

Actions as Events and Vice Versa: Kant, Hegel and the Concept of History

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τὰ γενόμενα ἐξ ἀνθρώπων

Most commentary on Kant’s and Hegel’s writings¹ on history focuses on their substantive claims about progress, especially the nature and plausibility of these claims.² Very little attention is devoted to the concept of history both philosophers employ, namely, the concept of a whole composed of what Herodotus calls “that which is brought about [τὰ γενόμενα] by human beings”).³ Such neglect is perhaps explicable on the grounds that philosophical history belongs to a discipline outside philosophy, such as the history of

¹ Citation to Kant is to the Akademie edition [=AA], by volume and page number with the exception of the first *Critique* [=KrV], cited according to the original A and B editions. Citation to Hegel is to *Werke*, (ed.) M. Moldauer and K. Markus. Frankfurt, by volume and page number.

² Discussion tends to focus on whether the claims of progress are plausible, and this usually means without a metaphysically demanding or scientifically obsolete teleology. For Kant, see Wood, 1999 and 2006; Deligiorgi, 2005 and 2006; Ypi, 2010; Pollman, 2011. For Hegel see Riedel, 1970; O’Brien, 1975; di Giovanni, 1984; McCarney, 2000; Wenning, 2009. As a result, substantive concerns tend to dominate. For example, a key substantive issue in the literature on Kant is whether moral progress is compatible with the core tenets of Kant’s moral philosophy. Whereas earlier commentators, such as Galston, 1975 and Yovel, 1980, emphasise political progress, the possibility of moral progress is central to most recent commentary (van der Linden, 1988; Castillo, 1990; Axinn, 1994; Kleingeld, 1995 and 1999), despite well-documented difficulties (see Stern, 1986). In Hegel scholarship, the debate tends to be divided between secularised political readings (from Kroner, 1931 to Rockmore, 1997) and those that discern a religious dimension to Hegel’s progressive claims (Berthold-Bond, 1989; Chételat, 2009). In both cases the key issue tends to be whether Hegel allows for genuinely open-ended historical development or not (see Marcuse, 1932 for a key statement of the issue).

³ Herodotus I (Prol.) Exceptions include Riedel, 1970, pp.102-104, who considers Hegel’s concept of history briefly before discussing his substantive claims, and Macdonald, 2006, who associates it with “experience” in the *Phenomenology*. Action as a separate category that generates the formal object ‘history’ is not discussed in the relevant literature, though interesting antecedents of this view in the Kantian literature can be found in the discussion of “nature” in Eberl and Niesen, 2011, p. 267, of “theory” in Henrich, 1967, pp. 14-15, of “providence” in Kleingeld, 2001, and of “culture” in Hampshire, 1989, pp. 150-151.

historiography, or that philosophical history does not deserve serious philosophical attention because, by allowing reference to a unified domain of human action, it facilitates illegitimate claims about this whole, for example, claims about progress.⁴ Yet, Kant's and Hegel's basic philosophical sense of 'history' deserves our attention; besides its contribution in sustaining their progressive teleologies, this sense has an important role in their respective theories of action. 'History' is not a stand-alone concept; it presupposes that human beings are capable of responding to the world around them as agents and serves to secure their actions as distinct objects of investigation.

Initially, this formal employment of the concept of history does not appear philosophically promising. First, it is far from clear that human actions have a common typic or structure. If they do, then it should be the task of philosophical – or possibly empirical – psychology to uncover it, which leaves philosophical *history* without a discernible task. Second, when we do look at what Kant and Hegel have to say about human psychology, agency, and mentality, their paths diverge quite sharply. So, either there is no identifiable objective correlate to human agency as understood by Kant *and* by Hegel, or, if there is, at best this means that they have a shared sense of something they call 'history', not that there are any commonalities of 'action' worth investigating philosophically *as* history. The aim of this paper is to show how concern with agency, expressed in the idea that history is the doing of agents, shapes both Kant's and Hegel's conceptions of history and, by extension, the roles they accord philosophical historiography. These ideas have clear practical implications that have received considerable attention because of their bearing on the question of progress. That is to say, statements concerning expectations of improvement in human affairs can be seen not as predictive but rather as descriptive of the sorts of beliefs agents must entertain if they are

⁴ As a genre of writing, philosophical history found fecund ground in eighteenth century thinkers' concerns about meaning and progress in human affairs; subsequently, it retained its attraction only among those who shared these concerns. There is little consensus about the different schools of philosophical history-writing and the extent of their debt to Voltaire's "*histoire philosophique*" (see Goulemot, 1996). In the German context, Kant and Hegel belong to a distinctive school that has very little – if anything at all – to say about specific events and periods in history. Rather, they seek to delimit an objective domain of human endeavour to which they attribute structure and direction. This is precisely what gives philosophical history its bad name: human actions are discussed without reference to particular events. This "speculative" turn was criticised forcefully in Popper 1957, among others. For the specific criticism of illegitimacy see Arthur Danto's characterisation of "substantive" philosophies of history (Danto, 1968, p.17), and Alex Callinicos's attempt to set out the legitimate domain of historical theory by separating it out from the "illicit" claims of the philosophy of history (Callinicos, 1995, p.8).

to perform certain practical tasks.⁵ What have been overlooked in these discussions are the theoretical elements of this view of history.

Considered formally, for both authors, history is the narration of human actions. Narration, whatever other purposes it fulfils, is also an attempt to make sense of the past. By subjecting the narration of human actions to philosophical treatment, Kant and Hegel seek to uncover not a topic or structure common to actions, but rather the sorts of concepts that can plausibly bring together agents and their actions in systematic fashion so as to allow for non-reductive explanations about why *anyone* wants to do *anything*. Both philosophers look to teleology for such concepts. In particular they use the notions of “purpose” and of “end” in order to constitute history formally. So, the commitment to the employment of teleological concepts is antecedent to, even though it doubtlessly also facilitates, substantive progressive claims.

This last point raises a further question and invites fundamental doubts about the very project of doing philosophical history since one can argue plausibly that there is *no* distinct object of investigation prior to and independent of progressive teleological accounts of history; it is the search for the meaning of history that generates the requisite sense of ‘history’. In other words, there is a difference between questions about the meaning of specific events and global questions about meaning. The former are legitimate and routine in history writing. Arthur Danto observes that the mark of the legitimate questions is readiness “to accept some context within which the event is considered significant”.⁶ By contrast, to “ask the meaning of the *whole* of history is to deprive oneself of the contextual frame within which such requests are intelligible”.⁷ The implication is that without such a context the question makes no sense, nor does the answer. Let us accept this constraint. We may then ask: what *would* be an appropriate context for considering the whole of history? Perhaps, as Danto suggests, the appropriate context is non-historical and non-temporal, such as a divine perspective on human affairs.⁸ The problem with this, on Danto’s view, is that the divine perspective assumes completeness, which is simply not available with respect to human actions. I will return later to the issue of completeness to

⁵ See for example Galston, 1975; van der Linden, 1988; Axinn, 1994; Lindstedt, 1999; Deligiorgi, 2006; and Ypi, 2010, for attempts to show the practical importance of Kant’s philosophy of history. Marxist readings of Hegel, such as Marcuse, 1932, do the same for Hegel; for non-Marxist perspectives, see Wenning, 2009 and Chételat, 2009.

⁶ Danto, 1968, p.13.

⁷ Ibid,

⁸ The point is originally made by Karl Löwith who argues that modern philosophers of history merely secularise theological principles and apply them to empirical facts. See Löwith, 1949, p.19.

see how, if at all, it affects the compositional task I attribute to Kant and to Hegel. However, the divine perspective on human affairs is not the only context in which history as a whole can be considered; an alternative, which does not presuppose a view from eternity, is the totality of natural happenings and processes. The context in the latter case is also a contrast class, which is helpful in that it gives us a first hunch about meaning – that history is not nature. Less briefly, the point of philosophy of history is to identify what can be said about human actions such that the fact that they are the doings of agents be recognised. To say, ‘not nature’ is not to say that nature does not play a role in shaping this concept of history; it does, and this is one of the things that makes for the complexity of the object Kant and Hegel have in their sights.

I.

The opening paragraph of Kant’s ‘Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Perspective’⁹ contains some important clues both about his substantive claims and his concept of history:

Whatever one’s conception of the freedom of the will from a metaphysical perspective, the appearances of the will, human actions, are just as much determined by natural laws as every other natural occurrence. History, which concerns itself with the narration of such appearances, however deeply hidden their causes might be, allows nonetheless to hope that if history observes the play of freedom of the human will *on a large scale* [*im grossen*], then it will be able to discover a regular course in it. And that what looks as confused and without a rule in individual subjects, in the species as a whole can be recognised as a continuous, if slow, progressive development of the original capacities [*Anlagen*] of these same individuals. (AA 8:17, translation altered)¹⁰

⁹ Depending on the translation of *Absicht*, the “idea” in question can have a cosmopolitan “purpose”, understood as “intention”, or “aim”, understood as “end”. Since both intention and end are important in the concept of history Kant employs, I use ‘perspective’ for the title to convey the basic cosmopolitan hope expressed in the piece.

¹⁰ Translation in Kant, 1992, pp. 41-53. In this whole paragraph the references to will are to *Wille*. However, I take this not as an indication of moral will, which is the standard rendering of *Wille*. Rather, it seems at the start of the essay, Kant appears to refer generically to what we might call the “free will” problem, and later in the paragraph to what he usually terms *Willkür*, or choice.

Let us reserve the term ‘idea’ for the substantive argument concerning “a universal cosmopolitan existence” (AA 8:28), which requires, among other things, reference to the existence and development of certain natural capacities, so that a progressive story can be told about human interaction that involves the gradual recognition and implementation of cosmopolitan principles.¹¹ To the extent that this substantive teleology is used to formulate an idea about history, however, it further requires reference to the object domain of history. Kant duly provides this at the outset, when he says that history is the “narration” of the “appearances”, or manifestations, of the will, and these appearances of the will are themselves “human actions” considered “*on a large scale*” (AA 8:17). This large scale view, he claims, allows a “regular course” to be discovered among actions. Our immediate concern, then, is with this claim concerning the regularity of human actions, a claim that remains conceptually distinct from the progressive direction of the substantive teleology.

Kant suggests that regularities can be discovered if human actions are treated as “every other natural occurrence” (AA 8:18). An obvious reading of this is to say that actions are events, or are event-like, and thus apt for cognition like any other putative item of experience. From the example Kant uses, however, it is not clear that this is what he means. Continuing from the passage just cited, he writes:

Thus marriages, the births that follow from marriages, and deaths, which are so influenced by men’s free will, seem not to follow any rule, and so their number cannot be calculated in advance; and yet annually produced tables in large states show that these are subject to settled natural laws, as is the unsettled weather, which cannot be determined in advance for individual weather-events, but on the whole [*im ganzen*] does not fail to sustain [...] uniformly and uninterruptedly the course of natural arrangements (ibid.)

¹¹ The role of these capacities in supporting a progressive teleology is discussed most recently in Ameriks, 2009. The existence of *Anlagen* is linked to Kant’s account of the genesis of purposive structures (AA 5:418-20), which in turn suggests commitment to an evolutionary thesis of purposive adaptation. See Kleingeld, 1995, pp.122-132. This commitment, however, does not appear to be supported by the teleological form of judgement defended in the third *Critique*, which is too generic to allow for these more specific claims. See Kolb 1992. In Deligiorgi, 2006, I defend an alternative reconstruction of Kant’s claims about progress that does not make use of this naturalistic basis. That such an alternative is available, however, does not affect the fact that Kant seeks to bring nature and history together, and this for the good theoretical reasons I discuss below.

A number of things are odd here.¹² The emphasis placed on “human free will” makes little sense next to the reference to deaths.¹³ But then the sense of the passage seems to be not about the ontological status of marriages, births, and deaths as products of human, natural, or some other agency, but rather about our poor epistemic position when it comes to prediction (hence the mention of the annual “tables”, which suggests that given a large enough data-set we can calculate probabilities). Here though, the parallel with the weather, one of the natural occurrences most resistant to prediction, casts doubt on such an interpretation, even though large enough data-sets would help with the tasks of prediction. Something Kant says later in this passage suggests that what he has in mind is not the availability of sufficient data to answer a problem about prediction, but rather a different type of explanation, namely a holistic explanation that incorporates weather-events into a whole, thus allowing the discernment of overall regularity: weather patterns help explain, in a “uniform” fashion, other natural phenomena (such as the growth of plants) only when we look at these different things on the whole (see also AA 8:361). This example of the advantages that accrue from treating phenomena holistically suggests that Kant does not propose to gather human actions in historical ‘tables’ to see whether any patterns emerge, as an anthropologist or sociologist might do.¹⁴ Rather, he proposes to offer a view of human actions *in grossen* and *in ganzen*, to facilitate their characterisation *as* actions in accordance with some settled “law”. In other words, he does not present his readers with an information-gathering problem, but rather with a philosophical problem about the adequate conceptualisation of order in the domain of human action. If this is correct and a problem about order arises at all, and is such as to motivate a distinctively historical perspective on human actions, one is presented with a question about how to reconcile this with the claim in the first *Critique* that human actions, as appearances, are

¹² Commentators who already read this passage in terms of a naturalistic teleology do not recognise, however, the oddity of some of these claims. See, for example, Wood, 1999, p. 209.

¹³ It is true that certain choices one makes can affect the time and manner of one’s death, e.g., the likelihood of dying in battle if one is a soldier rather than a baker; and nowadays we are all encouraged to make health-promoting choices to avoid early death. Unlike other outcomes that can be traced to choices one has made, however, death is not avoidable altogether and so it remains odd to group it with other things that are not just outcomes of choice, but themselves matters of choice (e.g. whether or not to get married). Thanks to Bob Stern for encouraging me to clarify this point.

¹⁴ Or indeed, as an evolutionary scientist, since statistical data can be used for phylogenetic explanations for behavioural traits. It is possible of course that Kant does consider here these avenues of research as potentially fruitful. However, there is a distinct case he seeks to make about actions, which, though explanatorily continuous with natural phenomena – and so both with Aristotelian final causes and modern adaptive and functional explanations – is ontologically distinct.

knowable just like natural phenomena and events. We can identify, Kant says, the “sources of the person’s empirical character” (KrV, A 554/B582), which may include education, social influences, and circumstances; we explain someone’s behaviour by reference to these things. This is a perfectly serviceable conception of regularity, which has the advantage of employing a concept, i.e. causality, that is knowable a priori, and therefore uniformly applicable to all putative objects of experience. If the motivation for philosophical history is to find an appropriate ordering concept fit for human actions, then something needs to be said about why causality (understood as efficient causation) does not suffice for the task.

Two difficulties motivate the search for a perspective on actions. The first is familiar to a contemporary audience from Thomas Nagel’s formulation of the problem of the “objective” perspective, the idea that “*my doing* of an act [...] seems to disappear when we think of the world objectively”.¹⁵ Precisely what makes the category of causality useful, and in the Kantian context indispensable, is that it gives us a handle on objectivity; with respect to actions, causality enables us to view them as events in the natural order. It is this gain in objectivity that creates Nagel’s worry about “the sense of being carried along by the universe like small pieces of flotsam”.¹⁶ Kant’s theory of action would seem to have a strong defence against this vanishing of the agent, because it makes provisions for an intelligible ground of actions that allows an additional perspective over and above their location in a causal series (KrV, A 544-5/B 572-3). Whilst this perspective would seem to be available in principle for all events, and not just actions, Kant specifies that in the case of “lifeless nature and nature having merely animal life, we find no ground for thinking of any faculty which is other than sensibly conditioned” (KrV, A 546/B574). This noumenal affirmation of agency carries no metaphysical weight; we are explicitly forbidden to consider this agent as a substance.¹⁷ This then is the second difficulty: the noumenal self

¹⁵ Nagel, 1989, p.111.

¹⁶ Nagel, 1989, p.112. This is not a universally shared worry; from certain religious perspectives, e.g., this sense of being carried along is liberating, provided of course that it is a divinized universe that does the carrying along. From certain naturalist perspectives, agential involvement is a matter of identifying appropriate psychological events, such as commitments, plans, and the like.

¹⁷ A strong reading of the noumenal self would not help, because what we want is a way of making sense of an agent’s doing of the action, not some impersonal noumenal substance acting behind the agent’s back; this is the direction of “intelligible fatalism” taken in the post-Kantian freedom debate, as discussed by Gardner, “Kant’s Metaphysics of Freedom” (unpublished manuscript). There is a separate issue concerning the causality of freedom, which refers to “an object that cannot be determined or given in any experience” (KrV, A 533, B 561). The causality of nature,

merely removes the agent from the empirical story altogether, which at best is a hollow consolation to those confronting Nagel's problem. So despite the epistemic and metaphysical resources of Kant's theory of human actions and agents in the first *Critique*, there is an explanatory gap left to be filled in the form of the need to integrate agents and their actions in an orderly fashion using appropriate concepts for that purpose.¹⁸

In the second part of the *Contest of Faculties*, Kant makes the following intriguing comparison between human affairs and planetary motions:

Perhaps the course of human affairs appears so senseless to us, because we have made a mistake in our choice of standpoint. Seen from the earth, the planets now move backward, now stand still, now move forward. From the standpoint of the sun, however, which only reason can assume, the planets move continually, according to the Copernican hypothesis in an orderly course (AA 7:83).

Kant calls the wrong perspective in astronomy, "Tychoic" (ibid.) and ridicules it, just as he ridicules the predictions, forward, backward, or cyclical, made by speculative historians. Presumably then, there is a Copernican, heliocentric, equivalent to the study of history. But Kant explicitly denies this: the standpoint of the sun, he says, which he calls the "standpoint of providence" (AA 7:83), is unavailable to us. He advises instead that we look at "human actions" (AA 7:84). So far, so familiar: what is missing from the causal account is any sense that human behaviour differs from the behaviour of planets; causality fails to discriminate between appearances and the subset that are actions, that is, appearances of a human will. Since human behaviour cannot constitute an exception to the causal order, what is needed is a concept that establishes a "regular course" of actions, and allows for their distinctiveness without antagonising causality. Ideally, such a concept will have some use in explaining natural phenomena apart from the will ("natural" because we consider it here irrespective of "one's conception of the freedom of the will from a

which yields the sum total of the "merely natural", gives us dateable events for which agents are unnecessary, the causality of freedom gives us a notion of spontaneity that is required for 'action' (KrV, A 538, B 566) but which also remains outside "all that is alterable in time" (KrV, A 540, B 568). For an a-causal interpretation of the latter, see Deligiorgi 2012, pp. 191-202.

¹⁸ Although morality enters into this discussion in manifold ways, it is also the case that not all actions are moral, so whatever distinguishes the latter is likely not to transfer to the former. Certainly, Kant is mainly interested in moral actions – and not just because of the importance he accords to morality – but he is also interested in actions *in grossen* and *im ganzen*, and it is this interest that generates the formal object of history.

metaphysical perspective”). Now there is such a concept, one with good explanatory credentials in the case of individual actions. This is the concept of an end: “an end [*Zweck*] is an object of the will [*Willkür*] (of a rational being) through the representation of which this will is determined to an action to bring about the object” (AA 6:380). The concept of an end is central to the category of action because of the complex relation Kant envisages between agency (or will), choice (or the determination of the will), and the form and matter of choice (the maxim of the choice and the end pursued). When Kant says that every action has “its end” (AA 6:385), he intends that we understand action as the exercise of the capacity to choose (AA 6:382), which in turn comes down to our capacity to act to bring about the object we desire in accordance with the concept we have of it (AA 6:213). A very basic way of understanding this set of claims is to say that we are capable of taking something as a reason for action and acting on it. To say this, however, is already to have a weighty sense of action, as Kant puts it “to have any end of action whatsoever is an act of freedom on the part of the acting subject, not an effect of nature” (AA 6:385).¹⁹

Importantly, the employment of telic concepts does not require any adjustments to the metaphysical picture given in the first *Critique*. Nor is history an exceptional case. Kant avails himself of telic concepts in other areas where cognitive needs arise that cannot be met otherwise. In the first *Critique*, he argues that the notions of “purpose” (*Absicht*), “purposiveness” (*Zweckmäßigkeit*), and of “end” (*Zweck*), can help address our need to secure systematic structure to our knowledge of nature only by enabling us to “regard all order in the world as if it had originated in the purpose [*Absicht*] of a supreme reason” (*KrV* A 686/B 714). In fact, he continues, we can understand the systematicity of nature in

¹⁹ To have a will is to be able to act in accordance with ends – “the capacity for acting in accordance with ends (a will)” (AA 5:370). The representation of something *as* an end is characteristic of rational willing: “anything that is brought about through the powers of a rational being can be thought of as a possible purpose [*Absicht*] of some will” (AA 4:414). There is a brief but fascinating discussion in the third *Critique* that illuminates the sense in which Kant uses here “effect of nature”. Kant distinguishes art from nature arguing that art involves a “doing”, or action, and it differs from a product of nature which is “effect”, and warns that “we should not call anything art except a production through freedom, i.e. through a capacity for choice that grounds its actions in freedom” (AA 5:303). The “freedom” in question may be understood in terms of the idea of a purposeful willing, which is lacking in the contrast class, exemplified by the statement that, in making honeycombs, bees “do not ground their work on any rational consideration of their own” (*ibid.*). The immediate point of this analysis is to draw out attention to the phenomenon of purposeful willing, and hence to show the relevance and use of the categories of end and of purpose in discussions of agency. In short, whilst narrow concepts of end, such as “function” are possible and plausible, on the Kantian picture, they are derived from a richer conception that we first and perhaps only encounter in the exercise of our agency.

terms of the purposive arrangement of its parts by using the idea of a benevolent creative act, “on the part of an Author of the world” (KrV, A 687/B 715).²⁰ It is tempting to interpret these claims as illustrations of the powerful hold of theistic views of nature, which Kant here seeks to accommodate within his epistemically modest philosophical system. A more interesting interpretation is that these claims illustrate the explanatory force of telic concepts. This force is what Kant wants at his disposal. Telic concepts draw their force from their role in the lives of agents who make sense of their doings by means of them.²¹

History and teleology, however, do not mix happily. Witness Kant’s review of Herder’s *Ideas on the Philosophy of History of Mankind*, which he characterises as the product “of an imagination inspired by metaphysics” (AA 8:55). Kant sees Herder as attempting to revive pre-modern views of nature as a teleologically- and hierarchically-ordered whole, by arguing that the universe is guided by an invisible organic force (*Trieb*), which propels human beings to higher levels of achievement, pushing them to develop ethically and spiritually. “What are we to think”, Kant asks, “of the whole hypothesis of invisible forces which give rise to organisation, and hence of the author’s attempt to explain what is not understood in terms of what is understood even less?” (AA 8:53). The answer seems to be: not much. This is harsh, especially given that Kant himself makes use of the concept of *Trieb* in the *Critique of Judgment*, published a mere five years later (AA 5:424). Half of the third *Critique* is devoted to teleological judgement, not to mention the natural teleology that supports the cosmopolitan argument of “Universal History” published the year before, an essay in which Kant repeatedly uses telic concepts to discuss progressive historical development (e.g. in AA 7:361-2).

²⁰ Kant recognises that this is difficult territory and accordingly places this discussion in the first *Critique* under the auspices of the logic of illusion. I follow here Brandt, 1989, p. 179.

²¹ The incipient circularity of this claim is not necessarily a problem: the point is that we use concepts to make sense of our doings as actions, so it is reasonable to seek to find a place for them in a philosophical account of our actions. More striking is Kant’s admission in the third *Critique* that our cognitive needs with respect to nature can only be addressed through a set of notions that have their proper home in the discussion of practical matters, involving agency, will, purposes, and ends that are the objects of willing, and so through teleology – “a causality in accordance with ends” (AA 5:408)- in the third *Critique*. As Kreines argues, it is Kant’s ambitious conception of teleology that motivates his epistemic modesty (see Kreines, 2008a, pp. 347-354). In any event, the teleological judgement Kant defends sustains only claims about the systematic properties of organisms. This seems to lend support to the argument that teleology in the third *Critique* is grounded in feeling, rather than cognition (see Makkreel, 1990, esp. pp. 104-105). However, it is also the case that purposive and teleological judgements are quite distinct. The former respond to the need for uniformity in nature, to secure the applicability of our concepts, and belong with aesthetic judgements of reflection, whereas the latter require concepts given by reason and the understanding (AA 20:221).

At issue, however, is not the mere use of telic concepts, but their appropriate use. Kant does not explain what such uses might be; instead, he says that the “material” of history is not to be found “in metaphysics nor in a museum of natural history”, but “in human actions” (AA 8:56). We have already established this in our discussion of the “Contest of Faculties” (see AA 7:84); this is why we looked to telic concepts in the first place. Granted that history is appropriately concerned with human actions, and granted that human actions are appropriately concerned with things such as the realisation of intentions and the pursuit of ends, our problem is exactly how to go about deploying telic concepts in history. Among the deployments that are clearly inappropriate are those that commit us to formal flaws (e.g. the fallacy of composition and the attribution of a purpose and end *to* history), and to metaphysical claims about the intentions of transcendent, supra-individual agents (e.g. Herderian forces). A clue about how to proceed in a proper fashion can be found in Kant’s concept of a systematic whole, which is one whose parts are interconnected in conformity with a single principle (see *KrV* A 645/B 673).²² If the parts of history are actions, and its principle is teleology, then this leaves us with the idea of a whole whose *parts* are explicable in terms of ends and purposes. Kant’s concept of history, then, is the concept of a whole that is ordered internally by means of telic concepts that connect its parts, concepts that have as their main task to attribute these parts to the activity of agents whose purposes and ends explain these parts. Though quite sketchy, this concept of history is serviceable for Kant’s purposes, namely to licence a hopeful part-to-part relation with a view to showing the possibility of a higher synthesis of purposes, thereby addressing those “ordinary right-thinking men” who despair that their efforts are in vein (AA 8:308-9). This substantive practical interest presupposes reflective agency because it describes the expectations of achievement of correctly guided reflection (as is vividly illustrated in the famous example of the intelligent devils (AA 8:366)). But likewise, history is not reducible to moral or political history; it holds its own as the domain in which purposive agents act, the domain of “the practical” proper (see *KrV*, A800/B828 and AA 9:455). Because of this, history helps us understand actions as the doings of agents. While

²² Kant employs a number of such concepts of wholes, in particular “nature” and “world” (*KrV*, A 433/B461; A 216, B 263; AA 28:657), and possibly also “moral world,” a *corpus mysticum*, in conformity with the moral law (*KrV*, A 808, B 836). That history belongs with these concepts is rarely acknowledged (an exception is Kleingeld, 2001). It is important to recall here that the constitution of the whole, in the case of history, is aimed at cognitive needs. History is a formal whole, so the idea of completeness Danto finds objectionable does not even enter into this (the same goes for “nature” and “world”).

this cognitive need has a specific Kantian inflection, it also addresses a more general demand that agents know themselves and others as agents.

II.

If the preceding argument is right, and Kant's teleological ordering of history as a formal domain aims at preserving actions as distinct objects of investigation by allowing us to make references to the purposes and ends agents pursue in and by their actions, then Hegel would appear to have no need for such a concept of history. The cognitive need addressed by Kant's concept of history is created by the vanishing agent, who is either made redundant in a causal chain of events or disappears into the noumenal realm. Hegel, however, is not committed to this Kantian view of the relation between agents and world. In fact, he is highly critical of it. The criticism centres on the way Kant designates the boundaries of subjectivity and of objectivity. Hegel seeks to show that key functions that Kant places on the subjective side are best viewed objectively, and that features of the objective world are best understood in terms of characteristic attributes of subjectivity. Both aspects of Hegel's reappraisal of subjectivity and objectivity are relevant to understanding his concept of history because jointly they result in a different problem of agency, which then motivates a distinctive approach to the philosophical study of history.

To say that subjective functions are best viewed objectively does not identify a single thesis; it is a generic description for a cluster of positions concerning a range of topics. With respect to agency and action, the central topic is identity of agents qua agents and how this is revealed and appraised, especially morally. "The true being of a man", Hegel writes, is "his deed [*Tat*]" (HW 3:242). The context of this remark, from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, is Hegel's criticism of attempts to "read" a person's moral character in his or her looks. This is one of many instances in the *Phenomenology* in which ontological questions, in this case, "who one is", are related to epistemological questions, "how we know who one is", and then to practical questions, "what it takes to be someone". In the case of physiognomic readings of character, Hegel focuses on epistemic issues and ridicules precisely their "nomic" pretensions. The 'laws' revealed by such readings are mere "subjective opinion", because they fail to identify their object properly, and look for the "who one is" in the wrong place. Hegel's reason for discussing these approaches at all is that, despite being naive or misguided, they nevertheless seek to make important features of subjectivity available for public scrutiny, by placing them in the domain of

objects. Kant, by contrast, who gets aspects of the ontology right, fails, on Hegel's account, to secure objectivity for his conception of the self. Briefly considering Hegel's criticisms of Kant, especially his reasons for characterising Kant's position as "subjective" idealism, is essential for understanding why Hegel's attempt to embed the subject in its world takes the form of an idealism that affirms the "absolutely eternal and necessary being of mind" (HW 7:399).

In the *Phenomenology*, the criticisms of Kantian moral subjectivity presuppose results from the criticism of the epistemic function of self-consciousness. Transcendental idealism, Hegel writes, "proclaims the simple unity of self-consciousness to be all reality, and immediately makes it the essence" (HW 3:182). This "pure 'I'", he continues, is not a simple unity, but one that contains the "difference" of the categories, the forms by means of which reality is grasped (*ibid.*). The argument is that the pure I synthesises the pure manifold of space and time, but what is unified in this pure manifold are the sorts of relations (spatial and temporal) that obtain between the sorts of things we encounter empirically, hence the sorts of things that are subject to categories. What might look like an advantageous conclusion from a Kantian perspective is damaging from a Hegelian one, because the subject, even as pure I, cannot be itself thought of as unified unless its representations are unified. Moreover, because the unification of these representations is finally a matter of making judgements that use the categories, the subject appears to depend on an "other" even as this idealism proclaims the subject's importance:

The pure reason of this idealism, in order to reach this 'other' which is *essential* to it, and thus is the *in-itself*, but which it does not have within it, is therefore thrown back by its own self on to that knowing which is *not* a knowing of what is true; in this way, it condemns itself of its own knowing and volition to being an untrue kind of knowing (HW 3:184-5).²³

This characterisation of idealism resurfaces in shorthand when, several pages later, Hegel discusses moral subjectivity, the self-consciousness that "knows duty to be the absolute essence", arguing that "because self-consciousness is essentially a mediation and negativity, its Notion implies relation to an *otherness* and [thus] is consciousness" (HW 3:443). The

²³ One could argue that what Hegel criticises can be turned around, and made into a positive point showing how, appearances to the contrary, transcendental idealism has externalist commitments of the sort of which Hegel could conceivably approve. The criticism of Kant given here in the *Phenomenology* is developed further in the *Logic* (see esp. pp. 582-587)..

description of the essence of self-consciousness in terms of mediation and negativity is the upshot of the earlier critical discussion of the unity of apperception, which has no “essence” other than its unifying function, the relating of a subject to its objects. So the unity of apperception is *prima facie* inapt for moral self-consciousness, which does have a distinct “essence”, namely duty. Hegel’s aim in rehearsing this criticism here is to show that, appearances to the contrary, the moral self also suffers a destabilising relation to *its* other, namely nature. This goes to explain the characterisation of Kant’s position as subjective idealism: what makes it subjective is not – or not just – the moral or epistemic importance accorded to the “I”, but rather that this “I”, or subjectivity, is characterised in terms of relational properties that feature an “other.” Because of this, subjectivity fails to provide the kind of grounding it is supposed to provide; it fails to be “objective”.²⁴ The question we need to turn now then is how this affects agents, their intentions, and their actions.

Two passages from the *Encyclopaedia* in which Hegel draws a map of the relations between various action-terms are relevant here.²⁵ The first is entitled “Purpose [*Vorsatz*]”:

Insofar as the immediate *existence* of action [*Handlung*] is concerned, that which is *mine* [*das Meinige*] is formal since external existence is independent with respect to the subject. This externality can pervert the action and show something different from what [the subject] placed in it. Whilst any alteration as such, which is brought about by the activity of the subject, is its deed [*Tat*], the subject does not recognize this as its action [*Handlung*], but recognizes as its *own* [*das Seinige*] and takes blame for that which is in the deed that was in its knowing and willing, which was its purpose [*Vorsatz*] (HW 10:313, translation altered).

The second is part of the following section entitled “Intention and Well-being”:

With respect to form, the subject must have known and willed the action [*Handlung*] according to its essential determination that concerns the particulars [of

²⁴ The account given here is intended merely to explain Hegel’s characterisation, not to defend it. The question arises about the kind of grounding Hegel seeks. Speaking of ground suggests that this is a question of metaphysical priority, though it is possible that Hegel is interested mainly in normative grounding. A defence of this claim can be found in Pinkard, 1996 (see esp. pp.5-6 for a succinct statement); Pippin, 2008, esp. pp.184-185 & n. as well as pp. 36-64.

²⁵ To allow the relevant action-terms and their relations emerge more clearly the translations that follow (i.e. from Hegel, 1988 a) have been amended.

the action]. This is the right of *intention* [*Absicht*]. While purpose concerns immediate existence only, intention is the substance and end [*Zweck*] of action (HW 10:313-4, translation altered).

First of all we have an alteration brought about by the activity of the subject, the “deed”. The term is capacious. Alteration is presumably anything one does when one moves one’s body about. Such things as are deeds, then, have an event-quality; they are dateable alterations in the physical environment that fit in a causal series. ‘Deed’ is a provisional term because all it says is that there are some events brought about by a “subject”. But this way of viewing actions, as we saw in the previous section, leaves out agency, that is, precisely the bit that the designation ‘deed’ is meant to capture.²⁶ Agency requires “knowing and willing”, which Hegel designates as “purpose”. The parallel with the previous analysis of Kant on action is that we have here a version of the notion of rational willing, understood as taking something as a reason for action. But whereas Kant saw choice between alternatives as characteristic of this ability, Hegel focuses on the ability *to* pursue a purpose, to do something for a reason, which then opens up the discussion to a consideration of the end agents pursue in their actions and the notions of well-being that

²⁶ Quante argues that “deed” describes an event with the involvement of the “will in the narrow sense” so that we grasp it as voluntary. Quante, 2004, p. 106. If this is the aim, then deed does not fulfil it, so the description of the event as voluntary fails to refer, and so the notion of action needs to be brought in and with it the notion of intention. There are, as Quante argues, other ways of securing voluntariness that make the notion of deed important, namely legal or political third-personal descriptions of the action that refer it to conventions we use to speak about actions as public objects in distinct domains. Ibid., p. 16.

guide their thinking.²⁷ “Purpose” is another broad category, and as we shall see shortly, not specific to intelligent agents.²⁸

To anticipate, whereas for Kant telic concepts form an integral part of intentional agency or authorship, for Hegel they do not. “Purpose” requires taking something as a reason for action, but this “taking” can be occluded unless “knowing and willing” can be made secure, that is, unless they do not collapse into, for example, “registering and reacting”, which would reduce purpose to mere function. To secure the reference to an agent Hegel says that purpose must be identified as intention [*Absicht*] by an agent. With intention in place, we can finally get hold of the action [*Handlung*]. Intentions play a key role in the identification of actions as actions.²⁹ But this is not just a point about the ontology of actions, it is about their evaluation as well. Or rather, it seems that the demand for the latter drives the former: if once it is out in the public domain, an action can be “perverted” in a way that what the agent “put in it” does not show, then getting the intention right matters. The problem with the identification of intentions raises the problem of objectivity rather acutely. On the one hand, it is important to pin down intentions so that they do not become something merely private; on the other hand, it is important to avoid letting intentions become mere items in the causal series. Again, as with Kant, telic concepts are involved in the resolution of this problem.³⁰

²⁷ A clarification is in order here. Hegel has a notion of “immediate or natural will” which is, he says, “implicitly free” (HW 7:62). This is because he has a gradualist and objectivist conception of freedom, freedom is a property that can only be attributed to a will that exists in a world in which freedom is “substance and determination”, through the establishment of the full system of right (HW 7:46). To have freedom as a “determination” of the will is to have a notion of well-being as one’s end. This goes some way toward explaining why the notion of well-being is brought together with intention in the *Encyclopaedia* section we are discussing: this is not just a commitment to a *sub specie boni* view of action (although it is also this). Rather, it is part of an attempt to inject the discussion of action with evaluative substance so that moral evaluation of actions, which for Hegel also involves their evaluation in terms of their fit with freedom as “substance”, is not added at a later stage, once the basic theoretical apparatus is established, but is instead a consideration from the outset. The other side of this articulation of what Hegel calls “second nature” (HW 7:46) is his treatment of natural talents (*Anlagen*), which provides an ethical anthropology with a naturalistic basis. See Lewis, 2005. On the separate issue of whether Hegel attributes causal efficacy to the will, Winfield, 2009 argues in the affirmative, with the proviso that this does not address the problem of agency for Hegel.

²⁸ See Inwood, 1992, p.32.

²⁹ The debate about the role of intention in Hegel is ongoing. See Quante, 2004; see also the essays of Pippin and McDowell in Sandis and Laitinen, 2010.

³⁰ There are significant differences, as we shall see when we examine the portion of Hegel’s argument concerning the redrawing of the boundaries of subjectivity and objectivity, which require that features of the objective world be understood in terms of characteristic attributes of subjectivity.

In contrast to Kant, who advocates epistemic modesty with respect to the use of telic terms, Hegel issues no such caution. The reason for this is that Hegel detaches authorship from telic concepts, and so favours a comparatively modest conception of teleology, one more akin to contemporary notions of “function”. As Jim Kreines shows, the analysis of teleology in the sections of the *Science of Logic* and the *Encyclopedia Logic* that treat of “Life,” give a very detailed analysis of the concept of a natural end [*Naturzweck*] that goes into much more detail than Kant’s generic judgement of teleology.³¹ In particular Hegel seeks to show how telic concepts help us explain among other things, part-whole relations in complex systems, assimilation, and reproduction. This gain in specificity comes at a cost, viz., the elimination from teleology of ideas of intentional or purposive agency.³² Telic explanations, then, invoking aim or end (*Zweck*) are applicable to a very wide range of cases, and alone cannot specify the agent-action relation. Although Hegel provides specific terminology for purposive agency (e.g., *Vorsatz* and *Absicht*), these terms are idle unless knowing and willing can be secured. Once he opens up the gates of teleology, it is hard to see why purposes cannot be reduced to the “movement of the end ... to posit [the object] as it is determined by the notion” (HW 6:447). So instead of knowing and willing we would have the processes that make up a “mechanical and chemical *world*” (ibid.). Here is the difficulty then with respect to agency: Hegel’s rehabilitation of final causes creates a new problem for the agent who now disappears in a sea of ends. For Kant, the cognitive need was created by the threat of agency from a world that is knowable but causal, and so has no room for actions that are not events. From that perspective, the unknowable world of noumenal agency is slim consolation. For Hegel, the threat comes from a world that is knowable through telic concepts, which are so fine-grained as to make reference to a purposive intelligent agent superfluous.

Clearly this result is not what Hegel wants, for in the very section in the *Logic* where he develops these explanatory tools, he also writes “[f]or here life is to be taken generally in its proper sense as *natural life*, for what is called the *life of spirit* as spirit is its peculiar nature that stands opposed to mere life; just as we speak too of the nature of *spirit*, although spirit is not a natural being and is rather the opposite of nature” (HW 6:471). The relation of nature to spirit is puzzling: one would expect that the allocation of so many traditionally subjective features to nature would blur the nature/spirit distinction, not make it sharper. This is to get Hegel’s philosophy of nature backwards. As Kreines argues,

³¹ See Kreines, 2008a, p.357-8; Kolb, 1992, p.19.

³² See Kreines, 2008a, p.359.

Hegel seeks to develop a holistic conception of physical reality which includes basic notions of what it is to be such and such a natural thing in terms of dispositions to react in certain ways to other natural things.³³ The problem with this holistic picture is that it threatens to de-substantialise nature, for it makes explanations depend on the whole that provides the reasons for all the relations observed within it. Hegel's solution is to make this partiality a feature *of* the natural phenomena under consideration; they simply lack their own complete reason, they are metaphysically dependent and incomplete.³⁴ So with respect to our concern with agency, this gives hope that there is scope for further discussion, that there is a way to go beyond nature, so to speak. From our earlier discussion, we know that identification of intentions holds the key to the solution of the problem of agency. Significantly, although Hegel strips all other telic concepts from their connection to authorship and intelligent agency, he keeps intention and purpose (*Vorsatz*) for this exclusive use. So if we are to look for intentions that relate to purposes, i.e. to knowing and willing, and thus to the kind of agency we seek to secure, we had better look to "spirit".

Hegelian "spirit" refers, or can refer, to a great number of things, including some that are complex (e.g. institutions), and others that are controversial (e.g. collective agency). So it is not obvious where we need to turn next. In the quote above, we may translate *Geist* as "mind" (following Miller's choice for the *Encyclopaedia*). So the reference is to the life of mind, and its nature. Intentions and purposes give us (part of) the nature of mind. Intention, as picked by the agent, the "subject" as Hegel puts it, gives the purpose of the action, that for the sake of which the action is performed. The type of subjects that interest us here, that is, agents capable of knowing and willing, can speak about their intentions and account for their actions. So when we are advised to look for the life of mind, it is plausible to look for such accounts. This is where history comes into the frame as the record of this life of mind.³⁵ History, Hegel says, is "the element in which the

³³ Kreines, 2008b, pp. 52-53.

³⁴ So, Hegel has an alternative version of Kant's epistemic modesty with respect to intrinsic natures. What Hegel says is that what falls under "nature" just is dependent and lacking "self-determination". As Kreines puts it: "In contrasting nature and *Geist*, Hegel is not saying that there is something limited or incomplete about the *image* or *conception* of nature in terms of such contingency and external determination; he is saying that nature and natural things themselves are limited or incomplete insofar as they *truly are* characterised by externality and contingency in these senses" (Kreines, 2008b, 60).

³⁵ Interestingly, in view of the importance Hegel places on language, in the section on physiognomy in the *Phenomenology* where he admonishes physiognomists to focus on the organ of speech, that is, to focus on language, he also acknowledges the eloquence of body movements, especially hand

universal mind exists”, it is “the actuality of mind in its whole compass of internality and externality alike” (HW 7:503).³⁶

In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, Hegel states that speeches of historical figures, as represented in historical narratives, are “actions among men and indeed very *important* and *efficacious* actions” (HW 12:546). Whilst he acknowledges that speeches can be mere words, he also argues that “speeches concerning a people or speeches among peoples, whether coming from a people or a sovereign, *as actions* they are the essential objects of history, more important than other actions” (ibid.). The reason such speeches are essential is that they give us access to what these people “will and how they know what they will” (ibid.). In effect, what Hegel says is that speeches are actions because they express purposes. Commenting on the speeches Thucydides attributes to Pericles and other statesmen, Hegel says that In these speeches, these men express the maxims of their nation and of their own personality, the consciousness of their political positions as well as moral and spiritual condition, the nature and principles of their ends [*Zwecke*] and ways of acting (HW 12:547 translation altered).³⁷

The discussion of speeches as examples of action fills in the blanks for “intention” and “purpose” with items from the life of mind, including “personality”, social role, political, moral, and spiritual, and so on. Speeches are treated as paradigmatic actions because they are the sort that help us make sense of actions; they are linguistic actions and their content in the historical context is *all* about purposive knowing and willing. Even the empty justifications that Hegel calls mere talk (*nur Rede*) use the same philosophical vocabulary; they are statements about why such and such a position or action is recommended.³⁸

Like Kant, Hegel is mainly interested in a substantive view of history. In fact, given his commitment to embedding the subject in its world, the pressure for substance, what

movements. So there is more to the life of mind than historical records. In fact, one way of looking at his *Lectures on Aesthetics* is precisely from this angle of a philosophical narrative of agency.

³⁶ This works conversely too. In the section on “Universal History” in the *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel argues that the mind of a people “exists in time” and that mind has a “history of its own”. HW 10:347.

³⁷ Again, it is essential for the clear identification of the action-terms Hegel uses to amend the translation in Hegel, 1988 b.

³⁸ Hegel’s discussion of mere talk (*nur Rede*) relates to the more famous discussion of ideals that dissolve in the harsh light of reality, and that, therefore, can be treated as mere individual fancies., They “have no place in the present discussion”. HW 12:52. This forms part of the “theory” problem discussed in Henrich, 1967 in the context of Kant’s “Theory and Practice” essay.

Hegel calls “judgement” (HW 10:347 and HW 7:503) is mighty. This substantive teleology, announced in the *Philosophy of Right*, and more schematically at the end of the “Philosophy of Mind” part of the *Encyclopaedia*, is fully worked out in the *Lectures* under the title “philosophical history” (HW 12:19, 557). But this philosophical history – which aims to establish that the *ratio* of human actions, to the extent that these are rational, is freedom – presupposes the more basic concept of history we identified previously. It is this more basic concept of history as the record of the life of mind that explains the following remark: “The history of mind is its own deed [*Tat*], because mind is only what it does, and its deed here as mind is to make itself the object of its own consciousness and to grasp itself as explicable to itself” (HW 7:504 translation altered).

III.

With this overview of Kant’s and Hegel’s concept of history as a whole composed of human actions, as doings of agents, we may consider briefly their motivation for wanting to keep the agents in the picture. We said at the start that bringing together agents and their actions in systematic fashion allows for non-reductive explanations of actions. For both Kant and Hegel this matters because they want certain concepts, viz., those relating to reasons relevant to agency having to do with freedom, the good, and a life worth living, to have application. So, a fuller appreciation of the reasons why agents matter in each case would require shifting our focus from history to individual moral actions, or actions within the ethical and political whole. Still, their work on history permits us to form a view of the importance they accord to agents. We said at the start that their concept of history is of a whole composed of actions, but actions and agents turn out to be mutually interdependent, and the telic concepts that organise the parts within the whole refer ultimately to the sorts of things agents include in accounting for their actions. Ends, purposes, and intentions pick out items that form parts of non-vacuous explanations of actions. This is important in turn for characterising actions as admirable, baffling, sensible, silly, etc. So, ultimately, keeping agents in the picture keeps these judgements in the picture. And it works in the other direction too: having the concepts that pick out and explain actions *as actions* identifies a distinct ontological class of such things as actions, of which various things can be predicated. Of course, this only counts as an achievement if one thinks that such things matter, and one tends to think that such things matter if one thinks that keeping agents in the picture matters.

There are obvious critical rejoinders to this. For one, one might think that the demarcation of the domain of actions that allows such judgements constitutes an obsolete approach to agency, one where the preferred explanatory models require reference to psychological mechanisms, rather than to ends and purposes, and to history, since it fails to reflect any of the methods, quantitative, analytical, or comparative, used by contemporary historians.³⁹ By way of indirect response, we may look at Hannah Arendt's formulation of the difference between modern and ancient notions of history. Modern historians, she argues, are concerned to ensure the scientific status of their discipline, and this takes the form of defending its objectivity. The relevant understanding of objectivity is encapsulated in Ranke's notion of a "pure vision" predicated on the "extinction of the self".⁴⁰ The "quiet, actionless contemplation" of Ranke's "pure vision", Arendt argues, presupposes a conception of the world that has its roots in "Aristotelean and medieval natural science, which consisted mainly in observing and cataloguing facts", and aimed at uncovering and communicating the purposive order of nature.⁴¹ In other words, what grounds the epistemic practice proposed by Ranke is a metaphysical picture that is no longer available, and was indeed eroded by the modern science that history seeks to emulate. Arendt does not advocate giving up on objectivity. Rather, she wants to retrieve a different conception of objectivity modelled on practices of ancient historians, especially Thucydides, who developed the idea of a "world we have in common ...regarded from an infinite number of different standpoints, to which correspond the most diverse points of view".⁴² This shared world describes an object and also a type of understanding, whose loss Arendt mourns and seeks to recover: "Greeks learned to *understand* – not to understand one another as individual persons but to look upon the same world from one

³⁹ Contemporary philosophical treatments of history share some of Kant's and Hegel's concerns, but at the level of the epistemology of historiography. In particular, at issue is whether narrative form is compatible with making of truth claims, and whether narrativity constitutes a distinctive form of explanation that is compatible with natural nomological accounts. See Fay Pomper and Vann, 1998.

⁴⁰ Arendt, 1968, p.49.

⁴¹ Arendt, 1968, p.50.

⁴² Arendt, 1968, p.51. There is another model of objectivity that Arendt mentions, but which does not seem recoverable for modern historians: this is tied to the idea that some actions are objectively worthwhile or deplorable, and so worth preserving for the education of future generations. Ancient poets as well as historians employ this form of objectivity that Arendt claims. The difference is that the historian offers grounds for his judgements – so education is a type of communication not inculcation. She then suggests that the presupposition of objectivity of value is unavailable to the moderns, so it is not surprising that modern historians cannot get it, let alone follow it. *Ibid.*, pp. 51-52.

another's standpoint".⁴³ In light of this conception of historical objectivity, Kant's and Hegel's concept of history can be seen as a modern vindication of a shared world, so that judgements can be made of it.

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⁴³ Arendt, 1968, p.51. Arendt is alert to the fact that by her own lights this classical objectivity cannot be just a feature of ancient historiography; it has to relate to the lived experience of the Athenian city-state, and therefore it is as lost to modern historians as are Aristotelian and medieval natural science. So, even if we accept her depiction of ancient Greek civic life, it is not clear how this lost experience, and the notion of objectivity that goes with it, can be recuperated under modern conditions of sociability which Arendt describes as a "society of men [...] without a common world which would at once relate and separate them". Arendt, 1968, p. 89. A clue to how Arendt herself might address these tensions in her work is given by the way she describes this essay, which is effectively an essay in social criticism, as an exercise in political thought. This suggests that she considers her writing as a form of political intervention in the sense of showing her readers a possibility for action they had not hitherto imagined. Thanks to Garrath Williams for suggesting Arendt's essay to me.

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