in part elsewhere. All literature sources used in this thesis are attributed and cited in references.

In Bratislava, 31 January, 2022 **Alex Nemec**

Abstract

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This thesis presents a critical approach to the concept of the substantial Absolute Truth of history developed by Hegel in *The Philosophy of History*. Namely, it focuses on the questions of this concept's sustainability, defensibility, and justifiability, when put against David Hume's strictly empirical epistemology developed in *A Treatise of Human Nature*. To do this, I provide an in-depth overview of Hegel's philosophy by means of the primary literature, focusing on his conception of dialectics, necessary conceptual relations, and world-history. I follow the same procedure for Hume, focusing on the basics of his epistemology and on three of his analyses where it is put into use.

The application of Hume's epistemology to Hegel's theory shows that the concept of the Absolute Truth in history becomes unsustainable, indefensible, and unjustifiable when placed under the scrutiny of empirical investigation. The critical analysis reveals that Hegel's idea of truth in history is merely an imposition of the structure of the human mind onto the empirical sense data. This in no way demonstrates or proves the claim about the Absolute Truth in history. Consequently, the thesis suggests that there might be a need to re-think the way we approach history and to focus strictly on the empirical whenever we attempt to make substantial claims about the world. Finally, the thesis hints at a possible interpretation of Hegel's *Philosophy of History* as the prime example of the natural structure of the human mind that can be subject to subsequent analysis.

Key Terms: Hegel, Hume, empiricism, history, epistemology, Spirit

Abstrakt

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Titul: Empiricizmus Vracia Úder: Skúmanie Nátury Hegelovej Absolútnej Pravdy v Svetových Dejinách
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Táto práca predstavuje kritický prístup ku konceptu nevyhnutnej Absolútnej pravdy dejín, ktorú Hegel vyvinul vo *Filozofii Dejí*n. Konkrétne sa zameriava na otázky zachovateľnosti, obhájiteľnosti a oprávnenosti tohto konceptu, keď je komfrontovaný striktne empirickou epistemológiou Davida Humea, ktorú vyvinul v *Pojednaní Ľudskej Prirodzenosti*. Za týmto cieľom poskytujem podrobný prehľad Hegelovej filozofie prostredníctvom primárnej literatúry so zameraním na jeho koncepciu dialektiky, potrebných koncepčných vzťahov a svetových dejín. Rovnaký postup používam pre Humea, so zameraním na základy jeho epistemológie a na tri s jeho analýz, kde sa používa.

Aplikácia Humeovej epistemológie na Hegelovu teóriu ukazuje, že koncept Absolútnej pravdy v dejinách sa stáva nezachovateľným, neobhájiteľným a neoprávneným, keď sa podrobí kontrole empirického skúmania. Kritická analýza odhaľuje, že Hegelova predstava pravdy v dejinách je len vnucovaním štruktúry ľudskej mysle do empirických zmyslových údajov. To v žiadnom prípade nepreukazuje ani nedokazuje tvrdenie o Absolútnej Pravde v histórii. V dôsledku toho téza naznačuje, že by mohlo byť potrebné prehodnotiť spôsob, akým pristupujeme k histórii a zamerať sa striktne na empirické vedomosti, kedykoľvek sa pokúšame robiť nevyhnutné tvrdenia o svete. Nakoniec, téza naznačuje možnú interpretáciu Hegelovej Filozofie Dejín ako hlavného príkladu prirodzenej štruktúry ľudskej mysle, ktorá môže byť predmetom následnej analýzy.

Kľúčové slová: Hegel, Hume, empirizmus, história, epistemológia, Duch

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Introduction

Every philosophical work, no matter how insignificant or great, has to begin with a question. A question to a philosopher is a lot like what a pot is to a chef—it is the place where the cooking is done—or, as in the case of a philosopher, it establishes a framework of inquiry. The present study will inquire into a question of arguably utmost importance; namely, the question of whether there exists a knowable Absolute Truth. Under the concept of 'Absolute Truth' is to be understood truth that underlies all of reality and gives it its content and meaning. To make a case for the importance of this question, no elaborate sequence of arguments is needed—one needs to look no further than the history of human beings. From the very beginning, this question has shaped the lives of everyone, from people living in small tribes to the greatest and most powerful of civilizations: Gods were created and worshiped, faiths established, shrines built, nations rose and fell in pursuit of the answer to this fundamental question.

We all naturally want to believe that there is some kind of Absolute Truth. Truth brings comfort. Truth allows for reconciliation. Truth brings meaning and explanation to the chaos of human existence. Truth answers not only the questions of 'What', but also those of 'How' and 'Why'. Logically, the Absolute Truth thus brings an absolute comfort, an absolute meaning, an absolute explanation. Nobody would ever have to wonder about the question of their existence or about why this or that occurred. The world would simply make sense. Unfortunately for us, however, the search for this 'Absolute Truth' has turned out to be a complete failure—no one ever has been able to establish where and how we find it, much less say what exactly it is supposed to be. Again and again, the greatest minds of history have brought up this question from all different angles and perspectives, and yet, not a single one of them has been able to come up with an answer that would satisfy everyone. Thus, it only makes sense that after such a long and seemingly fruitless cycle of absolute ideas being refuted one after another, perspectivism and relativism have arisen in modern times and are enjoying a well-established place in our minds. Today we are instinctively suspicious of anyone claiming to have found any absolute truth.

Philosophy, right from its earliest beginnings, has been all about trying to find and establish some basic first principle of truth. In writing, we can trace the origin of this question all the way back to Ancient Greece: Thales and the thesis that water is the fundamental

element; Heraclitus and his idea of 'fire' as the essential substance of all things;[1] Plato and his Theory of Forms;[2] or perhaps most importantly Aristotle and his argument for the existence of 'first principles' from which all subsequent knowledge derives.[3] Moving further in time, we can see the development of the concept in the Middle Ages: St. Augustine and his explanation of the world through the existence of God;[4] or St. Aquinas and his five arguments for the existence of God.[5]

However, arguably nowhere else can we see the development, elaboration, and impact of this idea more clearly than in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Germany. This period in the history of philosophy, which popularly came to be called the time of 'German Idealism', marks its beginnings with the rise of Immanuel Kant,[6] and his argument for the existence of *a priori* principles. Nevertheless, the true face of this movement, the one who has claimed that he has uncovered the ultimate rational design of the world and the plan of 'Divine Providence'—Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel[7]—certainly ought to take the spotlight. Nowhere else can we find a more profound and convincing argument for the existence of Absolute Truth than in Hegel's idea of the Spirit or *Geist* of World History.

Hegel's philosophy of history is perhaps the most ambitious attempt at the systematization of the entirety of the history of the human race into one united complex. It aims to describe history as a necessary rational movement with an inevitable destination in 'the Absolute'. The importance of this theory is still clearly present in our modern world. We intuitively think of things as developing or progressing such as with the evolution of technology,

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[1]Heraclitus Of Ephesus, *Fragments: The Collected Wisdom of Heraclitus*, trans. Brooks Haxton (New York: Viking, 2001).

[2]Plato, *Plato: Republic.*, ed. C. D. C. Reeve, trans. G. M. A. Grube (London Hackett Publishing Company, 1992).

[3]Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, trans. G. R. G. Mure (Whitefish, Mt: Kessinger Publishing, 2004).

[4]Augustine Of Hippo, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2013).

[5]Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica Complete in a Single Volume* (Claremont, Ca: Coyote Canyon Press, 2018).

[6]Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[7]Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. John Sibree (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 2004), 1–103.

species of plants and animals, stars, galaxies, etc. The idea that history has progressed a long way since the ancients seems completely obvious to everyone. But even if we can agree upon that, does the raw empirical data of history hold any sort of power to prove that there is an 'Absolute' hidden in it? And if so, how is it possible that no historian, over the course of the entire tradition of historiography, was able to find it?

I think that this dilemma evokes a question: To what or to whom does Hegel—and the rest of the authors of this line of thought—owe the authority of being able to talk about ideas and meanings of such a fundamental scale and importance for all of us? It seems only intuitive to me that such a truth should be readily available to our minds if it were to be out there in the world around us. But maybe Hegel was really right, and a proper philosophical mindset and investigation are required to be able to see clearly.

If one were to suddenly appear in eighteenth-century Scotland and propose this question to arguably its most influential philosopher of this time—David Hume—they would probably get a chuckle over the question, and told something along these lines: First, the world is actually not governed by reason and rationality, but rather people naturally like to believe that it is so; and second, to argue for such a grandiose idea is definitely admirable, but to what end is this necessary if everything can be explained by simple empirical thought? And we should certainly not underestimate Hume's authority when it comes to the subject of history; Hume, besides being a philosopher, was also a respected and accomplished historian. In many ways, Hume and his *A Treatise of Human Nature* in combination with *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*—even though published almost half a century before Hegel was even born—provide us with completely valid counterarguments concerning the nature of historical development to the one that Hegel, through his concept of Spirit, argues for in his *The Philosophy of History*.

I understand that to some (especially to those well oriented in the field of my inquiry) my choice of David Hume might appear odd and questionable. After all, Hume died in 1776, and Hegel was only born in 1770, and thus using Hume's ideas as a reaction to Hegel seems to be nothing if not ambiguous and anachronistic. However, let us not forget that Hegel's school of thought came into being as a form of reaction to the ideas of the Enlightenment —a movement to which Hume belonged. Additionally, Hume is famous for his skeptical approach to the problems of philosophy—a view that Hegel on many occasions

disregarded or simply rejected (along with the romantics) as a view that is missing the point of what philosophy actually is supposed to aim to achieve. Thus, it seems only fair that Hume should be given the opportunity to react to Hegel's ideas as well—even if it is coming *avant la lettre*, so to speak. Of course, I always had the option to turn to people in the school of postmodernism such as Jean-François Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard, or Gilles Deleuze, whose arguments also run along the skeptical line of thought. However, it is well known that the criticisms issued by postmodernist historians are often difficult to read or understand, thus rendering them inaccessible to the common reader. These thinkers also tend to end up in a simplistic relativism that does not do justice to the issue. Moreover, it has been argued that they have a shallow understanding of history. By contrast, I believe that Hume is a much more important thinker to look at when we want to critically examine Hegel's views of history. I would therefore like to claim that there is no need to look to the postmodernist thinkers of today for a refutation of Hegel's view. In fact, it already existed well before him in the work of David Hume whose works in many ways anticipate the ideas of the later writers, such as those of Hegel. His clear and sober argumentation makes for a much better and much clearer model to use to refute Hegel's 'Absolutist' theory.

Consequently, the present work proposes a less than conventional—and thus unexplored—approach to the Hegelian theory, specifically focusing on the possibility of its final goal, the proof of the Absolute Truth. In *The Philosophy of History*, Hegel's argument runs along the lines of the claim that history tells us a story of progress: the idea of 'freedom', visibly developing towards its full realization by means of what he calls a dialectical process. This full realization is the Absolute. As proof of this, he cites historical data.

However, I argue that Hegel's method of treating history possesses an inherent flaw that renders his conclusion about the Absolute impossible to prove—rather than re-constructing history as it has happened, Hegel constructs a new 'history', based on the principle of freedom that he has 'inferred' or 'taken out of history' during his studies of it. He then proceeds to use this principle as his 'viewing lens' and thus arrives at a story of history which is very much different from that of a traditional historian. I show this by analyzing Hegel's *The Philosophy of History*. I then explore Hume's strictly empirical thought when it comes to topics such as the origin of ideas, causality, substance, and modes, to

show the inability of both the sense data and of the faculty of reason to serve as a proof of any kind of necessary Absolute. I do this by analyzing his epistemological account from *A Treatise of Human Nature*: *Being an Attempt to introduce the experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects* and *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. This provides the groundwork for a compelling critique of Hegel's theory of history.

At the same time however, it should be understood that even though my point of view is critical, the goal of my inquiry is not to say that Hegel was wrong, but rather that he took his conclusions too far. Unlike those authors of postmodern relativism and perspectivism who like to throw around superficial verdicts about the whole of Hegel's philosophy, proclaiming it to be deeply ethnocentric, racist, or naive (and thus completely missing the point), I believe that Hegel made a lot of insightful points concerning the human understanding of history, and through his conception of dialectics he has in fact captured something very fundamental about the way we understand the world. In the end, it can be said that my thesis is of a corrective nature.

Nevertheless, in this work I argue that Hegel's 'discovery' of a necessary conceptual movement of an idea of freedom in history is unsustainable in the face of Hume's strictly empirical epistemology; moreover, I argue that Hegel's description of the historical development based on the inference of reason from the empirical data is methodologically unjustifiable, being merely an imposition of a structure created by the mind onto the sense data of history.

Chapter I: Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

Hegel makes a number of strong, provocative claims that later thinkers have found difficult to accept. His talk about attaining knowledge of 'absolute truth'; of the 'absolute idea'; and divine Providence sound both arrogant and implausible to our modern ears. Today no one in the field of philosophy would dare to use such terminology. But, of course, Hegel still has many admirers today, and it would be ill-advised to dismiss him out of hand. But how then can we go about testing his audacious claims to truth and knowledge? For us to prove the truth of Hegel's words, that is, that he has discovered the ultimate design of the world, the principle of reason which unites the entirety of world history into one, we would have to readily assert that his words will be always necessarily true for the future, just as they supposedly were for the past. For this, an inquiry into this principle is necessary.

To go about this, we need a certain method of procedure. Thus, I propose that we first try to understand Hegel himself as a thinker and the philosophical school he became acquainted with over the course of his life—Absolute Idealism. After that, we move to his understanding of dialectics, which make the whole of Hegel's philosophical system possible. And finally, we finish it off with an account of his lectures on *The Philosophy of History* that he gave in Berlin in the years 1822, 1828, and 1830. The reason why I propose that we focus on this specific work is that the massive scale of Hegel's system as a whole makes it practically impossible to give a complete account of it,[8] and so I have chosen to focus specifically on his philosophy of history, which is a sphere where scholars today find his claims about absolute truth to be especially implausible. My goal in this chapter is to establish the basic framework of Hegel's thinking so that it is possible to better understand his seemingly absurd claim about the idea of absolute truth in history. I wish to show that, while his theory has shortcomings, it is not as absurd as it might seem at first glance. So, without further ado, let us get started.

[8]Nor is it in any way necessary for the purpose of this work. At best, it would result in confusing the reader and distracting them from what is really being discussed.

1.1 Understanding Hegel

Most of the time, for one to understand where the ideas of any given philosopher are coming from is a fairly simple task—philosophers are very keen to explain what or who inspired them to inquire into this or that problematic at hand, and how their reasoning is tied to the rest of the field. Hegel however, is a notable exception and gives the reader very little to work with. He even goes as far as to open his arguably most famous book—*The Phenomenology of Spirit*—with the lines:

> In the preface to a philosophical work, it is customary for the author to give an explanation – namely, an explanation of his purpose in writing the book, his motivations behind it, and the relations it bears to other previous or contemporary treatments of the same topics – but for a philosophical work, this seems not only superfluous, but in light of the nature of the subject matter, even inappropriate and counterproductive.[9]

This provocative claim did of course not go unnoticed by the rest of the philosophical field; he was more than once accused of philosophical dishonesty on the grounds of his refusal to state his motivations and connections to other authors. But let this statement of his in no way discourage us from trying to understand where he is coming from. This is because as much as Hegel wished to separate himself from his philosophical system and present it more like a discovery independent of his mind rather than a product of it—the same way as an archeologist would present his discovery of a pyramid he found buried in the sands of Sahara—he still is creating a system in thought, and therefore the restrictions of the human mind must also be valid for him. To understand Hegel is to understand his system, and to understand his system is to understand the principle I wish to inquire into. In his lectures on *The Philosophy of History*, he states:

> The only Thought which Philosophy brings with it to the contemplation of History, is the simple conception of Reason; that Reason is the Sovereign of the World; that the history of the world, therefore, presents us with a rational process.[10]

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[9]Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, 1.

[10]Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 9.

This statement by itself gives us a lot of insight into the idea that Hegel had in mind while presenting his findings. First, it clearly articulates the fact that Hegel strongly believes in the capability of an inquiry, based on reason, to present us with fully factual claims about the world as such. Second, it tells us that Hegel sees history as a process, a rational process for that matter. Process, by necessity, implies causal relation between events; therefore, Hegel must have also necessarily thought of the history of the world as a process based on the causality of events, of one event leading to another with a clear and determinate trajectory, with a start and an end—which he in fact does. Of course, the idea of causality in Hegel gets a little more complicated with the introduction of purportedly necessary conceptual relations, but we shall delve into that later. And finally, this statement confirms that Hegel does not see himself as presenting a new idea; but rather he is merely presenting the history of the world through the lens of philosophical thinking. The basic underlying assumption of any science is that the world around us has some kind of logical structure that is accessible to the human mind. Nature displays certain regularities that we can empirically observe, and then the human mind can formulate certain basic laws that explain what has been observed. Hegel's point is that it is not only nature but also the human sphere that presents us with structures and forms of development that the human mind can understand. According to him, religion, society, and history all likewise contain an inner logic or reason that is seldom recognized. He makes it his goal to identify and explain this logic or reason in his analyses of these different spheres.

The scale and depth of his analysis were an astonishing achievement not only back in the early 19th century, but also up to this day. The amount and variety of data he worked with, and more importantly his capability of understanding it, appeals to our modern, sadly specialized standards, as either extraordinary or outrageous—both go to show that this is something way beyond what most of us would expect from a single man to achieve. Thus, in order to get a well-rounded idea of Hegel as a thinker, I believe it would be helpful for us to briefly explore the philosophical background from which Hegel comes from. This will help us to better understand what kind of philosophical problem he saw himself solving at the time.

1.2 German and Absolute Idealism

To begin with, we need to take a step back from Hegel, and attempt to comprehend the philosophical movement that found its stronghold in Prussia[11] in the late 18th and early 19th century—German Idealism.[12] German Idealism as a movement in philosophy can be traced back to Immanuel Kant and his attempt to reconcile the two opposing positions of his time – the view of rationalism that focused on the unique human capacity to use reason in order to attain knowledge *a priori*; and the view of empiricism, that claims the only way to attain knowledge is through *a posteriori* experience. Kant's doctrine came to be known as 'transcendental idealism': a doctrine that claims that there is a difference between the appearances or "representations" (*Vorstellungen*) of objects as we comprehend them through our cognition and the actual things in themselves. Kant argues that there are certain 'forms of intuition', space and time, which exist *a priori*, that is, prior to all experience, and make all experience possible and also determine the content of it. Kant also argued that our conception of objects is determined *a priori* by the categories of the understanding, such as substance, cause and effect, etc. Thus, our cognition only perceives the representations of things-in-themselves that are made available to our senses through the forms of intuition, but how things are apart from our representations we can never know since it is impossible to perceive anything outside of space and time. [13]

After Kant, a new generation of philosophers of German Idealism appeared on the scene, the best known of which were Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel[14]. And as is common in philosophy, the students did not stick with the ideas of their teacher for long; and thus, these new philosophers went on to establish their own conceptions of idealism. The one that interests us, is of course the one of Hegel. He came the idea of what we call 'Absolute

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[11]Even though Hegel's homeland was the Duchy of Württemberg and thus he was a foreigner in Prussia, Hegel spent a great and certainly defining portion of his career there.

[12]Hegel was born in the year 1770 and died in 1832. During his early life, he studied philosophy and theology, and it is commonly known that the works of Immanuel Kant had a significant influence on his philosophical views. Thus, it is fairly simple to understand how Hegel became acquainted and influenced by the rising philosophical tradition of German Ideology - a tradition of which he later became the leading figure.

[13]As a source of information concerning German Idealism, I am using: Colin McQuillan, "German Idealism," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ISSN 2161-0002.

[14]To mention just a few, of course, there were many more names such as Arthur Schopenhauer or Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi.

Idealism'[15]. This is a transformation of Kant's Transcendental Idealism and a refutation of his doctrine of a thing-in-itself independent of our actual experiences. All of the abovementioned new idealists came to the conclusion that Kant's Transcendental Idealism ends in skepticism since he claims that we can never know things-in-themselves, which means that absolute knowledge and truth are impossible. This is the point that Hegel wants to correct with his claims about absolute knowing, which he believes is in fact possible if we reconceive the issue. Hegel proposes that Kant's logic is mistaken when the latter claims that things-in-themselves must exist since we have representations of them. In other words, there must be some external object in the world that gives us the raw data that our perceptual capacity orders by putting it into space and time and seeing a representation of a discrete object. For us to have representations, they must be representations *of something*. Kant thus ends up with a two-world split of some *representation* and something *represented* (the thing-in-itself). Hegel, by contrast, argues that Kant's two-world split can be overcome when we realize that the thing-in-itself is just another kind of representation, that is, a product of the human mind. It is an abstraction from the idea of a representation. For Hegel, the problem can be resolved by just saying that both the representation and the thing-in-itself are 'objects for consciousness'. In this way, we can indeed determine the truth of things by comparing our representations or experiences with one another. There is nothing that is beyond our consciousness since everything that we have ever known is something that has been in our consciousness. Whatever we understand the truth to be, it can be found there as well.[16]

Under 'Absolute Idealism' is to be understood a strain of idealism that aims to prove that there is an absolute principle governing all of existence, from which everything else derives, and that it is in fact knowable. Even though Fichte and Schelling have their part to play in developing this concept, true ownership of this view has to be given to Hegel. His

[15]Just like in the "Transcendental Idealism", so it applies to "Absolute Idealism", the word "Idealism" proves to be misleading to the language of common sense. "Idealism" in the common language suggests something of a naively optimistic outlook on the world around us, believing that all will be well in the end. In modern philosophy however, I find it more comprehensible if we separate the word idealism into two parts and lose the "l": idea-ism. This way it is a lot closer to what the idealists (or we can even say idea-ists) are all about - the only things that truly exist are the ideas. "Idea", being an inherently mental thing, thus puts the human mind on the pedestal of understanding of the world.

[16]He explains the transition from the Kantian *thing-in-itself* to the *representation of the thing-in-itself* in his "Introduction" of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, para. 85-86.

conception of idealism possesses the elements of both the 'subjective idealism' focusing on the "I" developed by Fichte[17] and the dynamic idealism with a focus on the relationship of *Geist* (spirit) and nature by Schelling.[18] It is clear that Hegel found their works unsatisfactory and incomplete, but, at the same time, fruitful stepping stones towards his own conception of a system of idealism. In his works, Hegel set himself to once and for all proving the truths of 'Absolute Idealism', to go out there, look around himself, and find what is really substantial in the world—what is its absolute truth. He believes that it is possible to see the idea in the real world if one, specifically a philosopher, knows how to look for it. And there, with the eyes of a philosopher, he found it, laying in plain sight in the history of the world.

1.3 Hegel's Dialectics

Dialectic is an absolutely key concept for the whole of Hegel's philosophical methodology. Without understanding the dialectic, Hegel's words will always appear to be confusing, contradictory, or even nonsensical. Hegel himself recognizes the importance of this when he says:

> Properly construing and recognizing the dialectical dimension is of the highest importance. It is in general the principle of all movement, all life, and all actual activity. The dialectical is equally the soul of all truly scientific knowing.[19]

Hegel's system captures the dynamically developing idea in movement, all through space and time, making its way towards the Absolute by means of the process of dialectics. By the Absolute is to be understood the self-actualization of *Geist* (Spirit), the Spirit becoming in actuality that which it is potentially. Heidegger (2002) defined Hegel's Absolute Spirit as "that which is present to itself [*bei sich*] in the certainty of unconditional self-knowing".[20]

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[17]Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Science of Knowledge with the First and Second Introductions.*, ed. John Lachs and Peter Heath, trans. Peter Heath and John Lachs (Cambridge University Press, 1982).

[18]F. W. J. von Schelling, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, trans. Errol E. Harris and Peter Heath (Cambridge University Press, 1988).

[19]Hegel, *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel: Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline Part I: Science of Logic*, §81, Addition I, 129.

[20]Martin Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, ed. and trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 97.

As[21] for the dialectics, in the first part of his *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline Part I: Science of Logic*,[22] namely, the *Logic*, Hegel defines dialectics (or rather the dialectical moment) as follows: The dialectical moment is the self-sublation[23]of such finite determinations by themselves and their transition into their opposite.[24]

This by itself tells us very little, so let us put it into more comprehensible terms. Hegel's dialectic assumes a necessary conceptual relation of two parts based on a "speculative concept of difference, which he [Hegel] calls 'opposition' or 'contrariety' [*Gegensatz*]".[25] This can be explained by the example of the relation between 'life' and 'death'. Even though there is a clear difference between these two concepts, they share what we would call a determinate relation, the same way as the concept of 'up' is related to 'down', or the concept of 'right' is related to 'left'. Due to this determinate relation, by being able to think about life, we at the same time are necessarily thinking about death, but what is being expressed in the claim "I think about life" is life, whereas death is hidden in the concept of life. One cannot conceive of life, without implicitly conceiving of death as well, and vice versa. This relationship is what makes the dialectic much more than a simple negation.[26] Understanding this is crucial for understanding what comes next.

1.3.1 *Moments or Elements of the Dialectic*

The dialectic is a process, and therefore to give an adequate account of it, we have to take it on as a process, from the beginning to the end. Hegel tells us, there are in fact multiple moments and elements of dialectic. In his analysis of Aristotle's 'Law of Contradiction',

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[21]For those of you who are left confused by these sentences regarding *Geist*, do not worry, I discuss the concept of Hegel's *Geist* thoroughly in the next section concerning the lectures on *The Philosophy of History*.

[22]Henceforth, I will only refer to it as "*Encyclopedia*".

[23]Contradicts itself; moving towards its opposite.

[24]Hegel, *Encyclopedia*, §81, 128.

[25]Stewart, "Hegel, Kierkegaard and the Danish Debate about Mediation", 66.

[26]I find this especially well explained by Jon Stewart in his article "Hegel, Kierkegaard and the Danish Debate about Mediation" on pages 65-67, where he shows how Hegel, by analyzing Aristotle's 'Law of Contradiction', arrives at the 'doctrine of determinate negation'. This doctrine is indirectly explained and put into use in section 1.2.

the first moment that Hegel mentions is when dialectic is taken in isolation. He refers to this as the 'absolute difference' [*der absolute Unterschied*].[27] This is to say that we only think of the negation of the concept at hand, or as Stewart (2010) puts it: "A is negated by not-A".[28]

This can be regarded as the form of Plato's dialectic, depicted in the Socratic dialogues. For example, in *Euthyphro*,[29] Socrates begins by asking Euthyphro for a definition (A), which he then proceeds to refute (not-A). This process then repeats again and again, until the end of the dialogue, and each time Socrates leads Euthyphro's definition to its negation (B to not-B, C to not-C, etc.). Thus, the dialogue ends in an unsatisfactory fashion, with no clear definition in sight—this is what we call the famous Socratic *aporia*. This form of dialectic is sheer negation which produces nothing positive. By claiming that A is negated by not-A, we learn nothing of the positive qualities of A: "the pencil is blue" is negated by "the pencil is not blue": in no way has this informed us about the color of the pencil, it has merely told us that it is "not blue". The result is indeterminate. To use another example: What is that? That is a house (a positive claim). No, it's not a house. That is a car. No, it's not a car. That is an elephant. No, it's not an elephant. This is just like a childish game that goes nowhere and establishes nothing. Hegel is critical of this conception since it fails to see the necessary positive connections between the concepts. As Stewart tells us, this conception of negation is what Aristotle means in his logic with contradiction A and not-A.[30]

The second kind of negation that Hegel takes note of is when one takes dialectic as "an extraneous art that arbitrarily generates confusion among certain concepts and a mere semblance of contradictions among them".[31] To put it simply, this is the case when one produces a negation of a concept, but this negation is in no necessary way related to it.

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[27]Stewart, "Hegel, Kierkegaard and the Danish Debate about Mediation", 65.

[28]Ibid., 65.

[29]Plato, *Plato: Republic.*, ed. C. D. C. Reeve, trans. G. M. A. Grube (London Hackett Publishing Company, 1992).

[30]Stewart, "Hegel, Kierkegaard and the Danish Debate about Mediation", 65.

[31]Hegel, *Encyclopedia*, §81, 128.

Hegel calls this 'diversity' [*Verschiedenheit*].[32] "This concept simply states that a given thing is different from something else, and this difference is conceived as negation".[33] In this form, one can posit almost anything at all as a negation to another thing. Being is not blue; being is not square; being is not ten; being is not slow; being is not a camel. One could go on forever listing things that are not being, but nothing is achieved by this. This kind of negation is arbitrary. The two terms are different from one another and have no special relationship that would connect them necessarily as concepts. With the first kind of negation, nothing positive resulted. This second kind produces positive things,[34] but they are all arbitrary and thus do not serve the purpose of developing the concept further.

Then there is the element of reflexion: we start at being, and by reflecting on the concept, we arrive at the conclusion that if there is in fact being, there must necessarily also be nothing. This, however, is, as Hegel calls it, only "a process of going beyond the isolated determinacy, i.e., a relating of it, whereby it is brought into a relationship, despite its being maintained in its isolated validity".[35] To put it into a more understandable language, in connection with our example, by reflecting on life and establishing that there also must be death, we go beyond the isolated and fixed concept of life, and arrive at its necessary relationship with its negation—death; however, at this point, both of the concepts are still understood in their isolated meaning: life and death are now understood as necessarily related, yet, they are still clearly differentiated as two separate concepts. However, unlike in the example, we do not end here, but move further:

> The dialectic is, by contrast, this immanent process of going beyond [such determinacy] wherein the one-sided and limited character of the determinations of the understanding presents itself as what it is, namely as their negation. Everything finite is this, the sublating of itself.[36]

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[32]Stewart, "Hegel, Kierkegaard and the Danish Debate about Mediation", 66.

[33]Ibid., 66.

[34]At best one could argue that by being able to distinguish between the apparent and real contradictions among concepts, we are clearing up the determinations of concepts in question. This is to say that it betters our understanding of them, of comprehending their boundaries, and in turn, helps us to arrive at their negation.

[35]Hegel, *Encyclopedia*, §81, 129.

[36]Ibid., 129.

By this, Hegel means to say that to truly understand the concept at hand, we must move beyond its fixed determination, and comprehend it in relation to its negation and as its own negation. This is because by moving beyond the limited character of the determination of the concept, we understand that not only is concept A (life) related to concept B (death) by their necessary relationship, but it also becomes clear that to think of life without death is to think of life as an undetermined abstraction, which needs *the other* (death) to be determined[37]. This is, however, not to say that life causes death and that death causes life: it merely goes to say that there cannot be one without the other and that the one contains a germ of the other; or as Hegel puts it: "The true way to construe the matter, however, is that life as such carries within itself the germ of death and that, generally speaking, the finite contradicts itself in itself and for that reason sublates itself".[38]

Now, keeping this in mind, let us come back to the example of scientific concepts to see how dialectic works in practice. The way we thought about it until now is that when Concept A gets refuted by its negation—concept B—and therefore concept B becomes the truth. But in fact, what actually happens is this: We have a concept A—*the one*. Concept A is established as the truth. By reflecting on this concept, we arrive at its negation—concept B—*the other*. Concept B is not a wholly new concept, since we have arrived at it by reflecting on concept A and reflecting on what is incomplete in it: the latter bears its germ in the former, the former sublates itself into its negation (the latter) and by this, the concept A becomes an ideal moment[39] in concept B. This process is called mediation. Hegel defines it as: "to have gone from a first to a second and to emerge from something differentiated".[40] The product of this dialectic is Concept B that now possesses the parts of concept A that are true, but by correcting its mistakes, becomes a more complete concept of truth. Hegel refers to this process as 'sublation' (*Aufhebung*), which means both negation and raising up to a higher level.[41] This, for Hegel, is the true dialectical concept

[37]This relationship of course goes both ways.

[38]Hegel, *Encyclopedia*, §81, Addition I, 129.

[39]In other words, the moment of the idea realizing itself.

[40]Hegel, *Encyclopedia*, §86, 137.

[41]Ibid., § 96, Addition, 152; Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 81f.

of negation. Aristotelian negation or absolute negation is just not-A. This is indeterminate since it does not tell us anything specific about what the negation of A is. Not-A has no content. By contrast, the true dialectical negation of opposites (*Gegensätze*) is determinate since there is only one specific possibility for negation in this sense. There is only one dialectical negation of up, namely, down; only one of right, namely, left; only one of being, namely, nothingness. In these cases, the negation has a determinate content. In this way concepts can build on one another and develop in a dialectical manner: being implies nothingness, which together imply becoming. Up implies down, which together imply vertical. Right implies left, which together imply horizontal. These are necessary and determinate relations that constitute the heart of Hegel's metaphysics.

It is difficult to deny Hegel's idea of the necessary conceptual relations of concepts in the sense outlined that I have outlined here. This is a much stronger sense of necessity than that of cause-and-effect relations. There is also something very intuitive about this: a brief moment of deliberation informs us that it truly appears impossible to say anything about what is 'up', without in some way conceiving of 'down' as well. Furthermore, his conception of dialectics in many ways serve as a shield from all superficial criticism: an understanding of dialectics, which certainly is no easy task, is necessary for anybody who wishes to raise a critical remark against the Hegelian system. Unfortunately for Hegel however, it is not enough that his system works on the theoretical level. The challenge for him now is thus to demonstrate that such necessary conceptual relations can in fact be found in the sphere of history, which would seem to be the realm of cause and effect. Can this really be done?

1.4 The Philosophy of History

Even though it is not a matter of great importance with regard to my inquiry, for the purposes of this section,[42] I need to first paint at least a brief picture of what is meant by Hegel's concept of *Geist* (Spirit). For this, I will be using the interpretation of W.H. Walsh, which I find especially comprehensible. In his *Philosophy of History: An Introduction*, he claims that "Reality for Hegel is spirit: the universe is, in a sense, the product of the mind and therefore intelligible to mind. Hegel's philosophy is thus rightly characterized by the epithet

[42]And to fulfill the promise I made in footnote number 21.

'rationalist' ".[43] This makes a lot of sense, especially if we consider Hegel's rejection of Kant's two-world split. By saying that the issue can be resolved by simply considering the representation of a thing and the thing-in-itself both as objects of consciousness, Hegel in effect asserts that there is nothing that is not an object of consciousness. Thus, spirit also has to necessarily be of this kind—and thus intelligible to the mind. And because Hegel also goes on to say that spirit, not matter (matter being its direct opposite), and its development is the substantial object of world history,[44] he indirectly makes the claim that what is true and substantial in the world, is indeed spirit—hence the claim that reality for Hegel is spirit.

Now, we are finally able to move to our treatment of the philosophy of history. In a way, it can be said that Hegel's lectures on *The Philosophy of History* are an attempt at a concrete proof of the truth of his logic[45] that we partly covered in the previous section. This view of the matter is supported by Walsh, who writes:

> Philosophy of history, for Hegel, is part of the philosophy of Spirit, and the problem which confronts its exponent is that of tracing the working of reason in a particular empirical sphere. That reason is at work in history that in this as in other fields the real is the rational is a proposition which the philosophical historian does not undertake to prove or even examine: he takes it as demonstrated by logic or, as we should prefer to say, metaphysics. His task is to apply the principle, showing that an account of the facts can be given consistently with it.[46]

To a lot of people, this may appear outrageous: it is no secret that history, by its very nature, is such an ambiguous subject that it seems impossible to find any kind of tangible, enduring truth. Accounts of historical events are often impossible to confirm or deny, and the biases and prejudices of the authors are an ever-present problem that always has to be taken into consideration. But Hegel, of course, was not naïve: he has readily admitted and pointed to these kinds of problems that are inherent to the subject of his interest; and then, to the undeniable surprise of all, he proceeded to claim that these problems by no means affect

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[43]Walsh, *Philosophy of History: An Introduction*, 140-141.

[44]Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 16.

[45]The same can be said about his *The Philosophy of Religion* and *The Philosophy of Right*.

[46]Walsh, *Philosophy of History: An Introduction*, 142.

the truth of what he has to say, and he even went as far as to say that these problems, may actually not be problems at all. This is because in Hegel's conception of history, the particulars have to give way to the view of the whole. Hegel writes,

> The subject of this course of Lecture is the Philosophical History of the World. And by this must be understood, not a collection of general observations respecting it, suggested by the study of its records, and proposed to be illustrated by its facts, but the Universal History itself.[47]

The main problem of the work of a historian is the ambiguity of the data he is working, but Hegel is looking behind the data, behind the ambiguity—he is searching for the totality that makes itself visible from afar. To understand how exactly he is planning on doing that, let us move on to the next section, where Hegel distinguishes between three modes of treating history: Original, Reflective, and Philosophical; the last of which of course being of special interest for the purposes of this inquiry.

1.4.1 *Three Stages of History*

The first is 'Original History' where we have Herodotuses and Thucydideses of history writing. These original historians capture what was and is immediately happening around them; they supply us with a narrative of events that they themselves have seen or give accounts of what other people they met told them. Thus, the product of this kind of writing is a very limited and ambiguous account of events, with no regard for any larger historical context.[48]

The second form of historiography is 'Reflective history'. Here we can find writers such as Livy, who do not limit themselves in their accounts to the context of their time but reflect on the ages long gone from the perspective of their time. This then leads to a more complete, but all the more vague and still inaccurate representation of the past, because, as Hegel puts it: "It is the aim of the investigator to gain a view of the entire history of a people or a country, or of the world, in short, what we call *Universal History.* [...] The

[47]Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, 1.

[48]Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 1-4.

workman approaches his task with his own spirit; a spirit distinct from that of the element he is to manipulate".[49]

Finally, we are now left only with 'Philosophical History'. When the philosophical historian looks at history as it is written, all they can see is its fragmentary and incomplete character: this leads them to search for something better; for something that would bring order to this chaos of data and information. This 'something better', as Walsh puts it, is the "divination of the meaning and point of the whole historical process, the exhibition of reason's working in the sphere of history".[50] Hegel tells us that for the philosophical historian to accomplish this, they need, to put it simply, put their 'Thought' to work'.[51] The content that the philosophical historian works with is still the empirical data of history; however, it is not sufficient for them to merely take it for what it appears to be at face value—they must introduce the 'idea', the logical reason into it, to illuminate its contents.

Here, however, an absolutely crucial distinction has to be made: in no way is the 'idea' that the philosopher brings into the empirical data to be understood as a form of an *a priori* principle. The misunderstanding concerning this fact has resulted in a lot of ill-informed critique of Hegel's system and confused many of Hegel's readers as to what actually is the meaning of his words. I myself have been for a long time a victim of this confusion, but with my newfound understanding, I will now explain what is really meant

1.4.2 *The Realization of Geist in History*

According to Hegel, for one to come upon this idea, one needs to look no further than to what is written about the history of the world. The principle is there, laying amid the chaos of information—one just needs to be able to notice it. Hegel claims that historians are ill-equipped for this; their job is merely to capture the data and categorize it according to their respective historical ages and contexts. Thus, for Hegel, this means that it is left to the philosopher, who has the capability to look at history from a broad enough view, and,

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[49]Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 4.

[50]Walsh, *Philosophy of History: An Introduction*, 142-143.

[51]Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 8.

through his use of reason, 'abstract' this principle from the data. He explicitly expresses this when he says:

> It is only an inference from the history of the World, that its development has been a rational process; that the history in question has constituted the rational necessary course of the World-Spirit - the Spirit whose nature is always one and the same, but which unfolds this its nature in the phenomena of the World's existence.[52]

According to Hegel, the key to understanding history as the rational development of spirit is to consider the 'idea of freedom'. As Hegel says, we arrive at this conclusion through what he calls 'speculative philosophy'. By this term Hegel means a philosophy that attempts to give an account of everything and to see each specific concept or discipline in its own specific context and place vis-à-vis the whole. He believes that this relation of the individual to the whole is precisely what provides the necessity. Specialized studies into individual concepts or areas always remain abstract and can never provide necessity since they fail to see their subject matter in its broader context. This failure thus distorts what they are trying to understand. The truth can thus only be understood as the whole.[53] Thus, he thinks he can make philosophy into a 'system of truth'; a system, thanks to which philosophy "can lay aside the title 'love of knowing' and be actual knowing".[54]

According to Hegel, through 'speculation', we arrive at the conclusion that the same way as matter possesses gravity which aims to drive it towards the central point outside of itself, towards the realization of its idea, its unity, where the matter would cease to be matter (thus, driving it towards its opposite); spirit also seeks its unity, but contrary to matter, spirit possess its center is in itself. Consequently, spirit is a self-contained existence that has already found its unity in itself, and by the virtue of this, it is free.[55] But spirit is at first not aware of this fact—its unity is concealed from itself and thus it is not conscious of it.

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[52]Ibid., 10.

[53]He explains this in detail in the "Preface" of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, para. 4-5; para. 36-37; para. 56;

[54]Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit,* para.5.

[55]To elaborate on this, on the page 17 of *The Philosophy of History*, Hegel tells us that freedom comes especially by the virtue of the fact that its [spirit's] existence 'depends upon itself'. This gives us a little bit more insight into the idea of freedom that Hegel has in mind when writing his work - in its very essence, it is a freedom of self-consciousness that is completely dependent upon itself.

This is why history begins as the unconscious realization of the idea of freedom. Spirit does not yet understand that it is free, and thus, in search of its unity, it keeps contradicting itself, progressively moving from the unconscious to the realm of self-consciousness. This is why Hegel understands World history as the process of the self-actualization of spirit through the dialectical process, towards its goal—Absolute Freedom. This 'Absolute Freedom' is the moment, when the fully self-conscious spirit becomes absolutely free, and this freedom will be represented in the institution of states, which will reflect this idea.

As proof of this, Hegel points us to the actual historical development of world history:

> The Orientals[56] have not yet attained the knowledge of Spirit - Man as such - is free; and because they do not know this, they are not free - only one is free; [...] The consciousness of Freedom first arose among the Greeks, and therefore some were free; but they, and the Romans likewise, knew only that some are free - not man as such. [...] The German nations, under the influence of Christianity, were the first to attain the consciousness, that man, as man, is free: that it is the freedom of Spirit which constitutes its essence.[57]

According to Hegel, in the Oriental world, slavery was at the heart of society—thus, freedom was limited to only one individual, namely the Despot or King or Emperor. Moving to the Greco-Roman world, slavery was still in place; however, freedom was extended to citizens of the state, even if that did not mean all individuals—thus, some were free. It was only with the introduction of Christianity and its concept of the infinite worth of an individual to the German nations that freedom became universally recognized in the minds of people, even if it was not yet perfectly represented in the institutions of the state.

The idea of freedom is thus that of rational beings acting in accordance with rational institutions, in contrast to acting in accordance with irrational desires and impulses. The account of its historical development gives us a clear view of Hegel's attitude towards history. As Walsh points out, Hegel is doing exactly the same thing as Kant and thinkers of the Enlightenment: "making sense of history by means of the notion of progress",[58] the

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[56]By 'Orientals' is to be understood ancient China, India, Persia, and Egypt.

[57]Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 18.

[58]Walsh, *Philosophy of History: An Introduction*, 144.

only difference being his implementation of dialectics as its driving force. By implementing dialectics, he gives historical progress its 'inevitable' dimension.

Furthermore, Hegel's account of these historical stages serves to show us that his philosophy of history does not concern itself with the individual existences of men, but rather with the lives of entire nations and civilizations. Every nation has its characteristic genius, that is reflected in its specific phenomena such as customs, norms, religion, arts, science, political institutions… or we can call it with its collective name the 'Spirit of a Nation' [*der Volksgeist*]. This is because it is the nations, not individuals,[59] which serve as the vehicle of the World Spirit on its way to self-realization.[60] For spirit to achieve this, it utilizes the irrational in human nature: needs, passions, and desires. Hegel expresses this when he writes:

> Although Freedom is, primarily, an undeveloped idea, the means it uses are external and phenomenal; presenting themselves in History to our sensuous vision. The first glance at History convinces us that the actions of men proceed from their needs, their passions, their characters and talents; and impresses us with the belief that such needs, passions and interests are the sole springs of action — the efficient agents in this scene of activity.[61]

Thus, despite the fact that the Hegelian system establishes history as fundamentally rational, it also recognizes and allows for its obviously irrational and violent side.[62] Hegel gives this a very fitting name: "the cunning of reason".[63] The idea is that rationality cleverly infiltrates or makes its way into even what appear on the face of it to be wholly irrational actions and events. Only when one steps back and sees this from a distance (perhaps of years, centuries or millennia) can one discern the rational element. To reduce it to a very

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[59]Unless we are talking about "the world-historical individuals", but even in their case it is the nation that in the end makes the leap forward.

[60]Ibid., 144.

[61]Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 20.

[62]Anyone who went through the formal education would at first readily disagree with Hegel's statement that the history of the world is a rational process - it is, after all, a story full of destruction and violence: everything, from the smallest of human settlements to the greatest of empires – history tells us a story of their ruin. However, as we can see here, Hegel's system does not attempt to ignore this dimension of history - rather, it includes it in it, as a part of the dialectic of history, as means to the general end.

[63]Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 33.

simple language, it can be understood as the well-known principle that for something new to arise, the old needs to perish. But it should not be viewed as pure destruction that destroys all to create all, over and over again. Rather, it can be better understood by the example of a flower: At the beginning of its life, a flower is only a small, relatively simple seed, lying in the ground. This seed, in a way, already contains in itself the 'idea' of the flower in its bloom. To achieve this, the flower has to continually and repeatedly 'destroy itself'—or in the words of dialectic, repeatedly negate itself—in order to fulfill its idea; but, at the same time, still remain the same flower. Here we can recall Hegel's idea of 'sublation' (*Aufhebung*). At each of the stages of its growth, the flower becomes progressively richer and richer in its existence, continually transcending its previous stage of growth, until at last, it blooms. Thus, the flower has a 'rational design', but uses irrational means to fulfill this design. The realization of freedom in the history of the world works on the same principle. Spirit achieves this by means of violence and force, with the help of the so-called 'World-Historical Individuals'. Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, or Napoleon: these are the men who Hegel claims that by fulfilling their passions, have unknowingly brought about whole new epochs of history. They bring about the end of old morals and customs, countless individuals die at their hands, and yet, through their actions, the rational spirit makes a leap forward. "Such are all great historical men - whose own particular aims involve those large issues which are the will of the World-Spirit" [*Welt-Geist*].[64]

From the foregoing, it is clear that Hegel's view of history is not as naïve or easy to refute as it might appear at first glance. In fact, when we look at the world around us, it seems that the developing idea of freedom that Hegel observed in history might have something to it. Despite all the violence and irrationality in the history—even in the most recent parts of it—our age can pride itself with achievements of freedom such as The Declaration of Human Rights that was signed by all the countries on our planet; with freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and right to vote for all people (men and women alike) in almost all of the Western countries; or with war becoming an absolutely last resort option, rather than a solution of problems between nations. It is a common and agreed upon fact that we live in a much freer world today, than did, for example, even the free people in Ancient Greece. So, does that mean that Hegel was right? Are we really moving towards the moment of 'Absolute Freedom' that he has prophesied? Hegel certainly made it hard for

[64]Ibid., 30.

one to challenge him on this notion. However, let us not jump into any rash conclusions just yet. It is now time that we give the word over to David Hume and see what his skeptical mind has to offer to the topic.

Chapter II: David Hume

The name of David Hume certainly deserves a place among 'The Greats' of philosophy. He is regarded as one of the most influential thinkers of the entire empiricist tradition. The "Great Infidel's"[65] views on induction, causation, and morality inspired thinkers such as Immanuel Kant, Adam Smith, and Charles Darwin, and remain influential to this day.[66] As I will show later in the chapter, despite being born almost three hundred years ago, Hume's ideas in many ways resemble the modern thought of our age.

The method of procedure for this chapter is as follows: First, I give a general account of the school of empiricism and explain how David Hume fits into this picture. The same way as with Hegel, I endeavor to give a fairly objective account of the influences on his writing, and of his relation to other philosophers. Second, I move to give an account of Hume's conception of empiricism, by means of consulting Section I of his *A Treatise*[67] *of Human Nature*: *Being an Attempt to introduce the experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects*. This should give us a clear overview of how Hume approaches philosophy. Last, I move to Hume's accounts concerning ideas, substances, modes, and cause and effect. Here, along with the *Treatise*, I utilize his later work *An Enquiry*[68] *Concerning Human Understanding*, where he more-less deals with the same topics as in the *Treatise*, but I find some of his accounts there more comprehensive. Analyzing these accounts should give us a clear idea of Hume's epistemology, and of his position in regards to the ideas that Hegel is proposing, and thus serve us as the point of reference for the next chapter.

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[65]As he came to be known for his skeptical views concerning religion during his early life in early eighteenth-century Scotland.

[66]William Edward Morris and Charlotte R Brown, "David Hume (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)," ed. Edward N. Zalta, Stanford.edu (Stanford University, April 17, 2019), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2021/entries/hume/.

[67]Henceforth, I will refer to it only as the *Treatise*.

[68]Henceforth, I will refer to it only as the *Enquiry*.

2.1 Understanding Hume

To begin with, let us start with a slightly broader view of empiricism, i.e., empiricism as a philosophical tradition.[69] The main thesis of empiricism is, to put it simply, that experience is the only source of our ideas.[70] Contrary to the rationalists, they reject the claim that knowledge can be gained through reason, and some specific authors of empiricism reject the notion of knowledge altogether. Thus, the dispute between empiricists and rationalists is historically fundamental: both schools of thought attempt to explain the world, however, they greatly disagree on the method, or on what we can actually learn. In general, this puts us into the realm of epistemology and metaphysics, where the main question comes down to whether the nature of reality as such is knowable, and if so, then how do we go about it.

As I have mentioned in the first chapter, Immanuel Kant attempted to reconcile the differences between these two schools of thought through his 'Transcendental Idealism'. Interestingly enough, there is evidence from Kant himself that indicates that it was actually Hume who inspired him to attempt this reconciliation:

> I freely admit that the remembrance of David Hume was the very thing that many years ago first interrupted my dogmatic slumber and gave a completely different direction to my researches in the field of speculative philosophy.[71]

And while we know that Hegel was greatly inspired by Kant, we thus have a fairly clear line connecting Hume and Hegel. This strengthens the relevance of my choice of Hume for this inquiry since it demonstrates that all three thinkers were clearly interested in the same set of epistemological issues.

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[69]Apart from Hume, in this philosophical tradition, we can find authors such as John Locke, George Berkley, or more contemporary Bertrand Russell.

[70]Peter Markie and M. Folescu, "Rationalism vs. Empiricism (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)," ed. Edward N. Zalta, Stanford.edu, 2017, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2021/entries/rationalism-empiricism/,

[71]Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able to Come Forward as Science*, 10.

Furthermore, despite being a thinker of the Enlightenment, David Hume opposed the central thesis of the whole movement, that is, our capability of attaining knowledge by the means of reason. In this way, Hume's philosophy can be understood as a reaction to the metaphysical systems of Descartes or Spinoza, that attempt to deduce a system of knowledge from certain self-evident principles.[72] For Hume, this led to no real conclusions concerning the real world, while this kind of reasoning avoids confrontation with the reality as it is experienced; and the fact is that the conclusions based on reasoning, despite using the same method of deduction, arrive at diametrically different and often incompatible results. For example, both Descartes and Spinoza began with principles which they viewed as self-evident. By means of deduction from these self-evident principles, Descartes arrived at a dualistic view of reality, where the physical and mental are of completely different substances; whereas Spinoza arrived at the conclusion that everything that exists constitutes one infinite substance. This obviously leads us nowhere, because by mutually excluding each other, these thinkers have in no way improved our understanding of the world. This is why Hume was much more impressed by the discoveries of Isaac Newton, who developed his system of physics through means of experimental testing. The conclusions that Newton drew were arrived at by a verifiable method of consulting experience, thus rooting his theory in reality. To test the truth of Newton's claims, no elaborate argumentation is needed; one simply needs to consult one's everyday experience of the world. The impact of the Newtonian method will be apparent once we get to the *Treatise*.

Finally, what no serious overview of Hume's philosophical background, no matter how brief, should omit is the influence of John Locke on Hume's thought. Throughout his works, Hume often mentions Locke as a point of reference: there are nine explicit mentions of Locke in the *Treatise*, and ninety-one in the *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding.* Among Locke's ideas belong claims such as that when human beings are born, they are a *tabula rasa*, or in other words, white, empty paper, and it is only through experience that this paper is filled up.[73] At birth humans know nothing, and only with experience of the world do they gradually build up a body of knowledge. He thus rejects

[72]Dicker*, Hume's Epistemology and Metaphysics: An Introduction,* 1-3.

[73]This makes him one of the first thinkers who recognized the importance of the education of children at an early age.

the established theory of 'innate ideas' of rationalists, that is, the notion that we have ideas from the moment of birth and prior to any experience. He also theorizes that our ideas are divided between simple and complex ones. According to Locke, simple ideas are the clear and distinct original input available to our consciousness: color, shape, size, etc.; whereas we arrive at the complex ones through reflection on the simple ones. In many ways, Hume is a logical and more radical continuation of Locke's philosophy. The core of their thought is the same, but of course, they differ on specific topics such as causality, mind, or identity. But there is no need for us to go deeper into this relationship: the purpose of this brief introduction was simply to put Hume into a broader perspective in regards to his thought, and I believe that this has now been accomplished. So, without further ado, let us dive into Hume's empiricism.

2.2 The Empiricism of David Hume

David Hume's empiricism is concerned with human nature. He proclaims this in the title of his very first book, *A Treatise of Human Nature*: *Being an Attempt to introduce the experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects.*[74] In his introduction to this book, he expresses his frustration with the state of philosophy of his time. He says that every thinker who believes that they have discovered something new in the world of philosophy or that of sciences goes on to "insinuate the praises of their own systems, by decrying all those, which have been advanced before them".[75] This is of course to be understood as a condemnation of all the prominent rationalists of his time, each of which presents their own system of knowledge based on deduction and reason, while criticizing all those that came before them for their problems and fallacies and then proceeding to introduce their own. Hume explains,

> 'Tis easy for one of judgment and learning, to perceive the weak foundation even of those systems, which have obtained the greatest credit, and have

[74]By "experimental Method" is to be understood simply as the scientific method - a method based purely on experience and observation, or in other words, what can we say about human nature from our experience of it. Here we can clearly see the influence of Newton on Hume's thought. We also have to take care to not get tricked by the phrase "Moral Subject" – in the age when Hume lived, "moral" was simply understood as human. He informs us of this at the beginning of his *Enquiry*, when he writes "Moral philosophy, or the science of human nature [...]".

[75]Hume, *Treatise*, xvii.

> carried their pretensions highest to accurate and profound reasoning. Principles taken upon trust, consequences lamely deduced from them, want of coherence in the parts, and of evidence in the whole, these are everywhere to be met within the systems of the most eminent philosophers, and seem to have drawn disgrace upon philosophy itself.[76]

Hume observes that the philosophy of his time has no internal consistency, no clear and stable foundation upon which it can build: "There is nothing which is not the subject of debate, and in which men of learning are not of contrary opinions".[77] Questions such as 'How do I know that I exist?'; or 'How do I know that anything at all exists?' preoccupy the minds of thinkers who, not unlike Descartes and Spinoza, arrive at conclusions that are incompatible with each other. This leads to a lack of certainty when it comes to answering even the most trivial of questions about the world—after all, how can I be certain of anything if I cannot be certain even of my own existence? Every problem leads to even more problems, and they just keep multiplying to the point where it seems that nothing at all is certain. This is exactly what Hume aims to fix. To be able to do that, he needs something that is present both in philosophy and the sciences, something that can serve as this foundation upon which we can build:

> 'Tis evident, that all the sciences have a relation, greater or less, to human nature; and that however wide any of them may seem to run from it, they still return back by one passage or another. Even Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, and Natural Religion, are in some measure dependent on the science of MAN; since they lie under the cognizance of men, and are judged of by their powers and faculties.[78]

Human nature is that which is present in all our human activity and thinking. No matter what you choose to do, there is always the human element present in it. Thus, Hume takes this as the only real foundation upon which we can build our understanding. So, what we are left with is the 'science of man'. To understand the nature of man is to understand the rest of our sciences since they are in fact dependent upon it.

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[76]Ibid., xvii.

[77]Ibid., xviii.

[78]Ibid., xix.

Hume further argues[79] that the only reliable way to go about this is through experience and observation: "And as the science of man is the only solid foundation for the other sciences, so the only solid foundation we can give to this science itself must be laid on experience and observation".[80] To be able to understand his reasoning behind this claim, we must turn our attention to Section I of his *Treatise*. This section is titled "Of the Origin of our Ideas." Hume begins this section with the claim that all of our perceptions can be divided into two kinds—'*Impressions'* and '*Ideas'*. They are differentiated by the "liveliness with which they strike upon the mind, and make their way into our thoughts or consciousness".[81] He explains,

> Those perceptions, which enter with most force and violence, we may name *impressions*; and under this name, I comprehend all our sensations, passions, and emotions, as they make their first appearance in the soul. By *ideas* I mean the faint images of these in thinking and reasoning; such as, for instance, are all the perceptions excited by the present discourse, excepting only, those which arise from the sight and touch, and excepting the immediate pleasure or uneasiness it may occasion.[82]

To understand what Hume means by this, let us use an example of a lightning bolt. So, let's say there is a storm and you are outside when suddenly, a lightning bolt strikes. You see an extremely bright flash of white light, followed by a loud boom. According to Hume, this leaves an *impression* upon your mind. What you saw and heard entered your consciousness with 'force and violence'—you did not make a conscious decision to let the impression of the bright flash of light and loud boom enter your mind, but it just simply happened. There also is no clarity to the event—there is no clear and distinct input of simple perceptions entering your mind as Locke would say; there is only a mush of sensory experience that your mind now has to somehow process. What is then meant by the *idea* is our remembrance of this event, of recalling the impressions that the event left upon our

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[79]To us from our modern age standpoint, this claim might appear to be fairly straightforward – after all, our sciences work entirely on this method, and they are showing extraordinary results. But for Hume to propose this during the 'Age of Reason' is quite a different story. By making the claim that we have to consult experience, not reason, to get any tangible results, he strikes human beings down from the 'pedestal of superiority' down to the world of nature, where everything works by certain mechanistic principles such as cause and effect.

[80]Hume, *Treatise*, xx.

[81]Ibid., 1.

[82]Ibid., 1.

mind. But the idea does not have the same force or the same clarity as the original impression. Hume argues that this is how all our ideas come about: they are simply faint images of the impression that were left upon us by our experience. But more on this point later.

Then there is the division between 'Simple' and 'Complex' perceptions. The basic difference is that the simple impressions and ideas cannot be further separated: for example, the impression of a color or of a specific taste such as salty, sweet, etc.; by contrast, those of the complex kind can be further distinguished into different parts. Hume uses the example of an apple, that can be distinguished into a particular taste, color, smell and texture.

However, as Hume points out, there seem to be some complex ideas, which do not correspond to any of our impressions. For example, one can imagine the idea of a golden mountain without ever seeing one. But if that is the case, how can empiricism claim that all knowledge stands upon experience, if clearly there are certain ideas which do not need to be experienced? For Hume, the answer to this problem is quite simple: despite the fact that not all complex ideas have a corresponding impression, the nature of complex perceptions is that they can be divided into simple ones. Simple perceptions do not possess the problem of the complex ones—for every simple idea, there exists a corresponding impression and vice versa. Hume explains,

> But if any one should deny this universal resemblance, I know no way of convincing him, but by desiring him to shew a simple impression, that has not a correspondent idea, or a simple idea, that has not a correspondent impression. If he does not answer this challenge, as 'tis certain he cannot, we may from his silence and our own observation establish our conclusion.[83]

In effect this means that ideas such as a 'golden mountain' or a 'unicorn' are not some ideas that only exist in our minds: the golden mountain is a connection of the idea of a mountain and the idea of gold; the unicorn is the idea of a horse and the idea of a horn. And this applies not just to the ideas of a fictional nature: for example, when I was in Athens, looking at its Parthenon left a breathtaking impression on me; however, I will

[83]Ibid., 4.

never be able to form an idea which perfectly resembles the original impression. Thus, the complex idea of the Parthenon that I imagine has no exactly resembling impression, but the simple ideas that form the complex idea do. According to Hume, this holds true for all complex ideas; and indeed, despite me trying my hardest to find an idea where this does not apply, there seems to be no exception to the rule.

Furthermore, Hume considers the causality of impressions and ideas; or in other words, what causes what. As I have already hinted at before with the example of the lightning, for Hume it is indeed simple impressions from which simple ideas are derived. Hume expresses this when he says, "*That all our simple ideas in their first appearance are deriv'd from simple impressions, which are correspondent to them, and which they exactly represent*".[84] To see, to hear, to smell, or to touch are all sensory experiences—they are felt, not thought. Our first interaction with the world is through these senses, not through our reason. If the latter were the case, this would lead to a lot of paradoxical situations: for example, we could know how an apple tastes without ever tasting it, what it feels like to be in the water without ever actually being in it, or know how the color red looks without ever seeing it.

Finally, the last thing for us to consider in this section are *impressions of reflection.* By these, Hume is able to account for the origin of specific emotions, desires and feelings—a huge group of concepts which need to be accounted for in any epistemological account, however limited.[85] To explain what Hume means by this, a simple example will suffice. This time, let us use fire. So, imagine a situation where there is a lit candle in front of you. You have never before seen fire; in fact, you have no idea what it is that you are looking at. But you are curious, and so you go and touch the bright orange-red thing flickering on the top of the unknown object; just a few moments later you scream in pain because you just got burned. The impression of pain now enters upon your mind, and your mind proceeds to make a copy of it—producing its idea. This we already know from the previous discussion. However, now that you have the experience and have formed a corresponding idea of it, the next time you see fire, this idea of pain makes its way back into your

[84]Ibid., 4.

[85]Admittedly, they by themselves are not of crucial importance for the purposes of this work, however, an overall clarity of Hume's theory must take priority over saving space by not including a few additional lines.

immediate consciousness and produces a new impression: that of fear and aversion,[86] which in effect saves you from getting burned again. This is what Hume calls the impression of reflection because it is a reflection not upon the actual perception, but upon the idea of the sensation that it made you feel before. Thus, we have now arrived at the origin of most feelings, emotions and desires.

All in all, what I have sketched above is the basic outline of David Hume's empiricism: we need to consult our experience to arrive at any tangible results because experience and feelings precede reason and ideas. One cannot give an accurate account of reality, without relying on one's experience of it; indeed, if one fails to explore the role of experience, the account falls more into the realm of fiction than that of science.

2.2.1 *Brief Remarks Concerning the State of our Inquiry*

Even at this stage, a perceptive mind can already start to notice the major differences between the philosophies of Hegel and Hume. So much so that some readers with a more critical eye might even go as far as to say that my application of Hume is thus unjustified because clearly, these two philosophers had completely different goals in mind when writing their works. And from a certain perspective, I would agree that such a criticism would be completely justified. If one wanted to do a study that compared Hume and Hegel, there really is not that much common ground to cover: the former aims to scientifically systematize the origins of our knowledge of the world with the use of a model based on an empirical study of human nature; whereas the latter aims to convince us that there is a substantial absolute truth to be found in history of the world. To juxtapose these two views makes the incompatibility painfully clear.

However, I argue that there is one extremely important aspect, where Hume and Hegel do in fact overlap, or rather where Hume is applicable to Hegel, and that is the sphere of epistemology. Specifically, I think that the basic kinds of epistemological questions that Hume is asking about how we experience the world can serve as a useful corrective to Hegel, who is not as attentive to the basics of the empirical sphere as he should be. I will

[86]But in other cases, with other sensations, for example with having a taste of some delicious food, it can be the impression of desire or hope.

explore this in detail in the third chapter of this work. Now, I shall spend the rest of the present chapter further examining and explaining Hume's epistemological analyses that are to be found in his *Treatise* and *Enquiry*, so that this is clear before we move into the third and final chapter, where only the application of Hume to Hegel shall be discussed.

2.3 Further Elaboration of The Theory of Ideas

The human imagination seems to be the freest and wildest of all places. I think it is not too bold to assume that all of us had at some point the experience of letting our imagination run freely, from one idea to another, arriving at the most distant and chaotic images. The boundaries of our imagination seem to be at least as wide as those of the universe itself. But is this really true? Hume thinks that even though it may appear this way, the power of imagination is really not that impressive. As was said before, all our complex ideas, both those that have an exact corresponding impression and those that do not, are made of simple ideas that do always have a corresponding impression. Thus, the first, most intuitive restriction upon our imagination seems to be that we can only conceive of a limited number of ideas, because there is a limited number of perceptions in the world around us. Admittedly, this still leaves a huge space for our imagination, but at least we know for sure that it is not infinite.

However, when one consults experience—as one should—it seems to be considerably narrower than that. Hume puts it nicely when he writes: "[...] nothing wou'd be more unaccountable than the operations of that faculty, were it not guided by some universal principles, which render it, in some measure, uniform with itself in all times and places".[87] Thus, when one consults experience, one can immediately discern that there seems to be some sort of regularity to what kind of complex ideas our imagination forms. It seems very unlikely that such a regularity would be a product of mere chance, precisely because complex ideas of different people who never even met often match.[88] Thus, we have a basis to believe that imagination connects ideas based on association. Hume identifies three

[87]Hume, *Treatise*, 10.

[88]As a way of example, we can take the idea of a dragon. Stories concerning dragons of all different sizes and shapes can be found in many cultures all around the world, some of which did not come into contact until recent time. This seems to imply a regular pattern of imagination in the conception of this mythical beast, that seems to be common to many different people from many different cultures.

associative qualities: *Resemblance*, *Contiguity in time or place*, and *Cause and Effect*.[89] It is no revolutionary idea that when we think, our imagination jumps from one idea to another if it finds a resemblance between them. To illustrate this, I will use something drawn from my own experience. While I was trying to think of an example to use for the associative quality of resemblance, I unknowingly let my mind wander off, and I caught myself thinking of an airplane. But then, in a matter of a second, I ended up thinking of a helicopter, based on the fact that both of these objects are capable of flying. Such is the power of resemblance. When it comes to contiguity, Hume explains it as a habit of the mind that comes from the fact that our senses necessarily change their objects often and change them for objects which are contiguous in time and place to them. This is a complicated way of saying that when you are sitting in a room, your eyes automatically wander from object to object, and what our minds do is that they connect these objects by the virtue of them being at the same time in the same place. Hume explains, "[...] the imagination must by long custom acquire the same method of thinking, and run along the parts of space and time in conceiving its objects".[90] Lastly, there is the association based on the quality of cause and effect. But because I deal with cause and effect later in a separate section, it will suffice to say here that Hume esteems this quality as the most capable of producing association. It does this either when we consider the one to be the cause of the existence of the other, or the movement and action of the other; it even suffices if we consider the one merely possessing the power of producing it.

2.4 Substances, Modes, and Cause and Effect

The last matter for us to consider in this chapter are modes, substances, and cause and effect.[91] We will see how Hume deals with each one of these in a critical manner. He wants to argue that upon examination these well-known concepts have no grounding in reality because they lack an empirical basis. In a way, this will summarize his argument of empiricism and set an example of how his epistemology can be applied to specific issues.

[89]Hume, Treatise, 11.

[90]Ibid., 11.

[91]Cause and Effect shall however receive its own sub-chapter, while Hume's treatment of it extends its conclusion over both substances and modes.

Hume believes that the ideas of substance, modes, and necessary cause and effect relations are not real but rather simply prejudices of the human mind that have no basis, strictly speaking, in our perception. This represents the famous skeptical side of Hume's theory.

2.4.1 *Substances and Modes*

> I wou'd fain ask those philosophers, who found so much of their reasonings on the distinction of substance and accident, and imagine we have clear ideas of each, whether the idea of substance be deriv'd from the impressions of sensation or reflection? If it be convey'd to us by our senses, I ask, which of them; and after what manner? If it be perceiv'd by the eyes, it must be a colour; if by the ears, a sound; if by the palate, a taste; and so of the other senses. But I believe none will assert, that substance is either a colour, or a sound, or a taste. The idea of substance must therefore be deriv'd from an impression of reflection, if it really exist. But the impressions of reflection resolve themselves into our passions and emotions; none of which can possibly represent a substance. We have therefore no idea of substance, distinct from that of a collection of particular qualities, nor have we any other meaning when we either talk or reason concerning it.[92]

I begin this section with this long quotation from Hume's consideration of substances because it is one of the clearest examples that I found of how the epistemological set up we went over in the previous sections now falls into place. Having been made famous by Aristotle, the idea of substance, of something essential about an object that truly makes it what it is, is almost as old as philosophy itself. But as we can see, just a few questions from Hume suffice to call it into question. How do we get our ideas? —Either through our senses, or impression of reflection. What are the senses can we use to perceive the substance? —Sight, hearing, touch, smell, or taste. Can we see the substance? —No. Can we hear the substance? —No. Can we smell the substance? —Again no. Can we taste the substance? —Not at all. Okay then substance must be of the impression of reflection. —Certainly. But wait, those only produce our desires, passions, and emotions. That does not seem right. Then what is the nature of this mysterious idea of substance? We can neither sense it, nor can we find it among our impressions of reflection. Thus, we are now left with only two choices: either there is a substance but none of our senses are capable of capturing it, and thus it is a completely empty idea devoid of all content which makes it absolutely

[92]Hume, *Treatise*, 15.

meaningless; or there is no such thing as substance and what we call 'substance' is just, as Hume puts it: "The idea of a substance as well as that of a mode, is nothing but a collection of simple ideas, that are united by the imagination, and have a particular name assign'd them, by which we are able to recall, either to ourselves or others, that collection".[93]

The concept of substance and accident is that there is something that endures although its properties can change (or are accidental, thus accidents). Hume calls these accidental properties 'modes' (quite uncharacteristically from their common definition). The idea is that for a thing to be a substance, it must have properties (or modes), and for a property (or mode) to exist, it must belong to a substance. There is no substance that is completely devoid of properties, and there are no free-floating properties that are not attached to substances. So, for example, there is a substance 'dog', which has *accidental* properties (or modes) of brown, of barking, of having long hair, of having a tail. These are accidental since they do not have to be present in every dog: there are some dogs who have other colors than brown, some dogs which don't bark, some dogs which don't have long hair, and some dogs that don't have a tail. So how exactly can we define the enduring substance of a dog apart from these accidental properties? Let us conceive of a situation where you ask someone to imagine a dog. It would be unintelligible to assert that a person can imagine a dog without ever seeing one. Thus, we can say with absolute certainty that the idea of a dog arose in the mind only by the virtue of the fact that the person had seen a dog before, otherwise there would be nothing to imagine, because there would be no experience to inform the idea. So, what would this idea of a dog look like? Well, it seems evident from what we already established that it would consist of properties that we were informed of by our senses. Hence, the imagined dog would most certainly have at least some of the common characteristics of a dog: eyes, ears, legs, and tail; and also, a shape of some specific dog that the person has encountered before. But where is the substance? Can anyone, after enumerating all of the possible properties that their idea of a dog consists of, point me to any single one of them and tell me that this or that thing is the substance? If so, then I would like to meet that person, because I certainly have never met one of such superior perception.

[93]Ibid., 16.

Thus, to summarize Hume's argument in regards to our example, he argues that by repeatedly encountering 'dogs', our minds put together these recurring properties in our imagination[94] and then we attribute a name 'dog' to this collection of properties. But this does not correspond to any real thing in the world called 'the substance of dogs', because there simply is no substance perceived by our senses—reflection on our experience tells us as much.[95]

In the treatment of both substances and modes, I would like to direct our attention to Hume's insistence on the empirical. If you cannot identify the impressions from which your idea is derived, the idea becomes meaningless, because it is devoid of any content. It is only the empirical that can give content to ideas. It is the human mind that goes beyond what is actually given in perception and understands what it sees as discrete substances. In perception we observe a chaos of different sensory data (for example, an abundance of very different kinds of dogs), but it is the human mind that draws a circle around this data and declares this to be an individual object (this specific dog) and that can identify it as belonging to the substance (of dog-ness). We shall come back to this line of argumentation later in the third chapter. But for now, let us turn our attention to Cause and Effect.

2.5 Cause and Effect

Even the briefest of reflections informs us that the idea of cause and effect is somehow absolutely fundamental to our understanding of the world around us. We expect that causes are always followed by their effects. When we see a lightning bolt in the sky, we expect thunder to soon follow. When we knock a cup made of glass from a table, we expect it to break. This relationship of course also goes the other way, from effects to causes. When we hear thunder, we think that there must have been a lightning bolt, we just did not see it; when we find glass shards of a cup under the table, we think that someone must have caused it to fall and break. The constant presence of certain causes leading to certain

[94]This explains why children mistake one thing for another much more often than adults do – they simply do not have enough experience to form clear ideas of objects just yet.

[95]But if there is any who wishes to maintain that there is in fact a perceivable substance of objects out there in the world, I urge him to come forth and lead me to it. Because I must surely be very unfit to write works of this kind, if my senses are unable to pick up on such important perceptions.

effects leads us to infer that there is in fact a causal relationship at work in the world around us; it leads us to an idea of cause and effect. But is it really this clear? What justifies this inference? And where can we find its origins?

In the Section IV of his *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Hume proposes what later came to be known as Hume's fork. He argues: "All the objects of human reason or enquiry may naturally be divided into two kinds, to wit, Relations of Ideas, and Matters of Fact".[96] The first kind are discoverable *a priori*,[97] by mere operations of thought. These are mainly mathematical or geometrical truths, such as 'the sum of internal degrees in every triangle is equal to one hundred and eighty degrees', or 'all bachelors are unmarried'. As Hume puts it, these propositions are "demonstratively certain"[98] because they necessarily are true. If one were to say, 'the sum of internal angles of a triangle is not always one hundred and eighty degrees, sometimes it is one hundred and ninety', this proposition would be a contradiction in terms, because it can never be demonstrated, while it is impossible to imagine or construct a triangle with a sum of all internal angles equal to one hundred and ninety degrees. When it comes to the second kind, namely the 'matters of fact', there is no such evidence of their truth, and thus their contrary is always possible. According to Hume,

> That the sun will not rise to-morrow is no less intelligible a proposition, and implies no more contradiction, than the affirmation, that it will rise. We should in vain, therefore, attempt to demonstrate its falsehood. Were it demonstratively false, it would imply a contradiction, and could never be distinctly conceived by the mind.[99]

'The cup is full' and 'the cup is not full'; 'it will rain tomorrow' and 'it will be sunny tomorrow': all propositions of this kind can be proven true or false only by experience.

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[96]Hume, *Enquiry*, para. 25.

[97]As Peter Millican writes in the introduction to *Enquiry,* that certain relations of ideas are discoverable *a priori* is not to be understood as the ideas they involve are somehow innate to the mind. "What makes a truth a priori is that it can be justified without appeal to experience, purely by thinking about the ideas involved". This is to say that when one thinks about the ideas of 'a bachelor' and 'marriage', both being acquired through experience, one is able to conclude without any further appeal to experience - thus *a priori* - that the bachelor can only be a bachelor if he is not married.

[98]Hume, *Enquiry*, para. 25.

[99]Ibid., para. 26.

The evidence of their truth is thus completely rooted in the empirical, and unlike the first kind, there is no *necessity* to their truth.

Now, let us consider the idea of cause and effect through the lens of Hume's fork. So, is the idea of a causal relationship, for example, lightning being followed by thunder, demonstratively certain? Well, we can easily imagine thunder without lightning, or lightning without thunder following it. Or to use Hume's example of billiard balls, we can see one ball moving towards another, and imagine various outcomes: the balls bounce off each other and go into different directions; the second ball does not move and the first one bounces off; none of the balls continues moving after they make contact—the options are endless. This would not be possible if their relationship was demonstratively certain, because that would lead to a contradiction. So, it seems that the inference of causal relation is in fact *not* demonstratively certain. Thus, it must be of the other kind—matter of fact.

Hume confirms this when he writes: "All reasonings concerning matter of fact seem to be founded on the relation of Cause and Effect".[100] When we find a phone on an empty street, we infer that there must have been a person passing before us who lost it; seeing smoke rising over a forest leads us to infer that there is a fire which produced it; if we let go of a pen mid-air, we expect it to fall onto the ground; and countless more examples that can be produced at will by anyone who wishes to enumerate further. But where do we get the idea of causal relationship from? It certainly cannot be a form of *a priori* knowledge. Put a candle in front of a man with the most perfect and advanced faculty of reason, but strip him of all experience of the world, and watch him get burned by the flame like a child seeing fire for the first time in their life. Hume says that even the biblical Adam, "though his rational faculties be supposed, at the very first, entirely perfect, could not have inferred from the fluidity, and transparency of water, that it would suffocate him, or from the light and warmth of fire, that it would consume him".[101] No honest man will ever assert that upon seeing a piece of coal for the first time in their life, they instantly became aware of its capacity to keep them warm during the cold winter; nor will they be able to produce an *a priori* argument as to why eating an apple is good for their health, without having learned

[100]Ibid., para. 27.

[101]Ibid., para. 27.

basic chemistry and biology. Hence, we can say for a fact that all knowledge of causal relationships is based on experience.

But that still does not seem to be a sufficient answer to the question of this section. We now know that all our knowledge of cause and effect is based on experience, but what really is the cause-and-effect relationship in itself? In the example of lightning followed by thunder, we have two very distinct objects—lightning and thunder—and we may observe that it seems to be the case that when there appears a lightning bolt in the sky, it is most of the time followed by thunder. But that by itself tells us nothing of the causal relationship itself, we still have no idea why it is so, no idea of what connects these two completely distinct objects—we do not get to experience the causal link. What we really need is to consider any single event of cause and effect, no matter how simple and ordinary, and analyze it to its details. Let us take as an example Hume's billiard balls. What immediately appears to the senses is that there are two balls and one of them is in motion while the other one is standing in place. When the ball in motion reaches the one that is not, the latter suddenly gets into motion as well. According to Hume, this tells us that contiguity of objects: the two balls coming into contact; and succession of one by another: the motion of the first ball followed by the motion of the second one; is somehow linked to our idea of cause and effect. He writes,

> Having thus discover'd or suppos'd the two relations of *contiguity* and *succession* to be essential to causes and effects, I find I am stopt short, and can proceed no farther in considering any single instance of cause and effect. Motion in one body is regarded upon impulse as the cause of motion in another. When we consider these objects with the utmost attention, we find only that the one body approaches the other; and that the motion of it precedes that of the other, but without any sensible interval. 'Tis in vain to rack ourselves with farther thought and reflection upon this subject. We can go no farther in considering this particular instance.[102]

Thus, it seems we have hit a dead end in the inquiry into the nature of the idea of cause and effect. There does not seem to be any relationship to be experienced, which we could take as the basis for the impression of the idea. The relationship does not reveal itself to our senses either from the cause, or from its effect, and not even from their interaction.

[102]Hume, *Treatise*, 76.

But at the same time, it still cannot be denied that we think about the world around us in terms of cause and effect—our experience tells us as much. So where could it be hiding?

To find an answer to this, we need to consider why we believe in the idea of cause and effect at all. Why do we believe that the sun will come up in the morning tomorrow? — Because it did today. How is the fact that the sun came up today in any way related to the supposition that it also will tomorrow? What makes us so certain that it will? —The fact that it had risen day after day, every day, ever since we were born. Aha! So, it seems that we make the assumption based on our past experience of the same event occurring over and over again. Reason plays no part in it, nor can we find the experience of the causal power or force in our memory: it is purely based on custom and habit; a *feeling of expectation* that the future is going to resemble the past. Every time the sun set in the evening, it rose again in the morning. So, we say that it will also rise tomorrow. The vast majority of the time when there was a flash of lightning in the sky, the thunder followed. So, we say that the appearance of lightning causes thunder. Whenever we saw one billiard ball crashing into another, the other billiard ball began to move after the impact. So, we say that the first ball caused the movement of the second one. Hume calls this 'constant conjunction'. He writes,

> Now this is exactly the present case. Reason can never shew us the connexion of one object with another, tho' aided by experience, and the observation of their constant conjunction in all past instances. When the mind, therefore, passes from the idea or impression of one object to the idea or belief of another, it is not determin'd by reason, but by certain principles, which associate together the ideas of these objects, and unite them in the imagination. Had ideas no more union in the fancy than objects seem to have to the understanding, we cou'd never draw any inference from causes to effects, nor repose belief in any matter of fact. The inference, therefore, depends solely on the union of ideas.[103]

and

> We have no other notion of cause and effect, but that of certain objects, which have been *always conjoin'd together*, and which in all past instances have been found inseparable. We cannot penetrate into the reason of the conjunction. We only observe the thing itself, and always find that from the constant conjunction the objects acquire an union in the imagination.

[103]Hume, *Treatise*, 92.

> When the impression of one becomes present to us, we immediately form an idea of its usual attendant [...][104]

Thus, we have arrived at the conclusion of Hume's inquiry into the origin of the idea of causal relation. It is neither in the cause, nor in the effect, not even in their connection; no matter from what angle you look at the issue, there seems to be no causal link out there in the world that our senses could pick up on, and from the impression of which our minds could form the idea of it. And as it turns out, the reason why we could not find it out there in the world, is that it was hiding inside of us all along: it is our minds, our imaginations, that impose the causal structure upon the sensory data. Our minds become habituated by the constant conjunction of certain objects, such as lightning and thunder, or sunset and sunrise, and begin to form an idea of their causal dependency and necessity. But it is all just in our mind.

> So that, upon the whole, there appears not, throughout all nature, any one instance of connexion, which is conceivable by us. All events seem entirely loose and separate. One event follows another; but we never can observe any tye between them. They seem conjoined, but never connected.[105]

Once we see the cause, we automatically begin to *expect* the effect to follow. "Motion in one body in all past instances, that have fallen under our observation, is follow'd upon impulse by motion in another. 'Tis impossible for the mind to penetrate farther. From this constant union it *forms* the idea of cause and effect, and by its influence *feels* the necessity".[106] But there is no necessity to it. The only assurance of it happening is that it has happened before, but that only makes it probable at best. Thus, that leads us to conclude that there do not exist any discoverable necessary relations, we only by nature like to believe so.[107]

To sum up, Hume has demonstrated that there are no substances in our experience but rather this is an idea of the mind that goes beyond anything that we actually perceive. Likewise, the idea of necessary cause and effect is also a prejudice of our minds and not

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[104]Hume, *Treatise*, 93.

[105]Hume, *Enquiry*, para. 74.

[106]Hume, *Treatise*, 406.

[107]This reasoning extends to all different kinds of ideas: substances, modes; even identity.

something found in experience. Hume's empiricist plea is for us to look carefully and precisely at what we perceive and not go beyond this when we draw conclusions about the way the world truly is. He demonstrates that we must be extremely cautious about what we add on to our actual experience since the human mind tends to make illegitimate inferences of the kind illustrated by these two examples. If Hume had been a contemporary of Hegel, I think that he would have argued that Hegel is guilty of exactly this error, that is, of imposing onto empirical experience some abstract idea that there is no basis for in actual perception.

I urge the reader to understand my treatment of Hume's epistemology when it comes to ideas such as substances, modes, and cause and effect as a setup of my own inquiry into the nature of absolute truth that will follow shortly after. The goal of this is not to now go and treat Hegel's system as a system based on cause-and-effect relations, which it clearly is not. The goal was to first present the method that Hume introduces when it comes to knowledge in general, and to show how it applies to particular philosophical questions, so that I can now take this method and apply it further myself. With this in mind, we are now ready to move onto the last chapter of this inquiry.

Chapter III: Application of Hume's Epistemology to Hegel's Idea of The Absolute

It is often said that the first and the last steps are always the hardest to take; and indeed, the last chapter of this work proves to be no easy task. Neither Hume nor Hegel made it easy for one to disagree with them, much less to put them against each other. For the sake of clarity of what we are about to set ourselves to do here, let us briefly review what we already know from the discussions of the previous chapters.

First, we examined Hegel. Hegel presents to us an idea of the *Geist* of World History, rapidly and necessarily developing towards its Absolute conclusion by means of the dialectical process. Despite the irrational appearance of world history, Hegel argues that this is only the 'cunning of reason' of the rational Spirit, i.e., the means that Spirit uses to achieve its end of the Absolute, of self-actualization. According to Hegel, it is up to philosophers such as himself to look at the history of mankind from a broad enough point of view, so that they can see past its shallow scrambles and fights, and to penetrate to the real and substantial in it. This real and substantial is of course Spirit, and Hegel claims that one can see it when one considers the development of the idea of freedom in history. He says that tracing and studying this development, from the Oriental world of the past to the Germanic world of his present, is the way one can clearly see the outline of the rational structure of history.

And then, we turned to Hume. In Hume, we went over his views on epistemology which are strictly rooted in the empirical. Hume claims that all of our ideas come from experience—thus rejecting the capabilities of reason and 'innate ideas' as a whole. We experience the world through our senses. When we see, hear, taste, feel, or smell something, it leaves a simple impression on our minds. Our minds then form ideas from these impressions, and our imagination, based on associations, connects these simple ideas into complex ones. If there is no experience, there can be no idea, and from this point, Hume goes to inquire into the nature of modes, substances, and cause and effect relations. In each of them, Hume claims to have found no experience that would confirm their reality: no matter how he turned them and from which way he looked at them, the inquiry always proved to be fruitless. There simply was nothing substantial to be found in the sense data concerning their existence; no simple impressions that would inform these ideas. This

leads him to conclude that when it comes to the world of experience and perceptions—the only world that we can in fact know—all of these ideas are completely empty and devoid of any meaning; thus, we need to look for their origin elsewhere. This 'elsewhere' proved to be the human mind, which, without us being aware of it, imposes a structure upon the sense data and makes it to be more than it actually is.

The story of this work thus far was one of explanation and reflection, but now I turn to critical evaluation. I have gone over everything that I found necessary to make the positions of the philosophers clear, and now all that is left is the application of Hume to the ideas of Hegel. However, as I have already pointed out, due to the irreversibility of time, Hume never had the chance to react to Hegel, and thus it is up to me to make the case in his name. To do this, in this chapter I shall restrict myself to what I wish to say concerning the topic at hand, utilizing only the already laid out theoretical framework. My criticism shall consist of three counterarguments that I raise with the use of Hume's epistemology against Hegel's conception of the Absolute in history. And in the spirit of Hume, I ask: Is it really this clear? What justifies this inference? And where can we find its origins?

3.1 Is It Really This Clear?

The first objection I wish to raise is against Hegel's claim that the history of the (human) world is in fact a dialectical process in movement. It is true that if we consider it purely from what Hegel tells us in his lectures on *The Philosophy of History*, then yes, it can be admitted that it makes good sense and the idea of it appears intuitive and fairly non-problematic. For the historical dialectic to work, you need to have the rational and the irrational present, and only a little reflection on our history seems to show us both. We also can say that it really does seem to be true that history presents us with a story of progress, where even the most outrageously irrational of human actions is followed by a rational jump forward. To illustrate this, it suffices for us to look at how much the world has progressed since the end of the Second World War. Institutions such as NATO or the European Union, or documents such as The Universal Declaration of Human Rights are all more or less direct responses to the atrocities committed during the war period.

But is this enough? Does the fact that Hegel's dialectical movement can make sense of history suffice for us to proclaim it as the truth? We surely cannot make a conclusion of

such tremendous importance without being presented with hard facts and proof. Just because it makes some sense in no way leads to the conclusion that it must be necessarily true. And if Hume has taught us anything, then it is that one should always consult experience to get to the bottom of things. Thus, the question I ask is simple, yet cannot be avoided; nor can I be denied the right to ask it: What evidence do we have to support the idea of history being a necessary conceptual and dialectical process?

Hegel says that "It is only an inference from the history of the World, that its development has been a rational process".[108] We have already touched upon the meaning of these words before,[109] but just to make it absolutely clear, Hegel claims that it is by studying the data of the history of the World (which are as a matter of fact empirical) that its rational design makes itself visible. But what is required is a step back, an overall view of the whole. According to Hegel, this is a job for which the speculative philosopher is much better suited than the historian: it is the philosopher who can look past the particular events of history and see the true and the substantial at work behind it. Only by broadening our perspective can we see the recurring pattern, the principle of freedom coming forward over and over again, each time more complete, closer to its Absolute realization.

But is this 'inference' really justifiable? We here enter the sphere of inductive reasoning—a sphere which an epistemology of an empiricist such as Hume can only be critical of. When Hegel writes that an 'inference from world history' is necessary to show that it is indeed a rational process, what he really writes is this: We have a totality of historical data to which we can turn when trying to learn anything relevant about the past. At first, this historical data appears scattered and chaotic, with no real structure, one event just followed by another. If we try to study any specific period of time or any specific event, it tells us very little about the history of the world—this is why we need to try to comprehend it as a whole. In fact, it is similar to when one is looking at a painting or mosaic: if one stands too close to it, one cannot see the whole picture; only particular parts that lack the unity of the whole. According to Hegel, once we take a step back and take a look at history, a recurring principle makes itself visible. No matter how great the atrocities of history were, it seems that humanity as a whole is slowly but steadily making forward progress.

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[108]Already cited before in footnote number 52.

[109]Section 1.3.1.

It was this that suggested to Hegel that despite its explicitly chaotic and violent side, the history of the world appears to be a rational process; a process with an internal logic—dialectical logic for that matter—that can be traced all the way back to the beginnings of written history. The principle of progress, namely the development of freedom, thus becomes the 'inference', the lens through which we are supposed to view history in order to see its rational design. This is why he says that we can see it developing over three specific time periods: from the Oriental world where almost none are free, through the Greco-Roman world where some are free, until the Christian world of his time where almost all are free. This is why the end of history is in the Absolute: it is the Absolute realization of the freedom of Spirit. This is why it is necessary: because it is the internal conceptual logic that dictates the way, and the way is clearly forward. In Hegel's hands, the development of freedom became the central motive of all of history; in fact, his view can be considered by many as comforting and hopeful. He made history make complete sense.

There is only one slight issue with it: it in no way justifies the inference in question. Here, as in any other inference, we are moving from the *particular* to the *universal*. Hegel has discerned a principle of freedom, and then he proceeded to apply it universally throughout history. But what justifies this move? Let us recall the discussion of cause and effect from the previous chapter. There we have learned from Hume that "All the objects of human reason or enquiry may naturally be divided into two kinds, to wit, Relations of Ideas, and Matters of Fact".[110] Thinking of the first kind otherwise leads to a contradiction in terms, whereas of the second kind the opposite is always possible. Of which kind is Hegel's principle of freedom in history and the idea of progress? Well, we can easily imagine, for example, that starting tomorrow the whole process will start to go in reverse, Spirit will begin devolving and losing its freedom; or that the whole of the supposed historical progress will disappear from day to day, our whole civilization collapsing and being thrown back into the stone age. We can imagine all that, and thus it does not imply a contradiction in terms—there is no *a priori* justification,[111] nothing to arrive at by a mere operation of thought. Thus, Hegel's principle of freedom and of the progress in history, whether we

[110]Already cited before in footnote number 96.

[111]Here I mean *a priori* in the sense as used by Hume. See footnote number 97.

like it or not, falls under 'Matters of Fact'. And as a 'matter of fact', it is subject to all the same conclusions that we have arrived at in that section.[112]

Thus, it follows that there is no way to justify its necessity by logic because the future does not have to resemble the past. Hegel's principle of freedom is based on 'constant conjunction' of conjoined objects—only in his case, it is of reason and unreason. Hegel observed that no matter how great the display of human unreason in history is, it is always in turn followed by reason: wars leading into peace treaties and beginnings of cooperation; the institution of slavery dissolving when the tyranny of it reached its peak; and the greatest of conquests full of blood and suffering leading to new flourishing civilizations. He became habituated by it, custom and habit forming in his mind, and acquired a feeling of expectation that the future will resemble the past. He then brought this habit with him into his future interactions with historical data: it was not an *a priori* structure that he is so often accused of, but rather a habit of mind that he has acquired by studying the said data. And this is why I argue that Hegel's idea of "Spirit" progressing in history is just such an imposition of an idea on the sense data. Despite Hegel's best efforts, the historical account that he presents to us does not point to any substantial perception of Spirit. No matter how many instances of unreason being followed by reason that Hegel presents, he will never arrive at the point where he can say it is necessary. I can even go as far as to say that Hegel is correct, and up until now, the whole course of history is exactly how he has described it: a story of progress, of human beings, becoming progressively freer and freer, with three consecutive stages of history that strictly define the levels of development of freedom; and yet, there is still no way to make the logical leap from contingent to necessary. Who is to say that it will not change tomorrow? No amount of proof, no matter how convincing it can be, will ever suffice for us to be sure.

It might be argued in Hegel's defense that the necessary element is *conceptual* and not *empirical*, as we discussed above. It can be conceded that there is a necessity (in Hegel's sense) in the relations of the opposite concepts that he discusses: being and nothing, vertical and horizontal, right and left, etc. However, if the necessity lies in the conceptual and not the empirical element, then how can this be said to apply to history, which happens in the empirical world? For Hume, this would appear to be in principle impossible since it

[112]Section 2.5.

requires an interface of necessity (of concepts) with the world of perception, where there is no necessity.

3.2 The Construction of History

The moment that Hegel began viewing history through the lens of the realization of the Spirit and of the progression of freedom, he in fact stopped talking about the actual history of the world altogether. He began constructing his own history, rather than re-constructing the one that he started with, both consciously and unconsciously ordering it according to the pattern he inferred from his studies of it. To prove this, we do not need to construct any elaborate argument—Hegel himself readily confirms this in his *Lectures*. He says that it is in fact the job of a philosopher (a speculative philosopher specifically) to introduce the idea of reason to the historical data, in order to arrive at substantial conclusions, because "the Reason is the Sovereign of the World".[113] However, the moment that we allow for this, Hegel's philosophy of history starts, and the history of the world proper ends. We move from the re-construction of the events to new construction, one that is built around the idea of realization of Spirit in history at its heart. As proof of this, let us re-consider the account of the historical development as outlined by Hegel from section 1.3.2 of the present work. Hegel writes:

> The Orientals have not yet attained the knowledge of Spirit - Man as such - is free; and because they do not know this, they are not free - only one is free; [...] The consciousness of Freedom first arose among the Greeks, and therefore some were free; but they, and the Romans likewise, knew only that some are free - not man as such. [...] The German nations, under the influence of Christianity, were the first to attain the consciousness, that man, as man, is free: that it is the freedom of Spirit that constitutes its essence.[114]

Any person who went through the basics of history in school will readily admit that the way that Hegel describes history is diametrically different from that of the history we hear from actual historians. The use of terminology such as 'the knowledge of Spirit' or 'the consciousness of Freedom' is not something that we find in our regular history. That is

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[113]Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 9.

[114]Already cited before in footnote number 57.

because what Hegel is describing is the 'History of the Spirit" and not the history of the world. However, this by itself is no accusation, but it is merely stating the obvious. It is clear that Hegel was aware of it since he refers to it himself in *The Philosophy of History*,[115] but he just did not view it as a problem. Nevertheless, just because he did not view it as a problem does not mean that it is not one; nor does it mean that we as readers must, or should, respect it. On the contrary, to stay true to the empirical, we must reject such a proposition. It is a matter of fact that history is a realm of purely empirical data. It cannot be any other way; empirical data is all that history gives us. The study of history as a subject must then necessarily be informed by the methodological structuring of the empirical data at hand according to their respective time periods in history—otherwise, it would become a realm of fiction and nothing reliable and intelligible could be said about the past. The only way that Hegel's proposition would be acceptable is if he managed to convince us that the necessity of his conceptual dialectical movement is applicable to the data of history; and not only that, but also that it is, in fact, necessary for its working. However, as we have seen in the previous section, this is not the case.

3.3 Necessity in History

But all of this is not to say that what Hegel argues for is completely devoid of value and meaning. The conceptual necessity that he describes is in fact very telling of how the human mind thinks about history, how it perceives it, and how it imposes a connection on all that has ever happened to the present state of things. It is correct to say that the necessity that Hegel describes exists in the realm of imagination and is very telling of its workings. We like to think of history as a necessary process that has its beginning and its end; we like to believe that the way we are living now is better than it was a thousand years before; we also like to think that it will progressively be getting better in the future as well. We cannot think in terms of probability that Hume advocates upon which it seems that reality functions—we need to have certain 'absolutes' to make sense of our lives. That the sun will rise tomorrow is no more certain than that it will not—that is factually right—but we cannot be constantly thinking of the world in this way. The empirical world is a world full of uncertainty—uncertainty which is not fit for our fragile human brains. Imagine every day waking with a fear of whether the sun will rise; every step you take consciously think

[115]He refers to it at the top of page nine of "Introduction" to *The Philosophy of History*.

about the fact that it might be your last, that maybe you will fall through the ground, or that maybe all of a sudden, the world will end. That would be a life full of anxiety that would certainly drive any person to insanity. And in a way, I think that this might have been what Hegel was aiming at: to present the way human beings necessarily think about the world, how our consciousness approaches it and how it approaches others around it.

But, to say that history functions like this is factually incorrect: there is no necessity in history, and it is a logical leap to go from the empirical data we have to a necessary conception of the development of an idea—there is nothing we can base this necessity on. I believe that Hume managed to show us quite convincingly why even our most educated guesses about the world are based on nothing more than habit and custom of the mind. There is no 'Absolute' to be found in the historical process, no 'Absolute conclusion' towards which we are aiming; at least not in a way that we would be able to describe it because none of the sense data we have has the power to inform us of it. Although like the ideas of substance and cause and effect Hegel's idea might seem to have a degree of plausibility, it is nonetheless not found in the sense data strictly speaking. Therefore, despite Hegel's claims for the necessary development of the idea in history, this is not justified by the actual historical material in any way. Thus, Hegel's idea of absolute necessary truth in history cannot be justified by experience.

Concluding Remarks

It is now proper to answer questions that surely linger in the minds of attentive readers whenever they read a work such as this, that is, a work that claims to have brought something new to the table: So what?; Why should anyone care?; and Why is any of this important?

As we have seen, Hegel proposes a strong and compelling argument for the idea of progress in history. He makes a convincing attempt to root it in the empirical just as much as in the rational and fixes it in necessity through his dialectics. Historically speaking, Hegel's theory was without a doubt strongly influential in creating the very concept of World History and the paradigm of historiography that regards history as a form of progress. That history is progressing forward seems now to be a common belief not only of those who study history or Hegel but also of our society in general. There appears to be something deeply fundamental about it: one can scarcely find a person who would wholeheartedly claim that the world we live in is not better than the one of the past. Even our educational system seems to reflect this: subjects such as literature, history, or philosophy, all require a profound chronological knowledge of the whole field before the person is considered to be able to build on it and come up with something new. Taking all this into consideration, it truly makes it seem that the human being of today is the 'historical animal' produced by the necessity of the world-historical movement that Hegel conceives it to be.

This is why the conclusions I propose in the third chapter of this work prove to be all the more important since they are not only limited to Hegel's theory but rather are also applicable to the belief in the progress of history as such. When it comes to Hegel, I have demonstrated that there is no discoverable necessary conceptual movement of the idea of freedom in history. This proved to be simply unsustainable in the face of the fact that history is a purely empirical realm, in which there exists no necessity. Thus, the necessity that the conceptual logic brings with it is fundamentally incompatible with World History proper. Likewise, I have concluded that there is no way to justify the inference of reason as the fundamental design of history that Hegel argues for. No amount of empirical data holds the power to serve as proof of such absolute claims, and every claim of this kind can ultimately be seen to be an imposition of the mind onto the sense data. And as I have

shown, that is exactly what Hegel's *Philosophy of History* proves to be: an imagined *construction* of the historical development centered around the idea of freedom, based on an unjustifiable inference of reason in history. Because of this, the idea of a discoverable 'Absolute Truth' falls on its face so to speak: there might be an Absolute in Hegel's conception of history based on conceptual logic, but in no way does this extend to the realm of the empirical history of the world.

But regardless of that, there still seems to be something very intuitive about Hegel's theory. Thus, I conceded that what Hegel describes makes complete sense if we are talking strictly in the terms of the human mind. There, both the concepts of the necessary conceptual relations of Hegel's dialectics and the inference of reason from the World-Historical data have their place, and also their origins. This suggests that there might be space for an interpretation of Hegel's *Philosophy of History* as the prime example of the natural structure of the human mind, treating it through the lens of the phenomenon of 'pareidolia'.[116]

For the people in the field of philosophy, my unusual treatment of Hegel through the lens of Hume's epistemology might prove to be an interesting deviation from what already exists in the field. I believe I have clearly shown that, despite the fact that using Hume is in fact anachronistic, the theory that he lays down is way ahead of his time and can be applied to later thinkers; even to ones as complex as Hegel. This might potentially open doors for other researchers or students of philosophy who share my interest in the thought of Hegel and want to present something innovative, but feel like all the usual writers who are commonly used to approach Hegel's philosophy are already exhausted.

The way that the history of philosophy is usually read is that Kant is understood to have completely refuted the schools of rationalism and empiricism (including Hume) with his transcendental philosophy. This reading comes more or less directly from Kant's own comments in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Since Kant is obviously an interested party, this should make us suspicious about this interpretation of these previous schools of thought. Given his influential interpretation, all the focus falls on the critique of Hume (and the other empiricists) that is found in Kant and the other German idealists including Hegel.

[116]Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines pareidolia as "the tendency to perceive a specific, often meaningful image in a random or ambiguous visual pattern".

But this is one-sided and unfair. Instead of allowing Kant himself to dictate the interpretation of the history of philosophy and his role in it, it seems only fair to allow Hume and the empiricists to have the opportunity to respond to Kant and the idealists who want to cast them in the role of an *aufgehoben* paradigm.[117] As this thesis has shown, there is every reason to think that Hume's empirical skepticism has much to say that is critical of Kant, Hegel, and the other German idealists. The thesis thus opens a shift in perspective on our reading of the history of philosophy and will, I hope, encourage further research alone the same lines.

Furthermore, when I look at the World around me, it seems to me that the discourse concerning historical development—even if only in implicit form—is leaning heavily towards the side of Hegel's conception of history. Politicians often make use of historical rhetoric in order to support their ideas; companies constantly create advertisements with the idea of progress at its heart; and overall, there is a push to make everyone aware of the idea that we are living in a much better world than the people of the past did. But there is always a danger in such thinking based on a belief. It makes us lose sight of what is real and what is factual. And how are we supposed to approach the world for what it is if our most basic inclinations seem to be deceiving us?

This is why, by refuting Hegel's conception of history using Hume's empiricist epistemology, I have managed to show that there is a need to go back and rethink our approach to progress in history: both as a scientific subject and as a concept of interest for man as such. We can only know what we perceive and thus we need to take better care to not get fooled by our minds that seem to be naturally imposing a structure of the mind on to the sense data available to us, and making more of it than what actually empirically appears. In order to arrive at any tangible and factual results, we need to remember Hume's words, and always rely on the empirical and consult the experience, because that is where all of our ideas—the idea of the Absolute included—have their origins.

[117]This means that empiricism is regarded as "negated" and "refuted" and now "surpassed by the idealists.

Resumé

Zámerom tejto práce je predstaviť kritický prístup ku konceptu nevyhnutnej Absolútnej Pravdy dejín, ktorú Hegel vyvinul vo *Filozofii Dejín*. Hegelovým cieľom je opísať históriu ako nevyhnutné racionálne hnutie s nutným cieľom v 'Absolútnom'. Hegelov argument sa riadi tvrdením, že história nám rozpráva príbeh pokroku, resp. myšlienka 'slobody' sa viditeľne rozvíja smerom k jej plnému uskutočneniu prostredníctvom toho, čo nazýva dialektickým procesom. Táto úplná realizácia je absolútna a ako dôkaz toho uvádza historické údaje.

Autor, ale argumentuje, že Hegelova metóda zaobchádzania s históriou má inherentnú chybu, ktorá spôsobuje, že jeho záver o Absolútnom nemožno dokázať—namiesto toho, aby znovu vybudoval históriu tak, ako sa to stala, Hegel vytvára novú 'históriu' založenú na princípe slobody, ktorý 'vyvodil' alebo 'vytrhol z histórie' počas svojich štúdií. Potom pokračuje v používaní tohto princípu ako svojej 'pozorovacej šošovky', a tak prichádza k príbehu histórie, ktorý je veľmi odlišný od príbehu tradičného historika. Ukazuje to analýzou Hegelovej *Filozofie Dejín* v prvej kapitole tejto práce.

Ako kritiku Hegelovho prístupu ku histórii, autor používa striktne empirickú epistemológiu Davida Humea, ktorú vysvetľuje v druhej kapitole tejto práce analýzou Humeovhých diel: *Pojednania ľudskej prirodzenosti* a *Otázka týkajúca sa ľudského porozumenia*. Cieľom autora je vysvetliť Humeove striktne empirické myslenie, pokiaľ ide o témy, ako je pôvod myšlienok, kauzality, podstaty a spôsobov. Táto analýza slúži na poukázanie neschopnosť zmyslových údajov a rozumu slúžiť ako dôkaz akejkoľvek nevyhnutnej Absolútnej Pravdy. Všetko tu zmienené poskytuje základy pre presvedčivú kritiku Hegelovej teórie histórie. Autor, teda tvrdí, že Hegelov 'objav' potrebného koncepčného hnutia myšlienky slobody v dejinách je nezachovateľný, keď je vystavený prísne empirickej epistemológii Humea; Okrem toho tvrdí, že Hegelov opis historického vývoja založený na vyvodení racionality z empirických údajov je metodologicky neoprávnený, keďže je len vnucovaním štruktúry vytvorenou mysľou do zmyslových údajov histórie.

Záverom tejto práce je, že kritická analýza Hegelovej Absolútnej Pravdy v dejinách je iba vnucovanie štruktúry ľudskej mysle do empirických zmyslových údajov. Autor tvrdí, že, keď koncept podrobíme kontrole empirického skúmania, tak sa stáva nezachovateľným, neobhájiteľným a neoprávneným. Aplikáciou Humeovych záverov z analýz kauzality, podstaty a

spôsobov, sa koncepty, ako 'vývoj konceptu slobody v histórii' alebo 'nevyhnutnej Absolútnej Pravdy' predstavené Hegelom ukazujú ako empiricky neobhájiteľné a tým pádom prázdne. To ho vedie k záveru, že Hegelove tvrdenia v žiadnom prípade nepreukazujú ani nedokazujú tvrdenie o Absolútnej Pravde v histórii. V dôsledku toho téza naznačuje možnú potrebu prehodnotiť spôsob, akým pristupujeme k histórii, ktorý je v dnešnej spoločnosti postavený na ideách progresu, podobných, ako tých zastával Hegel. Na základe týchto záverov, autor tvrdí, že je potrebné sa zamerať sa na striktne empirické vedomosti kedykoľvek sa pokúšame robiť nevyhnutné tvrdenia či už o histórii alebo o svete. Nakoniec, autor naznačuje, že táto téza otvára dvere možnosti interpretácie Hegelovej *Filozofie Dejín* ako skvelého príkladu prirodzenej štruktúry ľudskej mysle.

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