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## LYOTARD VERSUS HEGEL: THE VIOLENT END OF POSTMODERNITY

### ABSTRACT

In the final phase of the Cold War, Jean-François Lyotard popularized the end of modernity and the dawn of a new era, "postmodernity". But postmodernism is already over again. In the resurgence of the great empires and civilizations that perished in European colonization and European-American hegemony, the rise of the "others", a new epoch of history is emerging that will define the entire 21st century. Lyotard's position is characterized by three different approaches that seem to flow into each other but need to be separated: A critique of Hegel with the core assertion that Auschwitz, as a symbol of infinite suffering, abrogated his philosophy of history, and the extension of this critique to the great narratives of modernity. This is followed by a meta-discourse on the great narratives of history on the basis of linguistic-philosophical considerations (in fact a meta-meta-narrative) and, finally, the construction of an alternative great narrative, that of the individual, particular, other, of postmodernity. This latter is only ostensibly not an alternative construction because it is intimately connected to the critique of grand narratives. In all three subfields, Lyotard has made groundbreaking considerations – but their immediate connection has reversed these advances. Lyotard exchanged a totalizing discourse of the absolute through a similar totalizing discourse of the particular. We not only need a radical reversal of the concepts of Western modernity, but also of those of post-modernity and re-invent a kind of different dialectics. It must be granted to Lyotard that an abridged interpretation of Hegel could support his critique. However, it is completely disputed whether Hegel's approach is based on a closed or an open system. The thesis presented here is that Hegel's approach is both open and closed at the same time. A simple and illustrative example is a sine curve on a slightly rising x-axis. This wave model is closed on the y-axis, but completely open and even infinite on the x-axis. Critics and proponents of Hegel's philosophy of history misunderstood his approach as a closed system and derived from it an "end of history" (Marx as well as Fukuyama). With Hegel, however, it can be argued that we are at the violent end of postmodernity. I wanted my text not only to attempt a critique of Lyotard and a reconstruction of the Hegelian method, but also to lay out the consequent substantive perspectives, even if they are necessarily not yet fully elaborated. In addition, I see Lyotard as an outstanding representative of post-structuralism, with whom he shares comparable problems, so that I make cross-references to similarities in this position, even if I do not treat them separately here.

### KEYWORDS

Hegel, Lyotard,  
postmodernity,  
Auschwitz, Clausewitz,  
*Science of Logic*

## The Fundamental Problem

At the end of the Cold War, Jean-François Lyotard proclaimed the end of modernity and the dawn of a new era, “postmodernity”. But postmodernity is already over. In the resurgence of the great empires and civilizations that perished under European colonization and Euro-American hegemony, in the rise of the “others” (Zakaria 2008, Herberg-Rothe 2020), a new epoch of history is emerging that will define the entire 21st century. The current wars are an expression of this development, which, however, was already foreseeable since the world financial crisis of 2007/2008. In his critique, Lyotard was able to “deconstruct” what he called the “grand narratives” of modernity as a totalizing philosophy of history, but he only rudimentarily noticed that he himself formulated a new grand narrative, that of the individual, the particular, the other. The end of modernity that he postulated was embedded in an unconscious philosophy of history. It corresponded to individualization and the market economy. Lyotard, Foucault, and Derrida formulated a radical critique of Western modernity that nevertheless remains within Western discourse (Herberg-Rothe 2017). Paradoxically, the major theoretical approaches that still dominate the discourse today (Habermas, Luhmann, Lyotard, Derrida, Foucault) all emerged in the final phase of the Cold War and were decisively shaped by it, but are today often misunderstood as supra-historical concepts, a fact that is far too little reflected upon. The collapse of the Soviet Union gave them a seemingly timeless validity. What greater confirmation of discourse and system theories could there be than that even the Iron Curtain had been breached by communication and democratic movements? The deadliest walls, as in Berlin, could be torn down by peaceful protest. These expectations, as expressed for example in the song “Wind of Change” by the Scorpions, are already history after only 30 years. Despite this limitation, it should be noted with Lyotard that Western modernity is finally over – but it remains a moment in a more comprehensive conception (Herberg-Rothe/Son 2018).

The deconstruction of the “grand narratives” of socialism and communism, of Western modernity and the superiority of Western civilization did not lead to real individualization (Lyotard 1987), but in the medium term to the formation of large ideologies and small communities. Alexander Dugin’s New Russia, Salafism, Zhang’s view of China as the only civilized state, Trump’s “Make America Great Again”, the ideologies of the New Right in Europe and the United States, and Hindu nationalism are such large-scale ideologies. Moreover, in almost all only seemingly ended civil wars, small-scale communities have been formed by ideologies around the notion of honor and recognition. Civil wars have become gang wars. Examples of the rule of such gangs are the Maras in Central America, the gangs on the west coast of Colombia that emerged after the end of the civil war there, but Iraq is also being torn apart by gang wars. A timely example are the gang wars currently taken place in Haiti. The modern ideologies that Lyotard criticized have been replaced by “postmodern” ideologies. While modern ideologies were characterized by the construction of a

concrete image of the enemy and the exaltation of one's own identity, postmodern ideologies are characterized by the binary construction: us *versus* them, us *versus* the rest, whoever the others may be (Herberg-Rothe/Son 2018).

The rise of the other (Zakaria) and the decline of the other (Herberg-Rothe) mark the end of postmodernity as proclaimed by Lyotard, the emergence of a new identity struggle of communities at the world-political, national, and individual levels, as identities are dissolved by the advancing hybrid globalization (Herberg-Rothe 2022), as well as by global civil wars and the struggle of world powers for hegemony. Interests are at the center when fixed and presupposed identities prevail; when these dissolve, a new struggle for identity recognition is ignited (Izenberg 2016). The critique of the return of tribalism through the overemphasis on fixed and sectarian identity (Fukuyama 2018 and Chua 2018), which is correct in principle, must not include the abolition of identity as such, otherwise this approach becomes a gateway for postmodern ideologies. At its core, the end of postmodernism is characterized by the replacement of the process of individualization by the struggle for identity of communities, a process that requires a different determination of the relationship between the individual and the community than that of Lyotard. Just to mention, the theorists of poststructuralism from Derrida, Foucault to Lyotard criticized not only concrete identities perceived as ideological, but the possibility of identity as such (Izenberg 2016: 302–303). What we are witnessing at the end of postmodernism is not individualization, but atomization – and already Hannah Arendt argued that the atomized masses need the “Fuehrer” (Herberg-Rothe/Son 2018). Without wanting to establish cause-and-effect mechanisms between the discursive and the *Realpolitik* dissolution of identities, the elective affinity between the two is illuminating.

Lyotard's position is characterized by three different approaches that seem to flow into each other, but must be separated: A critique of Hegel, with the central claim that Auschwitz, as a symbol of infinite suffering, invalidated his philosophy of history, and the extension of this critique to the great narratives of modernity. This is followed by a meta-discourse on the great narratives of history on the basis of linguistic-philosophical considerations (actually a meta-meta-narrative), and finally the construction of an alternative great narrative, that of the individual, the particular, the other, of postmodernity. The latter is only ostensibly not an alternative construction (Browning 2000), because it is intimately connected to the critique of grand narratives. In the direct connection of these three approaches, and especially in the reference to the linguistic-philosophical approaches of Alfred Tarski and Bertrand Russell, Lyotard gains an apparent scientificity that is problematic upon closer analysis. In all three subfields, Lyotard has made groundbreaking considerations – but their immediate connection has reversed these advances. Marx's inversion of Hegel already led to new insights, but the apparent possibility of a complete abandonment of Hegel led to fragmented partial aspects that could only be provisionally cemented by force and power (Herberg-Rothe 2002 and Herberg-Rothe/Son 2018). Among the poststructuralists, a fragile unity was

attempted to be established through new myths: “chora” in Derrida, “plasma” in Lyotard, “power” as an absolute in the early Foucault (Herberg-Rothe 2019). In the end, a supposed totalizing discourse of the absolute was just replaced by a similar totalizing discourse of the particular, the singular.

### Auschwitz as a Refutation of Hegel's Philosophy of History?

Hegel is the great antipode on which Lyotard is working, for he represents a totalizing philosophy of history in Lyotard's view. Hegel had formulated that the real is rational. His idea, borrowed from Goethe's *Faust*, that evil is part of that force which always wants evil but creates good through the “cunning of history” (Hegel, *Rechtsphilosophie*, Werke 7: §1), points in the same direction. Now, of course, it is obvious to criticize Hegel's philosophy of history against the background of Auschwitz, as Lyotard does – for in a simplified understanding of Hegel's approach, Auschwitz would also have been “reasonable”, perhaps even necessary to achieve the good? These are “outrageous” questions, but they go to the heart of the philosophy of history. Here, Adorno's statement that “to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric” stands out as representative. Adorno was co-author of the influential *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, co-founder of Frankfurt Critical Theory, and idol of the 1968 student movement. Where is Adorno right? Is only silence possible in the face of the suffering, the industrially organized lethal “processing” of millions of people, because every word misses the monstrous by far? (Adorno 1967, Herberg-Rothe 2019).

In the Hall of Remembrance at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem, I, like all the other visitors, could only mourn in silence: “and no one dared disturb the sound of silence” (Simon & Garfunkel). The extent of the suffering is so immeasurable that even any sympathy expressed falls far short of that suffering. And then there is the age-old question: Must linguistic representation and explanation always give meaning to the incomprehensible? What meaning can suffering have? What sense did Auschwitz have? Or do we have to face the meaninglessness of all suffering? Is there, then, an irrevocable boundary between suffering and the sufferer on the one hand, and its linguistic formulation, its articulation, on the other? And conversely, can anyone adequately express the extent of suffering linguistically? Lyotard argues that any positive philosophy of history must fail against the background of the suffering of Auschwitz (Lyotard 1987). Like many of Hegel's critics, Lyotard overlooks the fact that Hegel distinguishes between reality in terms of the forces at work in history and mere reality. The real (in German: “Wirklichkeit”, which is different from mere “Realität”) is what “works” in history, while mere reality has no meaning of its own. In this light, Auschwitz would also be meaningless to Hegel, because evil has no continuing meaning. What remains at work, however, is the consciousness of this monstrous crime against humanity and the discourse about it.

Despite taking up this fundamental problem, Lyotard, like all critiques of the philosophy of history, remains bound to his own historical context. Lyotard is of particular importance here because it can be shown that his critique of

the absolute must contain this as a tendency, because otherwise a new binary code is installed – that of the criticized absolute *versus* the individual with the primacy of the absolute would be merely replaced by a new one, that of the individual, the particular, the other. This problem is only overlooked in critique and superficially covered up in the form of methods (Habermas, Luhmann) or incomprehensible myths. We find such myths in Lyotard’s conception of the “plasma”, in Derrida’s of the “chora”, and in early Foucault’s absolutization of power (Herberg-Rothe 2019). The delegitimation of grand narratives in favor of heterogeneity, discontinuity, otherness, difference, and their synonyms is itself a totalizing judgment that traps Lyotard in a circularity that stems from a logic he did not accept but could not escape.

The Frankfurt “critical theory” in the wake of Habermas as well as the approach of Luhmann, absolutize the method and do not notice that they remain within an almost classical understanding of Western modernity and that there continues to be a “blind spot” regarding colonialism and non-Western civilizations in this tradition of thought (Herberg-Rothe 2017). One could even argue that they construct a hyper-Western modernity. Finally, there is also a negative anthropology as seen in Sofsky (1996) and the “violence innovators” who replace the binary progress myths of Western modernity with a new binary code of violence (Herberg-Rothe 2017). It is also paradoxical when Hans Joas criticizes Hegel’s philosophy of history and at the same time positively evaluates the global proselytizing of the Catholic Church. Like many others (Sofsky, Baberowski, Zimmermann, see Herberg-Rothe 2017 and 2019), his criticism of Hegel leads back to Nietzsche (Joas 2020). Instead of a more differentiated interpretation of Hegel, they attempt a renaissance of Nietzsche of all thinkers.

### Overcoming Hegel or a Hidden Meta-Narrative?

“Our entire epoch is trying to escape Hegel”, postulated Michel Foucault as early as 1970 (quoted Herberg-Rothe 2005, see also Foucault 1997). Only seemingly paradoxically, however, almost all “epochal” escapes from Hegel end up back with Hegel or Hegelian figures of thought, if they only develop their own position far enough or think it “to the end”. Of course, one can distance oneself from other philosophical positions, criticize them, without implicitly and unrecognizably adopting their position or at least certain foundations. This is more problematic with Hegel, because he, like hardly any other philosopher, included “the other” in his conception – as a necessary developmental moment of the “Absolute Spirit”. Thus, the criticism of Hegel’s conception itself and the emphasis on “other” contents can in principle be integrated into his position, especially in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Now, it is true that other “others” can be brought into the field against Hegel, which he did not or at least did not sufficiently take into account – death and love, for example. Or “the other” itself, as Lyotard argues (Lyotard 1987). It is questionable, however, whether this challenges Hegel’s conception at all? For many of the “other others” are either already contained in Hegel’s phenomenology as developmental

moments of the absolute spirit, such as explicitly Engels' and Lenin's concept of matter, which only seems to go beyond Hegel, but also conceptions such as the rather romantically influenced "unhappy consciousness". On the other hand, such "other others" enrich Hegel's phenomenology of the spirit with further facts that differentiate the path of development structurally described by Hegel, but without changing anything in the "result of Hegel", the transition to "absolute spirit". In Hegel's conception, every position is "surpassed" by a more developed category, with the exception of the "final determination" (Wandschneider 1997: 116, Wolf 1997).

Obviously aware of this problem, Lyotard addresses the Hegelian position only under the generic term "result". For only the questioning of Hegel's result makes possible a position that can no longer be interpreted as a differentiation *within* Hegel's development of absolute spirit. But wasn't Hegel finally finished, at the latest after the end of the Iron Curtain, because he was worshipped there as a political forerunner of Marx, and then scientifically shelved? If one looks at the French reception of Hegel, however, one finds that it had already turned radically away from Hegel and toward Kant before the epochal turn of 89/91. Before the other caesura, the movement of 68, Hegel was like "God in France" (at least for the left); after this caesura, he was held directly responsible for totalitarianism (Schnädlebach 1987). Henri Lefebvre, for example, believed that Stalinism was the realization of Hegel's absolute idea. However, this is debatable, since both Marx and Marxism-Leninism understood their own position as a reversal of Hegel's (Herberg-Rothe 2002). The paradoxical result, however, is that the most important French thinkers nevertheless used Hegelian figures of thought (Pillen 2003) or "in the end" came back to Hegel, especially Jean-François Lyotard, the popularizer of postmodernism. Lyotard had taken the insights of language-analytical philosophy, especially in his main philosophical work, *The Differend*, out of the "Oxford ghetto" in a completely new and ingenious way and made them useful for a diagnosis of the present (Reese-Schäfer 1995).

The thesis to be elaborated here is that there can be no complete abandonment or reversal of Hegel without a return to a Hegelian figure of thought, albeit uncomprehended and "in the long run". As can be seen especially in the work of Foucault, Derrida, and Lyotard, important epistemological advances are made through these departures and connections to Kant – but these are mythologized and almost reversed if they are not perceived as a further development of the antagonism between Kant and Hegel. By moving away from Hegel, they approach Kant, but "in the end" return to Hegel or Hegelian figures of thought. Not grasping in this way, they end up with a masquerade of Hegel, with Lyotard in the form of the "plasma" (Lyotard 1986).

If everything general is "deconstructible" (Derrida), the particular itself becomes general and is unconsciously re-formulated in Hegel's "magic formula" of the "identity of identity and non-identity". Hegel's concept of identity is simply replaced by non-identity in the concept of "the non-identity of identity and non-identity", the unity of theory and practice by the "practice of practice and theory", as given from Gramsci to Althusser (Herberg-Rothe 2002). If there is

no enactment or absolute reversal of Hegel without an uncomprehended return to a Hegelian figure of thought, this does not imply a hypostatization of Hegel's absolute idea or even a transfiguration of his person. Without exaggerating Hegel's philosophical achievement, his inescapable importance is above all systematically conditioned. Hegel marks one of two extremes in the dynamic field of an epistemological and inherently contradictory discourse within which the solutions sought are to be located. This discursive field is determined within the opposing positions of Kant and Hegel. Outside of this field marked by both, in principle, no solutions can be found without going back before their insights, though often without being understood. Pan-criticism, on the other hand, necessarily leads back to the hardest dogmatism (Hösle 1990: 171).

Lyotard wonders if we are not telling ourselves more than the "grand narrative of the end of grand narratives" (Lyotard 1987: 182). He is more aware of the problem than both his followers and his critics. This means nothing more than that Lyotard has been clear about formulating a grand narrative himself – albeit, in terms of his claim, a different one than that of modernity, socialism, and communism. The possibility of the self-application of the "meta-narrative" to Lyotard arises from one of his own "determinations". For he formulates that the only thing that is unquestionable is the proposition, because it is immediately presupposed (Lyotard 1987: 9). To doubt that one is "setting" propositions is itself a "setting", and so is silence. Wittgenstein's famous formulation, about which one cannot speak, one must be silent, presupposes a precise determination of what one must be silent about. Thus, silence about Auschwitz would itself be a "sentence" about it, at least in Lyotard's conception. This "silence" about Auschwitz is consequently Lyotard's decisive criticism of Heidegger: one "hears" Heidegger's "deep and conscious" compromise with National Socialism in his philosophical texts in what these texts conceal. Above all in the silence that they maintain until the end, with the exception of one sentence, on the annihilation in the Holocaust (Lyotard 1988: 65).

### **Ultimate Justification versus the Incompleteness Theorem**

At the end of his Hegel excursus, Lyotard emphasizes that the "conduct of philosophical discourse" is the discovery of a rule, without, however, being able to adapt the discourse to this rule before its discovery. Sentence by sentence, the concatenation would not be controlled by a rule, but by the search for a rule. With this consideration, Lyotard reflects a fundamental problem of justification. How should and can logical and linguistic rules and systems be justified and introduced without already presupposing them? It is true that German grammar can be explained in English. The fundamental problem, however, is how to explain grammar and logic "themselves" without presupposing and applying them at the same time. Lyotard goes one step further with the "linguistic turn" of philosophy and sharpens the problem by arguing that the rule that is actually to be justified already "generates" the sentences that are to be justified (Lyotard 1987: 168).

There are a number of attempts to solve this fundamental problem of justification. The two most far-reaching are, on the one hand, those based on Gödel's incompleteness theorem (Gödel 1931) and, on the other, those that infer from the reflexivity described above that there are ineluctable preconditions in the form of an "ultimate justification". In the first case, it is argued that there can be no complete and contradiction-free justification of rules or systems without resorting to axioms and propositions that cannot be justified within these rules and systems. In the second case the circular reasoning that is actually to be avoided – that which is to be justified is already presupposed in order to be able to formulate it – is understood as an inescapable precondition of all speech and argumentation – whether in the form of an inescapable ultimate justification of objective idealism (Höfle) or a pragmatic transcendental philosophy (Apel, Habermas). If we try not to simply leave the two approaches side by side, but to relate them to each other, it immediately becomes clear that they express a similar self- and other-reference, analogous to antinomies. The self-justification of all conceivable systems is necessarily based on a self-reference, while Gödel's incompleteness theorem is based on an external reference. Reflexive self-justification as well as Gödel's incompleteness theorem are thus the ultimate realizations of self-reference and other-reference.

In his discussion of Apel's concept of final justification (Lyotard, *Grundlagenkrise* 1986), Lyotard explicitly rejects any form of self-foundation and is associated with Gödel's position as well as Tarski's and Russell's philosophy of language. In this view, a self-grounding transcendental as well as transcendent philosophy is either antinomian or tends to be "total". Lyotard criticizes Hegel's position, which he attributes to ultimate justification, as follows:

But the beginning (in Hegel's *Science of Logic*) can only appear as this final result because the rule of the result was presupposed from the beginning. According to this rule, the first proposition was connected with the following and the others. If one does not apply it from the beginning, one does not necessarily find it at the end, and if it is not at the end, it has not been generated and was therefore not the rule sought. (Lyotard 1987: 168, translation Herberg-Rothe).

It can be assumed that with this distinction he only intends to criticize Hegel, but at the same time he marks an essential difference between Kant and Hegel. For Kant's intentions since the *Critique of Pure Reason* relate to the preconditions of the possibility of knowledge, while Hegel's relate to the further development of human thought, to the creation of new forms of thought. This explains the "infinite distance" between Kant and Hegel, since one emphasizes the clarification of the preconditions of human knowledge, while the other focuses on its development (this motif is most evident in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*), without being able to dispense with either approach.

Lyotard rightly notes that Hegel's concept is determined by the preservation of an identity despite all its developments. But this is only one aspect of Hegel's definition, since the concept of the beginning implies the opposite proposition, that something goes beyond itself, develops, changes. Change and the

maintenance of an identity together constitute Hegel's concept of the beginning. The "conflict" revolves around the question of whether Hegel ascribed primacy to one of the two sides, or whether the conundrum of thinking both sides together – the "staying with itself" *versus* the "going beyond itself" of an identity – could be resolved in a different way.

The fact that even his most determined critics return to Hegelian figures of thought, which can be interpreted or classified as forms of development of the absolute idea, is the problem to be explained. After all the attempts to leave Hegel behind or to "reverse" him (Herberg-Rothe 2002), and yet in the end unconsciously return to Hegelian figures of thought, only one possibility remains open: To rethink the "beginning" with Hegel against Hegel. In the opposition between taking sides and resignation, no *tertium vis-à-vis* Hegel seems possible (Röttges 1976: 2). However, this *tertium*, this third, is to be traced here through the self-application of Hegel and the identification of fundamental "contradictions" in Hegel's thinking, from which an alternative solution can be developed.

### Thinking with Hegel beyond Hegel

Following the seminal work of Heinz Röttges, our thesis is that the Hegelian concept of method cannot be "fully" defined without directly contradicting itself (Röttges 1976: 337–340). This concept states that it is necessary to move from the self-evident to the posited, linguistically represented determinacy (Röttges 1976). This problem can also be described as a semantic-pragmatic difference. It consists in the fact that the explicit meaning of a category does not express everything that is always presupposed for its meaning. In order to explicate a meaning, the whole apparatus of logical categories and principles must be presupposed. This tension between explicit content and implicit presuppositions necessitates the introduction of ever new categories through which this "pragmatic surplus of meaning" (Wandschneider 1997; translation Herberg-Rothe) is successively further explicated. This fundamental "drive", this *movens* of Hegel's dialectic, applies to all categories, with the exception of the "final determinations" (Wandschneider 1997: 116).

This is where the aforementioned fundamental contradiction arises: on the one hand, the concept of method cannot have its full meaning in itself, because the transition from the inherently presupposed to the posited determinacy would then also have to apply to itself. Due to the impossible separation of method and content in Hegel, this means nothing other than that the self-movement of a content contradicts itself (Röttges 1976). For Hegel, the self-movement is bound to the transition from self-appearance to posited determinacy and thus to at least two different contents ("something" must have been added to the first content), so that there can be no question of the self-movement of only one content. On the other hand, the self-development of one identity describes Hegel's fundamental concern. Without the resolution of this contradiction, Hegel's entire approach would "cancel itself out".

It could be argued that all concepts and propositions in Hegel's *Science of Logic* imply a contradiction between semantic and pragmatic considerations. A classic example of this is the sentence repeatedly quoted by Vittorio Hösle: "There is no truth". If this sentence is to be true, it must not be true, but then it shows in itself that there must be at least one true proposition. In itself, the proposition states that there is no truth; as a posited proposition, it is at least one truth. But Hegel's absolute idea itself must be excluded from such a performative contradiction, because only with it has the concept emerged "which itself is what it intends" (Wieland, quoted in Hösle 1988: 200; transl. Herberg-Rothe). This also applies to the concept of method, which Hegel accordingly does not address until the discussion of the Absolute Idea at the end of the Logic. For this, as for the Absolute Idea, it is true that it must itself be what it asserts, that it is what it intends. Otherwise, Hegel's method, and with it the Absolute Idea, would also be self-contradictory, at least performatively, and, according to Hegel's own methodological approach, would have to be abolished in an even more comprehensive whole – in the "true logical contrast" and its identity (Clausewitz), according to the thesis developed here later.

Röttges attempts to resolve the contradiction he himself presents in the concept of method by interpreting self-evident determinacy as already posited. The transition from self-evident determinacy to the posited as a transition from one to another content would be relativized by the assumption that the self-evident determinacy is already a "posited" one. Röttges thus repeats with Hegel the figure, already found in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, of the genesis of self-consciousness from object consciousness, on the condition that the latter is already a still undeveloped stage of self-consciousness (Röttges 1976: 337–340).

With this attempted solution, however, Röttges merely reverses the contradiction. For the first states that the complete determination of the concept of method contradicts the assumption of the self-movement of only one content. However, if we resolve this contradiction in the way Röttges does, the result is a contradiction to the method. The Hegelian method would suddenly have to be described as a transition from the posited to the being-in-itself and back again to the posited determinacy. However, this would relativize the self-development, since the set-being is the higher logical-linguistic form for Hegel (Röttges 1976). If one were to understand "being-in-itself" as already posited – in order to avoid the first contradiction – there would no longer be any higher development, but only the endless repetition of the same.

If Hegel's concept of method is determined by the transition from being-in-itself to being-set, this contradicts the further development of only one content. Conversely, in order for the content to remain with itself, the "first" content must already be set, but this no longer allows for further development. In positive terms, Hegel attempts to solve the problem of how repetitive movement and real development can be conceived together as a unified movement. Just how topical this Hegelian problem is can be seen in the contrast between the reversibility and irreversibility of time (Herberg-Rothe 2024).

This problem arises already in the concept of the beginning, where else than at the beginning of Hegel's *Science of Logic*. The concept of the beginning implies that something is just beginning, that it is not yet fully present. Thus, on the one hand, a content is defined as the beginning, but at the same time it refers to something else, another content, whose beginning it is. Other content must be added to this beginning. With regard to Hegel's concept of the beginning, however, this problem is "somewhat" more difficult, because the entire architecture of the work is a self-development of the Absolute, so there is no "designer" who overlooks the whole thing. For Hegel, all further development is already laid out in the beginning, but only insofar as that particular beginning refers to an end. For this reason, Hegel can write that only that which is set in a concept belongs to the developing consideration of it. To illustrate this problem again with an example. If the rate of expansion of the universe or any other parameter had been slightly different by a millionth of a second during or after the Big Bang, there would have been no formation of galaxies, stars or planets, not to mention human existence. Only what was "set" at the Big Bang made this evolution possible.

In his Introduction to the *Science of Logic*, Hegel again emphasizes the problem of having to begin with an immediate beginning on the one hand, while on the other hand having to take into account the insight that there cannot be such an absolute beginning:

In no science is the necessity of beginning with the thing itself without prior reflection stronger than in logical science. In every other science, the object it treats and the scientific method are distinct from one another. In this case, the content is not an absolute beginning, but depends on other concepts. His *Logic*, on the other hand, cannot presuppose any of these forms of thought. They only constitute its content and must first be justified within the representation of logic. Not only the statement of the scientific method, but also the concept and its object, the grasping thought, first belong to its own content and even constitute its final result (all Hegel WdL I, Werke 5, 35; translations Herberg-Rothe).

Hegel thus treats the problem of how to explain and justify fundamental rules of logic and grammar without at the same time presupposing them.

Assuming a complete absence of presuppositions, the beginning in logic is absolute, it is an absolute beginning. At the same time, however, Hegel must of course also presuppose "logic" in order to be able to speak and make statements at all. Consequently, Hegel begins his actual text with an introduction - one could almost say another introduction - to the question of where the beginning of science must be made. There he sums up that it is only in "recent times" that the awareness has arisen that it is difficult to find a beginning in philosophy. The beginning of philosophy must be either mediated or immediate, and it is easy to show that it can be neither the one nor the other. Thus, one or the other kind of beginning would find its refutation. The logical beginning could be taken either as a result in a mediated way or as an actual beginning in an immediate way (Hegel WdL I, Werke 5, 65-66).

The contrast between these two positions is obvious. In the (first) introduction, Hegel argues that logic must be absolutely presuppositionless. In contrast, in the second, we find the position that the logical beginning itself must be on the one hand a result, something mediated, and on the other hand something immediate. Hegel further emphasizes this problem by stating that the beginning of logic, as he presents it, is a result of his own discussions in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The beginning is logical in that it is to be made in the element of thinking that is free for itself, in pure knowledge. It is mediated by the fact that pure knowledge is the ultimate, absolute truth of the historical development of consciousness. Logic is thus based on the science of the appearing spirit (his book on the *Phenomenology of the Spirit*), which for Hegel is the proof of the truth of pure knowledge. In phenomenology, empirical, sensual consciousness is taken as the starting point, and this is the actual immediate knowledge, the immediate and first in science, and thus the prerequisite for all further discussion. In logic, on the other hand, the presupposition is what has proved to be the result of this observation – the idea as pure knowledge (all Hegel WdL I, Werke 5, 66–67). The contrast between the two positions can be summarized as follows: In the one case, Hegel emphasizes the necessity of the absolute presuppositionlessness of logic as a form of ultimate justification (Hösle is following this path in his interpretation of Hegel; Hösle 1988). In the other case, he emphasizes that the logical beginning must be taken from *two* sides: on the one hand as something immediate without presuppositions, and on the other hand as a mediated result (we might compare this second position with that of Gödel).

This “contradiction” between the two positions is already apparent in the structure of Hegel’s complete works, but in the end Hegel’s position is not a logical contradiction, but an antinomy (Kesselring 1984; Sainsbury 2001). In his *Science of Logic*, Hegel makes his earlier book on the “science of the appearing spirit” a prerequisite for his discussions. In the later *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, the problem of the beginning is presented quite differently. In the latter, there is no longer any talk of the science of the appearing spirit, of phenomenology as a prerequisite for the exposition of logic. Instead, Hegel begins directly with “logic”. On the contrary, the science of the appearing spirit is here (only in the third volume of his *Encyclopedia*) a much more advanced stage in the development of the overall presentation and appears within the consideration of the subjective spirit and is now a conclusion and no longer a prerequisite.

How can we explain this contradiction? First of all, it can be ruled out that Hegel made a simple mistake that he overlooked in the revisions of 1830 and 1831. Rather, this contradictory position is systematic. In fact, it reveals the whole problem, because Hegel begins with the absolute presuppositionlessness, the immediacy of being, only to emphasize at the end of his *Science of Logic* that the absolutely indeterminate being cannot be as presuppositionless as he himself has presented it. At the beginning of the *Science of Logic*, it is said that being in its indeterminate immediacy is only equal to itself. It would

not be held in its purity by any determination or content that would be distinguished in it or by which it would be set apart from another (Hegel WdL I, Werke 5, 82–83). Finally, however, Hegel explicitly states that such beginnings as being, essence, generality, etc. only seem to be of such a kind that they have all the generality and lack of content necessary for a formal beginning (Hegel WdL II, Werke 6, 568). We can thus draw an arc from the absolute presuppositionlessness of being at the beginning of the *Logic* and the emphasis that this beginning is not as immediate, as presuppositionless, as it appears. At the end of his *Logic*, Hegel even declares that it has been shown that the beginning is not to be taken as something immediate (as Hegel had initially repeatedly emphasized), but as something mediated and derived (ibid. 567).

For reasons of proof or self-movement, Hegel could have presented the beginning as absolutely presuppositionless, as an absolutely indeterminate general, although “actually” it is not. The “truth”, on the other hand, would be that the beginning is, on the one hand, an immediate without any presupposition and, on the other hand, a result, a mediated one. This unresolved problem is indicated above all by the fact that Hegel’s postulation of the absolute presuppositionlessness of the beginning and the realization of its resultant character articulates a “contradiction” in itself. In Hegel’s statements on the unity of immediacy and mediation of the beginning, both “contradictory” opposites are assigned to a single state of affairs.

This problem becomes particularly clear in Hegel’s fundamental statement that there is nothing in the world, nothing in the heavens, in nature or in the spirit, that does not contain both mediation and immediacy (Hegel, WdL I p.66). But if everything, really everything, contains this contradiction, then every fact articulates immediacy and mediation in itself. However, the articulation of two contradictory opposites in one fact seems to be logically contradictory. The possible solution to the contradiction of the absence of presuppositions and the resulting character of the beginning, as initially presented, thus necessarily leads to a further developed contradiction and finally to the concept of “contradiction” (understood as antinomy) in Hegel himself. In the history of philosophy, this fundamental problem has always been solved on one side. Either through self-reflection and the resulting concept of ultimate justification (Höslé), or through the incompleteness theorem in the wake of Gödel, Tarski, the Vienna Circle, and poststructuralism in general, and Lyotard’s concept of postmodernism in particular. The only possibility, then, is to understand this “contradiction” not as a simple logical or pragmatic contradiction, but as the form of an “other” contrast, of Clausewitz’s concept of the true logical contrast (Herberg-Rothe 2007), which expresses a form of polarity, but is a much more nuanced concept.

### **Detour via Clausewitz**

An alternative solution to the problem raised by Lyotard and Hegel is offered by another dialectic, as implicitly developed by Carl von Clausewitz on the basis of his analysis of attack and defense. Clausewitz’s approach is of paramount

importance in that it does not presuppose a primacy of identity over difference, contrast, and conflict (Confucius and, to some extent, Hegel), nor the reverse, as in the conceptualizations of the poststructuralists (Herberg-Rothe 2007, Herberg-Rothe and Son 2018). In contrast to binary opposites, Clausewitz's model of the "true logical contrast and its identity", a structure-forming "field" (something like a magnetic field), allows us to think of multiple mediations as well as differences between opposites. If we formulate such an opposition in the framework of a two-valued logic (which formulates the opposition with the help of a negation), there is a double contradiction on both sides of the opposition. From the assumption of the truth of one pole necessarily follows the truth of the other, although the other formulates the adversarial opposition of the first, and *vice versa*. Hegel's crucial concepts such as being and nothingness, coming into being and passing away, quantity and quality, beginning and end, matter and idea, are such higher forms of opposition which, when determined within the framework of a two-valued logic, lead to logical contradictions. Without taking into account the irrevocable opposites and their unity, a "pure thinking of differences" (as in Lyotard) leads either to "hyper-binary" systems (such as the relationship between system and lifeworld, constructivism and realism) or to unconscious absolutizations of new mythical identities (such as Lyotard's notion of plasma).

Clausewitz's "true logical contrast and its identity" makes it possible to think of a model in which the opposites remain irrevocable, but at the same time, in contrast to binary opposites

A. both remain in principle equally determining the whole; this model is therefore neither dualistic nor monistic;

B. it structures a "field" of multiple unities and differences;

C. makes possible a conceptualization in which the opposites have a structure-forming effect, but do not exist as identities detached from one another,

D. and in which there are irrevocable boundaries between opposites and differences, which at the same time, however, can be historically and socially differentiated. The concrete drawing of boundaries is thus contingent, without the existence of a boundary as such being abolished (Herberg-Rothe 2005, 2007 and Herberg-Rothe and Son 2018).

E. Finally, Clausewitz's model even proves superior to Hegel's, because the transitions from one extreme to the other are conceived differently. Defense goes directly into attack ("the flashing sword of retaliation"), while attack goes into defense as mediation (in detail elaborated in Herberg-Rothe 2007, Herberg-Rothe and Son 2018).

The model developed here and its usefulness for thinking beyond Lyotard and Hegel can be illustrated by two mathematical-physical examples: that of a slightly rising sine curve and that of polarity or that of a magnet respectively. Such a sine curve is both a closed and an open system. Closed on the y-axis, open and even infinite on the x-axis. In such a coordinate system, the slightly rising x-axis symbolizes Hegel's idea of the progress of humanity despite all the setbacks, the ups and downs of world history in the peaks and low points of

the sine curve. We are familiar with such wave movements in economic models of business cycles and the wave-particle dualism, which can be resolved as different ways of movement (Herberg-Rothe 2024).

Obviously, in the model, albeit limited, of a magnet, neither the south nor the north pole exist as an identity; a (violent) separation of the two even leads to a duplication of the model. At the same time, both poles are structure-forming for a magnetic field, without any priority of either side. Finally, Clausewitz's model of the true logical contrast goes beyond that of polarity, because it allows us to think of multiple forms of transitions. It is primarily concerned with categories such as mostly asymmetrical transitions and reversals, as well as the "interspace" (Arendt) between opposites. With such an understanding of dialectics, it is possible to understand the apparent contradiction between the rejection of a supreme meta-meta-language and the fact that the language used in this critique, theory, is itself this actually excluded "supreme" level of language, not as a logical contradiction, but as a different one (concerning this problem in Tarski's approach see Herberg-Rothe 2005). It is precisely Hegel's criticized and rejected form of dialectic that makes it possible to conceive of these contradictions not as "logical" contradictions, but as contradictions that ground but also compel further development, as opposed to mythical ways out as in Lyotard, Derrida and Foucault. At the same time, however, this form of dialectic contains the demonstration of a principle of development without conclusion and thus replaces Hegel's "great logic" as "God's thoughts before the creation of the world" (Hegel's Preface to the *Science of Logic*, Wdl I, Works 5; translation Herberg-Rothe).

### Elaborating Clausewitz's Implicit Dialectics

I do not want to stop at the critique of Lyotard or Hegel, even though I am aware that I am developing an as yet undeveloped research perspective. I start from the following fivefold distinction of thinking, based on the fundamental contrasts of life and civilization (this perspective is based on my understanding of Clausewitz, Hegel and Arendt, but with special emphasis on Katzenstein 2009, Baggini 2018 and Jaspers 1949, although the latter two largely reduce different ways of thinking to the development of functional differentiation; Herberg-Rothe 2005, 2007, Herberg-Rothe and Son 2018).

1. Either-Or systems – Western modern thought, concentration on method (since Descartes and Kant, Vienna Circle, Tarski), democracy, individualism, in Islam Ibn Sina and Ibn Khaldun, in Chinese thought the tradition of Han Fei and Li Se (Yan 2011, Zhang 2012).

2. As well as – Daoism, early Confucianism, but also New Age approaches, Heißenberg's uncertainty principle.

3. Neither-Nor enables the construction of "being-in-between"– Plato's *metaxis* plus Indian logic, the whole concept of diversity, difference thinking, de-constructivism, the post-structuralism, post-colonialism.

4. System thinking, structuralism – here I struggle with the distinction between holism (in the Islamic worldview) and pure hierarchies (in Islam Al Ghazali); inherent logic of systems (Luhmann) and functional differentiation; in Eastern philosophies we find this approach mainly in highlighting spiritual approaches.

5. Process thinking – in ethics this can be found e.g. in utilitarianism, stage theories (Piaget, Kohlberg; Hegel’s world history as the progress of freedom consciousness), Hegel’s becoming at the beginning of his “logic” as “surplus” of coming into being and passing away; cycle systems; Enlightenment; Dharma religions, in China, Mohism (for closer reading I recommend Baggini and Jaspers).

How can this fivefold distinction be derived from one model, which is not a totalizing approach (Mall 2014)? For this purpose I use here again the simplified model of polarity. This method is elaborated in my Clausewitz interpretation on his wondrous trinity and the dialectic of attack and defense (Herberg-Rothe 2007 and 2019, Herberg-Rothe and Son 2018).

### Differences in polarity as a unifying model

1. Either-Or systems: Each of the two poles is either a north or a south pole (= *tertium non datur*). We find those approaches in mathematics, logic, rationality and methods in general; such conceptualizations are also to be found in zero-sum games - what one side gains, the other loses (rationality, if-then systems, in China Li Si and Han Fei);

2. As well as (earlier Confucius, Daoism): the magnet as unity consists of both poles and the magnet “is” both north pole and south pole. This is analyzed in detail in my Clausewitz interpretation on the basis of war as unity and irrevocable opposition of attack and defense. We find this thinking especially in Chinese ideas of win-win solutions. Here, competition and conflict in one area do not exclude cooperation in another (Herberg-Rothe 2007, Chinese version 2020).

3. Neither north nor south pole exist as identities (Plato’s *metaxis*, Indian thought) – they are rather dynamic movements in between the opposites (see in detail again Clausewitz’s concept of attack and defense; this understanding is the methodological basis of diversity; Herberg-Rothe 2007; see the French theorists of post-structuralism).

4. Structure (system theories, Islamic holism): North pole and south pole “construct” a magnetic field outside and inside the magnet, a non-material structure.

5. Process thinking: Here the simplified example of the magnet finds its end – but can be understood beyond the physical analogy easily as movement from the south pole to the north pole and “always further” (sine curve on an ascending x-axis). In this sense, already Hegel had considered the discovery of polarity as of infinite importance, but criticized it because in this model the idea of differentiated transition from one pole to the other was missing (Herberg-Rothe 2000 and 2007). Molla Sadra (1571-1636), the most important philosopher of

the School of Isfahan, elaborated this progressive circular movement particularly clearly. Although he is mainly regarded as an existential philosopher who denies any essence, he actually postulated a kind of progressive circle as the decisive essence (for an overview see Yousefi 2016, and for more details concerning Molla Sadra see Rizvi 2021 and Herberg-Rothe 2023).

Starting from the premise that Western thinking is shaped by the billiard model of international relations and that of all other civilizations by concentric circles and cycles (Herberg-Rothe and Son 2018), the aim is to work out how extensively both models determine our thinking in the respective cultural sphere in order to develop a perspective that includes both sides. In doing so, I do not assume one-dimensional causes for action, but neither do I assume pure diversity without any explanation of causes. Instead, I work in perspective with virtuous and vicious circles – in these circles there are several causes, although they are not unconnected to each other, but are integrated into a cycle. So far, this methodological approach has probably been applied mainly in the Sahel Syndrome. The methodological approach would involve trying to break vicious and transform them into virtuous circles.

At the infinite end of this process would be a kind of mutual recognition of the civilizations of the earth, accompanied by their self-commitment to their own civilizational norms. My colleague Peng Lu from Shanghai University has made the following suggestion: In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Europeans conquered the whole world; in the twentieth century, the defeated nations and civilizations had to live with the victorious West; in the twenty-first century, the civilizations of the earth must finally learn to live together. This is in my view the task of the century. I have to admit that this approach cannot solve all the problems of philosophy – for example, the question of whether the universe has a beginning or not remains unsolvable for the human mind. However, such unsolvable questions do not require a decision, are neither decidable nor undecidable (Heinz von Foerster), but create a tension between which a balance must be found, as in Clausewitz's concept of the wondrous trinity (Herberg-Rothe 2007, Herberg-Rothe 2023). Despite my own limitations, I think this is a perspective that goes beyond Lyotard and Hegel.

How is Lyotard's critique, like his own implicit philosophy of history, to be judged now? Louis Althusser used an apt image for this: In order to straighten a bow, one must "overbend" it in the other direction (Herberg-Rothe 2002; Labica 1989, Althusser 1968). This is exactly what Lyotard has done, but this reversal is as logically and temporally limited as his conception of postmodernism. Herein lies both Lyotard's achievement and his limitation. We must therefore think beyond Lyotard and the theorists of poststructuralism, as well as beyond postmodernism, and imagine a more harmonious (Confucius) and balanced (Clausewitz) world order (Herberg-Rothe and Son 2018, Herberg-Rothe 2020, 2021 and 2022). Postmodernism as a bygone era was a necessary step forward – but as the poststructuralists did not sufficiently distinguish between individualization and atomization, this short period is ending in the worldwide dissolution of identities and the violent struggles for tribal identities

(Fukuyama 2018). The global village has been accompanied by a village mentality in the form of us against the other, whoever the other may be. It is the result of a generalization of the individual as in globalization (Herberg-Rothe 2020), that leads to mythical concepts of community such as race, gender, nation, ethnicity, culturalism. To counter these developments, we need to find a dialectical balance (Clausewitz) and harmony (Confucius) of the individual and the community that goes beyond Lyotard and Hegel.

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## Andreas Herberg Rote

### Lijotar nasuprot Hegelu: nasilni kraj postmodernosti

#### Apstrakt

U završnoj fazi Hladnog rata, Žan-Fransoa Lijotar popularizovao je kraj modernosti i zoru novog doba, „postmodernosti”. Međutim, postmodernizam je već završen. U ponovnom usponu velikih carstava i civilizacija koje su nestale usled evropske kolonizacije i evropsko-američke hegemonije, s usponom „drugih”, rađa se nova epoha istorije koja će obeležiti čitav 21. vek. Lijotarova pozicija karakteriše se kroz tri različita pristupa koja naizgled proističu jedan iz drugog, ali ih je potrebno razlikovati: Kritiku Hegela sa osnovnom tvrdnjom da je Aušvic, kao simbol beskonačnog stradanja, ukinuo njegovu filozofiju istorije i proširio ovu kritiku na velike narative modernosti. Sledeće je meta-diskurs o velikim narativima istorije zasnovan na lingvističko-filozofskim razmatranjima (zapravo meta-meta-narativ) i, na kraju, konstrukcija alternativnog velikog narativa, narativa o pojedincu, partikularnom, drugom, postmodernosti. Ovo poslednje samo prividno nije alternativna konstrukcija jer je usko povezano sa kritikom velikih narativa. U sva tri ova područja, Lijotar je izneo revolucionarna razmatranja – ali njihovo neposredno povezivanje je poništilo ove napretke. Lijotar je zamenio totalizujući diskurs apsoluta sličnim totalizujućim diskursom partikularnog. Potrebna nam je ne samo radikalna revizija pojmova zapadne modernosti, već i pojmova postmodernosti i pronalazak drugačije vrste dijalektike. Lijotaru treba priznati da skraćeno tumačenje Hegela može podržati njegovu kritiku. Međutim, potpuno je sporno da li se Hegelov pristup zasniva na zatvorenom ili otvorenom sistemu. Teza izneta ovde jeste da je Hegelov pristup istovremeno i otvoren i zatvoren. Jednostavan i ilustrativan primer je sinusna kriva na blago uzdignutoj x-osi. Ovaj talasni model je zatvoren na y-osi, ali potpuno otvoren i čak beskonačan na x-osi. Kritičari i zagovornici Hegelove filozofije istorije pogrešno su razumeli njegov pristup kao zatvoren sistem i iz toga izvukli „kraj istorije” (Marks kao i Fukujama). Međutim, s Hegelom se može tvrditi da smo na nasilnom kraju postmodernosti. Želeo sam da moj tekst ne samo pokuša kritiku Lijotara i rekonstrukciju Hegelove metode, već i da iznese suštinske perspektive koje iz toga proizlaze, čak i ako one nužno još nisu u potpunosti razrađene. Pored toga, Lijotara vidim kao istaknutog predstavnika poststrukturalizma, s kojim deli uporedive probleme, tako da pravim ukrštene reference na sličnosti u ovoj poziciji, čak i ako ih ovde ne razmatram zasebno.

Ključne reči: Hegel, Lijotar, postmodernost, Aušvic, Klauzevic, *Nauka o logici*