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Hegel, Edward Sanders, and Emancipatory History

Can one write a Hegelian history of the twentieth century? A positive answer does more than reject the so-called “end of history” thesis, proclaiming that history’s course has long since come to a close; it presupposes a “Hegelian” method of writing history separable both from the intricacies of G. W. F. Hegel’s philosophical science and from the specific details of the historical narrative offered in his lectures on world history. In what follows, I will argue that such histories not only can be but have been produced, and I will do so by examining the works of an author resolutely uninterested in Hegelian thought. In the first section of this paper, I use Hegel’s *Philosophy of History* (1827)¹ along with relevant passages from the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1820)² and *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1830)³ to explicate the nature of Hegel’s method of

1. G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie* [Lectures on the philosophy of history], in *Werke*, ed. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1969–71), vol. 12. Hereafter cited as *PH*. All translations are my own, although I have also consulted G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (1899; repr., New York: Dover, 1956). Hereafter cited as Sibree.

2. G. W. F. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* [Elements of the philosophy of right], ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet (New York: Cambridge, 1991). Hereafter cited as *PR* by paragraph number. Hegel’s own remarks to his numbered paragraphs are denoted by “R.”

3. G. W. F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundriss* [Encyclopaedia of the philosophical sciences], in Moldenhauer and Michel, *Werke*, vol. 10. All translations are my own. Hereafter cited as *Enc* by paragraph number. Hegel’s own remarks to his numbered paragraphs are denoted by “Ann.”

history writing. My contention is that Hegel presents neither a providential justification of the course of human events⁴ nor a general schema into which historical phenomena can be fitted;⁵ rather, he develops an investigative method for selecting data for inclusion in a universal history, grounded in a principle for critically appraising their essential "historicity." This principle is human freedom, which is the sole ground and implicit goal of all historical action. In the second section, I offer one example of a contemporary "Hegelian" history, *America: A History in Verse* (2000–8), by beat poet Edward Sanders.⁶ Although he remains indifferent to Hegel's texts, I argue that he independently both endorses and applies the core principles of Hegelian history writing in his own historical works and provides a necessary corrective to some reactionary inconsistencies in Hegel's own historical narrative.

In claiming that Sanders writes "Hegelian" history, I by no means seek to collapse the distinction between poetry and philosophy. While Hegel declares poetry to be the "universal art which can express every content"⁷ because, unique among the arts, it can present "a temporal sequence as a history" of human spirit (*Asth*, 15:233), Hegel nevertheless differentiates poetic and philosophic depictions of the same content. While, as with philosophy, poetry's "appropriate object is the infinite realm of spirit" (15:239), the two modes of discourse diverge in their grasp of spirit's universal essence. While speculative philosophy thoughtfully elaborates and defends this essence as both rational and graspable in separation from its manifestation in the real world, poetry does "not yet separate the universal from its living

4. For a recent eschatological account of Hegelian history, see Glenn Magee, "Hegel's Philosophy of History and Kabbalist Eschatology," in *Hegel and History*, ed. Will Dudley (Albany: State U of New York P, 2009), 231–46.

5. John McCumber, "Hegel and the Logics of History," in Dudley, *Hegel and History*, 69–83, 70.

6. Edward Sanders, *America: A History in Verse*; *The 20th Century* (Woodstock, NY: Blake Route, 2008), CD-ROM. Hereafter cited as *America*. The first three volumes were published respectively as Edward Sanders, *America: A History in Verse*, vol. 1, 1900–1939 (Santa Rosa, CA: Black Sparrow, 2000); *America: A History in Verse*, vol. 2, 1940–1961 (Santa Rosa, CA: Black Sparrow, 2000); and *America: A History in Verse*, vol. 3, 1962–1970 (Boston: Black Sparrow, 2004). Hereafter cited parenthetically by volume and page number. Where applicable, references to the print editions will follow references to the CD-ROM edition.

7. G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik* [Lectures on aesthetics], in *Werke*, 15:233, translation mine. Hereafter cited as *Asth*.

existence" and thus operates intuitively or practically (15:240). As we shall see, Sanders's work in many ways exemplifies Hegel's account of poetic discourse. Despite the distance between Hegel's systematic philosophy and Sanders's investigative poetics, both advocate a vision of history writing as a partisan affair, grounded in the essential principle of historical action, namely, human emancipation. Both defend and produce histories that affirm human liberation as the essence, observable result, and implicit goal of human history. My contention is that, although Hegel explicates the principle of emancipatory history writing, Sanders applies this principle more faithfully. Their historical works are thus complementary and mutually illuminating.

Hegel's lectures treat the "philosophical history of the world" (*PH*, 12:11; Sibree, 1). They do not present "general reflections" on history derived from a theory external to history, but seek to present "world history itself" (12:11; 1). Hegel, thus, offers neither a systematic deduction of what must have been the case, nor the arbitrary imposition of an abstract standard of appraisal on what has contingently occurred; rather, he articulates a method for writing historical narratives grounded in the objective essence of history itself. Grasping the core principles of his method of writing history, thus, does not depend on grasping the intricacies of Hegel's philosophical system. Rather, Hegel claims, in order to understand the distinctive nature of his method, it is "above all necessary to sift through [*durchzugehen*] the other methods of treating history" (12:11; 1).

The first method Hegel considers, "original history"—which he associates with Herodotus and Thucydides—describes "deeds, events and conditions, which [the authors] had [directly] before them, [and] whose spirit they shared" (12:11; 1). History concerns human actions, and the most immediate way of recording it is to capture such actions and the ethos inspiring them as they occur. Such accounts are presented without critical judgment by a "historian" who "describes what he more or less took part in, [or] at least experienced" (12:12; 2). Readers of Herodotus, for example, can "sink into" (12:13; 3) Grecian spirit, encountering events as various Greeks would have experienced them, just as consumers of mass media today share in the narrow range of contemporary American experiences of what occurs. Such histories must be written and read both so that citizens of a nation can internally represent their own immediate life to themselves and so that those of other nations

may come to know the general character of that nation at a particular time. Without original history there would be no contemporary documents for other nonoriginal historians to treat. However, suffering as they do from a lack of distance from the events at hand, the “content of such [original] histories cannot treat a large range” (12:12; 2). Immersed within the events it records, original history can only effectively treat “short periods of time” (12:12; 2), and those only immediately, within national and temporal boundaries, rather than the wider ranges of history proper.

This deficiency does not affect the second method, “reflective history,” which grasps the significance of past events recorded in original histories on a larger narrative continuum. It thus “requires in general an overall view of the entire history of a people or a country, or of the world, in short, what we call a *universal history*” (12:14; 4, emphasis in original). There is a wide variety of reflective histories—Hegel cites edifying history and the history of ideas, but we could also include labor histories, women’s histories, military histories, and others. All, however, are distinguished from original histories in that they approach their historical material with “a [contemporary] spirit distinct from that of the [past historical] content” (12:14; 4), evaluating events in the light of some selected principle.

This is more like history writing as we normally understand it, in part because we know that histories cannot possibly represent all events as they immediately occur over the course of time. Rather, “history of this sort which seeks to survey long periods of time, or the whole history of the world, must indeed forgo individual representations of actuality, and must abbreviate, epitomize and manage with abstractions [as, for example, when] events and deeds are omitted” (12:16; 5). Universal histories can be written only if they omit large numbers of events, distilling the essential from the inessential out of the infinite data present in original histories. The events recorded in original histories must be pared down into narratives that are not interminably long or excessively detailed and that coherently present thematically unified sequences across a longer stretch of time. Universal history, in short, is *condensed* history, selecting out events recorded in original histories for inclusion in a *cohesive* narrative. Women’s histories thus only treat advances or setbacks in the push for gender equity, while military histories concern only the development and deployment of defense technology, strategy, and power. Reflective histories select, condense, and coherently

narrate a sequence of events judged as significant in the light of a guiding principle.

Such narratives, like original histories, have value both intrinsically and for use by philosophical historians. Reflective histories remain insufficient, however, for *truly* universal history due to the arbitrary selection of principle. In order to facilitate condensation and cohesion, the reflective principles employed must be in large part distinct from the immediate spirit of the events chronicled; however, nothing in the mere process of reflection necessitates the adoption of any particular principle chosen by the historian. Identical events can be evaluated, for example, as labor victories or setbacks for the expansion of global capital or as justly overturning racial and sexual repression or unjustly disturbing traditional genetic and social orders with equally “valid” results. As such, no reflective history is more “historical” than any other, for as different reflective principles are employed, “one reflective history . . . supersedes another” (12:18; 7). Reflective historians, seeking to make their narratives more objective and universal, in fact make each one look relative and arbitrary, fragmenting world history into competing “truths.”

In order to overcome this reflective fragmentation, Hegel argues, historians must “pursue general points of view [which] are themselves the inner, guiding soul of the events and actions” that any history presents (12:19; 8). Truly universal history, in short, must be written from the perspective of the guiding spirit of human history itself. All the data gathered in original histories and thematically presented in various reflective narratives must be further distilled and brought into relation by a genuinely universal principle, into one coherent historical narrative. It is such histories that Hegel calls “philosophical,” but we can call them Hegelian. Hegelian history, then, is primarily defined not by the past length of time it covers or by its integration into Hegel’s systematic claims but by the principle through which it selects and evaluates historical data.

Even detached from Hegel’s system, the principle articulated for universal history is not an unobvious choice. History, after all, treats events and expressions specific to humanity and, more specifically, concerns humanity as active and expressive—what Hegel calls “spirit”—rather than determined and receptive. The very concept of history, for Hegel, presupposes human freedom, our ability to overcome merely given determinations in a

way that things in the nonhuman sphere cannot⁸; otherwise the events we call historical would be indistinguishable from mere contingencies produced by physical forces, biological drives, or other given contingencies, and as such these events would fall under the various specialized positive sciences. Freedom, then, is the ineluctable essential principle of truly universal history; thus, to write "Hegelian" history is above all to hold that history arises from human freedom, or that "all of the qualities of [historical] spirit exist only through Freedom, that all are but means for attaining Freedom [and, as such,] Freedom is the sole truth of spirit" (12:31; 17).

What, then, is this freedom which is the essence of human history? Freedom is "being with oneself . . . for, if I am dependent [upon something given externally], my being is referred to something else which I am not. I [in dependence] cannot exist independently of something external. I am free [only] when I am by myself" (12:30–31; 17). Freedom is self-determination, as opposed to the passive reception of external determination. Human freedom thus presupposes a determining capacity—distinct from mere natural impulse, habitual reflex, or contingent caprice, which Hegel identifies as the "free will"—treated most thoroughly in the *Philosophy of Right*.

The first condition of the will's freedom is that it not be linked to any particular willed content (for example, the presence of certain goods or desires). If the will necessarily required any externalities, then it would be determined by something other than itself and thus unfree. Thus, my will can only be free if it possesses the "absolute possibility of abstracting from every determination in which I find myself or which I have posited myself, [or] the flight from every content as a limitation" (PR, §5R). However, if the will were only free in such abstraction it would equally be conditioned by something outside that limits it, as its freedom would depend upon its *not* being affected by anything outside, thus determining it unfreely within limits set by something external to it. As such, while the abstraction from all particular contents is essential for the will's freedom, the "transition from undifferentiated indeterminacy to differentiation, determination, and the positing of a determinacy as a

8. Hegel states that "the essence of humanity is freedom" (PH, 12:129, 99). While Hegel, of course, provides systematic justification for his claim that free spirit is the essence of humanity, we can put it aside in order to better focus on its relevance for Hegelian world history.

content and object" is no less necessary (§6). The true freedom of the will, then, requires both its possible abstraction from all contents and its actualization through some particular determination. "The will is [thus] the unity of both these moments" (§7), or the abstract freedom which actualizes itself in concrete determinations.

Hegel takes great pains to distinguish actualized freedom from the mere "arbitrariness" (§15R) of the will, or the capacity to contingently select determinations from a given slate of choices (for example, to purchase a commodity, vote for a candidate, or act on one of our existent desires). Selectively affirming a pre-given determination maintains the will's "dependence on an inwardly or externally given content" (§15), for the will would not be actualized through any determinations of its own. There is no discernible difference between a willed "arbitrary choice" and an unwilled one, for both simply affirm a content that exists independently of the free will. As such, merely "willing" what is given cannot actualize freedom, since every such content is external to, other than and therefore a limitation to, the will.

Thus, the truly free will must actualize itself through determinations that are objective actualizations of itself, that is, "its object [must be] itself, and therefore not something it sees as other or as a limitation" (§22). Such actualizations, then, must not preexist the willing actualized through them, but they must nevertheless come to exist as objective determinations independent of that willing. This is why Hegel argues that the will is essentially actualized through the institutions of right, or that "right is any existence in general which is the existence of the free will" (§29). In particular, the institutions of *Sittlichkeit* (such as family, civil society, and the state) objectively exist independently of the individual subjects who actualize them as determinate structures of custom and law. However, these structures nevertheless only exist in and through the willed actions and attitudes of free individuals. For example, marriage arises from the "free consent of the persons concerned . . . to constitute a single person" in union, but such unions require each partner to place upon him- or herself, as well as upon each other, binding familial and legal duties, and as such "their union is a self-limitation" (§162). Marriage, thus, is both a freely willed actualization by the individuals who marry and an objective social institution binding on those individuals who freely will it. By extension, all the institutions of right proceed from free willing subjects and willing subjects freely posit the institutions of right.

As with the free will itself, however, its actualization should not be confused with the mere choice to affirm contemporary institutions as they exist (for example, current marriage laws and mores). Adopting a slate of preexistent institutional determinations would clearly be an act of the merely arbitrary will, rather than the true actualization of freedom. The will requires objective social institutions in order to actualize itself as free, and yet cannot be actualized as free simply by upholding the “prevailing circumstances and existing . . . institutions” within which it finds itself (§3R). This is no doubt one reason Hegel claims ordinary thinking “describes [the will’s actualization] as incomprehensible” (§7), and it must be acknowledged that even Hegel is not extremely clear in explicating it. However, there is only one solution consistent with his fundamental premises. The will is only actualized through determinate social institutions, but it is only actualized as free insofar as they do not externally determine the will through their given nature. As such, the will can only actualize itself insofar as at least some of the determinations of the institutions are changed through the actual, free willing of agents. Institutions only reflect the self-determination of those who fill them with concrete content if they are correspondingly determined by that willing. Altering the preexistent determinations of the institutions of right actualizes freedom through determinations of self-determined willing while mitigating the limiting effect of such institutions, thereby restoring the will to universality in and through particular institutional changes, thus actualizing human freedom.

Since institutional alterations only actualize the will by reducing the pre-given external determinations on freedom, such changes must increase our freedom to change the institutions of right.⁹ In the example of marriage, Hegel identifies the positing of legal divorce as an emancipatory addition to inherited marriage structures (see *PR*, §176), for it allows one to exit an unloving relationship to build a loving one with another. Yet Hegel decries the modern romantic, so-called “soul mate” conception of coupling for making loving relationships a “total contingency” achievable only by particular lucky individuals,

9. I explicate the emancipatory nature of Hegel’s political philosophy more fully in Jim Vernon, “Siding with Freedom: Towards a Prescriptive Hegelianism,” *Critical Horizons: Journal of Social and Critical Theory* 12.1 (2011): 49–69; and Jim Vernon, “Free Love: A Hegelian Defense of Same-Sex Marriage Rights” *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 47.1 (2009): 69–89.

rather than a right and duty for all (§162R). The social institutions essential for freedom can neither be accepted as they are, nor altered or rejected arbitrarily; rather, their determinations must be specifically reformed to increase human free self-determination.

Thus, it is not through the institutions of right themselves, but through the progressive emancipatory supersession of their limiting determinations through the process of institutional reform that freedom is actualized. Freedom, in short, is the incessant “activity” (*Tätigkeit*) of liberating itself from that which determines it, or of “making itself” actually what it is now only “potentially” (*PH*, 12:31; Sibree, 17). Correspondingly, history—the narrative of spirit as free—is the story of humanity’s self-emancipation from the preexistent forces that restrict its free essence.

Of course, claiming that history is essentially emancipatory amounts to presuming that “history has an essential and actual end [in other words that] there is reason in history” (*Eni*, 10:§549Anm). It is precisely this presupposition of an objective purpose in history that makes Hegel’s history so controversial. Cognizant of the controversy, Hegel considers the seemingly more objective “demand that the historian should proceed with impartiality” and simply record what has happened (10:§549Anm). Hegel readily acknowledges that we usually hold that the historical record must be approached with no presuppositions or principles through which one should “separate out” (*aussondere*), “arrange” (*stellen*), “and judge” (*beurteilen*) historical events (10:§549Anm). We intuitively expect histories to be impartial and empirical, not selective and rational, and thus Hegel recognizes that his historical method will be challenged for its bias.

In response, Hegel contrasts the “impartial” view of objectivity with that required of a judge. While all would hold that the judge should not interpret the facts of a case in the light of his or her contingent, personal interests, they should also recognize that a judge “would administer his office foolishly and poorly, if he had not an interest, and an exclusive interest in right [*Recht*], [and] if he had not that for his aim and sole aim” in confronting the facts of a case (10:§549Anm). While no judge should take a subjectively contingent side in a case, she essentially must employ a “partiality for right [*Recht*]” (10:§549Anm). The role of a judge is not simply to ascertain what happened when and why; judging is a principled, committed critique of the merely factual

that both determines what events are of essential interest to justice and seeks to actualize right through them.

Just as the judge must possess a partiality for right, Hegel claims, so the historian must employ a partiality for freedom which "alone is [history's] moving principle [*Bewegendes*]?" (10:§549 Anm). Hegelian history does not simply record what happened at various times; it evaluates what happened in terms of the essence of spirit and then justifies particular events as historical or as actualizing freedom. As Hegel puts it, the "liberation of spirit [*Befreiung des Geistes*], through which [spirit] works to come to itself and to realize its truth . . . is the highest and absolute right/law [*Recht*]" of history (10:§550, emphasis in original). Emancipation from external forces is both the highest right of the free individuals who make history and the essential law of historical development. History, made possible by human freedom, has its goal in universal human emancipation.

Above all, then, Hegelian history *judges* historical events in terms of "the liberation of the spiritual substance" manifested therein (10:§549). It selects the events most pertinent to human emancipation, evaluates them in accordance with the principle of freedom, and sequences them in a condensed narrative to reveal their import for the essential activity of spirit. An event, action, or expression is historical if it contributes to the emancipation of humanity from that which restricts its free activity; such moments are a- or antihistorical when they limit or repress freedom, actively or passively. It is, therefore, not surprising that Hegel claims that the "history of the world is the *progress* of the consciousness of freedom" (*PH*, 12:32; Sibree, 19, emphasis added). History, on Hegel's account, is necessarily progressive, because only those events that advance the emancipation of spirit from external determination—that make humanity in general more self-determining—count as "historical" (that is, actualize the free essence of history), and Hegelian history thus concerns only the victories, stalemates, or losses on that path of progress. As Will Dudley correctly notes:

Hegel recognizes that human endeavors frequently make no contribution to freedom, and are sometimes positively detrimental to it, but he refuses to grant that such undertakings, though undeniably real, deserve to be called "actual" in the proper sense of the term. "History," in other words, does not include everything that happens (no matter how important such happenings may be to the people who experience them)

but is limited to those events that play a part in the actualization of freedom.¹⁰

Hegelian history, then, does not justify whatever happens to exist; it actively *takes sides* in history, tracking, justifying, and openly celebrating emancipatory moments therein, while condemning, critiquing, or simply ignoring that which is inimical to human freedom. History is the struggle between freedom and determination, and "Hegelian" histories narrate that struggle from the perspective of freedom. It is essentially side-taking, critical and optimistic, for it holds that the "manifestation of the spiritual essentially reveals for humanity another purpose than that of merely natural objects . . . namely, a real capacity for change, and for the better—a drive for perfectibility" (12:74; 54). A Hegelian history, then, is a condensed, cohesive narrative of human events judged in terms of the progress of human freedom.

While such histories can assuredly be written about smaller spans of time and geography, Hegel's lectures seek to comprehensively narrate human emancipation from the "earliest" civilizations most bound to external determination (the cultures of Asia) to the "newest," most self-determining cultures (post-Reformation modernity). Hegel's narrative is too large to receive, and too well known to merit, substantial recounting here; my interest lies solely in the nature of the events included. While predictably and famously tracing developmental stages in political and economic structures through wars and international relations, what is striking is the degree to which Hegel also charts the improvements made in and through far less standardly "world historical" fields that nonetheless facilitated social emancipation. At times it is the ascendance of one religious myth among many that marks an advance in freedom, as when the Persians strike upon the unifying principle of Light (12:232; 187) or the Egyptian Sphinx poses the "problem" that demands resolution through a transition to the Greek worldview (12:263; 213); at other times linguistic innovations are recorded, as when Cadmus introduces phonetic writing to Greece (12:281; 228), or when the "Art of Printing" changes the course of modern communication (12:490; 410). Throughout, Hegel takes special care to remind us of the progress made in all areas of human expression: "poetry, plastic art, science, [and] philosophy" (12:94; 69)

10. Will Dudley, introduction to *Hegel and History*, 1–12, 2.

as well as noting improvements in sexual, marital, and family relations (see, for example, *PH*, 12:125, 153, 348–49; *Sibree*, 96, 121, 286–87), expressive media (see, for example, 12:169–73, 246–47, 498; 134–38, 199–200, 418), technologies and their application (for example, 12:172, 251–52, 481; 137, 203, 402), and other specifically human areas of endeavor. True to his historical principle, inclusion in Hegel's narrative is not determined by the size of an event or by its initial impact but by the fact that it contributes to humanity's self-emancipation.

Given this, it is somewhat surprising that Hegel devotes considerable—in fact, more—attention to historical repressions of freedom. Hegel spills considerable ink and spleen, for example, to condemn the “shattering Destiny” (12:338; 277) of the Roman Empire, through detailing the “arbitrary” application of its laws (12:347; 286), its devaluation of poetry for prose (12:350; 288), obsession with secrecy and code names (12:352–53; 290), barbaric and nonparticipatory athletic games (12:357; 294), and overall lack of creative expression (12:379; 312). Similarly, he widens the scope of the Germanic realm to include Islam, which he claims eradicates all particularity in a fanaticism akin to the French Revolutionary terror, producing an unbounded desire for empire that eventually collapsed into static despotism (12:428–34; 355–60). Such “regressions” in his lectures are often presented with more detail and emphasis than he provides for emancipatory moments.

These cases are explained, however, by his focus on the actual progress of freedom. For Hegel, both Rome and the Islamic empire, despite their repressive features, provided a spiritual corrective to the particularity-dominated stability that eventually had come to dominate Greece and early Europe, respectively. In Hegel's view, without the abstract universality posited at different times by Rome and Islam, the emancipatory advances in morals, art, and science made possible by succeeding peoples would not have arisen. Because it is precisely the repressive devices at issue that bring about the liberating response, such repressions constitute historical moments (that is to say, because Roman tyranny eventually produced the Christian principle and Islam sped up the development of abstract spirit in Europe, their domineering empires are still “historical”). It is often the most irrational, unfree forces that spur humanity again to emancipatory self-consciousness and action, and Hegelian history must thus record these events and condemn

their restrictions of freedom, but also reveal the role they played in bringing about subsequent emancipatory progress.

As we have already noted, however, not all repressions lead to liberations. This explains Hegel's extensive focus on “non-historical” cultures and eras. In the peoples of Asia, and especially the indigenous cultures of the Americas and Africa, Hegel finds little of redeeming quality, and his lectures offer lengthy condemnations of their “static” nature. There are peoples that Hegel thinks contribute essentially nothing to human progress, and he often seems to positively delight in condemning them. However, having made this (to say the least, controversial) judgment, Hegel also seems ready to believe any tale of their repression of freedom and apparently invents them when not sufficiently available.¹¹ Hegel condemns repression in all peoples, but in certain cases he refuses to acknowledge any actual or potential advances therein, to the point of embracing racism and fabricating evidence. Much of this can, of course, be written off to Hegel's own determination by or acceptance of the racial attitudes of his time; however, his attacks are strikingly similar to his critiques of Rome, contemporary Catholicism, and other post-Greco-Roman peoples, making it difficult to credit his scorn solely to standard Eurocentrism.

An additional, perhaps more central, reason may be that Hegel's overriding concern for freedom clouds his judgment. Confronted by what he takes to be at best minimal advances in human emancipation, outweighed heavily by reactionary domination, Hegel's side-taking interest in freedom may simply have rendered him unable or perhaps unwilling to record the redeeming features of those cultures. Hegel's account is thus often simply racist,¹² and sometimes even flagrantly fictitious,

11. Although, due to the apparent advance he makes on Kant and other predecessors in affirming universal humanity, there remain those who find in Hegel a “resourceful ally” in the struggle against racism, the flaws in Hegel's historical claims as regards non-Caucasian peoples are now well documented and seem intended solely to retain, against his defense of the universality of free spirit, some manner of hierarchy among the races. See Joseph McCartney, “Hegel's Racism?: A Response to Bernasconi,” *Radical Philosophy* 119 (2003): 1–4, 3. On the misrepresentations, contradictions, and fabrications in Hegel's accounts of, for example, Egypt, Africa, and the Americas, see, respectively: Jay Lampert, “Hegel and Ancient Egypt: History and Becoming,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 35.1 (1995): 43–58; Robert Bernasconi, “Hegel at the Court of Ashanti,” in *Hegel after Derrida*, ed. Stuart Barnett (New York: Routledge, 1998), 41–63; and Surya Parekh, “Hegel's New World: History, Freedom, and Race,” in Dudley, *Hegel and History*, 111–31.

12. On the role race plays in Hegel's definition of “non-historical peoples,” see

but it is not necessarily Eurocentric; rather, one might understand it as freedomcentric and understand Hegel's vitriol as stemming from his unwavering allegiance to the cause of human freedom. Like many who came after him, Hegel's love of freedom may simply have inverted into hatred of repression, adversely affecting the accuracy of his own historical narrative.

In fact, even those most sympathetic with Hegel's historical method must confront the fact that his lectures offer little in the way of actual historical data. As Jay Lampert rightly reminds us, "Hegel's *Philosophy of History* cites surprisingly few dates; indeed, for long sections it contains surprisingly little history. The text often describes social structures rather than events, more as spiritual topology than history."¹³

Hegel offers less a historical narrative of human events than a sociological account of different cultures, and one that not only offers little information on the internal development within each nation but also presents incredibly reductive accounts of them, limiting even the "historical" cultures—without argument—to one essential contribution to spiritual progress. Given that Hegel covers so much historical ground with so little detail or investigation, it is perhaps unsurprising that his actual account of world history is too schematic to successfully apply his own method. Rather than following through on his method and developing an account of the struggle for human emancipation through key conflicts and events, Hegel's narrative offers a general outline of human progress that simply cannot be grounded in the historical record. Hegel's history, in short, is simply too condensed and narratively simple to be accurately historical. This is why contemporary historians must extricate the "spirit" of Hegelian historical method from the "letter" of Hegel's lectures.

Before turning to a more consistent and successful Hegelian history given both the inherently progressive account defended above and the infamy of some of Hegel's claims, the "end of history" thesis requires at least some discussion. There is simply

Robert Bernasconi, "With What Must the Philosophy of World History Begin? On the Racial Basis of Hegel's Eurocentrism," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 22.2 (2000): 171–201.

13. Jay Lampert, *Deluge and Guiltari's Philosophy of History* (London: Continuum, 2006), 87. Even using an incredibly generous standard for marking a "historical event," Lampert counts a mere sixty-two historical dates in his text, none of them internal to nations, but all marking the "crossover points between cultures," thereby making them "inherently disputable" (88).

no getting around the fact that Hegel claims that "Europe is absolutely the end of world history" (*PH*, 12:134; Sibree, 103). Given his account of freedom, Hegel's claim depends upon the thesis that within European modernity, humanity finally "stands in [self-conscious] relation to its Spirit, and therefore in a *free* relation" (12:134; 103, emphasis in original). If we are to take this claim literally, it would seem that the advent of European modernity should be understood as having brought about an actualization of freedom that is qualitatively distinct from all that preceded it, apparently by generally manifesting self-determining self-consciousness among free beings. The end of history thesis, then, presupposes that freedom is both achievable in a relatively stable state of spirit and that such a state had been achieved by the time Hegel wrote.

As we have seen, there is nothing within Hegel's historical method that is compatible with these presuppositions. Freedom is the activity of self-emancipation from the merely given, not a particular attained state of human consciousness or society. While few would question the unprecedented contribution the "Declaration of the Rights of Man" (1789), for example, made to human emancipation, once posited, like any other actuality it becomes (as the Reign of Terror [1793–94] revealed) something merely given that consequently determines our behavior, often in ways inimical to freedom. As Andrew Buchwalter rightly puts it, "while Hegel claims that European modernity represents the world historical actualization of the principle of freedom, that principle, far from endorsing as definitive the structures of European modernity, only attests to the need for their self-transcendence."¹⁴ To affirm otherwise is to succumb to the kind of static worldview Hegel attributes to, and despises so much in, the pre-Grecoian cultures.

Moreover, while more nuanced supporters of the end of history thesis argue that "with the transformation of the Christian proclamation of universal human dignity into the modern secular insistence on universal human rights . . . we achieve a concrete, if not always universally accepted, consciousness of our universal, world-historical character and role"¹⁵ and thus define modernity as "the stage upon which self-determining

14. Andrew Buchwalter, "Is Hegel's Philosophy of History Eurocentric?" in Dudley, *Hegel and History*, 87–110, 95.

15. Stephen Houlgate, "World History as the Progress of Consciousness: An Interpretation of Hegel's Philosophy of History," *Opus of Minerva* 22.1 (1990): 69–80, 76.

subjects engage in creating the substance of their freedom,¹⁶ Hegel himself at times seems less sure. After all, he opens his lectures by claiming that the word “freedom” itself “leads to infinitely many misunderstandings, confusions and errors, and encompasses every possible excess, which is something that has never been better known or experienced than in contemporary times” (*PH*, 12:32; Sibree, 19), acknowledging that modernity possesses neither a unified, nor in the main even an improved understanding of freedom. As Hegel’s own reactionary lapses show, in his time, no less than ours or those that came before, the language and institutions of right were—often unconsciously, to be sure, but often cynically as well—employed to suppress freedom, and thus modern rhetoric and state forms cannot serve as evidence that the “*Weltgeist* has at last come into being.”¹⁷ The recognition of this fact (at least in others) perhaps explains why Hegel, despite claiming an end to history, still thought that America held the future emancipation of spirit. The principle of freedom requires spirit’s activity of self-emancipation to be perpetually carried forward in human history.

In sum: “Hegelian,” emancipatory histories are defined by their method of condensing, arranging, and judging historical data for inclusion on a narrative continuum comprehending the emancipatory progress/regress made by humanity in a given nation or time span, and furthermore they are explicitly partisan for the cause of liberation. While there are clearly many histories that both utilize, and side with, the world-historical principle of emancipatory freedom, as one concrete example, let us turn to an account of what for Hegel was still the “land of the future, where, in the ages that lie before us [what is of] world historical significance shall reveal itself” (12:114; 86).

Edward Sanders is probably still most well known either for his founding role in the satiric folk-rock group The Fugs or for his infamous activist pursuits, including helping organize the 1968 Yippie “Festival of Life” in Chicago and officiating at the 1967 “Exorcism of the Pentagon.” However, his primary and most consistent contributions have been made in poetry, and his central contributions to poetic practice derive from his 1976

16. William Maker, “The End of History and the Nihilism of Becoming,” in Dudley, *Hegel and History*, 15–34, 26.

17. Houlgate, “World History as the Progress of Consciousness,” 76.

manifesto *Investigative Poetry*.¹⁸ Drawing upon a tradition of history-based bards, in particular Allen Ginsberg and Charles Olson, Sanders controversially claims that “poetry, to go forward . . . has to begin a voyage into the description of *historical reality*” (*IP*, 7, emphasis in original). The controversy concerns less the claim that “poetry / should again assume responsibility / for the description of history” (3), than the corresponding claim that the “content of history / shall be poetry” (3). Poetry, Sanders seems to hold, should not simply transform historical events and narratives into its content; history itself must be comprehended poetically. This cannot mean that all histories must be written in verse; however, it does imply that the historian and the poet share the same essential method.¹⁹

In the opening volume of *America*, Sanders clarifies this method through the equation “*dichtung = condensare [sic]*” (1:44; 1:60). Poetry, like history, is an essentially condensing form of expression, taking an array of informational inputs and turning them into “high energy data grids” (*IP*, 21). Real events are the raw data that poetry condenses into cohesive form, and poetry succeeds when it transfers only the essential events over to its reader or when its

Illumination-sparks flood into
the mind along
and at every point
of the Data Grid. (22)

18. Ed Sanders, *Investigative Poetry* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1976). Hereafter cited as *IP*. An excellent overview of his life and work can be found in Tandy Sturgeon, “An Interview with Ed Sanders,” *Contemporary Literature* 31.3 (1990): 263–80. For an account of the origin and development of Sanders’s historical method, see M. L. Liebler, “A Terrible Beauty Is Born: Edward Sanders, the Techniques of Investigative Writing, and 1968,” *Review of Contemporary Literature* 19.1 (1999): 112–21; and on its application in *America*, see Steve Paul, “An American History, Line by Line: An Interview with Edward Sanders,” *New Letters: A Magazine of Writing Art* 76.1 (2009): 122–33. Regrettably, Sanders remains an unutilized resource for philosophers of history. To my knowledge, the only such treatment of his historical work is Lampert, *Delancey and Guattari’s Philosophy of History*, 105–6, but his analysis is restricted to identifying the role repressive “sleazo inputs” play in subverting emancipatory movements.

19. Throughout *Investigative Poetry*, Sanders acknowledges a debt to Charles Olson, *The Special View of History*, ed. Ann Charters (Berkeley: Oyez, 1970), which is “an attempt to state a view of reality which yields a stance nexal to the practice of verse” (13).

Ginsberg's *Howl* (1956), for example, should be considered "a work of American history" precisely because "Ginsberg was always, in the classic gum-shoe, or muse-sandal, manner, asking oodles of questions of his friends, clarifying anecdotes, keeping files on all his friends, many of which anecdotes and data-files [turned] up later on in *Howl*" (IP, 8). For Sanders, the historical poems of Ginsberg, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, and others "betoken an era of investigative poetry, a form of historical writing" (10), wherein terse "lines of lyric beauty descend from the data-clusters" arising within human history (8).

Historical poetry and genuine history thus both transform what merely happened into a unified, cohesive narrative by distilling it down to what is essentially historical. This is why Sanders claims that "the essence of Investigative Poetry" is found in the "Purest Distillations from the Data-Midden" (9) and why he refers to "the concept of history verse, of high energy data grids" as one construct (21). In volume 2 of his *America*, Sanders pays homage to the muses of history writing: "Retentia: Muse of the Retained Image / Sequentia: Muse of the Array & Sequence / Condensare: Muse of Distillations and Essence" (2:ii; 2:10). History and poetry both transform the infinite data of reality—retained in original and reflective histories—through the selecting condensation and sequencing arrangement of historically retained data, into a coherent narrative of essential events. As such, history and historical poetry must share a principle of condensation.

Sanders neither explicitly articulates nor rationally defends this principle. This is, perhaps, unsurprising, as Sanders is a poet, not a philosopher, and, indeed, he has long insisted, "I'm weak on theory and philosophy. I'm a practical man."²⁰ He does, however, provide at least a clue as to this principle, which, in a curious alignment with Hegel, arrives through an analogy to judging:

Lawyers have a term: "to make law." You "make law" when you're involved in a case or an appeal which, as in Supreme Court decisions which have expanded the scope of personal freedom, opens up new human avenues.

You make law.

20. Barry Miles, "An Interview with Ed Sanders—1 October 1968," *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 19.1 (1999): 14–22, 15.

Bards, in a similar way, "make reality," or, really, they "make freedom" or they create new modes of what we might term Eleutherarchy, or the dance of freedom. (IP, 9)

Like Hegel's philosophical history, Sanders's historical poetry grounds the condensation of events in the freedom that makes history possible, specifically through the emancipatory nature of such freedom, or the removal of given restrictions to human action and expression. His investigative poetry, correspondingly, is no more impartial than Hegel's philosophical history; to the contrary, it preaches that "all this talk how poets [should] . . . 'come to terms with it' [that is, with given determinations], how they [should] become 'more objective' is bunk from a punk" (22). Poetry is essentially historical when it takes sides with freedom in its selection and narrative presentation of data.

Lest one think—given his Beat lineage and Yippie membership—that Sanders advocates an individualistic, arbitrary, "do-your-own-thing" conception of freedom, his critique of "hippie-dom" is worth quoting at length.

I was a little too old to be a hippie, but I was sympathetic to them. I used to go out to California during the sixties all the time to perform, give poetry readings, hang out, goof off, so I was very sympathetic to the . . . movement. But the problem was that there were no institutions set up to support that worldview. . . . There's the question of who cooks while everybody's dancing and making love or playing the tambourine. That surfaced as the women's movement. There are other questions that surfaced that grew out of that time. How do you have a non-rat-race, free-time oriented society where you still have dental care? What do you do about cancer? All the issues that were latent are still working themselves through. The institutions to solve these problems are still growing.²¹

Rather than embrace the anti-institutional tenor of the times, Sanders's work from the beginning focused on the necessary institutional development, struggles, and changes necessary, in social collectives large and small, in order to actualize freedom from given restrictions, or to "make freedom."

It would appear that Sanders's initial emphasis on bards "making freedom" results from the actual historical impact of works like *Howl*. Writing in the wake of the brilliant

21. Sturgeon, "Interview with Ed Sanders," 276–77.

investigations that brought down the Nixon White House,²² as well as the monumental social impact of the poetry of the Beat generation,²³ Sanders initially envisions investigative poetry to primarily concern “the historical present, while aiding the future, even placing bard-babble once again into a role as shaper of the future” (*IP*, 11). Indeed, most of his early investigative works concerned then-contemporary events (the Manson murders,²⁴ Karen Silkwood’s death,²⁵ cattle mutilations,²⁶ and so on), and he still pursues such projects.²⁷ In the booklet accompanying the five-volume *America*, however, Sanders suggests that it was actually not until the mid-1990s—starting with his verse biography of Anton Chekhov²⁸ and chronicle of 1968²⁹—that he truly “began writing books based on the principles of [his] manifesto, ‘Investigative Poetry.’” In these works he approaches the historical past, recollected in original and reflective histories, through the essential principle of history. Most substantially, in his *America*, he provides a truly universal history of his country that selectively condenses a century of data into a narrative account of the emancipatory progress made by American spirit. This shift, unlike Hegel’s turn to history, does not find its place in an overall system or project.³⁰ In fact, he traces the origin of

22. See Sanders’s discussion of the post-Watergate/Church Committee report, “Age of Investigation,” in *America*, 4:193–94. Note that this implicitly accepts Hegel’s contention that sometimes great repressions produce emancipatory eras.

23. *Howl*, for example, was a work “destined to change American history. Its IMPLICATIONS were historical” (*IP*, 8).

24. Ed Sanders, *The Family: The Story of Charles Manson’s Dune Buggy Attack Battalion* (New York: Dutton, 1971).

25. Sanders’s unpublished musical, *The Karen Silkwood Cantata*, is part of his private collection and was performed in 1979 at the Creative Music Studio in Ulster County, New York.

26. Briefly, Sanders self-published a newsletter called “The Cattle Report” that investigated mysterious livestock killings of the early 1970s.

27. See, for example, his recent investigation of Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath in *Poems for New Orleans* (Berkeley: North Atlantic, 2008).

28. Edward Sanders, *Chekhov* (Santa Rosa, CA: Black Sparrow, 1995).

29. Edward Sanders, *1968: A History in Verse* (Santa Rosa, CA: Black Sparrow, 1997).

30. Indeed, he has produced a widely disparate set of chronologies, for example, Edward Sanders, “Yiddish-Speaking Socialists of the Lower East Side,” in *Thirsting for Peace in a Ragging Century: Selected Poems 1961–1985* (Minneapolis: Coffee House, 1987), 208–217; Sanders, “In Praise of William Morris,” in *Let’s Not Keep Fighting the Trojan War: New and Selected Poems 1986–2009* (Minneapolis: Coffee House, 2009). Sanders

his epic to the contingent coincidence of a personal crisis and a rereading of William Blake. However, these works—*America* in particular—do mark Sanders’s resumption of the bardic responsibility for describing historical reality, which has now been the focus of his poetic work for two decades. We will consider how such histories help “make freedom” in the conclusion; let us first see how Sanders applies his emancipatory, condensing principle to the past.

Immediately, the most striking difference from Hegel’s narrative is that Sanders refuses to “forsake the charms of depicting more closely the fortune, the periods of the bloom of peoples, the beauty and grandeur of individuals [and] the interest of their fate in sorrow and joy” (*PH*, 12:539; Sibree, 457) in narrating the history of freedom. To the contrary, even while “distill[ing] the essence” (*America*, 5:383) of history into “nifty, flowing poesy” (5:441), he seeks to accurately and precisely “trace what happened” (5:33) in detail. Thus, rather than offering, as does Hegel, a general survey of “American” cultural traits through major events and works, his account proceeds year by year, month by month, selecting events central to the struggle for political, legal, economic, sexual, and athletic emancipation, ending each year with a terse list of achievements in art, science, and technology, as well as the births and deaths of historical figures, in particular the “actual friend[s] of Actual Freedom” (3:351; 3:381).

Throughout, key events are singled out as “moments for America,” an appellation treated as interchangeable with “moment for the world” (2:110; 2:133), “moment for personal freedom” (2:319; 2:366), or simply “moment for freedom” (3:102; 3:112). Among them are obvious liberations from given determinations, for example, the freeing of Rome from Nazi rule (2:77; 2:97) and *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) (2:252; 2:292), but, as with Hegel, others mark more “quiet” (3:272; 3:296), but no less emancipatory, events, for example, the writing of “This Land Is Your Land” (2:2; 2:14), the Gallery Six reading of *Howl* (2:271; 2:312), the raised fists of Tommie Smith and John Carlos on the Olympic podium in 1968 (3:261; 3:284), and the inaugural voyage of Peter Seeger’s environmental-education

also produced biographies such as “Melville’s Father” in *Hymn to the Rebel Cafe* (Santa Rosa, CA: Black Sparrow, 1993), 111–23; and *The Poetry and Life of Allen Ginsberg: A Narrative Poem* (New York: Overlook, 2000). The only thread connecting them is the central theme of freedom gained or thwarted through concrete struggle.

schooner, *Cleamwater* (3:289; 3:314).³¹ As with Hegel, the benchmark for inclusion in Sanders's history is an event's impact on actualized freedom (for example, the eventual free speech and environmental legislation won through *Howl* and the *Cleamwater*). Of course Sanders, no less than Hegel, knows that human action often, even usually, fails to actualize emancipatory freedom. Thus, conversely, when an antihistorical event or an act performed "to the shame of time" (3:181; 3:199) arises, Sanders judges it as "Not a good/great moment for America and/or freedom," for example, the attempted assassination of Patrice Lumumba (2:341; 2:390), the invasion of Cambodia (3:320; 3:348), the sentencing of Lenny Bruce (3:102; 3:112), the wiretapping of Martin Luther King Jr. (3:114; 3:126), and William Rehnquist's defense of Bob Jones University's right to ban interracial marriage (4:431). However, even when repressive forces seem to dominate national spirit, Sanders persists in identifying history as the "the flow of freedom" (2:294; 2:339). Indeed, he holds that, *qua* free human,³² even "inside the [repressive] War Caste there are thousands of redeemable men and women of honor striving for perfection."³³

Moreover, unlike Hegel, Sanders is self-consciously aware of the potential for the side-taking stance of the emancipatory historian to reverse into reactionary anger. Pound's freedom-loving side, he notes, led him to the "insight into the money-hallucinated-out-of-nothing nature of the banking system, where sleazisms like David Rockefeller can create money by whim" (*IP*, 10); however, his fervent stance against the repressive effects of predatory financial capital led his poetry to speak "too strongly in favor of a society run by austere whip-freaks and fascists, and it condones Hitlerism and anti-Semitism" (10). As we saw in Hegel, taking sides against repression can cause one

31. David Herd correctly argues that Sanders's historical investigations reflect a search for "a genealogy of dissent" from repression but misses the role played by his valorization of "minute" events (*IP*, 24), claiming that Sanders devotes too much attention to details that "are of peripheral significance." "After All, What Else Is There to Say?" Ed Sanders and the Beat Aesthetic," *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 19.1 (1999): 122–37, 131, 130.

32. Throughout his history, Sanders almost invariably refers to individuals, especially reactionary ones, simply as "humans"; see, for example, *America*, 1:37 (1:52), 1:67 (1:85), 2:17 (2:30), 2:40 (2:56), 3:7 (3:10), 3:39 (3:44), 4:1, 4:44, 5:13, 5:14, 5:17. This, again, marks an improvement on Hegel, for whom repressive agents often lose the free trait of humanity.

33. Ed Sanders, *The Z-D Generation* (Barrytown, NY: Station Hill, 1981), 9.

to lose emancipatory principle, dehumanize free beings, and even side against the progressive sweep of history. Even in his own historical works, Sanders admits, his anger at repression "wound up suffusing some of [his] poems."³⁴ In *America*, for example, he occasionally castigates large groups as "hicks" (1:113; 1:135) or "right wing nuts" (1:176; 1:203), and it may be his anger at the imperial actions of the "war obsessed Japanese" (2:84; 2:104) that leads him to retain the offensive epithet "japs" throughout his account of the war (2:28, 36; 2:42, 51). However, he succumbs to this temptation far less frequently than Hegel and balances these slips by condemning the "shameful sequence" during which Japanese-Americans were forced into internment camps (2:91; 2:112) and continually affirming the freedom and emancipatory destiny of all actors. Thus, while Sanders, undoubtedly like all emancipatory historians, occasionally falls prey to his own anger at the suppression of freedom, he nevertheless teaches us that "the important lesson we can learn from Pound, in the matter of writing investigative poetry, or history-poetry, is never to allow hatred of a data-target, or the heat of a case, to arouse one, or to wire one up, to the point of insanity, or violence, or to the condoning of racism" (*IP*, 10). Side-taking history fosters anger in researchers and readers alike; thus, it is imperative to recall that we must side with freedom, rather than simply against a contingent oppressor, lest one, even if unintentionally, change sides.

While we lack the room to trace the complicated arc of his *America*, the above should make clear that Sanders (a) articulates a method of history writing nearly identical to that of Hegel, calling for the creation of condensed, essential narratives that both focus on the events that affect actualized human freedom, and explicitly take sides with the path of emancipatory progress; and (b) applies this method more consistently in his actual history, providing a chronology of the struggle between freedom and repression that is rich in both specific detail and internal progression, and that, in the main, affirms emancipation as the essential ground and goal of all human action. None of this, of course, is to say that Sanders's history is consciously "Hegelian,"³⁵

34. Sanders, *Poems for New Orleans*, xi.

35. Indeed, in an email dated October 24, 2010, Sanders tells me that he never paid much attention to Hegel. However, Ione Appleton, a character in his novel *Fame & Love in New York* who leads a Sanders-like squadron of emancipatory poet-historians, aims "for entrance into a long tradition, of Plato, Plotinus, of Emmanuel

an ideal model Hegelian histories must follow, or without controversy in its exposition.³⁶ However, it does show that Hegel has provided the precise explication and philosophical justification for the method of history writing that Sanders applies intuitively, while Sanders offers a concrete post-Hegelian attempt at truly universal history that implicitly carries forth that “Hegelian” tradition in a manner both more historical and more consistent with its essential principle.

Given the fact that such universal histories have in recent times fallen into disrepute, scattering the historical record into competing reflective narratives, we should close by considering their value. Hegel and Sanders may both advocate the critical, side-taking narration of human history in accordance with its free ground, but besides ensuring the coherence of form and content in historical writing, what are such works worth to nonhistorians? Why should reflective historians return to such truly universal “grand narratives”?

Hegel closes his lectures by separating comprehensive universal history from praxis, claiming that “philosophy escapes from the excessive movements of the immediate passions in reality” in order to contemplate the idea of freedom (*PH*, 12:439; Sibree, 457). However, he also reminds us that the self-determining nature of freedom demands that “subjective freedom also exist” (12:439; 456) in the form of emancipatory self-consciousness. Individuals must be brought to, or reminded of, the insight that they are not the playthings of fate or merely biological contingencies, but free actors in a human world with a rational ground and goal. In short, individuals must be reconciled to their historical world by grasping it as the result of their free essence, and thus as the task of their free activity. Universal history, in short, *explains* history as the emancipatory progress of humanity, reconciling us both to our world and our essential freedom. Given that all of us fall prey to determination by given

Kant, or Hegel, of Ione Appleton, dancing through the skush and gush toward Eidos.” *Fame & Love in New York* (Berkeley: Turtle Island, 1980), 140. This, of course, does not prove any direct influence, but suggests the implicit recognition of some consonance between investigative poetry and Hegelian distillation of the historical essence. I am grateful to Sanders for graciously and thoughtfully entertaining my questions about his work.

36. Sanders often acknowledges confusions in the historical record, and many historians will assuredly find some of his claims controversial, such as those regarding the John F. Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy, and Martin Luther King Jr. assassinations.

forces, we can often lose sight of our own nature; only universal history concretely reveals that life is not chaotic, irrational, and contingent, but that the “history of the world, [even] among the shifting spectacles [presented in] its histories, is the path of the evolution and real development of spirit [and] this insight alone can reconcile spirit with the history of the world” (12:439; 457). Hegelian histories serve to make evident that we inhabit a human universe revelatory of our own free essence, thus (hopefully) returning us to the work of self-emancipation.

Similarly, Sanders holds that distilling the essence of history from the “million stranded fabric / woven by billions of hands and minds” (*America*, 1:i; 1:7) is key to explaining that an emancipatory

Resistance Movement
 such as earlier against slavery
 against child labor
 (and against the military draft
 and the war in Vietnam
 [...])
 is really a permanent feature
 of a great nation. (5:544)³⁷

Of course, he knows well that history’s ever-shifting spectacles obscure the free essence of humanity, and that many, looking on at the repressions of the present, will assume that “everything [is] hopeless” because “a police state [is] part of the natural order.”³⁸ However, universal history reveals “all the good things so many millions have done / to make a Better World” (1:ii; 1:8), demonstrating that humanity as “free has a power that awaits / its rightful centuries” (3:291; 3:316). Thus, the universal historian can offer uniquely compelling advice for those who hold emancipation to be “impossible”: “Ask Elizabeth Cady Stanton / Walt Whitman, Allen Ginsberg, Frederic Douglass [sic]” (5:545).

For both Hegel and Sanders, then, the historian’s goal is the reconciliation of individuals to their historical situation *as historical* in order to reveal and reactuate the free, universal

37. This connection between historical knowledge of past emancipatory actors and rejuvenated efforts by present ones is a common theme in Sanders’s historical fiction, both in verse, as in *Egyptian Hieroglyphics* (Canton, NY: Institute of Further Studies, 1973), and in prose works like “A Night at the Café Perf-Po,” in *Tales of Beatnik Glory* (New York: Thunder’s Mouth, 2004), 368–82.

38. Sanders, *Z-D Generation*, 6–7.

essence of humanity. The enduring value of universal histories lies in the compelling evidence they provide to present actors of both their own capacity, and humanity's essential activity, to progressively and continually struggle to overcome existent limitations to freedom. Truly universal history, by explaining history as the concrete, emancipatory work of freedom, reveals that we are all free, historical beings, and thus calls us to our essential, emancipatory duty. Hegelian history demonstrates Charles Olson's insight that "history is the continuum which man is, and if a man does not live in the thought that he is a history, he is not capable of himself."³⁹

Universal, emancipatory history—philosophical, poetic, or otherwise—plays a vital and unique role in drawing us out of our immediate determinations, explaining the essential task of humanity and spurring us to continue our historical work of emancipatory self-determination, rather than assenting to reactionary stagnation. Thus, reflective historians should become "Hegelian" historians, not merely because the latter represents a more "historical" method but because reflective historians fail to do so, and we fail to heed them, at our peril.

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39. Olson, *Special View of History*, 28; partially quoted by Sanders in *IP*, 26. In fact, Hegel himself uses similar language in a passage suggesting that poetry may be superior to philosophy in disseminating this insight: "The chief task of poetry is to bring about consciousness [*zum Bewußtsein zu bringen*] of the powers of spiritual life. . . . Thus [poetry] is and remains the most universal and most widespread teacher of the human race. . . . [for a person] only exists in accordance with the law of his existence [*Daßens*] when he knows what he himself is and in what he is; he must know the powers which drive and guide him, and it is such knowledge that poetry, in its original, substantial form, gives [us]" (*Aesth.*, 15:239–40).