

HEGEL AND POCKOCK ON HISTORICAL TIME: A MACHIAVELLIAN MOMENT COMES LATE TO GERMANY?

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Abstract. *J.G.A. Pocock diagnosed in the Machiavellian Moment a difficulty in understanding the temporality of their civic engagement. That engagement concerned particulars rather than general rules, and it concerned mutable facts that varied over time and across space. Of course, Hegel is not writing in Machiavelli's Italy, and so there can be no question of simply locating Hegel's writing within this problematic. And yet it is also the case that Sattelzeit Germany was another place and time in which the development of a distinctively historical consciousness was forced upon thinkers by specific political events. Hegel thought that one of his essential contributions to philosophy generally was his development of conceptual resources for dealing with particulars – and with individuals as well. In fact, Hegel's location of both particularity and individuality within the concept is a distinctive and even idiosyncratic position with substantial consequences for his understanding of historical experience. And it is also the case that Hegel's own intellectual development is far more closely tied to related themes in Christian temporal schemes than is often acknowledged.*

Keywords. *Hegel; Pocock; History; Particularity; Temporality*

«There is a point at which historical and political theory meet, and it can be said without distortion that every society possesses a philosophy of history – a set of ideas about what happens, what can be known and what done, in time considered as a dimension of society – which is intimately a part of its consciousness and its functioning»¹

1. Introduction

My previous work has been an attempt to recover the historicity of German Idealist thinking (including Kant), particularly in

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¹ J.G.A. Pocock, *Politics, Language, and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1971, p. 233.

political philosophy². That work has been primarily oriented by the historian R. Koselleck and the *Begriffsgeschichte* tradition, but here I want to try to make the connection to another giant of historicism in the history of political thought, J.G.A. Pocock³.

The primary theme on which I want to focus is not the historicity of the republican moment in *Quattrocento* Florence or whether that form of thinking properly made it over the Alps or instead jumped the channel to the United Kingdom or even over the pond to the United States. Instead, I want to focus on the difficulty that writers in the so-called Machiavellian Moment had in understanding the temporality of their civic engagement. As Pocock presents that difficulty, it arises from two related aspects of that engagement. First, it concerns particulars rather than universals – specific events and problems rather than general rules. Second, it concerns mutable facts that vary over time and across space – events that happen only once or institutions that take different forms in Florence as opposed to Venice, for example. Regarding the first difficulty, Pocock argues that these thinkers had received no conceptual resources for handling particulars and were thus often forced to fall back on the presumptive force of customary practices lacking any self-reflective element or rational foundation. Regarding the second difficulty, neither the time schemes of Aristotelian political science nor those of Christian eschatology offered ready-made resources for understanding the temporality of these mutable facts and action in relation to them, and so new ways of bending those theoretical languages to this task had to be found.

Of course, Hegel is not writing in Machiavelli's Italy, and so there can be no question of simply locating Hegel's writing within

² C. Yeomans, *The Politics of German Idealism*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2023.

³ There is no space to discuss the relation more directly between Koselleck and Pocock, which was an incomplete encounter at best. In any event, their disagreement was primarily methodological, which is an issue only tangentially related to the present topic. For a brief discussion see J. Ifversen, *The Birth of International Conceptual History*, «Contributions to the History of Concepts», XVI (1), 2021, pp. 1-15.

this problematic. And yet it is also the case that *Sattelzeit* Germany was another place and time in which the development of a distinctively *historical* consciousness was forced upon thinkers by specific political events. And it is also the case that Hegel's own intellectual development is far more closely tied to related themes in Christian temporal schemes than is often acknowledged, as L. Dickey's work has shown.

But Hegel also thought that one of his essential contributions to philosophy generally was his development of conceptual resources for dealing with particulars – and with individuals as well. In fact, Hegel's location of both particularity and individuality *within* the concept is a distinctive and even idiosyncratic position with substantial consequences for his understanding of historical experience. Though Hegel's concern to develop the conceptual resources to grasp particularity is driven primarily by more general theoretical problems – and not by any specific perplexity surrounding the value of political practice engaging with those particulars – it is nonetheless the case that the distinctive ways in which particularity appears in the political experience of his time serve both as touchstones for the development of his theory of conceptuality as well as defining features of the historicity of that experience. For example, in lecturing on Aristotle's *Politics* which was also an essential text for the Florentine authors, Hegel claims that Aristotle could have no conception of the extent to which the abstracting power of natural right isolates individuals in modern states, and yet their economic activity also produces a distinctive kind of universality. Thus, in a way that is similar as we shall see to the Florentine authors of the *Quattrocento*, Hegel marks his difference from the ancients by means of the concept of particularity and the need to grasp its form conceptually.

I proceed, then, as follows. In §2, I briefly lay out Pocock's understanding of the predicament of the *Quattrocento* Florentine thinkers, with some even more brief presentation of the way that those thinkers addressed their problems. In §3, I briefly reconstruct the predicament faced by Hegel through a recapitulation of some themes from Koselleck and Dickey. Finally, in §4 I turn to Hegel's understanding of historical time in that context.

2. Pocock on the Machiavellian Moment

Pocock's *The Machiavellian Moment* is one of the great works of intellectual history with a richness to which I cannot do justice here⁴. In particular, the contrast between *virtù* and *fortuna* which is so important for Pocock's understanding of Machiavelli specifically must be left aside here⁵. But Pocock's primary theme is one of sufficient resonance with Hegel's time and his interventions in that time to be worth setting out in moderate detail – and this theme is the difficulty which the Florentines had in trying to grasp action in response to specific and changing conditions. As noted already in the introduction, we can think of the challenge of conceptualizing political action in the present as twofold: first, the challenge that whenever there is innovation in political affairs one is dealing with particulars, not universals; and second, the challenge that such action takes place in the temporal flux of historical experience. Thus, actions and the events to which they respond are not easily assimilated to a rule or type, on the one hand, nor are there customs developed which provide ready-made responses, on the other hand. As a result, neither the Roman nor Greek systems of political science, nor the customs developed over long usage, provide much in the way of guidance. This was true of the former because the «Greek and Roman intellects saw little reason to expect anything very new to happen in the human future»⁶; thus, the novelty of a particular that could not easily be labeled a repetition of a type eluded the grasp of their conceptual schemes. It was true of the latter because the novelty of the particular also necessarily fell outside the automatic response of custom, which had no self-reflective component and could not even receive one from a posteriori theorization:

⁴ J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1975.

⁵ For a discussion of a similar dynamic in the early Hegel, see L. Dickey, *Hegel: Religion, Economics, and the Politics of Spirit, 1770-1807*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 68.

⁶ Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, p. 31.

the people could not tell you why the customs they observe are good or those they abandon bad, not merely because the people are not philosophers, but because the philosopher himself could not tell you. The philosopher can see only the universal aspects of things; there is no method, no self-critical or self-verifying intellectual procedure, yet evolved for dealing with their particular aspects. Consequently, the goodness of a good custom can be inferred from the fact of its preservation; it can hardly be demonstrated, since demonstration consists in deduction from a universal premise, and no such premise can contain the particular character and circumstances of the people whose custom it is⁷.

Custom lacked the ability to exercise judgment and thus potentially to extend its reach by assimilating new particulars; the best that could be said for it was that a long-maintained usage had presumptive authority.

There were, of course, Christian eschatological models for dealing with temporal change – and these certainly changed the view of secular events by introducing to them both a relationship with and a contrast to sacred time. But these models were a double-edged sword and tended to deny the possibility of satisfaction in this life to the same extent that they promised the means to comprehend it.

All in all, the range of options was quite poor for comprehending particular events and actions in historical time:

So sharply limited were these means that it was possible to feel that the temporal flux evaded men's conceptual control: that it was under the dominion of an inscrutable power, which manifested itself as providence to men of faith and as fortune to men of none⁸.

As Pocock tells the story of the development of Florentine political thought – and particularly that of Machiavelli – it is the story of various attempts to describe the *virtù* which might be used to impose form on fortune in secular political action.

⁷ Ivi, p. 15.

⁸ Ivi, p. 114.

In addition, a further aspect of Pocock's problematic is relevant for illuminating Hegel. This is the fact that these problems with conceptualizing the particular in flux become problems in the context of the memory of a republic which had expanded citizenship and thus introduced an expectation that more residents would share in the active life of self-government. Such self-government is essentially reflective – but it can thus neither be customary nor can it have the self-reflection characteristic of philosophy with the latter's derivation of conclusions from general rules:

The citizen must have a theory of knowledge which allows great latitude for public decisions upon public events. To attempt the erection of a civic way of life upon epistemological foundations which allow the recognition only of universal order and particular traditions is to be hampered by certain limitations. It can be argued that the history of Florentine political thought is the history of a striking but partial emancipation from these limitations⁹.

The order of the day was to develop new ways of thinking about particular responses to particular events, ways that could be collectively practiced in a self-governing republic.

Finally, one way of such partial emancipation deserves mentioning as background before we turn to Hegel. This is the element that Hans Baron has dubbed 'humanistic sociological reasoning'¹⁰ and what Pocock terms a 'sociology of liberty'¹¹. For our purposes, the relevant aspect of this concept revolves around the question of how to make sense of the varying standpoints and strengths of different citizens, which were necessarily particular. In a complex discussion framing the Florentine writers' relation to Aristotle's *Politics*, Pocock notes that the Aristotelian language of one, few, and many to taxonomize governments into monarchies, aristocracies, and democracies was inherently ambiguous. On the one hand, it was simply a numerical distinction; on the other hand, it was a distinction of virtue or quality. On Pocock's view, the Florentines understood this

⁹ Ivi, p. 50.

¹⁰ Quoted at Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, p. 90.

¹¹ Ivi, p. 85.

ambiguity as the problem of distributing the universal business of the *polis* among particular citizens, each of whom had particular value-orientations. Each value-orientation could be considered an axis along which an elite few or even one could be distinguished:

[...] such elites were in theory as many as the identifiable value-goals which men pursued, and since every citizen had been defined as possessing his own value-priorities, there was in principle no citizen who did not belong to as many of these elites as he had chosen values for special emphasis¹².

Aristotle then saw that a constitution could be composed of the right elites for the right positions, i.e., of apportioning the different elements of a complex decision-making process to the kinds of citizens whose value-orientations made them best suited for that particular task. This is a form of sharing power that prevents any group from exercising «unshared power over the whole»¹³. We must necessarily leave aside here the details of the Florentine suggestions for the different ways that such a constitution might be structured, particularly with reference to the idealization of the Venetian constitutions. But the thought that a taxonomy or typology of the citizenry might be an essential element in a theory of political institutions is a thought very much alive in Hegel (though for Hegel this thought comes primarily from Montesquieu rather than Aristotle).

3. *The Sattelzeit and its Problematic*

I don't want to say too much here, since the point of this paper is to explore the connection between Hegel's conception of historical time and an abstract form of the problematic of the *Machiavellian Moment*. Here we have to do with what Koselleck named the *Sattelzeit*, that is the transitional period between early and late modernity which runs (very roughly) from the middle of the 18th to the middle of the 19th century. Intellectually, this period

¹² Ivi, p. 69.

¹³ Ivi, pp. 70-71.

is the culmination of the German Enlightenment. Socially, it is the period of the split between state and society and furthermore of corporate, traditional society from the new civil society (both of which developments were somewhat delayed in Germany as opposed to England and France). Politically, it is the period of the long-delayed end of the fragmented Holy Roman Empire after the Napoleonic Wars and its replacement by the much-consolidated German Federation.

The form of historical experience that came into being within these fractures led Koselleck to think that there were three simultaneous temporal strata (*Zeitschichten*) with different scales of variation: very fine-grained experiences of the unique and the surprising; medium-grained experiences of generational changes; and very coarse-grained experiences of long-running institutions such as a nation or the Catholic Church¹⁴.

The philosophy of history of the German Enlightenment produced a conceptualization of these fractures by means of a conception of historical time not as reconstructable from a future vantage point, but rather as experienced in the present. In this conception, both the concepts of modernity (*Neuzeit* = *neue Zeit*) and of progress play central roles, and indeed are identified with each other:

For progress is that which has brought to a single concept the difference between the previous past and the coming future. Thereby time won a new historical quality, which it had not had within the horizon of that which is always the same and the return of the exemplary¹⁵.

But progress was a question of institutions, and different institutions might progress in different ways, or their progress might even trade off against each other so that one moved forward historically while the other regressed. In fact, this is exactly what happened in the Prussian experience, according to Koselleck:

¹⁴ R. Koselleck, *Zeitschichten: Studien zur Historik*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 2003, pp. 19-26 and pp. 34-41.

¹⁵ Ivi, p. 323.

With exaggeration one can say that the economic modernization according to the principles of Adam Smith had hindered the attempt to catch up to political modernization in the sense of a western constitutional system. The economic time-sequence and the political time-sequence led, as it were, to contradictory results¹⁶.

This dynamization of historical experience produced a time which was experienced as itself historical, not merely as a product of history or as a series of events later to be turned into history by the historian. And this dynamization changed the nature of the past, present, and future in such a way as to make them all aspects of the experience of the expanded present of historical time. The future is made present in what Koselleck calls the 'horizon of expectation' (*Erwartungshorizont*). This is a way of experiencing the present as animated by the future, as an essentially provisional state whose significance and success is measured by its relation to the normative demands of the ideal future. The question is: what progress is being made? The past is made present in what Koselleck calls the 'space of experience' (*Erfahrungsraum*). Here the orientation is towards the expectations transmitted from the past, and qualitative changes from those expectations generate surprise and discomfort in the present whereas suitably gradual quantitative changes are easily and without awareness subsumed under the same habits which originated to deal with past expectations. The tension generated by experience in the present by the pull between the space of experience and the horizon of expectations opens up the space of political action, of planning and prognosis. In this space it might be asked, on the one hand, what was being done to conserve the goodness of the past and, on the other hand, what progress was being made towards a better future. In one paradigmatic example of the progressive side from Kant, the value of the republic becomes transformed into the necessity of republicanism, i.e., the endless progress towards a republican constitution¹⁷. This was not the conservation of or return to self-government sought by the Florentine authors, but rather a commitment to interminable progress.

¹⁶ Ivi, p. 326.

¹⁷ See ivi, pp. 333-334.

I will say just one more thing about Koselleck here, to tie it again to some of Pocock's problematic and to transition to Dickey's analysis of Hegel. Koselleck sees this 'temporalization' (*Verzeitlichung*) and 'acceleration' of history in modernity as a matter of the planning attitude that we take towards the future, and the concomitant importance of prognoses and modes of knowing what is possible in the future – and these are quite different from the prophecies that on his account had been the main way that the future broke into the present until the middle of the 17th century:

Prognosis produces the time within which and out of which it weaves, whereas apocalyptic prophecy destroys time through its fixation on the End. From the point of view of prophecy, events are merely symbols of that which is already known. A disappointed prophet cannot doubt the truth of his own predictions. Since these are variable, they can be renewed at any time. Moreover, with every disappointment, the certainty of approaching fulfillment increases. An erroneous prognosis, by contrast, cannot even be repeated as an error, remaining as it does conditioned by specific assumptions¹⁸.

That Hegel's time was a time of prognosis does not mean that Christian eschatological reasoning was absent from the background of Hegel's thought; however, it does mean that it takes on a different form and relevance, and for this we need to look to Dickey's work.

We can start to see the different form of Christian temporality in Hegel by noting a very important difference between Hegel's historical context and that of the *Quattrocento* Florentines: their worry that Christianity was hostile to political action because it denied the value of this-worldly achievements was not at all shared by Hegel. As Dickey has argued at length, Hegel was formed by a Württemberg in which a Protestant population had a Catholic ruler to confront, and so there was simply no choice but to see public political activity as an essential part of their religious duties. This makes various themes in Christian eschatology available to Hegel in a way that they

¹⁸ R. Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. by K. Tribe, Massachusetts, The MIT Press, 1990, p. 19.

were not for the Florentine writers. For the latter, the primary mode of combining these options was in terms of prophecy, and particularly the prophecy of Florence as a distinctive place destined to fulfill a crucial role in salvation history. In G. Savonarola's sermons and exhortations, action in secular time was understood and made meaningful by this prophecy, and the republic founded during that time as an interlude between periods of Medici rule was justified as a form of civic renewal which was also religious renewal¹⁹. But as Dickey makes the case, the denominational conflict between the population and the ruler itself generated sufficient religious interest in the present to make civil action not merely something that *could* have meaning but something that was actually *required* to practice one's Protestantism.

However, there was something customary about this religious approach to civil life:

[T]he ideal of Protestant civil piety was founded less on a conscious theory of how religion and politics should interact than on a tacit assumption, one that was the result of what Berger and Luckman would call a 'process of habitualization'. The assumption was that one of the basic functions of religion was to make men better by improving the ethical quality of civil life. With time this belief in the civil value of religion became part of the general stock of Old-Württemberg's knowledge about itself. For the most part, however, this knowledge was part of the 'pretheoretical lives' of Württemberg Protestants [...]²⁰.

In fact, one of the most interesting features of the background of Old-Württemberg is the way in which custom and tradition were themselves put to new uses through their combination with other aspects of Protestant civil piety. This happened through the way that the Good Old Law was seen as a protection for Protestant religious rights. In this way, an essentially forward-looking interest in religious reformation was married with an essentially backward-looking traditionalism represented in the Estates as a way of pushing back against expansion of the princely power of the Catholic duke.

¹⁹ See Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, pp. 104-113.

²⁰ Dickey, *Hegel*, pp. 7-8.

There is, again, such a wealth of detail and erudition in Dickey's work that we must be extraordinarily selective. The first major point is just the one we have been making so far: there is no need for prophecy or chiliasm to make available religious resources for the understanding of secular events. Hegel's time shared neither the difficulties of *Quattrocento* Florence nor our own tendency to separate private church religion from public politics. As Dickey describes his approach,

Instead of assuming, as so many have done, that the activism and reformism in these writings reflect the values of an anti-Christian radical, we can see very well how that activism and reformism manifest the concerns of a liberal Christian reformer who regarded the world as a field of Christian opportunity and who wished, therefore, to make political activism and integral part of his program of applied Christian theology²¹.

Political participation was a part of the ordinary practice of Christian piety and had no need to depend on the attribution to the present place and time of any unique meaning in salvation history.

Secondly, one of Hegel's main *departures* from the general tenor of this background civic piety is his rejection of the strain of asceticism found there due to his 'discovery' of the economy. This naturally resonates with another theme from Pocock which we must largely leave aside, namely the modulation of civic humanist concern to champion virtue against corruption into the specific form of the protection of the virtue of collective political life against the particularizing effect of commerce. But the point from Dickey that I want to pull out from here is the point that the temporal orientation of this modulated concern was, for writers such as Hegel and Christian Garve, *future-directed*:

For Garve and Hegel, for example, *Tapferkeit* [courage] expressed a political hope for the future far more than a fear of the possibility of decline in the present. It expressed, in other words, a liberal Christian hope for the future more than a conservative political hope for the present²².

²¹ Ivi, pp. 141-142.

²² Ivi, p. 229.

Hegel's own contribution to the development of this line of thought is the attempt to show that economic activity itself contributes to the development of the political awareness and commitment required for participatory citizenship²³. This will be crucial when we come to discuss the 'humanist sociology' of Hegel's theory of historical time. Dickey has some discussion of this in Hegel's early writings, but I want to focus on the later writings.

With these pieces of context in place, we can try to understand Hegel's understanding of historical time.

4. *Hegel's Conception of Historical Time*

The primary point which I want to make in this section is that Hegel is also a conceptual innovator with respect to particularity, and that this is intrinsically connected with his theory of historical time. First, in his *Logic*, he includes particularity within the concept, rather than treating the concept as a general rule that is then applied to particulars in some way. This is innovative to the point of being idiosyncratic. Second, in his *Philosophy of Nature*, he introduces time as one of two ways in which particularity is brought to the foreground of our view of the world (the other is space). Finally, he distinguishes historical time from natural time.

To begin with logic, Hegel builds both the particular and the individual into his version of concepts (alongside the universal).

The *concept* as such contains the moments of *universality* (as the free sameness with itself in its determinacy), *particularity* (the determinacy in which the universal remains the same as itself, unalloyed), and *individuality* [Einzelinheit] (as the reflection-in-itself of the determinacies of the universality and particularity, the negative unity with itself that is the *determinate in and for itself* and at the same time identical with itself or universal²⁴).

²³ See *ivi*, p. 241.

²⁴ G.W.F. Hegel, *Werke*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1970 (henceforth cited as TW, followed by the number of the respective volume), vol. 8, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften I*, §163 (all translations of these texts to English are

The details of these three moments of the concept need not detain us here, but we can say that they are severally necessary and jointly sufficient ways of registering the logical salience of anything at all. From the perspective of universality, we register the generality of the object; from the perspective of particularity, its specificity; and from that of individuality, its totality. Roughly speaking and stripped of the faculty psychology, these represent the different contributions of Kantian concepts, intuitions, and ideas to cognition as Kant understands it.

There are two obvious innovations here and a third that is easily missed. The first obvious innovation is the inclusion of particularity within the concept rather than something to which it is applied: particularity «is not a *limit*, as if it were related to an *other* beyond it, but is rather, as just shown, the universal's own immanent moment»²⁵. There must be a kind of specificity that is essential to the concept itself – even to its generality – and so in trying to understand the conceptual form of anything at all, we must look for its specificity as well.

The second innovation is the distinction of particularity from individuality – i.e., of the aspect of specificity from the aspect of totality – and the inclusion of both within the concept. This is often misunderstood by Hegel scholars who are too quick to collapse the inner structure of the concept back into universality (even if understood as a so-called ‘concrete universality’). But it is essential for understanding historical time because Hegel thinks that we identify different totalities within our historical experience which move at different speeds or even in different directions. This will be crucial to the ‘humanistic sociology’ of that experience.

The third innovation is the *modification* of the conception of universality itself that is required once it is seen to cohabitate with

mine). I generally prefer ‘individuality’ to ‘singularity’ as an interpretation of ‘Einzelheit’ because Hegel’s usage of the German term involves a sort of totality or unity that I hear as more present in the former English term than the latter.

²⁵ G.W.F. Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 12, *Wissenschaft der Logik. Die subjektive Logik*, ed. by F. Hogemann, W. Jaeschke, Hamburg, Meiner, 1980 (henceforth indicated as GW 12), p. 37.

particularity and individuality within the concept. This modification is itself a product of a historical movement, on Hegel's account, namely Christianity:

It is of the greatest importance, both for cognition and for our practical behavior too, that we should not confuse what is merely communal with what is truly universal [...]. [I]n its true and comprehensive significance the universal is a thought that took millennia to enter into men's consciousness; and it only achieved its full recognition through Christianity. The Greeks, although otherwise so highly cultivated, did not know God, or even man, in their true universality [...]. Consequently, for the Greeks there was an absolute gulf between themselves and the barbarians, and they did not yet recognize man as such in his infinite worth and his infinite justification²⁶.

This changes the problem of the relation of universality to particularity from the Florentine case, since we have to do less with a general rule which might or might not be instantiated and instead a kind of ideal expressing itself to greater or lesser degrees in specific individuals. The possibility of novelty is built into the generality grasped through conceptual thought, rather than providing a challenge to its successful extension.

These changes represent Hegel generalizing a lesson he learned from Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, namely the necessity of different orders of interstitial concepts that are related to each other in determinate ways. When Hegel comes to discuss historical time, he thus has a set of categories already worked out on a general basis that provide many ways of grasping the particular. That is, he is not using his analysis of historical time itself to *generate* such conceptual resources, as the Florentine writers are. This is *not* to say that problems of political action and historical time were not on Hegel's mind as he was developing these resources, since above all Hegel designed his concept to provide an understanding of self-reflective practices, and the *Sattelzeit* self-reflective practice was ineliminably historical. But before moving on to history proper, just a few remarks on natural

²⁶ TW 8, § 16, Z 1.

time, both because the connection with particularity is so striking, and because its limitations point the way to what is distinctive about Hegel's conception of historical time.

Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* is a grand experiment to understand natural phenomena through the lens of particularity. It is truly remarkable that neither natural laws nor physical forces play much of any role in the explanation of the phenomena, and neither does the species/genus hierarchy. Except for the elements – and these are treated as functional placeholders for future scientific discovery – general types of entities play a very limited role. Instead, the emphasis is on specific phenomena and their interrelation. For our purposes, the main point is that Hegel describes nature as the way the world appears to us when the idea (i.e., the fully developed form of the concept) «*resolves to release out of itself* into freedom the moment of its particularity»²⁷. And then in Hegel's version of a very Kantian doctrine, space and time are the most basic forms of intuition in which this particularity is made manifest. For time in particular, this is connected not only to particularity but to the aspect of particularity that most troubled the Florentines, namely its mutability: time is «*intuited becoming*»²⁸. 'Becoming' (*Werden*) is one of the earliest categories of the *Logic* and is generally used by Hegel later to refer to random or ungoverned change.

Hegel furthermore ties this feature of time to the three traditional modes of time, which he relabels 'dimensions,' but in a way which bring individuality into the picture:

The dimensions of time, the *present*, *future* and *the past*, are the *becoming* of externality as such and its dissolution in the difference of being as the passing over into nothing and nothing as the passing over into being. The immediate disappearance of these differences in the *individuality* is the present as *now* [...] ²⁹.

²⁷ Ivi, § 244.

²⁸ TW 9, § 258.

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

But something essential is missing in natural time, and that is the experience of the future and the past. Natural time dissolves the differences that might provide a stable distinction between the three dimensions of time, leaving only the present moment for experience. Hegel says that we can represent the future or past through, e.g., memory or fear – but we seem not to be able to experience it as such³⁰. This experience is first made possible in historical time.

In beginning to discuss Hegel's theory of historical time, two well-known features of it must be stated explicitly. The first is the essential connection between history and conflict, which is a connection so strong that Hegel juxtaposes it to the comparatively 'harmless' process of natural change. Here is a famous passage:

Development, which as such is a peaceful procedure because in its expression it remains simultaneously equivalent to and within itself, is, within spirit, in a hard and ceaseless conflict with itself. Spirit wants to attain to its own concept, but it conceals itself from it and is proud and full of satisfaction in its alienation from itself. [Spiritual] development, therefore, is not just a harmless and conflict-free process of emergence, as in organic life, but rather a hard and obstinate labor directed to itself; moreover, it involves not merely the formal aspect of developing as such but rather the production of a purpose or end with a specific content. We have established from the beginning what this end is: it is spirit, and indeed spirit in accord with its essence, the concept of freedom³¹.

To generate historical experience, we need conflicts. But not just any sort of conflict will do – it cannot be conflict on the basis of natural characteristics, but only spiritual characteristics such as rights claims, religious doctrines, or visions of the good life.

³⁰ See *ivi*, § 258 R.

³¹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 18, *Vorlesungsmanuskripte II (1816-1831)*, ed. by W. Jaeschke, Hamburg, Meiner, 1995 (henceforth cited as GW 18), pp. 184; trans. by R. F. Brown and P. C. Hogson, *Lectures on the philosophy of world history. Vol. 1, Manuscripts of the introduction and the lectures of 1822-1823*, Clarendon-Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011 (henceforth cited as LPH), pp. 109.

We can get a slightly better grip on this by briefly investigating one of Hegel's more distinctive claims in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, namely the claim that Persia was a world-historical state in a way that neither China nor India were³². Why does Hegel think this? Not because China or India lacked a state, nor because China lacked a historiographical tradition, nor because there weren't significant events. Instead, he claims that China *remained independent* through all of those events, even when briefly conquered by other groups. In a reversion of the Florentine authors' concerns that the existence of the republic in historical time meant that its independence was finite, Hegel concludes that the infinite independence of China was evidence that «To that extent it has no history»³³. And in both China and India, Hegel thinks that the social conflicts were structured in terms of natural distinctions: between the state and particular families in China and between different castes in Indian (which Hegel denies is a racial category but nonetheless conceives as natural). But in Persia, we get something different, and here the keynote is *individuality*. On Hegel's account, in Persia we get different nations with their own religions and normative commitments bound together into one state:

[T]his Persian empire [...] is not so much a single shape as it is a tying to so many national groups together into one bundle; it is a unique entity, a kind of free union of peoples, thus reflecting in a single focal point the glory of all of them. There is no political whole of comparable customs and laws; instead the many peoples stick to their characteristic individuality. All of them retained their own characteristic features and they were not fused into one whole³⁴.

But Persia is lost without a trace whereas India and China endure – on Hegel's account, the Florentines were right to worry about the durability of a republic exposed to real history. The point

³² See G.W.F. Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 27,1, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte* (1822/1823), ed. by B. Collenberg-Plotnikov, Hamburg, Meiner, 2015 (henceforth cited as GW 27), pp. 205-206; LPH, p. 304.

³³ Ivi, pp. 103-104; LPH, p. 214.

³⁴ Ivi, pp. 229-230; LPH, p. 326.

about individuality is crucial. We only get historical experience in Hegel's sense when we have conflicts between completely formed peoples or nations with their own timelines of development and outlooks on the past and the future. It is precisely the contrast between these groups that makes visible the tension of the historical present and allows us to experience the past and the future in a way that natural time could not make possible. Here we come to the relevance of Pocock and Baron's humanist sociology, and in the remainder of this section, I want just to say briefly how Hegel thought this worked itself out in the Germany of his own transitional and thus essentially historical time.

As I noted above, Hegel's sociology of liberty does not appear to have any roots in his reading of Aristotle but is primarily indebted to Montesquieu. 'Sociology of liberty' is a particularly apt description of this piece of Hegel's thought because it proceeds by analyzing the different modes in which modern freedom was lived by different social groups³⁵. The groups held together as citizens of a modern state because they collectively realized the complex nature of modern freedom. Each individual group represented one facet of that complexity, such that no one group could claim to have the monopoly on liberty, but what each was lacking was made up by the others.

This sociology of liberty then allowed him to construct an account of the historical experience of the Germans of his time by means of a model state which put into conversation different institutions, each of which is animated by one of these groups and its distinctive perspective. As the Florentine's saw with Aristotelian eyes that one could apportion different parts of collective self-government to different elites defined by different virtues or value-orientations, Hegel thought that one could apportion different parts of collective self-government to the different estates [*Stände*]. But what Hegel has above and beyond either the Florentines or Aristotle is the thought that these estates have different temporal and even historical orientations.

³⁵ See C. Yeomans, *The Expansion of Autonomy: Hegel's Pluralistic Philosophy of Action*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2015.

The agricultural estate that represents one house of the estates-assembly is represented by the landed nobility and other large land-owners. It is backward-looking and inertial, comfortable with a natural, constant change but completely disoriented by any acceleration. In Koselleck's terms, they live in the space of experience.

The commercial estate represents the other house of the estates-assembly and is both forward-looking and accelerationist. The future cannot come soon enough. These are the movers and doers who have always disturbed conservatives. They live within the horizon of expectations, which seems so necessary to them that they can almost touch it.

The public estate is uniquely treated by Hegel, in the sense that they are denied any representation in the estates-assembly. Why? For the simple reason that in the *Sattelzeit* they were already the primary originators of policy ideas and reform proposals. It was their suggestions that needed to be vetted before the estates assembly, and to give them representation there would thus be otiose. But more importantly, this group is temporally focused on the near future, on the present as it is evolving.

The modernity of historical experience for Hegel is, in part, measured by the way that both the agricultural and public estates are essentially responsive to the temporal orientation of the commercial estate. The commercial estate drags the agricultural estate into the present and challenges the public estate to go faster. The mere fact that the public estate is aimed not at the present proper but at the near future shows the extent of this pull towards the perspective of the commercial estate, which is the perspective of civil society – the new time defined by the possibility or even inevitability of progress. When put together in this package, the distinctive historical experience of modern Germans looks quite a bit more complex than one might expect. What makes it *historical* for Hegel is the essential element of the simultaneity of the non-simultaneous (*die Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen*). This is a more specific constellation than particularity in flux, and actually generates historical experience out of the interaction of different timelines for that flux.