

Circulation and Constitution at the End of History

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Hegel's claims about the end of history seem bold and disturbingly specific. Could he really have believed that the institutional forms he discerned in the Europe of his day were the last word in society and politics? Many argue that developments since Hegel's time have undermined any claim that the particular political and economic structures he describes are the final and necessary mediations of social unity. Some others, liberals or postmoderns, do speak about what amounts to an end of history today, but they are satisfied with far less detail than Hegel; usually they restrict themselves to general commendations of capitalism and representative democracy. But their real difference from Hegel concerns more than generality; it concerns the necessity Hegel sees for definite intermediate structures in thought and society. This necessity also puts Hegel at odds with Heidegger's comments about the end of metaphysics and the final technological society.

Speaking of his own time, Hegel says that

The realm of fact has discarded its barbarity and unrighteous caprice, while the realm of truth has abandoned the world of beyond and its arbitrary force, so that the true reconciliation, which discloses the state as the image and actuality of reason, has become objective. In the state, self-consciousness finds in an organic development the actuality of its substantive knowing and willing; in religion, it finds the feeling and representation of this its own truth as an ideal essentiality; while in philosophic science, it finds the free comprehension and knowledge of this truth as one and the same in its mutually complementary manifestations, i.e. in the state, in nature, and in the ideal world. (PR §360)¹

This citation is one of many expressing a satisfaction with the present that suggests Hegel believed history had in some sense been completed. But in what sense? In a weak interpretation the passage could be expressing satisfaction with a present that has completed the process of overcoming some long-standing dualisms, but without

¹. References to Hegel's works will be made in the text according to paragraph numbers in E (Encyclopedia), PR (Philosophy of Right), and according to pages in the German and English editions in WL (Science of Logic, Meiner Gesammelte Werke vol.page/Oxford Miller translation). Some translations have been modified. I am grateful to John Burbidge, David Cumiskey, Rebecca Comay, John McCumber, and John Russon for comments on earlier versions of this essay.

ruling out the emergence of new fundamental tensions and dualities.

In a strong interpretation Hegel would be saying that at least on certain levels a definitive turning had been achieved. Ours is not merely the latest but in some ways the final stage of history. This does not mean that historical events will cease. But the stage on which the dramas of peoples and nations and economies will play their roles is now fully displayed and fully furnished, and no radically new institutional structures are to be expected.

It is the strong interpretation that interests me in this essay. The weaker claims mostly reduce to variants of the Enlightenment belief in progress, whereas the strong claim challenges us to think more deeply about the relation between modern times and social possibility in general. The strong version has contemporary relevance as well, since certain problems that emerge in considering Hegel's thesis challenge today's fashionable views that maintain their own versions of the end of history. These problems impugn both the triumphalists of the American Way of Life and the grave diggers of metaphysics.

Ends for History

Presumably, if we were at the end of history we would relate to our possibilities for action in a changed way. The obvious approach to thinking that change is as the completion of a teleology: at least on the large scale of political and social structures, a set of potentialities would have achieved its full actualization. This would happen in a structure that as part of its completion leaves possibilities open for individual and group action on lower levels of generality. Such a description fits Hegel, and the Aristotelian overtones are appropriate. The final stage has its own definite structure with its own institutional identity, which for Hegel is a version of the liberal, capitalist state. Some more recent proclamations of the end of history, notably Francis Fukuyama, agree that representative democracy and capitalism are the final social forms.²

A different image for the end of history is as the exhaustion of possibilities. We find this in Heidegger and some of his descendants. Our age completes the trajectory of western metaphysical culture and exhausts its potential. Anything "new" that develops will remain marked by the general flow of our age. That flow can be either regretted

². A 1989 pair of articles by Francis Fukuyama in Nation's Interest helped fuel recent debate about Hegel's views on the end of history.

(with Heidegger) or celebrated (with the postmodernists).

This will be clearer if we consider a third image of the end, as an unblocking of circulation. Barriers have been removed that restricted the movement of something whose flow creates society. This unblocking can be seen optimistically; in Marx the end of history is an opening rather than a closure, because old restrictions are being removed that have blocked the circulation of communal self-affirmation and resources.³ But the unbinding of circulation can also be thought in a bleaker way. For Heidegger, our final epoch of metaphysics has no one particular institutional form, but the possibilities open to us are all of a kind. They are all within the sweep of a circulation that makes them its way-stations and undercuts all resistance to the movement of surfaces and usage.

Hegel's end of history can also be described as the unbinding of a circulation. His movement of mutual recognition and the self-comprehension of spirit finally overcomes otherness and completes the circle of spirit's self-recognition. But Hegel thinks this final stage under the sign of Aristotelian actuality whereas Heidegger and others think it as Nietzsche's eternal return of the same.

All these theories distinguish two levels. On the general level a final stage has been reached; the lower level remains a sphere of relatively free variation. It may appear that Hegel only differs from later theories in that Hegel's higher level is more elaborate; he dictates more institutional structures and leaves less room for social variety. I argue below that there is much more going on than a disagreement over levels of generality. At stake are different ways of thinking about how social possibilities are established and connected.

Views that proclaim or imply an end of history today tend to be unstable. They slip and slide in four directions. The first direction is back to the general Enlightenment narrative of progress in which history has no final stage but does exhibit a steady direction towards an ideal of liberation. This view has lately become a familiar target for

³. Unlike Hegel, Marx does not describe the structure of the final society in any detail; the future self-determining community should establish its own structures. Such communal voluntarism is anti-Hegelian. Habermas could also be seen as discussing the unblocking of circulation. While he doesn't believe that this is the end of history, he does share the view that in our age it is possible to remove barriers to fuller communal will-formation and self-determination. He differs from the earlier discussions of Adorno, Horkheimer, and Benjamin, for whom history has become at least stalled, if not ended, in our protean system of domination.

attacks from both right and left. Under such attack the Enlightenment narrative tends to slide in the other directions.

The next direction is away from global claims. You merely tell a local story which appraises current institutions along some pragmatic axis of evaluation and finds them good. An example would be Richard Rorty's discussions of the effectiveness of current values and institutions. He gives us a local story of Western development, with a positive judgment but no claimed necessity. This is a down-to-earth position but it lacks the drama many contemporaries find in claims about the finality of technological or media society. And since Rorty's kind of story remains internal to our own local narratives it leaves room for competing external and internal stories. This is not a problem for Rorty but it bothers Hegelians and Heideggerians who seek more necessity in their analyses of current society.

The third direction is back towards fuller Hegelian claims for necessity and detail in the end of history. Interpreters find themselves arguing with Hegel about just what institutions would be required to properly mediate the various aspects and partial unities that make up political and social community. They end up defending some updated version of Hegel's constitutional and economic arrangements. Positions of this kind can be found, for example, in the writings of Richard Winfield or Klaus Hartmann. This direction leads into rough argumentative terrain because of the difficulty of locating the line between necessary structures and contingent detail.

The fourth slide is the most fateful. For the reality of and the discussions about civil society have not stood still since Hegel's day. The fourth slide is toward Heidegger, Adorno, and postmoderns such as Baudrillard, Lyotard, and some aspects of Foucault. Though these thinkers have their own disputes, they stand together in affirming a perverse finality for the present age.

Heidegger's essays on technology picture a world where the destiny of metaphysics has been completed. In a manner that would be repugnant to the Plato who nonetheless was its ancestor our time fulfills the goal of bringing all beings into the certainty of grounded presence. With the long-prepared death of God and his substitutes no foundational being remains withdrawn from the leveling movement.

In the age of technology every being stands revealed as material for ordering and use, but there is no controlling center to which these uses all refer. Even the apparent domination of the world by human subjectivity has given way to the engineering of

whatever types of subjects are most useful for the flow of will and power. That larger circulation has no closure or goal beyond its own increased efficiency and velocity. The will to power is the will to will.

In discussing Hegel I will be speaking much about intermediate structures. For Heidegger today's world brings the flattening of human reality and the de-differentiation of modes of being. Individual beings are confronted directly by the naked imperatives of use, and individual subjects face directly the anonymous forces of impersonal bureaucracy and efficacy. Whatever intermediate structures remain in our world have lost their power to mediate individuals into an articulated totality.

Heidegger proclaims the end of our particular Western history. But the newer postmodern stories go further. By moving Heidegger's discussions into economic and semiotic registers, Baudrillard arrives at the description of a final age that absorbs all fixed identity into the circulation of capital and floating signifiers. This story deepens the interchangeability and replaceability that characterized particulars in Hegel's civil society. Institutional structures themselves become indifferently replaceable within a movement that overcomes them in the name of a circulation that lies beneath any stability.

Ends in Hegel

In order to get some perspective these claims about the end of history, I will concentrate on Hegel's theory, bringing in Heidegger along the way, and returning to the postmodern theories later.

The end of history involves the larger question of closure in Hegel's system. When Hegel's thought is taken as a whole it is difficult to determine to what degree he did endorse finality and closure. I have argued elsewhere that his system is indeed meant to be final on a certain level of categorial generality.⁴ The keys to this closure are to be found in Hegel's treatment of the categories of thought in his logic. In this essay I look to the logic to find the categories that would be needed to describe a strong end of history. I will be asking how Hegel would describe the relation between a final historical

⁴. See the discussions in my [The Critique of Pure Modernity: Hegel, Heidegger, and After](#) (University of Chicago Press, 1987), and "What is Open and What is Closed in the Philosophy of Hegel" [Philosophical Topics](#), vol. 19, no. 2, Fall 1991. There I try to see what kind of closure is appropriate to Hegel's theory, and suggest my argument that such closure cannot be achieved.

situation and the field of possibilities that surrounds it. That is, I will investigate what kind of thing an end of history would have to be, rather than examining what precise institutional details Hegel argues for in his Philosophy of Right.

What are the categories Hegel claims are needed if we are to think a closure in social and political structures? He has, I will argue, very stringent but convincing criteria for what would count as a strong end of history. He has thought deeply about closure and what it would demand. One major problem he sees and works to overcome is what he calls "repulsion," which undermines weaker claims about an end. Looking at that problem I will argue that contemporary thinkers who proclaim an end of history cannot meet his criteria for closure. Since I doubt whether even Hegel can meet those criteria, the results will dispute any claim about such an end.

At a strong end of history certain kinds of social change could only be conceived as regression. This is a daunting claim because it legislates about future possibility. How would we ever be in a position to establish such a sweeping claim? A universal preference (say, for liberal democracy) cannot prove a strong end of history; people have had different widespread preferences in the past. The proclamation of the end demands some necessity beyond an empirical survey.

Generally the strong claims have a Kantian base: we have come to know something about the conditions of the possibility of social institutions, and those conditions both open a field of possibilities and show its limits. Knowing those limits we can sketch out the final stage which comes when we can self-consciously create institutions that express those conditions fully and nakedly.⁵

Hegel elaborates that Kantian base in his logic. The logic develops from Kant's inquiry into categories and conditions of possibility. In the logic Hegel much concerned with what it means for something to be determinate and definite, and how things relate to their possibilities. Hegel shows that this happens in many different ways. There are many ways for a being to be determinate: as simple qualitative presence, as measured quantity, as realization of essence, as a thing with properties, as formed matter, and so on. These are not for Hegel reducible to one another, and they all have their own various relations to possible other determinations.

The end of history is a stage of history distinct from others. We can then ask how

⁵. On a sufficient level of generality, this description would include Max Weber's theory of modernization.

we are to think its difference from other past or imagined possible stages. If we think the final stage as one among many, simply present with its own definitions and structures, it will be an example of what Hegel calls Dasein, the category of determinate being. Any entity or system described this way is thought as occupying one determinate location within a space of possible qualities. It is blue rather than red or black, democratic rather than monarchical or oligarchical. Its identity is bounded by the things it is not, just as they are bounded by it. There is nothing in its qualitative identity that makes it special or final. If the end of history were to be thought using this notion of determinate identity, there would have to be some extrinsic reason or measure that nominated this rather than another as the final stage. Its finality would be contingent, since there are many different external standards that could be brought to bear.

The end of history must be more than some situation that for extrinsic reasons happens to terminate society's wandering through various structures drawn from a larger pool of possible structures.⁶ It should also be more than the culmination of one local narrative inserted amid a space of other possible narratives. It should have some necessity and should dominate the field. To think the end of history as truly final we must think of it as relating internally to earlier stages and rival narratives, perhaps by encompassing the field of historical possibilities, perhaps by relating to other stages of history as deficient or primitive forms of itself, perhaps by subsuming rival narratives into itself.⁷

The obvious candidate for thinking the end of history in this way is Hegel's category of the good or true infinite, which occurs conveniently in the logic at just this point. In a sense this does provide his answer, since its general move is to a self-enclosed totality. However in its first appearance the good infinite is not sufficiently developed. While many people read Hegel as if the crucial moves are made early in his works and then explicated in the long continuations, the early versions of the crucial moves remain themselves abstract and too immediate. In his lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit Heidegger reads Hegel in this way. Because Hegel's works are so long, it is pedagogically easier to declare that crucial moves are made at the

⁶. "The individual is more than merely an entity bounded on all sides, but this more belongs to another sphere of the concept; in the metaphysics of being, the individual is simply a determinate something" (WL 21.100f/113f, my emphasis).

⁷. There is an analogy in the language of physics: there can be many trajectories through a state space; the end of history cannot merely be the end of one such trajectory; it must be itself specially related to the dimensionality and metric of the state space.

beginnings, but this can be very misleading.

At its first appearance in the logic the category of the infinite remains too impoverished. As it reappears during the continuation of the logic it acquires more content (becomes more "concrete," in Hegel's terms) until the appropriate categories are reached at the end of the logic.⁸

The good infinite is often presented as the result of a transition from the notion of an endless linear infinite series to a notion of circular infinite self-relation. However, the bad infinite is not so much a linear series as an indefinite oscillation. "Something becomes an other; this other is itself something; therefore it likewise becomes another, and so on ad infinitum" (E §93). We do not yet have an infinite progress but only a directionless wandering through the space of possible quality-states. This arises from combining the demand for unity with a type of identity that is not equal to that demand because the unity it offers is negatively defined. When the unity is affirmed its constitutive relation to others is also affirmed, and so the unity cannot be final and self-enclosed. As long as determination is thought as limitation and relation to otherness there can be no real closure.

For example, Aristotle's famous discussion of the forms of government classifies different types and ranks them, but Aristotle makes no claims about any necessary order in which the different forms occur. Over time, a given city can move from democracy to monarchy to tyranny to democracy to oligarchy without there being any overall pattern or culminating stage. In Aristotle's case the space of possible social forms is relatively small, and history wanders about within it. Particular transitions or revolutions may have their own goals, but there is no overall goal. There is a best form of government, but there is no unified historical process leading to the realization of that form. History overall is not an entity that realizes a potentiality. More recent theories may make the space of possible social forms quite large, or even indefinitely large, but keep the un-ordered wandering through possible forms.

⁸. Hegel summarizes the different types of infinities that occur in the first part of the logic during his discussion of measure (WL 21.370/371). Elsewhere, Hegel makes caustic remarks about those who find the infinite depths of space and time conceptually significant. They provide only more and more stars, more of the same kind of facts. What should be impressive is the relations of measure and law which allow the grasping of these immensities (cf. WL 21.222/228). Presumably he would make similar remarks about those who would exclaim over the depth and variety of history without seeking its underlying pattern.

Hegel's subsequent treatments of the infinite enrich the notion, but not enough for use in thinking an end of history. In the discussion of quantity we find an ordered infinite series, but one without a goal.⁹ In the section on measure this becomes a series that can be thought as maximizing some quality.¹⁰ That treatment could allow us to think history as a directed process of growth that increases a measure such as population or resources. But since it is in the nature of measured change that there can always be more of it, this model cannot provide a concept that describes an end.¹¹

It is only in the third major part of the logic that categories will be available that combine totality, self-relation, and a key change in the relation of particular states to the field of possibilities within which they find their identity.¹² Hegel thinks that fully self-enclosed unity (such as must characterize the end of history) will find its identity in defining a space of possibilities rather than in belonging to one. Such self-relation will demand a mediated unity with its own intermediate articulation of the field of possibilities.

⁹. The ordered series arrives in Hegel's second discussion of the bad infinite. During the logical treatment of quantity a certain generative relation produces the infinite number series. But the series of the integers, while ordered, is not yet teleological. The series is once more an alternating affirmation of identity and otherness, without any cumulation or finality. Because at this stage quantity is being thought in abstraction from quality, each unit of the series is similar in quality to the others. There are no resources here for thinking history or finality.

¹⁰. After quantity and quality are joined in the category of "measure" another infinite arises. After the famous treatment of quantity changing into quality comes a sub-section devoted to "the measureless" (WL 21.369/371). This describes a measureless substrate that remains while the measure ratios of associated quantities vary. As the quantitative ratios alter, the associated qualities change. Further quantitative changes then lead to further qualities, and so on. The individual phases can be ordered through their measures, and unified because of their substrate. So the series as a whole can be conceived as ordered and as having a direction of quantitative growth.

¹¹. In addition, there is the problem of justifying the choice of one measure among the many available. Also, this procedure contains no assurance that the qualities associated with the quantitative ratios will themselves show any interesting order.

¹². It may seem curious that in the second major part of the Logic, on essence, the bad infinite makes only one major appearance, as a directionless wandering through a space of possible grounds among which explanation wanders until the category of "complete ground" is established to put limits on what can count as a legitimate ground (WL 11.311/466). However, all of the categories of the essence section attempt to think a totality in which particular determinations stem from an inner essence. This is an advance because it allows that the field of possible states is not simply given but is dependent on some deeper principle. But the categories of essence fail to stabilize the relation between the inner essence and the field of possible determinate manifestations.

Repulsion

Before continuing to those final categories, however, I need to clarify the challenge that they must overcome. I have been claiming that the various treatments of the good infinite do not give us a notion of self-enclosed unity adequate to thinking an end of history. Hegel acknowledges this in his first discussion of the good infinite. While in the notes to that first discussion he anticipates much that he will develop later, the actual text of the transition moves only to the category of "being-for-self," which lacks the kind of closure we need. This lack shows up in its affliction by what Hegel calls repulsion.¹³

Repulsion is an Hegelian expression of the problem of competing multiple unities and plural stories. Repulsion is the categorical implication whereby the attempt to think a self-enclosed unit demands that the unit be thought as amid a multiplicity of such units, each indifferent to the other yet necessarily implied. The possibility of the unit is also the possibility of other such independent units. A "being-for-self" is thought as independent of any constitutive relation to others. But just because of this independence from context, such a unit can be thought only as one of an indifferent multitude of such units. In its independence and its isolating closure on itself such a unit has no ability to define and control the space of possibility it inhabits. Its categorial structure provides no way to think uniqueness, for this would demand some constitutive relation between the unit and the field of possibilities. So, the category allowing the thought of one such unit demands the thought of a possible indefinite number of them.

Hegel's repulsion bears an uncanny resemblance to Heidegger's discussion of identity and difference, and to that deconstructive dissemination which denies any

¹³ Hegel connects Repulsion to abstossen and aussersichkommen. Repulsion is not a force, but a logical category providing the conceptual condition for thinking a multiplicity of identical units that might be subject to some empirical force (WL 21.156/168). It is very important that repulsion is not an example of becoming, since it is not a transition from being into nothing. It is an explication of the self-relation of being-for-self; "a self-subsistent whole of this kind, just because it is a real being-for-self, is at the same time a repulsion into distinct self-subsistent somethings" (WL 21.344/347). In the section on quality repulsion occurs to the being-for-self unit. In the treatment of quantity repulsion occurs before the infinite number series; it affects the enclosed quantitative unit and so allows the infinite series to be thought. In the treatment of measure repulsion affects the enclosed measures that correlate with qualities, and so makes possible the categories of the nodal line and the measureless substrate.

unity its attempted closure. Repulsion works to multiply closure rather than fracture it, but that multiplication denies the self-sufficiency of the attempted closure precisely by asserting it.

Hegel wishes to find categories that evade repulsion by internalizing it. Everything hangs on the success or failure of that maneuver. Evading repulsion is crucial to the end of history. The basic proposal was to think the end of history after the model of the good infinite that affirms an enclosed being-for-self instead of an aimless alternation of different social forms drawn from some larger pool of possible forms. But such unities suffer repulsion. Thought as self-enclosed, the end of history will be thought as one among a number of externally related histories within a larger space of possible stories.

Repulsion raises the spectre of a multitude of different stories unifying the "same" events of our history. There would be no reason why these stories should all end at the same time. Second, repulsion threatens to dissipate the universal end into a multitude of unrelated local ends. Our history and the Martians? What about European history and Chinese history? American and Canadian history? Massachusetts and Rhode Island? Boston and Cambridge? There would be no categorial reason why the many histories could not be ever more finely distinct. Nor need they be simultaneous, nor structurally alike. It would be an empirical question whether the end of history was widely shared or not--and how would that empirical question be settled? Such local teleologies would lack any universal significance. If by chance they showed many local paths leading to a similar goal, this coincidence would be only external. At this point repulsion would have shattered not only Hegel's end of history but also the kind of unity claimed for Heidegger's history of being and age of technology.

To avoid repulsion and its multiplications of stories a rigorous essentialism is required to control which descriptions of events and which groups of events fit into legitimate stories. If such essentialism is not externally enforced, as in Augustine's City of God, then it will likely depend on an attempt such as Hegel's--or Heidegger's--to define the conditions that make any story possible. It is crucial that the final self-closure be able to control the field of possible stories. If it cannot successfully station itself above that field and legislate its contours, then the closure will suffer repulsion. Unless we can accept something like a full Hegelian closure--and we cannot--all doctrines of the end of history, weak or strong, Hegelian or Heideggerian or post-modern, suffer a repulsive dissipation.

Ends that Work

So we return to the question: what is the status of the field of possibilities within which the end of history is located? To what extent does the end of history constitute and overarch that field rather than being located within it?

What is needed is a new conception of identity and unity that avoids repulsion both for the particular content and for the overall unity. Such categories are offered in the third part of the logic. There the basic ontological unities are conceptualized first as the universal which particularizes itself, then as objective systems which include their determinate members, then finally as cognitive, volitional, and "absolute" wholes that include a field of possible subordinate determinations within their dialectical identity. These categories transform plurality into self-mediated totality.

Of course, to invoke these names is not to establish the categories as the only legitimate and necessary ways of thinking totality and closure. Other end of history theories tend not to accept Hegel's elaborate categories. But at this point we can see better the reasons why Hegel feels such categories would be needed. Whether or not Hegel succeeds, his worries about less than perfect closure still apply to other theories of the end of history.

It is in the third part of the logic that we find Hegel's categories that provide the conceptual resources for thinking a strong end to history. Here the particularity of historical stages is treated in a new way.¹⁴ In this sphere a limit is not a Schranke or a reference outside (WL 12.36/604). "The concept . . . is determinate and possesses its determinateness in this true way, namely, that it differentiates itself within itself and is the unity of these fixed and determinate differences" (WL 12.91/665).

In the third part of the logic, the universal unity is self-related in and through its spreading out into particularization. The key, Hegel thinks, is to realize that while the identity of this or that particular content is in relation to other actual and possible particular contents, the whole field of possible determinations obtains because it is

¹⁴. "Determinateness (Bestimmtheit) as such belongs to being and the qualitative; [but in the third part of the logic,] as determinateness of the concept it is particularity (Besonderheit). It is not a limit, as though it were related to an other beyond it; on the contrary . . . it is the proper, immanent moment of the universal; in particularity, therefore, the universal is not with an other (bei einem Anderen), but utterly with itself (schlechthin bei sich selbst) (WL 12.37/605)

constituted in the self-positing of the universal unity. That unity comes about through the establishment of a space of possibilities and not as one item within such a space. The ultimate implications of this must lead to the overarching "absolute idea," since the various universals must themselves be related in a similar way to some overarching unity which finds itself through positing the possibilities of their multiplication. This is the ultimate block to repulsion. But if that full closure is weakened, repulsion will attack all its unities.

In the third part of the logic the bad infinite makes important final appearances in the discussions of the formal universal and the formal syllogism (WL 12.98/673). Earlier bad infinities were rooted in the constantly recurring negative otherness that defines any identity. Now, bad infinity occurs as the endless substitution of one positive particular for another within a mediated universal unity. The higher identity is defined as the inclusive whole, self-determining because it defines the space of possible determinate particulars. However, in the "formal" universal and syllogism the bad infinite enters because the unity is still too unstructured; it is a form that can receive arbitrary content. The space of possible particulars is too abruptly juxtaposed to the unity. There are no necessary intermediate articulations of the field of possibilities into groups and classes that resist indiscriminate substitution. As a result, any particular contents will do to realize the universal, and none are final; they are interchangeable and infinitely substitutable for one another.

For example, almost any contract, any monetary transaction, any arbitrary social role can count for membership in a modern "civil society." The circulation of identity and need in that society depends on endless substitution. In Hegel's view such unity is both too much and too little. Too much: the universal unity is too close to the particular content, baptizing each of them with the same meaning. Too little: the universal unity provides no necessary structures to articulate the field of possibilities, and so allows endless substitution of one content for another. The formal universal in civil society substitutes plurality for totality (WL 12.75/648). This description also fits the open flow of power and use in Heidegger's Gestell and its descendants.

In order to have a truly final universal unity, what kind of connection does there have to be between the unity and the determinate content it is to unify? Hegel criticizes his contemporaries for declaring philosophical unities that are too formal, such as Schelling's absolute or the electric polarities of romantic Naturphilosophie. These unities can encompass all particular content but they make no distinctions; they can be attached indifferently to any state of affairs. The total unity stands indifferently next to

the content, and does not incorporate the content into meaningful intermediate structures.

Intermediate Structure

Hegel claims that the basic insight needed at this point was provided by Kant. The prime example of a universal unity is the "I" or ego, which maintains its identity precisely in and through differentiating and uniting the diversity of time and experience through the structure of the Kantian categories.

Differentiation must be regarded as an equally essential moment of the concept. Kant has introduced this consideration by the extremely important thought that there are synthetic judgments a priori. This original synthesis of apperception is one of the most profound principles for speculative development; it contains the beginning of a true apprehension of the nature of the concept and is completely opposed to that empty identity or abstract universality which is not within itself a synthesis. (WL 12.22/589)

Pure blank unity is not enough. There is no sheer presence of the "I" to itself. Nor is the I merely juxtaposed to the varied particular content of experience, as Hume might have it. Rather, the unity of the ego is maintained across and through the diversity introduced by the necessary synthetic a priori truths. The categories and the principles that express them allow for the structuring of experience in such a way that it can be unified under the self-conscious ego. The unity of experience is not that of an other-related multitude facing a blank ego-unity. Categories and principles give necessary structure to the whole, and the relation goes both ways: the necessary structure makes possible the unity of experience, and the structure is itself necessary because of its role in that unity.

The categories are the necessary intermediate structures that allow the unity and the diversity of experience. They define the dimensions that open the field of possibilities used to understand things: causal relations, temporal relations, sameness, inherence, and so on. These structures define what it is to be an experience and an object of experience. They are not themselves determined as one kind of object within a field of possibilities. Nor are they selections from some wider field of possible categories. If they were, the transcendental question would recur, demanding an account of the larger field of possibilities. This is why Kant can write a "metaphysics" of morals or nature and claim to have proven necessary conclusions.

For Hegel the ego is a prime example of a self-differentiating universal unity that includes necessary intermediate structures.¹⁵ But there are other such unities as well, including some which overarch individual self-consciousness. The unity of these other universals also demands that they have non-arbitrary intermediate structures akin to Kant's categories. These intermediate structures cannot be thought using the other-related categories of being or essence. The only adequate self-conception of such unity is as containing within itself the categories that are the parameters for fields of possible particulars. The universal opens fields of possibility rather than belonging to them.

Hegel tries to develop his version of Kant's categories from the controversial beginning point of the logic in pure thought alone, asking what it takes to effectively think content and determination. The resulting categories are arranged in the complex series of inclusions and oppositions that make up the logic. The necessity of the categories is shown in their self-development from the indefinite beginning to the all-encompassing final category. This development is not a history but a tissue of relations of more abstract and more concrete categories (in Hegel's special sense of these terms). The sequence encompasses the contradictions and resolutions that occur in earlier categories. Its final member contains the earlier ones as impoverished versions of its own richness and complexity.

The different levels of these categories provide Hegel's means for thinking nature and history on a variety of levels suited to the varied content of experience. Most importantly for our topic, the final categories provide Hegel's way of thinking temporal development. The final stage in a temporal development embodies in itself not only the field of possibilities for current particular content, but also the earlier stages of its own history, now seen as past anticipations and subordinate current components of the final unity. Thus the end of history is an end in a much fuller sense than would be intended by Kant's Enlightenment notions of progress, or by current Enlightenment-style praises for liberal democratic institutions.

As a way for thinking closure, this Kantian-Hegelian program provides for a bi-level treatment of detail. In both Kant and Hegel, the program presupposes another level of purely contingent data that enters into structures it cannot on its own supply. This avoids the problem of deducing Krug's pen and provides a way for combining

¹⁵. "The concept, when it has developed into a concrete existence that is itself free, is none other than the I or pure self-consciousness" (WL 12.17/583).

closure and openness. In Kant, some generalizations will be synthetic a priori truths and others will be empirical generalizations unified by the categories. In Hegel, some determinations will be necessitated by the overall unity while others will be contingent and free. Thus the end of history can occur on one level of generality while leaving us free to act within its parameters on other levels.¹⁶ As in Kant so in Hegel this is in practice a very difficult, perhaps impossible, line to draw.

State and Civil Society at the End

While the end of history requires both unifying categorial structure and free particular content, Hegel does not believe that the structures of civil society (the free market and a minimal state) provide sufficient categorial structure. I have argued elsewhere that Hegel believes that the transition from formal to more structured universality applies to the relation between these two institutional forms.¹⁷ The inner necessity of the universal unity of the state must be expressed by more elaborate structures that have internal connections with the concept of intersubjective community rather than with the formal rationality of the market.

If this is the case, then the end of history cannot be an apotheosis of civil society. That would be to claim that a species of formal universality was enough. Civil society is almost all contingency, caprice, opinion, and the outer necessity of the market and the system of needs. There is not enough of the mediating intermediate structure that creates self-enclosed unity. In civil society the parameters that open the space of social possibilities are set by arbitrary will (contract), nature (needs), and contingency (the indefinite multiplication of needs in the market). The space of possibilities so constituted has no internal shape; it provides for almost unlimited circulation and substitution. But without any internal dimensionality and differentiation the space of possibilities remains open and uncontrolled; no final narrative can be told about it except the story of more and more freedom and commodities, a story that achieves no

¹⁶. "The concept is absolute power just because it can freely abandon (entlassen) its difference (Unterschied) to the shape of self-subsistent diversity (selbständiger Verschiedenheit), outer necessity, contingency, caprice, opinion, which however must not be taken for more than the abstract aspect of nothingness" (WL 12.39/608).

¹⁷. In Hegel's more technical terms, a syllogism is required whose middle term is not the particular (civil society), but the universal (the state). In the full picture it turns out the civil society is not an alternative to the state but a subordinate aspect of the more concrete unity. See my The Critique of Pure Modernity: Hegel, Heidegger, and After (University of Chicago Press, 1987), chapters 4 and 6.

final actuality.

This is why the recent stories of the finality of civil society tend to fall back into the Enlightenment two-stage narrative: at first circulation and substitution (and so freedom) were limited in many ways, now the limits are being removed so that circulation and substitution and freedom are open to continual increase. As a result, civil society stands ambiguously in present debates; it is sometimes a particular set of institutions and sometimes a kind of social meta-structure for generating institutions characterized by substitution and circulation. The formal universality of this social meta-structure may remain stable but its contents are constituted by repulsion, the combination of particular sufficiency and mutual indifference. We can recognize the lineaments of Heidegger's technological world and its postmodern descendants.

For Hegel this cannot be enough. The space of social possibilities needs more internal structure so that individuals and groups can achieve a social identity integrated into a whole of social possibility, rather than slipping and sliding through the featureless circulation opened by civil society. In Hegel's jargon, there must be structures that more fully mediate and give equal weight to the moments of universality, particularity, and individuality. Civil society over-emphasizes particularity at the expense of the other two moments. This is shown, Hegel claims, by the self-transcending tendencies he sees in civil society, tendencies that reveal the necessary inherence of civil society within a wider community with more elaborate intermediate structures. The Philosophy of Right discusses those structures in detail. The elaborately interrelated institutions of Hegel's government involve a citizenry differentiated into economic and occupational groups where natural inclination meets a rational representative structure unfolded within the concept of a self-constituted community.

Thus at the end of history we have, for Hegel, a rational constitution encompassing while profiting from the dynamic of civil society. Ordinary events will not cease, of course, because these structures function precisely by encouraging and unifying a whole mass of contingent desires, actions, and events.

Nor does this mean that every nation will be the same. The rational constitution is still fairly general. The French and the English will not "do" it the same way, for they have different histories and different national spirits that emphasize different values. But overall the modern world will tend toward world-wide economic relations and one general type of political institutions.

Hegel claims that we have reached a time of self-comprehensive rational closure, where the necessary intermediate structures are in principle available. Of course he sees that many serious problems remain to be addressed, but they are to be handled within those structures, or else they are signs of the inadequacy of any institutional structure to bear the full weight of the logical Idea.¹⁸

Yet Hegel also questions the adequacy of any particular structure. We are familiar with his image of the owl of Minerva bringing understanding only when a form of life has grown old. In the third part of the logic he also writes:

The highest maturity (Reiffe) and the highest stage which anything can attain is that in which its downfall (Untergang) begins. (WL 12.42/611)

This quotation is somewhat out of context, but Hegel is indeed asking whether any particular finite arrangement can really express the full dynamism of the universal unity.¹⁹ After all, that unity maintains itself in part by demonstrating its independence from any one determinate state of affairs (though not from all).

The most straightforward application of this passage is that the rational state as a type endures while particular states grow and decay. For Hegel political universality is not the ultimate unity. The rational state is the end of world history in the sense that it exemplifies a set of institutions that mediate all the aspects of social unity. This state is a type, not a particular nation. Any individual nation and people has its downfall. If the story of social and institutional development has a relatively harmonious ending for

¹⁸. Most well known are Hegel's remarks on the intractable problems of poverty with its the increasing disparities of wealth and the creation of a rabble of disaffected citizens. "The important question of how poverty is to be abolished is one of the most disturbing problems which agitate modern society" (PR §244A). He also worries about problems connected with interest group democracy. In party politics any group will be seen as only representing a particular set of interests, and so as exercising arbitrary power. The government is "opposed by the advocates of liberty as the mandates of a particular will, and branded as displays of arbitrary power. The will of the many expels the ministry from power and those who had formed the opposition fill the vacant places; but the latter having now become the government, meet with hostility from the many, and share the same fate. Thus agitation and unrest are perpetuated. This collision, this nodus, this problem is that with which history is now occupied and whose solution it has to work out in the future" (Philosophy of History, Sibree translation, p. 452).

¹⁹. The passage continues, "The fixity of the determinateness into which the understanding seems to run, the form of the imperishable, is that of self-relating universality. But this belongs properly to the concept; and consequently in this universality is to be found expressed, and infinitely close at hand, the dissolution of the finite. This universality directly refutes the determinateness of the finite and expresses its incongruity (Unangemessenheit) with the universality" (WL 12.42/611).

Hegel, the story of national development remains tragic. No particular national identity will last forever, and international relations have no final institutional structure in a world state such as Kant envisioned. There is no end of history on that level, though Hegel expects conflicts to be somewhat muted by the increasing rationality of the inner constitution of states. Our final self-conscious reconciliation will not be found in the removal of tension and negativity from history but rather in the more contemplative arenas of art, religion and philosophy. So Hegel can consistently maintain that nations have reached a rationally satisfying institutional structure, without claiming that the play of nations in world history is over.²⁰

All this suggests that one might agree with Hegel about the need for what the Philosophy of Right discusses as the transition from the atomism of morality (Moralität) to the intersubjective structure of ethical community (Sittlichkeit), but at the same time try to show the necessity of a different set of institutional structures than those Hegel discusses. Or one might try to argue that while the transition to ethical community demands some institutional structures, the particular structures in any given community are a matter of contingent detail.

Hegel would not be happy with such positions. They leave the unity of ethical community only a formal unity to be specified by contingently available institutions. This puts us back with a determinate form of society inserted within an empirically given field of possibilities. Only a weak end of history is possible at that point, namely the meta-claim that we have realized the final truth that social mediation is necessary though the form of that mediation is contingent. For Hegel this would leave the final self-relation too general. Logically it would be subject to repulsion. Practically it would undermine the detailed systematic necessity Hegel thinks we need in order to resolve the lived dichotomies of the modern world. He would reiterate his general arguments for the transition from formal to substantive universality, and his particular arguments for the transition from civil society to the state. It is just these topics that are emerging in current discussions that imply an end of history.

Postmodern Ends

When Heidegger speaks of the trajectory of western civilization having completed itself in das Gestell of technological society, he is not thinking of any

²⁰. It is in this way that I would attempt to include Hegel's remarks about the scene of world history moving to the Americas.

Hegelian unity. There is still a Kantian impetus, however, because the closure Heidegger speaks of is also due to something that must be thought as opening a field of possibilities rather than as one item within a given field. The event that grants the meaning of being to our era opens the ways actions and individuals will understand themselves. It is not itself a happening within some larger space of determinate possibilities.

However, the pedigree of Heidegger's Gestell is not simply Kantian. Besides the link to Kant's categories and to the self-relation achieved by Kant's rational will, there is Nietzsche questioning the necessity of a unified epistemological or political subject. Nietzsche converts the Kantian and Hegelian self-return into a wandering circulation of will and power that never coincides with itself. This self-affirming but never self-present will is what is reappropriated in Heidegger's Gestell, then reworked by others.

In Heidegger as in Hegel there is a fundamental "motion" that opens fields of possibility rather than being an item or a trajectory within such a field. But for Heidegger that motion is not the self-distancing-and-return circulation of Hegel's spirit. Temporalization in Heidegger is not a self-unity but a distension and binding and separating that is prior to any unity. It is an opening that allows for goals, movements, and closure without itself being any thing of that sort.

In Hegel the circulation of spirit's self-affirmation establishes its own space and its own stations. Spirit establishes those stations by unfolding itself into a necessary set of intermediate structures. These structures open the distances and articulations that make social life possible. The achieved necessity and transparency of these intermediate structures mark the end of history.

However, in Heidegger and his successors it is precisely the lack of necessary intermediate structures that marks the end of history. Once we have found that all such structures are only stopping places in Gestell's flow of use and will (or capital or power or signifiers), then we have achieved the final stage. No institutional or value change will move us from this place where all institutions and values exist only as nodes or temporary stations that are always already undermined.

Rather than being mediated by necessary intermediate articulations, this universal goal-less circulation is directly in touch with particular possibilities and actualities. The overall flow imposes no structures or limits, but it is always there beforehand disturbing all unities. There is no depth of structure, so the possibilities are

all the same. Particular structures remain and are multiplied ad infinitum. We cannot do without them, but they lose their finality, their weight, their necessity.

There are some necessary structures found by Heidegger's analyses (such as his discussions of temporality and the fourfold), but they remain extraordinarily general and reach across epochs and eras. They are not themselves determinate structures of a particular epoch and they do not unfold into necessary intermediate structures.

From the perspective of the Hegelian problematic as I have been expounding it, Heidegger and his postmodern successors tell stories of the end of history that look like a retreat to formal universality, with all the problems Hegel sees in such formal unities. There is indeed something about these stories that resembles the romantic Naturphilosophie that Hegel criticized so sharply. Like the followers of Schelling, Heidegger and the others go about putting the same labels on everything. The Schellingian tells us that both love and magnetism are embodiments of an absolute polarity, and now we are told how the Beatles and Bitnet both exemplify the technological age and its undermining circulations.

Such formal universality simply asserts its own dominance. It tells us we now understand the movement that makes institutions and values possible. We have reached the end of history because we have moved from societies where the basic circulation was bounded (or unrecognized), to a final stage where it overreaches all structures. No matter how ironic its stance, this final story must itself override (undercut, corrupt) all others, yet without making the detailed Hegelian attempt to mediate other stories into a final identity. Intermediate stories are un-told. This Heideggerian story may seem more appropriate to our troubled times. But its formal totalization does forbid the detailed analysis that might find crevices and tensions in our world. To that extent Heidegger's story of the history of being and its end wars against the more deconstructive aspects of his own thought.

There is another problem as well. Heidegger's story of the history of being and the technological age avoids Hegel's self-closure and its necessary intermediate structures that try to enclose possibility. But as a result Heidegger's story is liable to repulsion. And this has happened. Heidegger's has multiplied into a variety of postmodern stories that lack the seriousness and weight Heidegger hoped would counteract our reduction to functioning units within the technological age. In these other stories circulation is unbound still further so that we become Nietzsche's last men, without the depth of memory and the piety of thought so important to both Hegel

and Heidegger.

In Hegel's theory historical becoming and the earlier forms of the state are aufgehoben into the present structures. The system breaks the immediacy of present social structures; we achieve a kind of double vision that both remembers past institutions and values as they once were, dominant, and sees them as they are now, differentiated subordinate functions within a greater whole.

In contrast, Heidegger's final technological age erases earlier modes of being into undifferentiated availability and presence. Yet Heidegger allows for a more active memory, since part of what the thinker can still do in our era is retrieve past possibilities. In Hegel the retrieval is already performed, and telling spirit's story of its past completes our present identity. Whereas in Heidegger retrieving the past offers some limited hope of expanding or at least challenging what we have become.²¹

The difference between the two thinkers concerns the past as possibility. In Hegel our historical origins contained possibilities that have been presently realized. The past cannot be interrogated further since it contains no undeveloped possibilities. Our destiny is now, and it enfolds the past. History is differentiation, not retrieve. That differentiation binds circulation into necessary patterns, and repulsion has been contained.

For Heidegger our historical origins open space in a circulation that cannot be overseen. The appeal to our origins is to a history that cannot be capsulized, to a distention of possibility that does not reduce to a present field of alternatives no matter how dialectically interwoven. The past may yet surprise our present identity.

But it is this aspect of Heidegger that is challenged by his own story of the history of being and the technological age. Repulsion has multiplied that story into a host of variants clamoring for just the finality Heidegger wants to reject. Perhaps we should go with that repulsion and give up the attempt to announce a privileged description of our situation or to tell a single overarching story about it. Repulsion undermines the seductive hope of becoming either the universal overseer or the universal underminer.

²¹. Notably missing in both thinkers is the Nietzschean and Darwinian memory that holds traces of earlier uses and former teleologies abruptly redirected by evolution or the will to power.

That renunciation can lead to a non-final way of talking about history. To hear it we could attend to some aspects of Hegel, to Heidegger's Identity and Difference, and to some of its deconstructive descendants. These do not proclaim an end, for they deny total stories. Hegel's repulsion challenged the singularity of any self-enclosed units that did not themselves control their field of possibilities. Repulsion now challenges the very stability of any field of possibilities, and thus the identity of any individual particular. Any fixed set of possibilities, and so any identity, may be fractured and repulsively multiplied. This splinters both the weak and strong stories of the end of history. It dissipates such claims not into rival total stories, but into contentious threads that do not make either allness or totality. At best there may be some general and very formal truths about our situation, but there would be no final story to generate either structures or circulations that finally embody our fragility and plurality.²²

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²². I have made some tentative steps in this direction in Postmodern Sophistications: Philosophy, Architecture, and Tradition (University of Chicago Press, 1990).