



# verifiche

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# HEGEL'S IDEA OF PHILOSOPHY AND THE WORLD AT THE END

by Angelica Nuzzo\*

**Abstract.** *This essay draws to the center the idea of the 'world' in Hegel's philosophy. The impetus for this work is given by the experience of the 2020 Covid pandemic. This is, I suggest, the direct experience of the dialectical nature of the 'world', the direct experience of the contradiction in the world from which the idea of the 'end of the world' follows. The essay examines Hegel's new, dialectical cosmology in the aftermath of Kant's criticism thereof. In particular, I appeal to the distinction between Schulbegriff and Weltbegriff of philosophy in order to place Hegel within the cosmological tradition and make sense of the possibly cosmological notion of an end of the world.*

**Keywords.** *World; Dialectic; Kant; Cosmology; End*

Here is one of the many thoughts triggered by the current global pandemic crisis<sup>1</sup>. «It is not difficult to see» – we could ascertain, following Hegel's way of rendering the glaring, yet deceiving, evidence of what is under everyone's eyes<sup>2</sup> – that our present world is swiftly falling into chaos. This chaos reveals that the world is in fact small and limited: *there is no escape in it, no escape from it*. The pandemic makes us experience directly the meaning

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<sup>1</sup> This lecture was delivered at the end of 2020; an early version of it, extensively revised here, was published in the journal «Argumenta philosophica», II, 2020. Now, in the summer of 2022, it is common perception around the world that the pandemic is winding down. I am highly doubtful, though, we are at the end of it. In revising the text, I have decided to maintain the reference to the historical actuality of the time it was delivered. I do think we are still there today.

<sup>2</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Werke*, 20 vols., ed. by E. Moldenhauer and H.M. Michel, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1986, vol. 3, p. 18; hereafter TW.

of that metaphysical «pan» (a far more original sense of ‘globalization’). Our current experience of the world is the experience of a contradiction: the world-order-cosmos is chaos; the world is, contradictorily, both *revealed as the world-whole* by the pandemic, and *undermined as world-cosmos-order* by the pandemic.

The question I set out to investigate in this essay is whether Hegel’s dialectical philosophy can rescue the concept – and the reality – of the world from the antinomic disintegration that the current chaos seems to confirm every day in our experience. And, if a dialectical rescue of the world is somehow possible, the further question concerns the kind of ‘world’ (or the kind of ‘cosmos-order’) that Hegel’s dialectic leaves us with in contrast to Kant’s antinomic dialectic.

To address this question, I draw to the center the connection between the world and philosophy. Philosophy is, inescapably, *in the world*; but it is also always *of the world* (even when it denies it is; even when it does not want to be); and finally, philosophy is, in important ways, *responsible for (the concept of) the world*. As Hegel maintains, the «world» is the one and only «content» of philosophy (Enz. § 6). The world has been incorporated in the very designation of the philosophical activity time and again at crucial junctures of its history. The notion of ‘worldly wisdom’ or ‘wisdom of the world’ is as old as ancient Greek cosmogonies<sup>3</sup>. Kant has famously claimed a *Weltbegriff* of philosophy next to its practiced *Schulbegriff*. The *Weltbegriff* of philosophy is, Kant contends, a *conceptus cosmicus* (KrV B866/A838)<sup>4</sup>. And yet, he designates the idea that occupies reason in its antinomies as *Weltbegriff* as well (KrV B448/A420). What is the legacy of Kant’s *Weltbegriff* of philosophy in Hegel? This is the first question at stake in the following considerations. But the common, un-reflected feeling characterizing our age of pandemic globalization allows us to refine these questions in a more pointed and unsettling direction.

<sup>3</sup> See, in general, R. Brague, *The Wisdom of the World. The Human Experience of the Universe in Western Thought*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> N. Hinske, *Kants Verankerung der Kritik im Weltbegriff*, in S. Bacin, A. Ferrarin, M. Ruffing (eds.), *Kant and Philosophy in a Cosmopolitical Sense*. Akten des XI Kant-Kongress, Berlin, DeGruyter, 2013, pp. 263-275, p. 265.

What happens to philosophy when the world slides into chaos? While Kant's critical enterprise sanctions the end of metaphysical cosmology ultimately proposing a new critical (and indeed moral-practical) meaning for the *cosmicus* to which philosophy's destiny is tied, the current crisis makes us aware of a possibility always already nested within the world, namely, the possibility of the world's end. Now, given the longstanding connection between philosophy and the world, what happens to philosophy when the world meets its end<sup>5</sup>? What kind of 'end' is the world meeting and what is the world that is (perceived as) ending?

My starting point is the contemporary consciousness of our inhabiting a contradictory world, which I draw to the center by examining two famous and much discussed passages: the first contains what I take to be Hegel's *Weltbegriff* of philosophy; the second presents Kant's theorization thereof. I then examine the way in which Hegel's speculative dialectic transforms Kant's critical cosmology thereby helping us articulate the contradiction brought to light by our contemporary predicament. Ultimately, at stake is a question of 'ends' – not so much the teleology of *Endzwecke* but the conclusive finality of *das Ende*. What is the 'world' that is perceived as ending – the natural world, the human world, the idea of the world? This question and the apocalyptic thought that underlies it are as old as humanity, as old as philosophical reflection itself. Hence the connected question: is philosophy following the world's end and by losing its 'one and only content' meeting its own end? Issues of 'end' have notoriously afflicted Hegel's interpreters perhaps more than Hegel himself (such are the cases of the contentious 'end of art' and 'end of history'). They are, however, important questions insofar as they disclose the historical predicament of philosophical thinking itself. So, here we are again: is the end of philosophy to accompany the end of the world? Can philosophy withstand the end of the world? Can philosophical thinking re-invent or re-

<sup>5</sup> The central idea – or rather, the central problem – remains even though we do qualify the 'end of the world' by adding: 'the world how we know it' or similar expressions. Properly, that qualification is a way to cope with or to circumvent the finality of that end.

imagine the world after the end, thereby proposing, with Hegel, a sort of new dialectical cosmology?

### 1. *The Concept of the World: Contemporary Challenges*

The world seems to be shrinking both because no part of it is spared by the pandemic, and because the world's spatial extension is reduced to the one-dimensionality of the spreading of the infection. Geographical distances are now measured in a different scale than before and ultimately become irrelevant. Differences seem to be only a matter of time (not yet here, already here, here again, no end in sight though). Indeed, time itself is measured in novel ways. In our lives, it mostly advances in unities of 'quarantines'. Natural demarcations as well as political borders are erased, as they no longer have the power to keep distances in place. The virus knows no borders; it spreads with equal ease through natural barriers and political frontiers. The newly introduced and ubiquitous term 'social distancing' becomes the only relevant spatial measure of our activities. But distance is now properly interruption; it does not characterize the act of broadening our connections but the act of retreating from them. Now distance isolates and cuts us off – from each other and from the world. It is the limit at which we stop, not an expansiveness to be desired and pursued. The world, however, is not made of distances but of connections. For those in isolation (or 'quarantine', as it were) there is properly no world. With spatial extension shattered, the world is imploding; its previous vastness reduced to the monadic point, to the non-world of the individual – the self-standing and self-contained 'bubble' of solitary isolation. Bubbles multiply creating the illusion of an infinite manifold of individual worlds. *But the real world is one and only one.* For, the world is the whole or totality that makes the parts possible, not an aggregate made up by the sum of a manifold of self-standing individual parts. We seem to be slipping into the illusion of a Leibnizian universe made up of monads – each a self-enclosed simple individual substance (windows and doors shut closed); or into an Epicurean world of atoms separated by the void and ruled by chance.

And yet, the world is deeply and essentially interconnected. The real world is a *shared* world: *ordo et connectio*, as a metaphysical formulation has it. Thus, the experience of the pandemic is the experience of how the world's essential interconnectedness once hijacked by the virus backfires so as to produce the disintegration of the whole. Atomism – and the attempted multiplication of individual independent worlds (but truly non-worlds) – is the response to the deadly risk of interconnectedness. The necessity of the latter, however, cannot be removed. Hence interconnection is shifted to the level of virtual reality. The embodied reality of space is eliminated as connection becomes virtual: all contact, transaction, exchange has become 'remote' – not just distant but receding into an otherworldly disembodied remoteness that is properly nowhere. Taken out of the world though, connection is no longer real and no longer human, only 'virtual' and technological. But is the world still a connection of parts when virtual reality takes over thereby replacing real embodied space and actual embodied presence? That is, is the world still 'world' or are we rather in a sort of 'worldless world', in a world overtaken by its own remoteness?

There is no doubt that the 'normality' of the world is shattered. Ingrained habits are utterly disrupted and have no longer the ability to inform our life. But more radically, the reliability of the world, which hitherto supported those habits, is faltering. The world is no longer the reliable ground of common practices, the solid background of predictable behaviors and executable projects. Now we live in a dis-oriented world. Dis-orientation forecloses the future as well as the possibility of forming new sustainable habits. This is another reason why the world's interconnectedness fails: the world no longer seems capable to reliably sustain our being and doing *together into the future*. And when the contingency of the future forecloses the possibility of intersubjective action, only the retreat into the private is possible. Thus, with the loss of the world's normality, its sociality is lost as well. The world is no longer the shared, public world. We retreat into the private, intimate sphere – we are shut into our homes, hidden

behind our masks – and we do not emerge again, not even when we venture out in what once was the public physical space.

In this framework, it is not difficult to see what is at stake in the concept of the world. In the troubled, imploding cosmology sketched above, the human is at stake; nature is at stake; history is at stake; and philosophy itself – its function and its ends – is at stake. It is significant that in the history of modern pandemic narratives the ‘plague’ stands, metaphorically and paradigmatically, for the ‘end’ of humanity itself – of society, knowledge, culture, language<sup>6</sup>.

### 2.1. *Philosophical Thinking and the Concept of the World – Hegel*

It is one of the most famous Hegelian passages, dated June 25, 1820. At issue is the fundamental relation between philosophical thinking and the «contemporary world» (*gegenwärtige Welt*). The «philosophy of right», he argues, is the attempt at conceptually comprehending the state in its full actuality. Thereby Hegel sets his work against two different intellectual programs. The aim is neither to «construct a state how it ought to be», i.e., an ideal (or utopian) state, nor to «instruct» the state as to «how it ought to be». If a normative ‘ought’ is entailed in the philosopher’s work, it is the one contained in the question of how ‘the ethical universe ought to be cognized’. The «ethical universe» or the «world» is the touchstone for philosophy itself: «*Hic Rhodus, hic saltus*», says Hegel concisely referring to Aesop’s fable (TW 7, 26). Herein (*hic*) – i.e., in the world – lies the test of philosophy’s capacity of rational comprehension: not in the construction of an ideal; not in the instruction imparted to those in power or, directly (and naively), to the world itself (TW 7, 27). Indeed, it is «here», i.e., in the comprehension of the «ethical universe» that the relation that binds philosophy to the world is tested. The task of philosophy is the conceptual comprehension of «what is» actual (*wirklich*) because «what is actual is reason» (TW 7, 26). Since the world is the totality of what is, it encompasses the order of rationality. The

<sup>6</sup> From Mary Shelley’s 1826 *The Last Man* to Albert Camus’ 1943 *The Plague*.

universe, however, has a temporal dimension as well. The world is actual as the «*contemporary world*» (TW 7, 26).

While an extensive literature almost exclusively concentrates on the connection between philosophy and the present time (hence history), I want to emphasize the connection between philosophy and the 'world' as the totality in which philosophy is always and necessarily inscribed. Indeed, Hegel's *Weltbegriff* of philosophy is at stake here: not so much the concept of the world produced by philosophical speculation but rather the world in which philosophy necessarily operates as the conceptual comprehension of its contents. Philosophy is *in its own world*, and it is in the present because the present is a constitutive feature of the world. More precisely, philosophy is an immanent dimension of that world and time, namely, the dimension of its rational (self-) comprehension. Reason is the common basis that joins the world and its philosophical comprehension. The world is neither a construction of reason (is not an ideal lacking actuality) nor does it await instruction from reason as to what it «ought to be» (TW 7, 27). The world is the *actual* dimension of reason itself. To this extent, the world cannot be transcended just as the dimension of the present cannot be transcended. It is the ultimate test of the powers of rationality – the intimation to actually perform, here and now, that winning 'leap' in Aesop's fable. In requiring practice (or actual performance) as the only sign of truth, the world is the proof of truth itself (no other promises, witnesses, and additional conditions required). «*Hic Rhodus, hic saltus*». Properly, however, no 'leaping' beyond the world, just as no leaping beyond one's time is possible. The world, just as reason, is the totality that cannot be transcended: only the position of immanence within it is warranted. Hence, Hegel completes the thought elicited by Aesop's quote: «It is just as foolish to imagine that any philosophy can transcend its contemporary world as that an individual can overleap its own time, or leap over Rhodes» (TW 7, 26).

In fact, that philosophy cannot transcend the actual world is less intuitively clear than the impossibility for the individual to overcome the time she lives in. Hasn't Plato (along with perhaps most philosophers) attempted precisely to paint a world other

than and alternative to the actual? Is this not a possibility (perhaps even a *desideratum*) of philosophical thinking, imagining worlds other than the actual one? Why should philosophy be confined to the real world? Hegel denies philosophy the privilege of being free from the constraints of the world on the ground, first, that what is exercised in philosophy is reason, not mere opinion or imagination or individual subjective belief and feeling; and second, on the ground that unlike mere opinion, reason is precisely that which animates actuality, which makes reality or the world *actual* and *present*. An imagined, merely private world – namely, the world made up by individual opinion and feeling – is properly not a ‘world’, hence is not the actual and present world; it is not the shared and public ethical world and it is not the historical world. It is a world that has properly no presence (*Gegenwart*) and no actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) and to this extent is not the topic of philosophical comprehension. Accordingly, the retreat into alleged private, alternative, merely possible (non) ‘worlds’ (or monadic, atomistic bubbles, as it were) sanctions philosophy’s renunciation to the actual and present world along with the renunciation to its own peculiar task. Ultimately, it signals that the commitment to rationality is being abandoned. Herein we have Hegel’s first lesson to our contemporary world.

## 2.2. *Kant: Philosophy and its Weltbegriff*

In the Architectonic of the first *Critique*, Kant claims that one cannot learn philosophy («except historically») because there is no actual philosophy to be learned<sup>7</sup>. Philosophy is the «mere idea of a possible science» never given *in concreto*. Philosophy does not seem to belong to the actual world (KrV B866/A838). In its mere ideality, it is out of time and out of place, existing only in the ideal space of reason, not in the real world. Kant maintains, however, that one can learn the *activity of philosophizing*, which is the exercise of the «talent of reason» in following its general principles. Unlike

<sup>7</sup> For a more extended development of this topic in Kant, see my *Philosophy and the World at the End – Hegelian Reflections*, «Argumenta Philosophica», XX (2), 2021, pp. 123-146.

(the idea of) philosophy, philosophizing is the open-ended process taking place in the world and aiming at the «idea» of that possible science. It is the activity practiced by philosophers in the world. Herein, Kant introduces the well-known distinction between *Schulbegriff* and *Weltbegriff* of philosophy – a distinction that is placed in the specific time frame of the present, setting to the present a specific task. «Until now», Kant maintains, «the concept of philosophy has only been a *Schulbegriff*, namely, that of a system of cognition» the end of which is «only logical perfection». «But there is also a *Weltbegriff* (*conceptus cosmicus*) of philosophy that has always grounded this term» (KrV B866f./A838f.). The *Weltbegriff* is more original and grounding than the *Schulbegriff*, and shows this originality «especially» in the individualization that is the «ideal of the philosopher». In the philosopher, philosophy comes closer to the world joining its *conceptus cosmicus*. The *Weltbegriff*, Kant argues, sets «all cognition in relation to the essential ends of human reason». In referring all cognition to the «essential ends» of reason, the philosopher is «the legislator of human reason». Importantly, the world is at issue in this legislative task. The concept of the world is related to reason's highest and most essential ends, i.e., to ends in which everyone has a necessary interest (KrV B867/A839). Accordingly, the world is the expanded sphere of a rationality that is fundamentally intersubjective or collective.

The term *Weltbegriff* is employed in the first *Critique* either in the Transcendental Dialectic or in the Architectonic<sup>8</sup>. These are two alternative concepts of the world, namely, the world in *sensu scholastico* and the world in *sensu cosmico* or, rather, *cosmopolitico*<sup>9</sup>. The former is the world as a metaphysical and indeed scholastic concept produced by philosophy (in its *Schulbegriff*); the latter is the

<sup>8</sup> See Hinske, *Kants Verankerung*, p. 269: of the nine times it is used in the first *Critique*, six are in connection with the antinomies; three in connection with the Architectonic.

<sup>9</sup> See for example *Logik Pölitz* (AA 28, 2,1, 532f.). Accordingly, Hinske suggests that in the passage of the *Critique* Kant means «*sensus cosmicus*» as «*sensus cosmopoliticus*» (Hinske, *Kants Verankerung*, pp. 270f.). Kant's added parenthesis intends to differentiate the scholastic concept at stake in the antinomies from the concept of the world of the Architectonic.

world as the totality in which reason is itself thematized and from which philosophy is dependent in its essential ends<sup>10</sup>. The latter is the world to which philosophy originally belongs, quite in Hegel's sense. The *Schulbegriff* of the world is the metaphysical concept that gives rise to reason's antinomies. Such a concept, although an inevitable (indeed, «natural») possession of reason, is not one of its «essential ends». Philosophy does not belong to *this* world (the world in *sensu scholastic*).

The world in which the philosopher is active and in which reason's highest end is implicated is neither Nature nor the metaphysical cosmos but the public ethical world. In elaborating on the type of ends at stake in *this* world Kant maintains: «*Weltbegriff here*» (i.e., in the connection of the Architectonic) is «that which necessarily interests everyone» (KrV B867/A839). This concept indicates the public dimension of reason, a «world» determined by what «essentially» and «necessarily» concerns all human beings. This is the moral sphere of reason – Hegel's «ethical universe».

In setting the «essential ends» of human reason in relation to the «highest end», Kant presents the latter as «*die ganze Bestimmung des Menschen*» (KrV B868/A840). At stake herein is the necessary connection between philosophy in its *cosmopolitical* concept and the «world» as the realm of reason's moral activity; the connection between philosophy as ongoing and open-ended rational practice and the intersubjective public world of human action. The world is the totality in which our human destination is essentially inscribed and ought to be recognized and enacted. It is the sphere encompassing those ends that necessarily concern everyone. Kant claims that as «*Kenntnis der Welt*» philosophy's task is to produce the «knowledge of the world» capable of orienting our «life» in it by disclosing our essential human ends, and, ultimately, our most proper *Bestimmung*<sup>11</sup>. Such «cognition of the world» informs, in its turn, the moral world in which such vocation is embedded. The «world» at issue here is the necessary basis of moral philosophy, ethics, anthropology, and history.

<sup>10</sup> See Hinske, *Kants Verankerung*, p. 271.

<sup>11</sup> See AA 2, 443: *Vorlesungsankündigung* for the Summer semester 1775; also Kant's letter to Marcus Herz at the end of 1773: AA 10, 146.

### 3. Hegel: *Philosophy and the World of Spirit*

Moving from the Dialectic to the Architectonic, Kant severs the link between the cosmological and the moral concept of the world<sup>12</sup>. This duality parallels – but is not identical with – the separation between nature and freedom. It is on the latter, practical concept of the world and its relation to philosophy that Kant and Hegel find common ground – the former's «*Kenntnis der Welt*» (AA 2, 443) echoed by the latter's definition of philosophy as «*Gedanke der Welt*» (TW 7, 28). Common is the idea of a rationality that is legislative over a public, intersubjective sphere which is structured as a «world». And yet, the differences are relevant as well. First and foremost, at issue is the relationship between the cosmological and the moral concept of the world – their separation being endorsed by Kant and rejected by Hegel. But relevant is also the fact that in Hegel all mention of our human *Bestimmung* and the highest end of human reason, and also, crucially, of their embeddedness in the world, is lacking. The rational comprehension that defines philosophy is measured, directly, on the *actuality* of the ethical world, not on the ideal deferment of an 'ought to'. The question, then, is how these two positions respectively speak to the disintegration of the world we currently experience.

A fundamental optimism underlies Kant's cosmopolitical concept of philosophy. For, this concept offers an empowering insight that shapes the world according to our human vocation to the extent that the moral world is separated from and opposed to the speculative idea of the world. According to the latter, the world is inherently fragile – even more so after having gone through reason's antinomy and criticism. The cosmos-world is a whole that poses to speculative reason an insoluble problem of origin – but also, just as well, a problem of end and disintegration; it is a whole that constantly risks losing its unity and scattering in its irreducible atomistic parts; a world in which freedom is paralyzed as its presence can neither be proven nor denied. On this

<sup>12</sup> The two concepts, by contrast, are deeply connected in Plato, see Brague, *The Wisdom of the World*, p. 34.

basis, just like Kant, the materialist – Epicurus and Lucretius to begin with – denies that philosophical wisdom is «wisdom of the world» in the cosmological speculative sense<sup>13</sup>. Philosophy is «non-cosmic» wisdom. There is no human vocation inscribed in and supported by the structure of the world of which reason can have knowledge. And yet, unlike Kant, the materialist does not allow for a concept of the world other than the cosmos. It is Kant's second *Weltbegriff* – the *cosmopolitical* concept – that constituting the practical context of reason's legislation allows Kant to tie philosophy to the world. There is no way to *know* that the world is, objectively, a unitary cosmos that makes human sense and supports our vocation. The moral world is not open to reason's *knowledge*; it is, instead, the sphere of reason's free action. For, reason must act *as if* the world were amenable to moral and free action, *as if* the world made human sense. This condition separates the moral world from its historical actuality. It is this condition that Hegel sets out to remove. On Hegel's view, there is, in fact, a question of knowledge that the ethical universe poses specifically to philosophy (in contrast to common sense, opinion, and feeling – TW 7, 26). However, as far as philosophical cognition is concerned, the ethical universe is not a different world than the natural world.

Now, it seems that the experience of the world informed by the current pandemic comes closer to the contradictory, despairing predicament of speculative reason than to the empowering outlook of philosophy in its cosmopolitical concept. Furthermore, our experience seems to spread the antinomic doubt even to the moral cosmos, thereby undermining reason's faith in it. Can we still, today, think of the world as encompassing all that which is of necessary interest to everyone (KrV B867/A839)? Besides making us doubt the viability of the idea of essential, universal, and necessary ends of human reason and producing disillusionment regarding the notion of a human vocation inscribed in the moral structure of the world, the pandemic has put us in touch with the possibility of a world independent of and indifferent to our human ends, interests, and welfare; with the

<sup>13</sup> Ivi, p. 43.

fragility of a world-order on the verge of shattering. The question is whether Hegel may be able to present us with an insight more compelling than the Kantian one.

Hegel brings us back to the *actual* world of which, in turn, both the metaphysical cosmos and the moral world are integral parts<sup>14</sup>. There is only one (actual) world; or, *Wirklichkeit* is one. In the passage of the preface to the *Philosophy of Right* examined above, Hegel presents the task of philosophy *vis à vis* the world in diminutive terms if confronted to Kant. At stake can only be the conceptual comprehension of the contemporary world – not its ideal construction, not philosophy's legislation over it. It is no longer an issue of human ends and not an issue of human *Bestimmung* – ethical and cosmological.

In the *Encyclopedia*, in the Positions of Thought Toward Objectivity, Hegel confronts the concepts of the world theorized by traditional metaphysics and by Kant's critique. The upshot of Hegel's examination is the dialectical-speculative transformation of the metaphysical and critical concepts of the world. Hegel's claim is that the world is not a given object of thought. It is neither an «object» (*Gegenstand*) nor an «already given» and fully constituted object (Enz. § 30). Rather, the world is thinking itself in its objectivity, «*objektiver Gedanke*» (Enz. § 25). Moreover, the world is not a *fixed* object that can serve as an anchor for thinking in its activity. Metaphysics takes the world as a fixed point (or object) in which thinking can rest finding «*einem festen Halt*» on which to hang its static predicates (Enz. § 31). On their part, empirical thinking and Kant find in the immediate presence and givennes of the world the solid anchor («*den festen Halt*»: Enz. § 38) to which empirical cognition owes its own certainty. On Hegel's view instead far from being a «*fester Halt*» (or, rather, the illusion thereof), the world is *one dynamically ongoing process*, one with thinking's own process of (self) determination and apprehension. In its pure form, this process is staged by the Logic. In its concrete and specific ongoing determination in actuality, the

<sup>14</sup> In a sense, which is Hegel's sense, Plato's *Timaeus* and his *Republic* both express his actual, historical world.

world-process constitutes the world of nature (or *the world as nature*) and the world of spirit (or *the world as spirit*). The question then is whether this *dynamic process* that is the world has an end – whether it admits one or even requires one.

#### 4. *Philosophy and the World at its End*

In the *Logic*, Hegel develops the pure structures of the process that constitutes «objective thinking» as one with the objectivity of the «world». In its actual determination, the world is first the world of nature arising out of the conclusion of the *Logic*, and then the production of the world as the «world of spirit» that is, most generally, the «system of right» as spirit's «second nature», the «realm of actualized freedom» (*Philosophy of Right* § 4), and finally «world-history» – *Welt-Geschichte*. Ultimately, Hegel's transformation of the metaphysical and critical concepts of the world amounts to the *historization* of the world process. On the ground of this transformation, the «absolute opposition» (*Enz.* § 35 Remark) that paralyzes Kantian reason in the cosmological antinomies becomes the driving force shaping the world in its immanent development. In particular, the issue of the world's beginning and that of the world's end receive a new meaning. At stake is no longer the quest for a metaphysical origin or an apocalyptic cessation of the world-whole impossibly set out of time and out of the world itself. At issue, instead, is the indication of different moments that are immanent within the development of the world's constitution and spirit's action. Ultimately, when the full extension of world-history is taken into consideration, at stake is an issue of historical periodization<sup>15</sup>. Furthermore, the antinomy of freedom, which leads Kant to separate both the world of nature and the speculative idea of the cosmos from the moral

<sup>15</sup> See my *Logic and Time in Hegel's Idea of History – Philosophical Einteilung and Historical Periodization*, in D. Losurdo, A. Tosel, Centre de recherches d'histoire des idées (eds.), *L'idée d'époque historique*, Frankfurt am Main, Lang, 2004, pp. 165-180; also *Memory, History, Justice in Hegel*, London-NY, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

world in which alone freedom can be thought as actual, is transformed into the immanent and necessary contradiction driving freedom in the movement of its progressive actualization. Such process is identical with the constitution of the «world of spirit» as the intersubjective and objective sphere of ethical life and world-history (*Philosophy of Right* § 4).

The novel aspect of Hegel's theorization of the issue of the end consists in presenting it as a defining moment of his dialectic-speculative «method»<sup>16</sup>. In its first systematic occurrence, the end is pure thinking's action of bringing the Logic to conclusion thereby initiating an utterly new type of activity – the natural and spiritual activity whereby freedom is actualized in – and *as* – the world. At the end of the Logic, thinking's task is to close the first circle of the science – *Schluss*. This, Hegel claims, is indeed a momentous «decision» – an *Ent-schluss* – from the part of logical thinking (TW 6, 573). The *methodological* problem of the end is the problem of knowing when and how to stop; when to close the circle of action that would otherwise continue on indefinitely. Making the end is taking the highest risk, embracing the hardest contradiction: at the height of the absolute idea, in the seemingly highest position of subjectivity and freedom, thinking must «let go» (*frei entlassen*) of all it has, surrender all it has achieved, and indeed let go of itself and let itself go in its absolute other, namely, nature – *frei Entlassen* (TW 6, 573). This act of ending and this alone is indeed the highest freedom. It is the discovery of an utterly new possibility, namely, the world of nature and spirit. It is, properly, the action that begins the process that is the constitution of another world, the world of nature as the idea's radical other. The new world is possible only *after the end*. Hence we should let the present world end.

Kant defines transcendental freedom or «freedom in the cosmological sense» as spontaneity, i.e., as the action of making an absolute beginning out of itself (KrV B561/A533). Hegel, I suggest, sees the crucial moment of true freedom in the capacity

<sup>16</sup> See my *Approaching Hegel's Logic, Obliquely: Melville, Molière, Beckett*, Albany (NY), SUNY Press, 2018.

of making the end. The action with which the logical idea makes the end is, he maintains, an «absolute liberation». This freedom is *complete*. The end is not in itself a proper «transition» but the liberating gesture that hints to a novel world, to another, unprecedented way of acting and being – a way that is not yet there, not even in outline but must be entirely invented, imagined anew. As the idea in a final act of freedom «determines itself» to simple being, this is «the concept that in its determination remains with itself (*der [...] bei sich selbst bleibende Begriff*)». Indeed, «to-remain-with-oneself» is no transition and no becoming; it is, rather, another expression of the highest freedom caught in its concluding act. However, Hegel suggests that if there is a «transitioning» in this action, it should be taken «in the sense that the idea *freely lets go of itself* [*sich selbst frei entlässt*], absolutely certain of itself» (TW 6, 573). The idea's «absolute liberation» is the act whereby the idea frees itself from itself: having fulfilled its (logical) task, it absolves and un-bounds itself from it, and is now both retrospectively *free from* it and prospectively *free for* a new life, a new destination, and a new task. In its freedom, the idea lets itself go or lets go of itself as it has been as *logical* idea, and lets itself go as something utterly other – nature. This is the act that by ending makes a thoroughly new beginning. Properly, the movement beyond the end begins with both the idea's *Entschluss* and its *Befreiung* – «decision» and «liberation» disclose the world of nature and the world of spirit beyond the idea's logical end.

To conclude, this is now my suggestion. The current pandemic as moment of historical crisis puts us squarely in the predicament in which the courage entailed in the action of ending is required from our part. We should dare loose the «*fester Halb*» that our world no longer is – neither in actuality nor in its concept. Thinking must join the actuality of the present world – a world in crisis. We should dare set the world in motion and let go of the fixity it has displayed up until now. Philosophy's challenge is to summon such courage and with it the ability to make the end – to bring our world (which is philosophy's own world) to the end, to radically let go of it. Not just to relinquish old habits, not just to suspend social, political, economic customs with the hope

of resuming them unchanged (or only slightly changed) soon or later; but to «let go» of our world entirely, thereby showing the openness to new possibilities, the willingness to be part of the process that is the construction of a truly *new world*. The task of philosophy, then, is to re-imagine these utterly new possibilities, to outline the contours of the new world, to indicate where to start in order for the new world to begin its process of actualization. As «*Gedanke der Welt*», philosophy, Hegel famously claims, comes always «too late» in relation to the constitution of the world (*Philosophy of Right*, Preface TW 7, 28). This is why it is its peculiar task to make the end, to mark the end of an epoch. But for this very reason and in this very act, philosophy is also the first. Thinking's freedom is creativity. Freedom is the capacity of re-invention. Dialectically, however, creation can come only after the end. Philosophy, then, displays its power after the end of the world. *Hic Rhodus, hic saltus*: the end is our Rhodus. It is our task as philosophers to summon the courage to sanction the end of the pre-pandemic world. It is our task to reimagine *entirely* the public sphere, intersubjective relations, race and gender relations, social and political bonds and institutions, economic activity, borders and frontiers, the relation to nature and the natural world. But thinking must also re-imagine the very way it performs its tasks, the categories it uses, the methods it mobilizes in approaching reality and its understanding. And the list continues. The world is nothing but the «system» that holds together all these activities.