

# Hegel's Idealistic Approach to Philosophy of History

## Abstract

Philosophy of history is the conceptual and technical study of the relation which exists between philosophy and history. This paper tries to analyze and examine the nature of philosophy of history, its methodology and ideal development. In this I have tried to set the limits of knowledge to know the special account of Hegel's idealistic view about philosophy of history. In this paper I have also used the philosophical methodology and philosophy inquiry, quest and hypothesis to discuss the Hegel's idealistic concept of philosophy of history. It also examines and demonstrates the views of other idealist philosophers like, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. It also shows the how history of mathematics is a complementary of idealism as most of philosophers who were idealists are also great mathematicians. In this paper we are investigation the epistemological approach, logical and metaphysical approach to study the nature of history, meaning of history and structure of history.

**Key words:** Philosophy, History, Hegel, dialectical method, idealism.

## Introduction

Hegel's idealism is well-known for its dialectic method. The dialectic method is based on the assumption of the identity of thought and things. It is the thought itself which passes from the abstract to the concrete, from empty to the fuller ideas. Ultimately things are nothing but the system of thoughts. First we would discuss the idealistic view of history; idealism is theory which asserts that reality is spiritually constituted in the same sense history is spiritually constituted in Being, Non-being and Becoming. Philosophy of history is the philosophy or philosophical theories, which relies on the inquiry of history. Every historical concept implies historical nature. History as we know is the study of when and where; about events and order of time scale, and about periodical nature of present and past. Philosophical concepts explore history which can become authentic and valid only when they are described in the context of history. So, history is evident in the origin and development of philosophy. Every history has its philosophical nature and every philosophical concept gives us historical objectivity and context. Philosophy and history are interdependent while for the former it is necessary that it's all –isms and concepts are historical and in case of latter, every philosophical theory, concept, ism, system and doctrine cannot be evaluated on the standards of history. It is only the nature of discipline and the methodology which distinguishes philosophy and history that is why most of the theories in history are studied and examined under the cloak of philosophy, but the fact is that philosophy has its own boundary and standard to discuss the range of historical concepts. The methodology in both the subjects differs but some methods are same like inductive method and deductive method, hermeneutic method and phenomenological method. R. G. Collingwood in 'the idea of history' said about History as 'What history is, what it is about, how it proceeds, and what it is for, are questions which to some extent different people would answer in different ways'.

Philosophy is intimately connected with the concept of history. It is only history which gives us the philosophical account along with objectivity and authenticity in the Greek, Medieval and Modern traditions. It provides the time, place, tradition, state of affairs and regime about the philosophical theories. Through the facts of the history we are studying the valid concepts of history. If we take the example of Thales of Miletus; who is he, what kind of philosopher he is, what is his tradition, which type of philosophy he asserts, why Thales choose water why not other substance, what was his sayings and writings, what is his association to Anaximander and Anaximenes? All these questions can be answered in a philosophical sense but without knowing the history of these problems we can't produce valid arguments and analysis. It seems to me that it is only history which exhibit and scrutinize the problems in the domain of philosophy. However we can say that history is a plan in the minds of the philosophers. Hegel examined philosophy of history on the principles of idealism which asserts that whatever is factual in the field of philosophy is governed within consciousness. According to Hegel, the world and its history are the concrete expression of thought. Thus, everything that happens and every field of human enquiry are the proper task of the philosopher, who alone can understand and interpret the true relationship of each aspect of reality to the whole. Absolute idealism, as this philosophy is called, attempted to achieve a coherent and unified conception of all reality, a conception that gave meaning to each and every aspect in relationship to result. It was gigantic pinnacle of metaphysical speculation, and virtually everything that happened subsequently in metaphysics and epistemology happened in reaction to it, as you are about to see. According to Hegel, the most real is absolute; is thought thinking of itself.<sup>1</sup>

World for Berkeley and Hegel is different where for Berkeley, the objective world exists in the minds of individuals while for Hegel, the objective world is an unfolding or expression of infinite thought; and the individual mind is the vehicle of infinite thought

<sup>1</sup> See Moore B. N & Bruder. K. (2005). *Philosophy The Power of Ideas*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed., (New Delhi: Tata McGraw-Hill), p. 143.

reflecting on itself. Hegel explains the concept of absolute (reality) in historical context within the supposition of philosophical reflection. He termed that the absolute is the coherent thought or the sum total of all existing things which is made up of state of affairs or propositions. In historical terminology reality exists in triads i.e. thesis, antithesis and synthesis. Consequently we can assume that the most basic or fundamental category or concept is being. But being cannot exist without not-being, its opposite. And the synthesis of these opposites is becoming; hence the absolute is becoming. Both the thesis and the antithesis have a unity in a higher synthesis. Nevertheless, the higher levels in the historical domain reside in the lower levels.<sup>2</sup>

### **Hegel on the correspondence of Philosophy and History**

Philosophy of history performs an important role in the development and revision of philosophy. In the Greek tradition philosophy was studied together with history. Nature was the only problem before them. All history is not authentic. There are many historical facts and state of affairs which has been misconceived and misinterpreted by historians due to their considerable subjectivity, tradition, nationality and ethnicity. Hegel has seen history in the context of the natural rendering of this word, which someone sufficiently familiar with both German and English would come up with spontaneously, is "difference", that being a sufficient explanation of the fact that this has been the standard choice of translators of Hegel into English. Another consideration in favor of this option is that Hegel holds that there is a general correspondence between, on the one hand, the sequence of categories as they are derived from one another in the system of logic and, on the other, the temporal sequence of positions in the history of philosophy.

Now, "identity" and "difference" is a traditional couple, and to replace "difference" with anything else (as the present translation does with "distinction") is to obscure the historical dimension of Hegel's system of logic.<sup>3</sup> Of the first kind, the mention of one or two distinguished names will furnish a definite type. To this category belong Herodotus, Thucydides, and other historians of the same order, whose descriptions are for the most part limited to deeds, events, and states of society, which they had before their eyes, and whose spirit they shared. They simply transferred what was passing in the world around them, to the realm of representative intellect. An external phenomenon is thus translated into an internal conception. In the same way the poet operates upon the material supplied him by his emotions, projecting it into an image for the conceptive faculty. These original historians did, it is true, find statements and narratives of other men ready to hand. One person cannot be an eye and ear witness of everything. But they make use of such aids only as the poet does of that heritage of an already-formed language, to which he owes so much; merely as an ingredient. Historiographers bind together the fleeting elements of story, and treasure them up for immortality in the Temple of Mnemosyne. Legends, Ballad-stories, Traditions must be excluded from such original history. These are but dim and hazy forms of historical apprehension, and therefore belong to nations whose intelligence is but half awakened. Here, on the contrary, we have to do with people fully conscious of what they were and what they were about. The domain of reality actually seen, or capable of being so affords a very different basis in point of firmness from that fugitive and shadowy element, in which were engendered those legends and poetic dreams whose historical prestige vanishes, as soon as nations have attained a mature individuality.<sup>4</sup>

It is tempting when one considers passages like these to draw a simple distinction between philosophical and historical readings of texts, and on a general level such a distinction can be quite illuminating. On a more detailed level there are a range of ways in which one can engage with a text that has bearing on both the historical and the philosophical dimensions. Within 'continental' philosophy one can distinguish between a range of schools on the issue of the typology of the historiography of philosophy: There is the Kantian school based on some form of progressivism in regard to topical philosophical questions, the hermeneutic school (encompassing Schleiermacher, Dilthey and Heidegger) and The Hegelian tradition which has both a right and a left (western Marxism) wing to name but a few. The need for classifications between different models of the historiography of philosophy is a pressing issue and comes equipped with its own history. From the ancient world stems the doxographical tradition and the Placita-literature and from there on until the present different modes and genres of historiography have evolved and it is by no means clear where the demarcation lines are to be set. Related to this issue is the question of how philosophical and intellectual progress functions over time and how it is to be assessed. How are we to understand the historical development of disciplines of human inquiry in general and moral philosophy in particular? This question is in many ways decisive for our present concerns: Whether historiographical study is fruitful for moral philosophy proper hinges on how we understand the developmental process.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 144-145.

<sup>3</sup> See G. F. W. Hegel, *The Encyclopedia of Logic*, Trans. T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting, H.S. Harris, Cambridge: Hackett, 1991, p. xlv.

<sup>4</sup> Geog Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, Blackmask online <http://www.Blackmask.com>, 2001, p. 1

<sup>5</sup> Frits Gavertsson, *Philosophy of History in the Analytical Tradition*, pp. 11-12.

The Philosophy of History means nothing but the thoughtful consideration of it. Thought is, indeed, essential to humanity. It is this that distinguishes us from the brutes. In sensations cognition and intellection; in our instincts and volitions, as far as they are truly human Thought is an invariable element. To insist upon Thought in this connection with history, may however appear unsatisfactory. In this science it would seem as if Thought must be subordinate to what is given to the realities of fact; that this is its basis and guide: while Philosophy dwells in the region of self-produced ideas, without reference to actuality. Approaching history thus prepossessed, Speculation might be expected to treat it as a mere passive material; and, so far from leaving it in its native truth, to force it into conformity with a tyrannous idea, and to construe it, as the phrase is, priori. But as it is the business of history simply to adopt into its records what is and has been, actual occurrences and transactions; and since it remains true to its character in proportion as it strictly adheres to its data, we seem to have in Philosophy, a process diametrically opposed to that of the historiographer. This contradiction, and the charge consequent brought against speculation, shall be explained and confuted. We do not, however, propose to correct the innumerable special misrepresentations, trite or novel, that are current respecting the aims, the interests, and the modes of treating history, and its relation to Philosophy. The only Thought which Philosophy brings with it to the contemplation of History, is the simple conception of Reason; that Reason is the Sovereign of the World; that the history of the world therefore, presents us with a rational process. This conviction and intuition is a hypothesis in the domain of history as such. In that of Philosophy it is no hypothesis. It is there proved by speculative cognition, that Reason and this term may here suffice us, without investigating the relation sustained by the Universe to the Divine Being, is Substance, as well as Infinite Power; its own Infinite Material underlying all the natural and spiritual life which it originates, as also the Infinite Form, that which sets this Material in motion. On the one hand, Reason is the substance of the Universe; viz. that by which and in which all reality has its being and subsistence. On the other hand, it is the Infinite Energy of the Universe; since Reason is not so powerless as to be incapable of producing anything but a mere ideal, a mere intention having its place outside reality, nobody knows where; something separate and abstract, in the heads of certain human beings. It is the infinite complex of things, their entire Essence and Truth. It is its own material which it commits to its own Active Energy to work up; not needing, as finite action does the conditions of an external material of given means from which it may obtain its support, and the objects of its activity. It supplies its own nourishment and is the object of its own operations. While it is exclusively its own basis of existence, and absolute final aim, it is also the energizing power realizing this aim; developing it not only in the phenomena of the Natural, but also of the Spiritual Universe the History of the World. That this Idea or Reason is the True, the Eternal, the absolutely powerful essence; that it reveals itself in the World, and that in that World nothing else is revealed but this and its honor and glory is the thesis which, as we have said, has been proved in Philosophy and is here regarded as demonstrated.<sup>6</sup>

Immanuel Kant argued that time is the construction of the mind. Hegel goes beyond Kant and imagined that everything is the construction of the reason. In his noteworthy work *The Philosophy of History*, he described the relation between philosophy and history as

The only thought which philosophy brings with it to the contemplation of History, is the simple conception of reason; that reason is the sovereign of the world; that the history of the world, therefore, presents us with a rational process. This conviction and intuition is a hypothesis in the domain of history as such. In that of philosophy it is no hypothesis. it is there provided by speculative cognition, that reason and this term may here suffice us, without investigation the relation sustained by the universe to the divine being is substance, as well as infinite power; its own infinite material underlying all the natural and spiritual life which it originates, as also the infinite form that which sets this material in motion. On the one hand, reason is the substance of the universe. On the other side, it is the infinite energy of the universe. It develops not only the phenomena of the Natural, but also of the spiritual universe; the history of the World. this 'idea' or 'reason' is the true, the eternal, the absolutely powerful essence; that it reveals itself in the world, and that in that world nothing else is revealed but this and its honor and glory is the thesis which, as we have said, has been proved in philosophy, and is here regarded as demonstrated.<sup>7</sup>

So far as the Hegel's philosophy of History is concerned, he was of having the concept that idea is the synthesis of which thinks and that which is thought of; it means that idea is the synthesis of the subject and the predicate. Hegel said the idea is the self conscious thought which alone is real and truth. Hegel's conception of dialectical philosophy or philosophy of history reflects his triad of being, non-being and becoming. We can easily understand his philosophy with the following triads;

|          |            |           |
|----------|------------|-----------|
| Thesis   | Antithesis | Synthesis |
| Idea     | Nature     | Spirit    |
| Software | Hardware   | Program   |

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 12- 13.

<sup>7</sup> Cited from Georg Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, Translated by J. Sibree (New York: The Colonial Press, 1900).

|         |              |              |             |
|---------|--------------|--------------|-------------|
|         | Human        | Animal       | Rational    |
|         | Seed         | plant        | Flower      |
|         | Reason       | Experience   | Perception  |
| Subject | Object       | Absolute     |             |
|         | Hypothetical | Categorical  | Disjunctive |
|         | <b>A</b>     | <b>not-A</b> | <b>B</b>    |
|         | Identity     | Difference   |             |

### Conclusion

Philosophy of History implies the objectivity in facts, thoughts, and words. It explores the philosophical attitude towards historical events. Philosophy of history interprets the philosophical thoughts and text with historical context. It is a state of fact that if something is philosophical in nature, it must have its historical constitution, when it was occurred in that situation, where it was occurred, who gave the concept, why it was occurred in that situation why not in another reference. What was the environment and tradition there in. in this paper I have described the theoretical concept of history. It explains the dialectical idealistic, rational, realistic, empirical, critical, analytical, and phenomenological view of the tradition or history. Further, philosophy of history explains the metaphysical, ethical and epistemological approach to study the past events, time, historical facts, evolution processes, ideologies and dialogues. Thus it seems to be that "history chooses and sets the problem whereas philosophy interprets and argues".

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