

# Felsefe Arkivi

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## History Between Metaphysics and Science: Hegel's Teleological Interpretation of History and Rickert's Critique

Metafizik ve Bilim Arasında Tarih: Hegel'in Teleolojik Tarih Yorumu ve Rickert'in Eleştirisi



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### Abstract

The philosophy of history has long been shaped by the tension between metaphysical and scientific approaches. This paper examines the fundamental contrast between Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's teleological historiography and Heinrich Rickert's scientific and methodological approach. Hegel conceives history as a rational and necessary process, unfolding according to the dialectical development of Spirit (Geist). In contrast, Rickert rejects historical determinism, maintaining that historical meaning is not inherent in events but constructed through conceptual selection and methodological categorization. This divergence raises critical questions: Is history an ontologically structured process, or is it an interpretative discipline shaped by epistemological frameworks? Hegel's approach emphasizes universalism, necessity, and progress, positioning history as a teleological movement toward the realization of reason and freedom. Rickert, on the other hand, treats history as a field of contingent and unique events, arguing that historical inquiry must rely on systematic classification and value-based selection rather than speculative metaphysics. This study explores the implications of both perspectives, assessing their theoretical coherence, methodological strengths, and limitations. The analysis reveals that Hegel's philosophy of history provides a grand explanatory framework, allowing for a coherent and structured understanding of historical change, but at the risk of overlooking contingency and historical specificity. Meanwhile, Rickert's emphasis on methodological rigor ensures a more flexible and empirical approach, yet it raises concerns about fragmentation and the absence of overarching historical meaning. This debate remains central to historiography, influencing discussions on historical objectivity, interpretation, and the role of historians in shaping narratives. By engaging with this debate, this paper highlights the continued relevance of both metaphysical and scientific historiography in contemporary historical thought.

### Öz

Tarih felsefesi, uzun süredir metafiziksel ve bilimsel yaklaşımlar arasındaki gerilim tarafından şekillendirilmiştir. Bu çalışma, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel'in teleolojik tarih yorumu ile Heinrich Rickert'in bilimsel ve metodolojik tarih anlayışı arasındaki temel karşıtlığı incelemektedir. Hegel, tarihi rasyonel ve zorunlu bir süreç olarak görerek, onun Tin'in (Geist) diyalektik gelişimi doğrultusunda ilerlediğini savunur. Buna karşın, Rickert tarihsel determinizmi reddeder ve tarihsel anlamın olayların kendisinde içkin olmadığını, tarihçiler tarafından kavramsal seçim ve metodolojik kategorilendirme yoluyla inşa edildiğini öne sürer. Bu ayrım, şu temel soruyu gündeme getirir: Tarih ontolojik olarak yapılandırılmış bir süreç midir, yoksa epistemolojik çerçeveler tarafından şekillendirilen yorumlayıcı bir disiplin midir? Hegel'in yaklaşımı, evrensellik, zorunluluk ve ilerleme kavramlarına dayanarak tarihi, akıl ve özgürlüğün gerçekleşmesine yönelik teleolojik bir hareket olarak konumlandırır. Buna karşılık, Rickert tarihi tikel ve tekil olayların alanı olarak ele alır ve tarihsel araştırmanın spekülatif metafizik yerine sistematik sınıflandırma ve değer temelli seçime dayanması gerektiğini savunur. Bu çalışma, her iki perspektifin kuramsal tutarlılığını, metodolojik güçlü ve zayıf yönlerini değerlendirerek bu yaklaşımların tarih yazımına etkilerini incelemektedir. Analiz neticesinde Hegel'in tarih felsefesi, kapsamlı bir açıklama modeli sunarak tarihsel değişimi anlamlı ve bütünlüklü hale getirdiği, ancak bu yaklaşımın tarihteki rastlantısallık ve özgüllüğü göz ardı etme riski taşıdığı gösterilmiş diğer taraftan, Rickert'in metodolojik vurgusunun,



“ Citation: Gedikli, Mehmet Eren. "History between metaphysics and science: Hegel's teleological interpretation of history and Rickert's critique". *Felsefe Arkivi-Archives of Philosophy* no. 63 (2025): 157-179. <https://doi.org/10.26650/arcip.1638174>

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daha esnek ve ampirik bir tarih yazımına olanak sağladığı ancak tarihsel anlamın parçalanması ve büyük ölçekli tarihsel anlatıların reddedilmesi gibi sorunlara yol açabileceği vurgulanmıştır. Netice itibarı ile bu çalışma, metafiziksel ve bilimsel tarih anlayışlarının günümüz tarih felsefesindeki önemini vurgulayarak, tarih disiplininin doğasına ilişkin süregelen entelektüel tartışmalara katkıda bulunmayı amaçlamaktadır.

**Keywords** Hegel · Rickert · teleology · historiography · historical objectivity

**Anahtar Kelimeler** Hegel · Rickert · teleoloji · tarih yazımı · tarihsel nesnellik

## Introduction

One of the most fundamental questions in the philosophy of history is whether historical events unfold according to a rational and purposeful order or whether history is merely a contingent sequence of events whose meaning is imposed retrospectively by historians. This question has divided thinkers for centuries, leading to two dominant paradigms: the teleological conception of history, which posits that history moves toward an ultimate goal, and the scientific-historiographical approach, which seeks to reconstruct the past based on empirical analysis without assuming an inherent purpose.<sup>1</sup>

The teleological view of history has a long and complex intellectual lineage, tracing back to Plato's (427 BCE – 347 BCE) and Aristotle's (384 BCE – 322 BCE) conceptions of purpose (telos) in nature and human affairs. Aristotle, for instance, saw historical development as the realization of human potential within political communities, though he did not conceive of history as moving toward a single final goal. However, it was within the Christian tradition that teleological history became a dominant paradigm. Augustine (354–430), in *The City of God*, argued that history progresses through divine providence toward the final realization of God's kingdom, a perspective that influenced medieval historiography.<sup>2</sup> This theological framework portrayed history as a linear and meaningful process, sharply contrasting with the cyclical historical views of the ancient Greeks and Romans. Although early modern thinkers such as Vico (1668 – 1744) and Herder (1744 – 1803) secularized aspects of historical development, it was Hegel who fully transformed teleological history into a rationalist and philosophical system, replacing divine providence with the dialectical unfolding of the World Spirit (Weltgeist).<sup>3</sup>

Hegel's innovation was to synthesize the teleological structure of Christian historiography with a secular and rationalist metaphysics. For Hegel (1770-1831), history is not merely a series of disconnected events but a necessary process in which reason progressively unfolds through dialectical contradictions. Each historical epoch, with its political, social, and philosophical structures, represents a stage in the self-development of Reason (Vernunft), culminating in the realization of freedom in the modern state. Unlike Augustine, who attributed historical progress to divine intervention, Hegel argued that history follows a rational and necessary logic—though it is not always apparent to those living within it. His approach implies that all historical events, even seemingly tragic or irrational ones, contribute to the greater rational whole, a perspective that has been both praised for its comprehensive vision and criticized for its deterministic implications.<sup>4</sup>

In stark opposition to this metaphysical and teleological framework, Heinrich Rickert (1863-1936) sought to establish history as a scientific discipline rather than a speculative or philosophical endeavor. A key figure in the Baden school of neo-Kantianism, Rickert developed an epistemological critique of Hegel's idealist historiography, arguing that history does not follow a predetermined rational course but is instead a domain of individualized, value-relevant facts. Unlike Hegel, who saw historical meaning as inherent in the dialectical process of reality itself, Rickert maintained that

<sup>1</sup>Doğan Özlem, *Tarih Felsefesi* (İstanbul: İnkılâp Kitabevi, 2001), 13-19.

<sup>2</sup>Özlem, *Tarih Felsefesi*, 24-33; Ayhan Bıçak, *Tarih Düşüncesi III: Tarih Felsefesinin Oluşumu* (İstanbul: Dergâh Yayınları, 2004), 49-54.

<sup>3</sup>Frederick C. Beiser, *The German Historicist Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 27-30, 98-101; Özlem, *Tarih Felsefesi*, 21-36.

<sup>4</sup>Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox (London: Oxford University Press, 1978), 155-160, 216-224.



meaning is imposed by historians through conceptual selection and categorization. Following Kant's critical philosophy, Rickert distinguished between the natural sciences (Naturwissenschaften), which seek universal laws, and the historical sciences (Kulturwissenschaften), which focus on unique, culturally significant phenomena. His rejection of historical teleology was thus deeply tied to Kant's rejection of metaphysical speculation beyond what can be known through empirical and conceptual analysis.<sup>5</sup>

The contrast between Hegel's teleological history and Rickert's scientific historiography represents one of the most significant methodological and epistemological debates in modern historical thought.<sup>6</sup> If Hegel provides a grand, unifying vision, he does so at the risk of retrospective determinism, where historical events are justified in terms of their later consequences. Conversely, Rickert's insistence on scientific rigor and methodological individualism ensures that history remains empirically grounded, yet it raises questions about subjectivity -if historians impose meaning through value-selection, can history ever be truly objective? This paper will first explore Hegel's idealistic, dialectical, and teleological conception of history, followed by an examination of Rickert's critique and his attempt to establish historiography as a scientific discipline. Finally, a comparative analysis will highlight the strengths and limitations of both perspectives, assessing their relevance to contemporary historiography.

## Hegel's Metaphysical and Teleological Conception of History

Throughout the history of Western thought, few philosophers have offered an interpretation of history as ambitious and comprehensive as that of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Hegel's philosophy of history, deeply embedded within his broader system of Absolute Idealism, represents a striking attempt to unify historical development within a single, rational, and teleological framework. In contrast to empirical historians, who focus on particular events, or to skeptical philosophers, who view history as a chaotic sequence of arbitrary occurrences, Hegel perceives history as the necessary unfolding of Reason through time. In this sense, history is neither wholly contingent nor accidental; rather, it follows a structured, rational, and progressive trajectory in which each stage is built upon and transcends the limitations of the preceding one. Undoubtedly, this progression takes the form of dialectical development, which constitutes the fundamental logic of Hegel's entire philosophy and manifests itself in historical events, in the actions of historical figures, and in ultimate social institutions such as the state. It is precisely this aspect—the self-unfolding of Spirit or Geist through concrete historical reality—that renders Hegel's philosophy of history profoundly metaphysical.<sup>7</sup>

Another fundamental characteristic of Hegel's historiography is its teleological nature. Hegel's philosophy of history is teleological because, in his system, history is not merely a sum of accidental events but, as previously stated, the process by which Reason, Spirit, or, in theological terms, God, realizes itself; this process is directed toward a final, purposive end, namely the actualization of freedom, self-consciousness, and self-unfolding. According to Hegel, historical development is the movement of Spirit coming to know itself, and each historical moment emerges as a necessary stage advancing toward this ultimate goal. In this context, teleology does not arise from some transcendent design

<sup>5</sup>Beiser, *The German Historicist Tradition*, 399–405.

<sup>6</sup>It is crucial to include this extensive footnote here to avoid potential confusion. As will be elaborated upon later, Hegel characterizes his own historical writing as scientific and seeks to grant the philosophy of history the status of a scientific discipline; however, this notion of science differs significantly from the modern understanding based on experimental and empirical methods. For Hegel, science is not merely the chronological arrangement of events or the description of isolated occurrences; rather, what is truly scientific is the comprehension of the rational necessities underlying history, the processes through which Geist realizes itself, and the universal development of freedom. According to Hegel, for instance, the French Revolution is not merely a political upheaval or a social crisis but represents a necessary historical stage in the evolution of freedom consciousness; from his perspective, this makes historical writing scientific. Yet modern science rests on criteria such as experiment, observation, documentary evidence, objectivity, and methodological critique, and the discipline of history explains events through documents, socio-economic factors, and adopts an empiricist approach to causality. In contrast, Hegel employs empirical data merely as concrete examples within his speculative philosophical system; historical events, for him, function as tools and materials in Geist's journey toward achieving its universal purpose. Thus, although Hegel draws upon historical examples, he does not treat them as objects of scientific investigation per se but rather as integral components of his teleological understanding. Consequently, Hegel's description of his historical writing as scientific is consistent within his own speculative and systematic philosophy; however, from the standpoint of modern empirical scientific criteria, Hegel's philosophy of history is not a scientific discipline but remains fundamentally an endeavor of profound philosophical interpretation. Accordingly, throughout this article, this distinction is adopted as a guiding principle, whereby the philosophical approaches of Hegel and Rickert to history are differentiated or categorized as metaphysical and scientific, respectively.

<sup>7</sup>Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Tarihçe Akıl*, trans. Ömer Sözer (İstanbul: Kabcacı Yayınevi, 2003), 55–60



imposed from outside history but stems from the immanent dialectical structure of history itself: the inner necessity of contradictions, conflicts, and reconciliations propels Spirit forward toward freedom. Since freedom is the ultimate end (telos) of Spirit within Hegel's system, history functions as the temporal unfolding of this end. Consequently, the wars, revolutions, and cultural transformations of each epoch are moments directed by rational necessity, for Reason constitutes both the essence of reality and its principle of movement. Hegel's teleology articulates the self-realization of the Absolute, independent of the purposes of individuals or nations. Therefore, history is understood not merely as a factual depiction of the past but as a teleological journey of Reason oriented toward the principle of freedom.<sup>8</sup>

In this regard, Hegel's conception of history, which presupposes the existence of a rational structure inherent in the nature of history itself, stands in stark contrast to empiricist and relativist approaches that reject the notion of an overarching historical necessity. Many modern historians and philosophers argue that history is shaped not by an underlying rational necessity but rather by complex social, economic, and psychological factors. Within this context, the primary element that renders Hegel's philosophy of history metaphysical is the concept of *Geist*, whose meaning in Hegel's philosophy of history will be elucidated in order to clarify the main theses and thereby present the core framework of his philosophy of history. However, before delving into the details of the relationship between *Geist* and history, it is essential to address the distinction Hegel draws among different modes of historical writing. For Hegel, history can only be grasped in its essential, necessary, and rational character if it is understood through a particular "mode of historical writing," and it is solely through this mode that history attains its true meaning.

### Types of Historiography and the Specificity of Philosophical History Writing

Hegel's conception of history is regarded as one of the most sophisticated and systematic models within modern philosophy of history. He understands history not merely as a record of the past but as a necessary stage in the dialectical development of Reason and Spirit. Within this framework, Hegel's view of history is both teleological and systematic, asserting that history is governed not by contingency but by the necessary unfolding of rational principles. Yet, in articulating his philosophical approach to historiography, Hegel engages critically with existing historiographical traditions and classifies them into distinct types. According to Hegel, philosophical historiography seeks to interpret historical events based on the inherent necessity within the process of the development of Reason, whereas original historiography (*Originalgeschichte*) focuses on immediate, eyewitness accounts of events, and reflective historiography interprets history through the subjective perspectives and conceptual frameworks of later historians. Hegel's taxonomy of historiographical types thus illuminates not only how historical material is organized and processed but also how historical "meaning" itself is constructed and articulated.<sup>9</sup>

In Hegel's classification, original historiography is defined as the most fundamental and primordial form of historical writing. This type of historiography is based on the author's narration of events that they have directly observed or personally experienced. Consequently, personal witness and immediate experience occupy the central place in the narrative. Within this conception of history, the writer does not yet possess an awareness of a broader historical perspective or of long-term developmental processes; the history that is written here consists primarily of descriptions and accounts of events. Herodotus and Thucydides are regarded by Hegel as classic representatives of this type. However, Hegel also emphasizes the limited nature of original historiography, since this form lacks the capacity to grasp the overarching rational trajectory underlying events. The author remains confined within the values and intellectual horizon of their own time; thus, history is interpreted solely within the cultural, moral, and political framework of that specific period. Therefore, original historiography does not yet uncover the inner necessities or universal laws of historical development; rather, this form of writing remains largely at the level of "living through history" and "recording

<sup>8</sup>Hegel, *Tarihte Akıl*, 34-54.

<sup>9</sup>Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover Publications, 2004), 1-3, 16-20.



memory.”<sup>10</sup>

Reflective historiography (*Reflektierende Geschichte*), which represents a stage more advanced than original historiography, refers to a mode of historical writing in which the author looks back upon the past and attempts to comprehend and evaluate it from a particular perspective. Reflective historiography entails assessing the past from a certain distance and level of conscious awareness. Hegel further subdivides this type into several distinct categories: universal history, pragmatic history, critical history, and particular history.<sup>11</sup>

I) Universal history (*Universalgeschichte*) endeavors to understand human history in broad outlines and within a wide-ranging panorama. In this approach, the author considers different epochs and cultures as parts of an overarching whole, thereby presenting history not merely as a collection of isolated events but as the general narrative of humanity's development. Yet even this approach often remains dependent upon the author's own cultural and historical perspective. Writers of universal history tend to construct a developmental trajectory that aligns with their own value judgments, rather than uncovering the immanent rational necessities underlying historical progress. II) Pragmatic history (*Pragmatische Geschichte*) aims to draw lessons from the past and to provide the reader with moral or political teachings. In this type of historiography, history functions as a means of education and moral instruction. Authors such as Montesquieu and Machiavelli, for example, utilize historical events as tools for deriving political and ethical insights. According to Hegel, this mode of writing emphasizes the derivation of lessons in accordance with existing values, rather than investigating the dialectical necessity underlying events; for this reason, it tends to assume a predominantly didactic role. III) Critical history (*Kritische Geschichte*) centers on questioning historical sources and investigating their accuracy. In this mode of historiography, the reliability of historical documents, the consistency of sources, and the factual reality of events are subjected to critical scrutiny. While Hegel acknowledges the importance of this type, he also points out that critical history focuses solely on verifying the factual correctness of events, yet fails to grasp their inner meaning and necessity. IV) Particular history (*Besondere Geschichte*), on the other hand, narrates the history of a specific nation, event, or period. This type may, for instance, engage in an in-depth examination of topics such as the French Revolution, the Roman Empire, or Ottoman history. However, due to its limited scope, it falls short of apprehending the universal and holistic dimensions of historical development.<sup>12</sup>

In conclusion, according to Hegel, none of the forms of historiography briefly discussed so far possesses the capacity to reveal the true spirit, direction, purpose, or meaning of history. The only mode of historical writing capable of fulfilling these requirements is the writing of philosophical world history, which alone can apprehend the Idea, the essence, the Spirit, and ultimately Reason itself within history.

According to Hegel, the concept at the center of philosophical historiography is Reason. This constitutes the fundamental distinction that separates philosophical history from all other conceptions of history: the idea that Reason, Spirit, or, expressed in theological language, God, governs the flow, development, and events of world history is, for Hegel, the sole condition for comprehending the meaning of history. Otherwise, history remains nothing more than a chaotic heap of events explained by arbitrariness and contingency, without any knowledge of necessity. In Hegel's approach, Reason is not an externally imposed hypothesis used to interpret historical events; rather, it is understood as the immanent principle of necessity inherent within history itself. The existence of Reason as a principle of necessity operating in and directing history is the foundation of philosophical historiography.<sup>13</sup>

However, Hegel does not use the term “Reason” in the ordinary sense of individual human reason. In his philosophy of history, the Reason in question is not limited to the faculties of understanding (*Verstand*) or practical reason within

<sup>10</sup>Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 1-4.

<sup>11</sup>Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 4-8.

<sup>12</sup>Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 4-8.

<sup>13</sup>Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 8-11.



the human soul; rather, the Reason he speaks of is Divine and Absolute Reason. Accordingly, history is to be understood as the stage upon which Divine Reason reveals and actualizes itself.<sup>14</sup>

In elaborating his concept of Divine Reason, Hegel engages critically with two significant conceptions of reason that preceded him: Anaxagoras's notion of *nous* and the religious notion of fate. First, he critiques Anaxagoras's understanding of *nous* as the principle that imparts order and meaning to the cosmos, transforming chaos into cosmos. Yet, according to Hegel, Anaxagoras's *nous* lacks consciousness and self-consciousness. The laws of nature are unchanging and orderly; however, neither the sun nor the planets are aware of the laws governing their own motions. They remain merely mechanical beings through which laws operate unconsciously. Thus, the *nous* posited by Anaxagoras is a principle that does not reflect upon itself and is devoid of self-awareness.<sup>15</sup>

Secondly, Hegel critiques the concept of fate as another inadequate interpretation of Divine Reason. The notion of fate emphasizes the intervention of God's will in history and the manifestation of divine providence in human lives. However, Hegel argues that this conception is also deficient, for it reduces the divine order underlying events to the realm of chance and arbitrariness. Believers often hold that divine grace intervenes during times of distress; yet, this fails to comprehend that God's absolute wisdom and Reason operate according to a specific and necessary order. Fate thus remains within the domain of an abstract belief, lacking concreteness and clarity, uncertain as to when and upon whom it might manifest.<sup>16</sup>

For this reason, Hegel asserts that the inability to grasp Reason within history is directly related to the question of whether God can be known. The prerequisite for writing philosophical world history is faith in the knowability of God. Hegel addresses frequent criticisms on this point, particularly the objection that humanity's attempts to discern the divine plan operative in history amount to a form of arrogance, as if seeking to overstep the bounds of human knowledge by probing into the divine decree. Yet, for Hegel, true humility consists in recognizing and understanding God's workings not merely in nature or emotions, but also in the flow of history itself.<sup>17</sup>

Hegel emphasizes that God's wisdom operates equally in both nature and history. Just as divine reason manifests itself in plants, animals, and the orderly structure of nature, so too is it active in the destinies of nations and rulers. For Hegel, God is involved not only in minor occurrences but also in the greatest revolutions and wars in human history. The power of God cannot be limited to either small or great events alone, for God reveals the same absolute reality in both the whole and the particulars. In this regard, to limit God's activity and knowability in history would be to limit truth itself.<sup>18</sup>

Another perspective to which Hegel objects is the idea that God can be known solely through feelings. Such a view reduces knowledge of God to individual emotional states and thereby relativizes it. Emotions are subjective and mutable; thus, a conception of God based solely on feelings cannot offer universally valid knowledge for all. Reducing God to the sphere of personal emotion, according to Hegel, amounts to surrendering absolute reality to subjective caprice. By contrast, Hegel maintains that God is knowable not merely through individual feelings but through universal Reason.<sup>19</sup>

Ultimately, for Hegel, it is not in nature or in individual feelings but in history that God can be known in the most explicit and concrete way. World history is the stage upon which Spirit comes to consciousness of itself; in other words, it is the highest level of reality in which God actualizes and makes Himself visible. In this sense, history is not merely a record of the past but a stage for theodicy, in which God is justified and reveals Himself. This approach, which aligns

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<sup>14</sup>Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 11-13.

<sup>15</sup>Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 11-13.

<sup>16</sup>Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 13-16; *Tarihçe Akıl*, 17-18.

<sup>17</sup>Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 13-16; *Tarihçe Akıl*, 47.

<sup>18</sup>Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 13-16; *Tarihçe Akıl*, 47-48.

<sup>19</sup>Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 13-16; *Tarihçe Akıl*, 49-50.



with Leibniz's concept of theodicy, demonstrates that God is not only the sovereign ruler of history but also the subject who is justified within history itself.<sup>20</sup>

In conclusion, according to Hegel, the philosophical examination of world history—or the writing of history from a philosophical perspective—means comprehending the ultimate end of Spirit, Reason, and God, and discerning what God seeks from the world in its full actuality and totality. In this respect, world history is the history of Spirit; thus, to understand history is possible only through grasping the nature and operation of Spirit. Spirit, as the principle both immanent within and directing history, contains within itself both the essence and the ultimate purpose of history, for history is the process through which Spirit realizes itself and attains freedom. In this context, the self-determination of Spirit is directly linked to the understanding of the ultimate purpose of the universe. Yet Spirit cannot achieve its ultimate purpose if it remains merely an abstract entity; it must realize and concretize itself. It is precisely for this reason that, in the process of self-realization, Spirit makes use of various instruments, chief among them individual passions and the institution of the state. The following sections will address these themes, thereby clarifying the distinctiveness of philosophical historiography as compared to other forms of historical writing.

### The Abstract Nature or Essence of Spirit

According to Hegel, the nature of Spirit can only be comprehended through that which stands entirely in opposition to it. Just as the substance of matter consists in occupying space, so too is freedom the essence of Spirit. All the attributes of Spirit derive their meaning through freedom; all other qualities are merely instruments serving the realization of freedom. The ultimate purpose of Spirit is freedom, and freedom itself is the capacity for self-determination. True freedom entails being independent of external circumstances and subject only to one's own inner necessity. A subject dependent on the external world is not free; only a subject who acts in accordance with its own inner necessity can be truly free.<sup>21</sup>

More precisely, for Hegel, freedom does not mean arbitrary behavior or boundless license. Freedom signifies self-determination—that is, the capacity of the individual (in this context, Spirit as the historical subject) to act not merely according to external influences, but in alignment with its own inner necessity, reason, and rational laws. At this point, Hegel links freedom with necessity: genuine freedom is not in contradiction with necessity; rather, freedom consists in recognizing and adhering to the inner necessity of Reason and Spirit. A subject who remains dependent on external circumstances cannot be free; only one who acts according to the laws of reason can attain true freedom.<sup>22</sup>

Therefore, history can be nothing other than the process in which the essence of Spirit—that is, freedom and its inherent inner necessity—is actualized. Otherwise, history could not be the history of Spirit, nor, from the Hegelian perspective, could it be “true” history at all; it would merely be a collection of happenings, the sum of human actions and occurrences in the past. Thus, for Hegel, what makes history truly history is not simply the sum of events themselves, but rather the presence of the ultimate end of Spirit, its abstract nature, and thereby the presence of freedom within those events.<sup>23</sup>

Another fundamental attribute of Spirit is self-knowledge, for freedom, by its very definition, is identical with self-knowledge. Spirit attains freedom to the extent that it knows itself and becomes conscious of itself. Spirit is simultaneously both subject and object; in this domain, the knower, knowledge, and the known are one and the same. In this respect, Spirit is “thought thinking itself.” The state of self-knowledge entails Spirit reflecting upon itself; here, the distinction between subject and object disappears.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>20</sup>Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 15-16.

<sup>21</sup>Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 16-17.

<sup>22</sup>Frederick C. Beiser, *Hegel*. trans. Seçim Bayazit (İstanbul: Alfa Basım Yayın, 2017), 105-110.

<sup>23</sup>Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 16-17.

<sup>24</sup>Hegel, *Tarihte Akıl*, 68-79.



A third essential characteristic of Spirit is that it is living, active, and concrete. Spirit does not simply find its content ready-made; rather, it creates and realizes its own content through a process and thereby becomes what it truly is. Spirit does not remain merely a transcendent principle; it objectifies and concretizes itself within history. Thus, Spirit is not merely potentiality (*dynamis*), but actuality (*energeia*). Freedom, knowledge, and actuality are inextricably interwoven within Spirit: Spirit can only be free insofar as it actualizes itself and knows itself; it cannot actualize itself without becoming free, nor can it know itself without actualization. Put differently, the ultimate aim of history—freedom—is, for Hegel, not merely individual freedom or formal liberty but rather moral and social freedom. The liberation of Spirit occurs when all individuals act in accordance with their own conscience, moral responsibility, and universal values. The recognition by individuals that they are bearers of Spirit constitutes the highest stage in the realization of freedom. In this way, history, insofar as it is the domain in which Spirit achieves freedom, is equally the sphere in which individuals and societies progress toward freedom. Indeed, these two processes are essentially identical. The abstract nature of Spirit can achieve genuine freedom only insofar as it is actualized and manifested in history; it cannot attain freedom if it remains merely in itself, without becoming for itself and achieving actuality.<sup>25</sup>

In the following sections, it will be shown how this process of actualization manifests itself in the national spirits (*Volksgesister*), in historical individuals, and ultimately in the model of the ideal state, thereby clarifying the expressions that here might still appear somewhat abstract.

### The Process of Spirit's Self-Actualization: Peoples and Passions

According to Hegel, the initial form of Spirit's self-awareness arises within individual human consciousness. Initially, the individual perceives themselves merely as a sentient being, sensing themselves without any relation to external objects; however, over time, the individual becomes aware of themselves and their needs. This awareness confronts the individual with an inner contradiction: although they exist, they feel incomplete and insufficient. This sense of lack propels the individual to transcend themselves and to seek wholeness and completeness. In this process, instincts come into play; living beings pursue satisfaction and unity through their instincts. However, on this instinctual level, the human being does not differ from the animal. What fundamentally distinguishes humans from animals is the capacity for thought. Through thought, humans free themselves from dependence on their desires and the external world; they turn inward and attain the capacity for self-determination. It is through thought that individuals can regulate their desires and direct them towards rational ends. This marks the beginning of true freedom, whereby individuals can define their own goals rather than simply submitting to what is imposed upon them. In this way, they can progress by liberating themselves from the immediate determinations of nature. Yet, the level of individual consciousness does not represent the full development of Spirit. The complete realization of Spirit transcends individual existence and takes concrete form at the level of society, the state, and peoples.<sup>26</sup>

In this respect, throughout history, Spirit takes shape in collective consciousnesses, manifesting as the national spirit. The national spirit is one of the temporary forms that Spirit assumes in its process of liberation. Each national spirit represents a different stage of Spirit and possesses its own unique historical mission. However, the national spirit is not ultimate; it is, in essence, a concrete manifestation of the world spirit (*Weltgeist*). The world spirit is reason actualizing itself throughout history and ascending to higher levels of consciousness. As previously stated, the ultimate purpose of Spirit is to fully know its own essence and thereby to achieve freedom. Until this goal is realized, Spirit expresses itself through various peoples and civilizations.<sup>27</sup>

Each national spirit is merely a transitional stage in the process of Spirit's self-actualization. When a people has fulfilled its historical mission, it withdraws from the stage of history. Thus, the rise, flourishing, and decline of nations is

<sup>25</sup>Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 17-20; *Tarihçe Akıl*, 59.

<sup>26</sup>Hegel, *Tarihçe Akıl*, 61-64.

<sup>27</sup>Hegel, *Tarihçe Akıl*, 61-64.



inevitable. Once a national spirit has accomplished its task, it makes way for a new people, allowing Spirit to continue expressing itself at a higher level. In other words, the historical progression of Spirit is a dialectical process in which oppositions and contradictions are overcome. Each national spirit dissolves once it has fulfilled its purpose; however, this dissolution does not signify an ultimate extinction but rather prepares the ground for the rebirth of Spirit at a higher level. In this sense, world history is a progression wherein Spirit comes to know itself step by step, achieving ever higher levels of freedom and consciousness.<sup>28</sup>

Consequently, the history of humanity is the process through which Spirit realizes, knows, and liberates itself. Spirit must actualize itself in order to know itself and to be free; it can only attain self-knowledge and freedom to the extent that it becomes objective reality. In this process, individuals and nations play an instrumental role; the crucial point is Spirit's self-knowledge. Therefore, the fundamental task of philosophical historiography is to comprehend how Spirit actualizes itself through nations and individuals.

Moreover, Spirit requires concrete existence, historical actions, and dynamic movement in order to realize itself. At this point, individuals and their passions come into play. Spirit utilizes the passions and subjective efforts of individuals as instruments for the realization of its universal aim. Thus, standing in opposition to the abstract essence of Spirit are the passions of individuals, which appear as the dialectical counter-moment (the antithesis) within the historical process.<sup>29</sup>

Individuals manifest themselves in history through their desires, interests, personal aims, passions, and talents. While some individuals may directly pursue the universal good, from a historical perspective, the primary driving force behind individual actions often consists of passions and personal desires. According to Hegel, laws and principles do not move of their own accord; it is human needs, inclinations, and passions that give them life.<sup>30</sup>

Here, Hegel assigns a positive function to passions, in contrast to much of classical philosophy, which tends to disparage them. Whereas many philosophers regard passions as irrational forces that ought to be suppressed, Hegel considers them as necessary driving forces in the development of history and Spirit. For human beings to perform actions, they must be emotionally and personally invested in those actions. An individual must embrace an action not merely out of a sense of duty but also out of personal desire and fulfillment. Otherwise, a dry and abstract morality of duty ignores human nature. Although Spirit is an overarching and transcendent reality beyond individual passions, historical actions take place precisely through these passions. Without passions, history would not move forward, for humans cannot act without them. In this respect, passions are not inherently evil or irrational; rather, they are indispensable instruments of historical progress.<sup>31</sup>

However, passions do not directly govern history; the true subject of history is always Spirit. Passions are merely the tools that Spirit employs to realize itself. Individuals act under the influence of their passions, yet the outcomes of their actions frequently serve the universal aim of Spirit, often beyond their own intentions. Hegel explains this through his famous concept of the "cunning of reason" (*List der Vernunft*). While individuals pursue their own passions, they inadvertently fulfill the purpose of universal Reason. The cunning of Reason ensures that history progresses not through deliberate planning but through the unintended consequences of human actions. This means that human agency does not contradict historical necessity but operates within its logic.<sup>32</sup>

For this reason, according to Hegel, the great individuals of history (*Weltgeschichtliche Individuen*) are those who identify themselves with the historical aim of Spirit. These individuals perceive the emerging new stage of Spirit's

<sup>28</sup>Hegel, *Tarihçe Akıl*, 69-77.

<sup>29</sup>Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 20-21.

<sup>30</sup>Hegel, *Tarihçe Akıl*, 85.

<sup>31</sup>Hegel, *Tarihçe Akıl*, 86-89.

<sup>32</sup>Hegel, *Tarihçe Akıl*, 93; *The Philosophy of History*, 32-33.



development, undertake the actions demanded by that stage, and transform history. Their actions are not guided by moral norms in the conventional sense but are in harmony with the necessity of Spirit's development. Thus, Hegel asserts that great individuals are those who have the courage to realize their aims without regard for the opinions of others.<sup>33</sup>

Figures such as Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, and Napoleon, who act as representatives of the World Spirit, do not consciously follow a rational historical plan; however, their actions, driven by personal ambition or vision, ultimately serve the emergence of Reason. For instance, Napoleon may have pursued his own military conquests, yet in doing so, he propagated legal and political structures that embodied modern rational freedom. In other words, these heroes channel their passions not merely for personal gain but in alignment with the universal aim of Spirit. They shape the will of nations, effect change, and bring to life what has become historically necessary. In this sense, from Caesar to Napoleon, the great individuals of history have served as instruments for the self-realization of Spirit. Even though they themselves may not be fully conscious of this universal plan, Spirit employs their passions for its own purposes. Spirit does not bear the cost of existence and transience itself; it exacts this cost through the passions of individuals. In other words, individuals act upon their passions, history progresses, but what endures and remains is Spirit.<sup>34</sup>

According to Hegel, the purpose behind Spirit's utilization of individual passions is to construct the state, which represents the concrete realization of freedom. All conflicts, crises, and transformations in the historical movement ultimately culminate in the modern state, where ethical freedom becomes institutionalized. The state is both the manifestation of Spirit's self-knowledge and the historical and institutional embodiment of its freedom.

### The State as the Highest Realization of Rational Freedom

As previously stated, for Hegel, history is not merely the product of contingencies or of individual passions; rather, it is the journey through which the universal Spirit realizes its freedom. This journey advances dialectically through different cultures, societies, and political forms, with the concept of freedom gradually acquiring an increasingly rational and universal character in the course of historical development. Hegel's theory of the state thus reaches its culmination within this historical framework. According to Hegel, throughout history, different forms of political organization have represented partial and limited expressions of freedom. In ancient despotisms, only the ruler was free, while the people were entirely subject to his will. In the classical Greek world, freedom had become more widespread, yet remained confined to a privileged citizen class. With the rise of Christianity, the principle of the infinite value of the human being and inner freedom was introduced, and in the modern era, the concept of constitutional government began to establish freedom as a universal right. However, this transformation has not been a seamless progression but has been woven through conflicts, revolutions, and processes of institutional development throughout history.<sup>35</sup>

According to the logic of this historical development, the highest expression of freedom consists not merely in individual arbitrariness or in the absence of external constraints, but in the existence of individual subjectivity harmonized with the universal principles of Reason. Hegel finds both the liberal conception of negative freedom—which leaves the individual entirely to their own devices—and authoritarian models of the state that suppress individual will to be inadequate. For him, true freedom is realized in an order wherein the individual perceives themselves as part of the universal Reason and the shared ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*). Therefore, for Hegel, the rational state represents the highest moment in the historical development of Spirit. The state is not merely an instrument of coercion but is the concrete embodiment of human reason and freedom. It is not a structure in which individuals are merely externally compelled to obey; rather, it is a rational totality that enables individuals to realize themselves as ethical beings. Within the rational

<sup>33</sup>Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 29-32; Hamdi Bravo, "Hegel'in Tarih Tasarımında Özgürlük ve İlerleme", (*In Hacettepe Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, Volume 21, 153-164, 2004), 163.

<sup>34</sup>Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 29-32

<sup>35</sup>Hegel, *Tarihte Akıl*, 113-118.



state, the individual is not merely a passive recipient of the law but recognizes the laws as expressions of their own reason and ethical nature. Hence, true freedom does not consist in being restricted by law but rather in conscious and rational participation in the law.<sup>36</sup>

From the perspective of Hegel's philosophy of history, this role of the state is directly tied to the internal logic of historical development. History is the gradual expansion of consciousness of freedom. Each political form arises to resolve the contradictions of the preceding stage, but each also contains within itself new limitations and conflicts. The progression from feudalism to absolute monarchy and eventually to constitutional forms of government represents the increasing institutionalization of freedom in more universal and rational forms. This advancement is the expression, on the stage of history, of Spirit's process of self-knowledge and self-realization.<sup>37</sup>

As noted, for Hegel, the state is the highest ethical organization in which universal Reason and freedom are concretized, transcending individual passions and contingent events. Thus, pre-state communities, although filled with "res gestae," i.e., deeds and events, are not yet historical subjects in Hegel's eyes because their lives lack a universal purpose or rational order. For example, tribal wars, migrations, or legendary heroics remain at the level of res gestae; yet, the emergence of democracy in Athens or the development of Roman law holds genuine historical significance because they embody principles of universal Reason and freedom. For Hegel, historical writing only becomes true philosophy of history —*historia rerum gestarum*— when it seeks to comprehend the rational necessity underlying events and to assemble them into a meaningful whole. This distinction is crucial for Hegel: particular occurrences in history serve merely as means and instruments in the realization of Spirit's purpose on the historical stage. Thus, Hegel's philosophy of history goes beyond the chronological narration of res gestae, elevating itself to the level of philosophical history by uncovering the universal rational principles underlying events such as the French Revolution and interpreting them as stages in Spirit's journey toward freedom.<sup>38</sup>

In this context, Hegel classifies world history into four major cultural spheres: the Eastern world, the Greek world, the Roman world, and the Germanic world. In Eastern societies, only a single ruler is free while the people are subject to absolute obedience; in the Greek world, freedom expands to encompass the community, though citizenship remains confined to a privileged class; in the Roman world, the concept of individual personality emerges, but individuals become alienated from the social whole; finally, in the Germanic world, under the influence of Christianity, the principle of the inner freedom and universal worth of the human being arises and becomes concretized through the rational structures of the modern constitutional state. For Hegel, these four stages represent the historical process by which freedom becomes conscious and universal. Particularly in the modern European states, Hegel perceives evidence that Spirit has reached a level where it both knows itself and realizes freedom through concrete social institutions.<sup>39</sup>

Within Hegel's philosophy of history, the relationship between Christianity and the Prussian state represents a significant turning point. Christianity introduced the principle of the infinite value of the human being and the capacity for inner freedom as a universal ideal, which Hegel regards as one of the greatest revolutions in history. However, initially, the Christian principle remained merely an inner, abstract consciousness and did not acquire concrete reality within historical and social institutions. For this reason, Hegel argues that the true realization of Christian consciousness of freedom can only occur within the institutions of the modern rational state. According to Hegel, this historical synthesis, although it finds expression in the modern European constitutional states, takes its most concrete form in his own time in the Prussian state. In his view, the Prussian state represents a rational order that reconciles individual autonomy with the principles of universal Reason and the rule of law. Thus, the Christian teaching of inner freedom no longer remains

<sup>36</sup>Hegel, *Tarihçe Akıl*, 144-149; *The Philosophy of History*, 37-52; Pierre Hassner, "Hegel," trans. Allan Bloom, in *History of Political Philosophy*, 3rd ed., ed. Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 738-742.

<sup>37</sup>Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, 155-160, 216-224.

<sup>38</sup>Celal A. Kanat, *Hegel'in Devlet ve Toplum Felsefesine Giriş* (İstanbul: Doruk Yayınları, 2015), 265-267.

<sup>39</sup>Frederick Copleston, *Felsefe Tarihi: Hegel*, trans. İdea Yayınevi (İstanbul: İdea Yayınevi, 2010), 69-72.



merely at the level of faith but becomes social reality through concrete laws, institutions, and civic consciousness. In this sense, Hegel views the emergence of Christianity as the substantive summit of history and the modern rational state as the formal and institutional completion of that summit. Consequently, history, for Hegel, finds its fulfillment in the concretization of Christianity's universal principle of freedom within the rational structure of the state. According to Hegel, history, in a certain sense, thus reaches its end, not in the sense that no further events will ever occur, but because the idea of human freedom has been established as a universal principle and the essential internal goal of history has been achieved. In Hegel's view, the modern constitutional states, and especially the Prussia of his own era, represent the highest manifestation of this historical consciousness and freedom.<sup>40</sup>

However, Hegel's historical classification also exposes one of the most significant criticisms directed at his philosophy of history, namely the problem of Eurocentrism that arises from judging history through the lens of a single value perspective, as later highlighted by thinkers such as Rickert. While asserting that the universal Spirit finds its highest expression in modern Europe, and particularly in the Germanic world, Hegel relegates non-European societies either to the early stages of historical development or excludes them altogether as being outside of history. Hegel categorizes many peoples in Asia, Africa, and the Americas as "ahistorical peoples" (*geschichtslose Völker*) and regards these societies not as active subjects in the process of the universal Spirit's self-realization but merely as passive stages upon which history unfolds. In his view, these peoples have neither developed a consciousness of freedom nor created rational political institutions from within themselves. For this reason, their contributions to historical progress have remained limited, and they have occupied a peripheral position on the stage of history. Hegel characterizes Africa as a "prehistoric dark continent" and describes America as a continent that only gains significance through the civilization brought by European culture.<sup>41</sup>

Ultimately, Hegel does not conceive of history as merely a sum of contingent events; rather, for him, history is a process imbued with profound meaning and directed toward a definite purpose. What gives this process its direction and meaning is Spirit or, in theological terms, God. In Hegel's thought, history is both the scene upon which Spirit attains its own freedom and the arena in which humanity achieves its liberation. For Hegel, freedom is not mere arbitrariness but the process through which Spirit realizes itself in the world, with human beings consciously contributing to this process. Therefore, Hegel interprets history within a framework of determinism; the essential force at work in history is the will of Spirit, while particular events or individual actions remain incidental and contingent within this grand process. Yet this does not imply that human will or the will of nations is entirely irrelevant. Spirit determines the ultimate direction and goal of history, but it is impossible to foresee in advance which individuals, peoples, or events will serve as its instruments. Peoples and individuals acquire lasting significance in history only when they act in harmony with Spirit's aims, whereby Spirit remains the enduring essence behind historical events, while particulars participating in the realization of freedom become meaningful components of history.<sup>42</sup>

Nevertheless, Hegel constructs his philosophy of history as a teleological process directed toward the goal of the universal Spirit's freedom and thus imposes an a priori meaning upon history from the outset. Despite this, he does not ignore historical events, figures, and political transformations as empirical data; rather, he uses them as concrete examples and instruments within his philosophical system. Yet Hegel's employment of these empirical elements does not place his philosophy of history within the realm of history as an empirical and methodological discipline, for his true aim lies in comprehending the rational necessities underlying historical facts, the place of Spirit within its process of self-realization, and the stages through which freedom becomes universal. Accordingly, although Hegel's philosophy of history draws upon empirical facts, it ultimately remains not merely a chronological description of events but a

<sup>40</sup>Hegel, *Tarihte Akıl*, 126-136; *The Philosophy of History*, 318-336; Kanat, *Hegel'in Devlet ve Toplum Felsefesine Giriş*, 301-306.

<sup>41</sup>Kanat, *Hegel'in Devlet ve Toplum Felsefesine Giriş*, 306-310; Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 79-102.

<sup>42</sup>Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 78-79.



philosophical endeavor to interpret them as manifestations of universal reason and the idea of freedom. Thus, it belongs not to the class of empirical sciences but rather to the tradition of speculative philosophy.<sup>43</sup>

However, this approach to history has also been subject to criticism from thinkers such as Rickert. Rickert argues that this generalizing framework overlooks the uniqueness of individual events and their contexts. Yet, while Hegel's emphasis on reason and the order of freedom provides a significant framework for modern philosophy of history, it has simultaneously brought history to the forefront of philosophical inquiry and sparked debates about the necessity of interpreting historical events from diverse perspectives. It was within this intellectual climate that thinkers like Rickert, who helped establish history as a central subject for philosophy, emerged.

### Rickert's Critique of Hegel and the Foundations of Scientific History

The study of history has long been divided between philosophical interpretations that seek an overarching meaning and scientific approaches that emphasize empirical analysis. While Hegel's metaphysical historiography presents history as a teleological and rational process, Heinrich Rickert -one of the leading figures of neo-Kantianism- argues that history must be approached as an empirical and methodologically rigorous discipline. In contrast to Hegel's idealism, which posits that history follows a rational necessity, Rickert maintains that historical meaning is not inherent in events themselves but is constructed through the selection and organization of facts. His work represents a fundamental shift from speculative philosophy to scientific historiography, rejecting grand metaphysical narratives in favor of conceptual and methodological precision.<sup>44</sup>

Moreover, Rickert's work is deeply influenced by Immanuel Kant's epistemology, particularly his distinction between the phenomenal world (what can be known through experience) and the noumenal world (what remains beyond human cognition). Just as Kant rejects metaphysical speculation about ultimate reality, Rickert argues that historians must avoid attributing inherent meaning to history itself. For Rickert, meaning in history is not discovered but constructed, guided by scientific principles rather than speculative metaphysics. This fundamental distinction between metaphysical and scientific historiography is central to Rickert's rejection of Hegelian idealism and his development of a methodologically rigorous approach to history.<sup>45</sup>

*"Anyone who studies world history, whether as a philosopher or an empirical historian, is primarily concerned with the development of culture within the immanent spatio-temporal world. If, therefore, the immanent world is reduced by metaphysics to a second-tier reality, and the true reality -where the highest values and the highest being, the summum bonum and the ens realissimum, coincide- is conceived as timeless and spaceless, then the spatially and temporally unique and individual process of development immediately loses its meaning, both from a historical-philosophical and an empirical-historical perspective. In a certain sense, 'world history' must always remain a 'worldly' matter, that is, a concern of this world. Otherwise, the inevitable question arises: What is the purpose of humanity's long struggle and strife over millennia, if, at best, it is only capable of imperfectly and incompletely realizing what, in the deepest essence of the world, is already eternally and timelessly complete?" (Author's translation).<sup>46</sup>*

The following sections will explore Rickert's critique of Hegel's historical metaphysics, his scientific alternative to teleological historiography, and his analysis of the role of values in historical interpretation.

<sup>43</sup>Kanat, *Hegel'in Devlet ve Toplum Felsefesine Giriş*, 279-289.

<sup>44</sup>Heinrich Rickert, *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science: A Logical Introduction to the Historical Sciences*, trans. Guy Oakes (London: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 22-27.

<sup>45</sup>Beiser, *The German Historicist Tradition*, 399-405

<sup>46</sup>Heinrich Rickert, *Die Probleme der Geschichtsphilosophie: Eine erkenntnistheoretische Studie* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1924), 151-152.



## Rickert's Critique of Metaphysical History

Rickert's opposition to Hegelian historiography is rooted in his rejection of teleological and metaphysical interpretations of history. While Hegel sees history as a rational necessity, Rickert contends that such a framework distorts the complexity and contingency of historical events. According to Rickert, historical reality is not governed by a predetermined logic but is instead a domain of singular occurrences that must be analyzed through rigorous empirical methods. Hegel's approach, which treats history as the self-realization of Spirit, is problematic because it retroactively imposes coherence and purpose onto events that may, in fact, be contingent and unpredictable.<sup>47</sup>

A central problem in Hegel's historiography, according to Rickert, is that it confuses historical interpretation with ontological necessity. Hegel claims that historical events are necessary stages in the unfolding of Reason, but Rickert argues that this necessity is an illusion created by retrospective analysis. For example, while Hegel interprets the French Revolution as a dialectical moment in the realization of freedom, Rickert insists that such an interpretation is an imposition rather than an objective fact. In reality, history does not contain an inherent rational structure -rather, it is a collection of discrete events that can be understood in multiple ways depending on the historian's perspective.<sup>48</sup>

Rickert's rejection of Hegelian teleology is closely tied to his Kantian epistemology. Kant's philosophy emphasizes that knowledge is not a direct reflection of reality but is mediated by conceptual structures. Rickert applies this insight to history, arguing that historical meaning is not something inherent in events themselves but is imposed by historians through their selection and categorization of facts. This view fundamentally opposes Hegel's belief that history follows an objective rational progression. For Rickert, history is not a universal process with a fixed goal but a field of study that requires careful methodological distinctions.<sup>49</sup>

Another major critique Rickert levels against Hegel is that his historiography prioritizes totality over specificity. Hegel's approach treats historical periods as mere moments in an overarching system, rather than recognizing them as unique and context-dependent realities. Rickert argues that this totalizing perspective erases the individuality of historical phenomena, reducing them to abstract categories rather than concrete experiences. This is why Rickert insists on the importance of idiographic methods, which focus on the specificity of historical events rather than fitting them into a predetermined philosophical system.<sup>50</sup>

Rickert also challenges Hegel's belief that history has an intrinsic moral or rational order. While Hegel sees historical progress as the unfolding of freedom, Rickert argues that such moral judgments are external to the historical process itself. History does not have an inherent ethical direction; rather, moral meaning is assigned after the fact by historians and philosophers. For example, while Hegel views the Napoleonic Wars as a necessary step toward modern constitutionalism, Rickert warns against interpreting historical events as if they were destined to lead to a specific outcome. Instead, he advocates for a more cautious and empirical approach that acknowledges the complexity and unpredictability of history.<sup>51</sup>

In summary, Rickert's critique of Hegel's metaphysical historiography is based on three key objections: (1) history does not follow a necessary teleological structure, (2) historical meaning is constructed rather than discovered, and (3) Hegel's emphasis on totality overlooks the specificity of historical events. By rejecting grand metaphysical narratives and advocating for a more methodologically precise approach, Rickert lays the groundwork for a scientific historiography that prioritizes empirical rigor over speculative philosophy. His work represents a fundamental shift from viewing history

<sup>47</sup>Rickert, *Die Probleme der Geschichtsphilosophie*, 151-152; *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, 22-27, 212-216.

<sup>48</sup>Rickert, *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, 22-27.

<sup>49</sup>Heinrich Rickert, *Science and History: A Critique of Positivist Epistemology*, trans. George Reisman (London: D. Van Nostrand Company Inc., 1962), 30-40; *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, 22-27.

<sup>50</sup>Rickert, *Science and History*, 53-62.

<sup>51</sup>Rickert, *Die Probleme der Geschichtsphilosophie*, 151-156.



as an unfolding necessity to seeing it as a structured but interpretative discipline, shaped by conceptual frameworks and methodological choices.

## Scientific Approach to History

The question of whether history can be considered a scientific discipline is one of the most fundamental debates in historiography. While some historians and philosophers argue that history is primarily a narrative or interpretive discipline, others seek to establish it as a rigorous field of knowledge governed by methodological principles. Heinrich Rickert belongs to the second category and seeks to provide a systematic framework for historical research that distinguishes it from both Hegelian speculative metaphysics and the generalizing and legalizing empirical description used in positivist natural sciences. Rickert argues that history should be analyzed through "scientific categorization" rather than philosophical speculation. Rickert's approach is based on neo-Kantian epistemology and essentially emerges through a fundamental critique of the connection between concept and reality established by Hegel within a framework similar to Kant's distinction between phenomenon and noumenon.

Hegel and Rickert have very different perspectives on the relationship between concept and reality. Hegel's understanding of concept and reality is informed by his idealist and teleological metaphysics. Concepts (*Begriff*) are the fundamental essence of reality in Hegel's system and also the elements that construct reality itself. Reality arises from concepts and develops through their concretization. According to Hegel, thought and reality are inseparable; thought is an active process that constructs reality. Concepts are not merely a reflection of reality but also function as its dynamic and creative elements. Thought influences reality and reveals its rational nature. Reality is perceived in Hegel's system as the concretization of thought; there is no distinction between thought and reality, because reality can only be grasped through thought. This approach has been clearly demonstrated in Hegel's philosophy of history. As a brief reminder, according to Hegel, the process of development in history is the progression of the concept to a higher level by overcoming its own internal contradictions. In this context, history is the progression of the *Geist* toward freedom of consciousness, that is, the process of thought realizing itself. Hegel's philosophy of history thus applies this intrinsic relationship between thought and reality to historical events; historical developments are, in fact, forms of the realization of thought (or the concept) over time. Therefore, no event in history is accidental; every event constitutes a link in the chain of the necessary unfolding of the concept. This approach forms the philosophical basis for Hegel's evaluation of the historical process as a teleological whole.<sup>52</sup>

Rickert's understanding of concepts and reality is based on Neo-Kantian epistemology, which focuses on scientific knowledge. For Rickert, concepts are not reality itself, but tools used to scientifically organize and interpret it. Reality, with its scope and dense structure, contains infinite diversity, and this infinity cannot be fully grasped by concepts. According to Rickert, this diversity emerges in the individual events of reality and their complex structure. Concepts strive to divide these individual events into general categories, but this effort always falls short in the face of reality's boundless complexity. Concepts can only be useful within a specific framework and represent only a particular dimension of reality, not its entirety. In other words, reality contains infinite diversity, and this diversity cannot be fully encompassed by concepts. This situation shows that scientific concepts can only be functional within a specific framework and can never fully reflect the holistic nature of reality.<sup>53</sup>

Rickert divides reality into two basic categories: homogeneous continuity and heterogeneous continuity. Homogeneous continuity refers to the structure of reality dealt with by the natural sciences, where events can be generalized and reduced to repeatable laws. This approach allows reality to be conceptualized within a mathematical order. In contrast, heterogeneous continuity encompasses the individual and unique events that history is concerned with. Heterogeneous continuity emphasizes the unrepeatable, one-time, and complex aspects of events. According to Rickert,

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<sup>52</sup>Beiser, *Hegel*, 99-103.

<sup>53</sup>Rickert, *Science and History*, 30-40.



the fundamental function of history is to attempt to represent this heterogeneous continuity through concepts, while acknowledging that this cannot be fully achieved.<sup>54</sup>

This distinction is based on Rickert's assessment of concepts as an “abstraction tool” or, perhaps more accurately, as “constructive and regulatory.” The individual, historical, and unrepeatable aspects of reality can never be fully encompassed by concepts; however, this supports the idea that scientific understanding is a constantly evolving process. Concepts are merely tools that attempt to represent this infinite diversity, and it is impossible to fully grasp reality. According to Rickert, this structure of reality also implies that it is irrational. Reality contains a complex structure that cannot be fully organized by concepts or fit into an abstract framework. This irrational quality reveals the fact that the individual and diverse aspects of reality cannot be represented by concepts in an exhaustive manner. Rickert's views on reality can be reconciled with Kant's understanding of phenomenology. These distinctions do not mean that reality is understood as “what it is in itself,” but rather point to the distinction between the ways in which humans experience and interpret reality. Therefore, Rickert's general philosophy and understanding of history do not contain a metaphysical or ontological claim, but rather an epistemological approach. His aim is to provide a framework for understanding the representations of reality in the scientific process of knowledge and the limits of these representations, and to show how transcendental patterns, in the Kantian sense, function or play a role in empirical historical sciences.<sup>55</sup>

On the other hand, Rickert's ontological (or metaphysical) objections are also directed at Hegel's teleological emphasis in his philosophy of history. Hegel states that the ultimate goal of history is the development of consciousness of freedom and that all historical events exist as elements of this grand narrative. According to Rickert, this approach carries the risk of reducing the infinite diversity of reality to a single “Geist” plan. The irrational aspect of reality, that is, its unique and unrepeatable dimensions that cannot be fully explained by concepts, is ignored in Hegel's dialectical understanding. Rickert argues that even in the field of history, individual events and conditions have their own specific values and meanings, and that placing all this diversity within a single teleological line is an abstraction that cannot be scientifically defended.<sup>56</sup>

On this epistemological basis, Rickert positions history as a science based on empirical data, and historical philosophy, perhaps more accurately, as an epistemological approach to history that identifies the conditions that make these empirical data possible. However, two points are critical to understanding Rickert's scientific approach. The first is that, for Rickert, the empirical nature of history does not mean that he approaches history with a positivist understanding of science or that the generalizing scientific method used in the natural sciences can be used in history or, in his words, in the cultural sciences. The second is his view that historical knowledge can only become “meaningful” or scientific in relation to transcendental values. Therefore, it is essential to address these two issues to clarify his scientific approach to history.

### ***Natural and Historical Sciences: Two Separate Epistemic Domains***

Rickert emphasizes the differences between natural sciences and historical sciences by clearly revealing the epistemological basis of these two fields. This distinction is very important in defending the objectivity and scientific status of historical sciences. According to Rickert, while natural sciences adopt a generalizing method, historical sciences operate with an individualizing approach.<sup>57</sup> The aim of natural sciences is to arrive at general laws and predict events through these laws, while historical sciences aim to understand each event within its own unique context. This distinction clearly highlights the methodological difference between history and natural sciences.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>54</sup>Rickert, *Science and History*, 30-40.

<sup>55</sup>Rickert, *Science and History*, 30-40.

<sup>56</sup>Rickert, *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, 22-27, 45-60.

<sup>57</sup>Rickert was inspired by his teacher Wilhelm Windelband's famous “nomothetic” (legalistic) and ‘idiographic’ (individualistic) distinction, but found this distinction insufficient and, while remaining faithful to its essence, added a “value-centered perspective” to the classification of science.

<sup>58</sup>Rickert, *Science and History*, 135-146.



Natural sciences focus on finding causal connections between events and transforming them into generalizable laws. Newton's laws of motion or the basic principles of thermodynamics are concrete examples of this generalizing method. Rickert states that natural sciences aim to arrive at universal knowledge by examining phenomena that can be generalized using this approach. However, this method has a perspective that is far from understanding individual events. For example, examining the development of machines and the increase in production capacity may be sufficient to understand the technological effects of the Industrial Revolution. But this kind of analysis may ignore the social and cultural effects of the revolution. Therefore, the methodology of natural sciences cannot fully grasp the meaning of historical events.<sup>59</sup>

Rickert emphasizes the individualizing method of historical sciences. In this method, each historical event is treated as a unique phenomenon. Events such as the French Revolution or the Industrial Revolution are not seen merely as parts of a specific universal structure; rather, the unique contexts and meanings of these events are examined. According to Rickert, historical science aims to deeply understand the historical context of individual events by revealing their relationship with cultural values. For example, viewing the Industrial Revolution solely as a technological advancement makes it impossible to understand its role in the structural foundations of modern capitalism and the emergence of the working class. Rickert emphasizes that historical science requires a multidimensional and contextual analysis, stressing the necessity of an individualizing method in understanding historical events.<sup>60</sup>

In fact, Rickert introduced this distinction between natural sciences and historical cultural sciences in order to differentiate his approach from those of Comte and others who sought to conceptualize historical content as an extension of the positivist or natural scientific system, or in other words, who sought to reduce historical cultural sciences to natural sciences. In this regard, Rickert's criticism of Auguste Comte's understanding of history is highlighted in the introduction to his work *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung (The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Sciences)*. Rickert questions Comte's naturalistic and deterministic perspective on historical facts and argues that it is insufficient for understanding the nature of historical science. Here, it would be appropriate to open a parenthesis on Comte's criticism in order to clarify Rickert's criticism of Hegel and to make his scientific conception of history clearer. This is because Rickert believes that, despite all their differences, Hegel and Comte are fundamentally united on common ground in their approach to history.<sup>61</sup>

Rickert's fundamental criticism is that Comte reduces historical processes to a three-stage law of progress. Comte's universalist understanding of history in terms of "theological, metaphysical, and positive stages" does not, according to Rickert, adequately reflect the complexity of historical events, nor does it allow for value judgments between events. Rickert argues that this approach negates the unique meaning and context of historical events and treats human history in a reductionist manner. Evaluating historical events as "progress" requires subjecting different times or events to a value hierarchy. However, according to Rickert, such a ranking based solely on an inherent framework is flawed when evaluating historical events, as historical processes remain incomplete unless they are linked to transcendental values. Rickert also questions Comte's epistemological foundations. Comte, while addressing historical events within the framework of universal natural laws, does not sufficiently question the validity and truth of these laws. As a result, Rickert evaluates Comte's understanding of history as a reductionist and one-dimensional perspective and, therefore, argues that Comte's understanding of history is far from offering a method appropriate to the singular and meaningful nature of history.<sup>62</sup>

Interestingly, in the same work, Rickert brings together Comte and Hegel, who are often considered to be in opposition to each other as thinkers who frequently adopt opposing approaches in the history of thought, in terms of the

<sup>59</sup>Rickert, *Science and History*, 40-53.

<sup>60</sup>Rickert, *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, 99-107.

<sup>61</sup>Rickert, *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, 22-27.

<sup>62</sup>Rickert, *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, 22-27.



obstacles they created to elevating history to the status of a historical science, and argues that they are similar in many respects. In other words, Rickert criticizes both Auguste Comte's positivist understanding of history and Hegel's understanding of history based on metaphysical speculation, arguing that both approaches, despite appearing to be opposed to each other, fall into the error of reducing the nature of history to a single framework. Arguing that both thinkers reduce historical sciences to their own ideological frameworks, Rickert criticizes both approaches methodologically because he defends the originality and unique methods of historical sciences.<sup>63</sup>

Rickert's views on universality and values are also at the center of his criticism. The natural sciences adopt a principle of objectivity independent of values in their attempt to establish universal laws. This leads to the neglect of the meaning and context of individual events. In Hegel's understanding of history, universal values, especially the goals of the spirit's pursuit of freedom, are decisive. However, Rickert argues that this understanding of universal values obscures the unique meanings of individual events in their cultural and social contexts. According to him, historical science should preserve the unique values of individual events while also seeking to understand their place in broader cultural contexts.<sup>64</sup>

In light of this information, in order to understand Rickert's attempt to position history as an autonomous scientific discipline separate from the positivist natural science paradigm and Hegelian teleological understanding of history, it is necessary to examine his transcendental value theory and the way in which this theory elevates historical knowledge to scientific status by grounding it in criteria of objectivity.

### ***Transcendental Values as the Possibility of a Scientific Approach to History***

In the section *Geschichte und Metaphysik (History and Metaphysics)*, Rickert examines the relationship between the philosophy of history and metaphysics, offering an important perspective through the concept of transcendental values. So, what exactly are these transcendental values, and how do they provide an explanatory framework for historical analysis? Transcendental values are values that exist beyond the realm of experience, independent of time and space, and are absolute and universal. These values provide historians with a criterion for interpreting events and evaluating the historical process as a whole.<sup>65</sup> However, to understand the concept of transcendental values, it is first necessary to understand Rickert's critique: Rickert acknowledges that the philosophy of history cannot completely break away from metaphysical questions. However, he opposes the use of metaphysical concepts such as God's thoughts or a divine plan to interpret historical events, as this obscures the uniqueness of historical analysis. According to him, such explanations weaken the reality and significance of historical events.<sup>66</sup>

So, how can the philosophy of history engage in the search for value and meaning while remaining detached from metaphysical inquiries and without resorting to metaphysical speculation? This is where transcendental values come into play; transcendental values, because they exist beyond the realm of experience, are not bound to any historical period, culture, or belief system, and thus provide historians with an objective perspective, offering a common or objective basis for evaluating different historical events and processes.

<sup>63</sup>Rickert, *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, 22-27.

<sup>64</sup>Rickert, *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, 99-107.

<sup>65</sup>It should be clearly stated that Rickert does not feel the need to explicitly provide examples of transcendental values in the section *Geschichte und Metaphysik* or in any of his other works. Instead, he emphasizes that these values exist beyond the realm of experience, independent of time and space, and are absolute and universal. However, based on Rickert's arguments and his general perspective on the philosophy of history, we can draw some examples of transcendental values: Truth: Truth, which is the fundamental goal of scientific knowledge, is a universal value independent of any historical period or culture. The philosophy of history also refers to this value when interpreting and evaluating historical events. Beauty: Beauty, which lies at the heart of art and aesthetic experience, can also be considered a universal value independent of time and space. The philosophy of history can refer to this value when evaluating the artistic productions and aesthetic values of different cultures. Moral Goodness: The concept of moral goodness, which is the basis of moral actions, can also be seen as an important transcendental value in the philosophy of history. The philosophy of history can refer to this value when evaluating the moral values and norms of different societies. Justice: Justice, one of the fundamental principles of social order and law, is also a universal and timeless value. The philosophy of history can refer to this value when evaluating the conceptions and practices of justice in different societies. We hope these examples provide an idea of how Rickert uses the concept of transcendental values (Rickert, *Die Probleme der Geschichtsphilosophie*, 151-156).

<sup>66</sup>Rickert, *Die Probleme der Geschichtsphilosophie*, 151-156.



Thus, in Rickert's thought, transcendental values establish a delicate balance between the philosophy of history and metaphysics. These values preserve the essence of historical research while enabling the search for meaning and value. At the same time, they prevent the philosophy of history from becoming mired in metaphysical speculation, thereby preserving the objectivity and originality of historical analysis. However, Rickert himself avoids making a definitive judgment on whether transcendental values point to a metaphysical reality. According to him, the answer to this question transcends the boundaries of the philosophy of history. Transcendental values are a tool used to provide an explanatory framework for historical analysis. Questions about metaphysical reality, on the other hand, belong to a different domain of philosophy.<sup>67</sup>

In this sense, there are important differences between Rickert's understanding of transcendental values and the role of values in Hegel's philosophy of history, and another aspect of Hegel's criticism of historical metaphysics stems from this difference in understanding. According to Rickert, transcendental values (e.g., true, good, and beautiful) are universal and transcendent realities independent of individuals and historical processes. These values form the basis of historical and cultural sciences and provide a scientific framework for interpreting historical events. In Hegel's philosophy, however, values evolve historically in the process of the self-realization of the spirit and are shaped by the historical context. Values are both the result of events in the historical process and the guiding elements of these events.<sup>68</sup>

Rickert positions transcendental values as an indispensable epistemological foundation for historical science to be able to make sense of individual, unrepeatable historical facts and events. These values offer the possibility of approaching historical events with a universal criterion; however, they do not ignore the unique context of each event.

In conclusion, for Rickert, the possibility of history as a science depends on transcendental value. However, this raises another question. When positioning history as a science, can the historian not use transcendental values arbitrarily and subjectively, thereby preventing history from becoming a science? And in this case, how can the interpretation of historical facts go beyond being a scenario written by a single person? According to Rickert, the only way to avoid this danger is to make a clear epistemological distinction between *Wertbeziehung* (value relation) and *Bewertung* (evaluation) in the production of historical knowledge. Value relation refers to the cultural and methodological orientations that guide the historian in selecting events, while evaluation means imposing moral or ideological judgments on events. Rickert asserts that the objectivity of historical science can only be guaranteed by maintaining this distinction. In this way, the historian can make meaningful choices while maintaining scientific consistency. In simpler terms, to ensure the objectivity of historical science, the historian must view history through a method free from personal values, which is based on the distinction mentioned above. Now let us move on to this topic.

### ***The Distinction Between “Wertbeziehung” and “Bewertung” as a Condition for the Objectivity of History***

Heinrich Rickert distinguishes between the concepts of *Wertbeziehung* (value relation) and *Bewertung* (evaluation) in order to preserve the objectivity of historical science and the unique meaning of individual events. According to him, historical sciences cannot be completely independent of values; however, these values should not turn into personal or ethical judgments that endanger scientific objectivity. This distinction aims to develop the ability of historical science to both select events and treat them objectively. Value relation plays a decisive role in the selection and interpretation of historical events, while evaluation refers to the assessment of events according to personal or ethical judgments and weakens the impartiality of historical science.<sup>69</sup>

Value connection refers to the historian's decision to consider certain events worthy of study and highlights the selective nature of historical science. Rickert argues that the subject matter of historical science is infinite and that,

<sup>67</sup>Rickert, *Die Probleme der Geschichtsphilosophie*, 151-156; *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, 289-312.

<sup>68</sup>Rickert, *Die Probleme der Geschichtsphilosophie*, 112-114; *Science and History*, 87-92; *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, 93-96, 113-114.

<sup>69</sup>Rickert, *Science and History*, 87-92; *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, 93-96, 113-114.



therefore, the selection of which events are considered important is guided by values. Value connection regulates the field of historical science by focusing the historian's attention on a particular period or events. For example, when studying the French Revolution, a historian may focus not only on political events but also on changes in social class structures or cultural influences. The value relation enables historical events to be examined in a broader context through such choices and enhances the interpretive capacity of historical science.<sup>70</sup>

The fundamental function of the value relation is to prevent the study of history from becoming a chaotic field. According to Rickert, the value relation enables historians to understand the unique contexts of individual events and to exercise scientific selectivity with regard to them. The value relation not only facilitates the selection of events but also their historical interpretation. However, Rickert emphasizes that the value relation does not involve any ethical or subjective judgment. This mechanism allows individual events to be examined within their contexts without compromising the objectivity of historical science and enables the historian to work within the framework of a scientific discipline.<sup>71</sup>

When it comes to evaluation, it refers to the historian adding ethical or personal judgments to historical events. Evaluation involves categorizing events as “good” or “bad” and making an ethical assessment. According to Rickert, such evaluations threaten the impartiality of historical science and prevent the objective examination of events. Evaluation can distort the historical context of events by incorporating the historian's personal or ideological prejudices into scientific inquiry. Therefore, Rickert argues that historians should avoid ethical judgments and subjective evaluations. According to him, historical science should aim to objectively reveal the context and meaning of events.<sup>72</sup>

To explain how evaluation threatens scientific historiography, Rickert focuses on two fundamental problems: subjective judgments and distortion of context. Subjective judgments prevent the impartial examination of events by incorporating the historian's personal views into scientific analysis. Distortion of context refers to the separation of events from their historical context and their re-evaluation in light of modern value judgments. This can render the fundamental aim of historical science—namely, understanding the original context of events—impossible. Rickert therefore argues that evaluation weakens the objectivity of historical science and is incompatible with a scientific method.

In Heinrich Rickert's philosophy of history, the concepts of value relation and evaluation provide a critical framework for Hegel's teleological understanding of history and, like Comte, for Marxist historical materialism, which should be considered alongside Hegel. From the perspective of the value relation, Hegel's understanding of history organizes the historical process around the concept of a universal mind or spirit. According to Hegel, history is the process of humanity's attainment of freedom consciousness. Similarly, the Marxist understanding of history also centers on class struggle and approaches the historical process as a dialectic directed toward the goal of a “classless society.” In essence, Hegel's and Marx's understanding of the value relation and the act of evaluation are intertwined.<sup>73</sup> For Rickert, this has vaporized the dichotomy that must exist between two concepts or attitudes and led to a methodological error. From the perspective of the concept of evaluation, the Marxist understanding of history tends to examine historical events with ethical judgments. Capitalism is considered evil as the “source of class oppression,” while a classless society is accepted as the “ultimate good.” Rickert argues that such value evaluation weakens scientific objectivity. Evaluation causes the historian's personal or ideological prejudices to seep into scientific inquiry. This leads to the detachment of historical events from their original contexts and the loss of objectivity in scientific historiography. From the perspective of the concept of evaluation, Hegel's teleological understanding of history, like the Marxist understanding of history, tends to evaluate historical events with certain ethical or metaphysical judgments. In Hegel's understanding of history, individual

<sup>70</sup>Rickert, *Science and History*, 87-92; *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, 93-96, 113-114.

<sup>71</sup>*The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, 61-66.

<sup>72</sup>Rickert, *Kültür Bilim ve Doğa Bilimi*, trans. Burcu Gedikli & Mehmet Eren Gedikli (Ankara: Eskiyeeni Yayınları, 2025), 136-138.

<sup>73</sup>Özlem, *Tarih Felsefesi*, 154-158.



historical events are evaluated as tools serving the process of the Geist's attainment of freedom of consciousness. In this process, the contextual meanings of individual events are secondary, and events are interpreted as good or bad developments based on a universal plan. Thus, with a priori evaluation, the science of history limits itself and loses its objectivity.<sup>74</sup>

### Conclusion and Comparative Analysis: Metaphysical vs. Scientific Historiography

Hegel's historiography is deeply rooted in his idealist metaphysics, which holds that reality is fundamentally rational, and history is the process through which Spirit realizes itself. In this sense, history is not a random sequence of events but a necessary dialectical movement, where each stage negates the contradictions of the previous one and leads to a higher realization of freedom. This implies that all historical events—revolutions, wars, cultural transformations—are ultimately expressions of a rational necessity, even if their meaning is not immediately apparent. The role of the historian, in Hegel's framework, is not merely to record facts but to uncover the rational structure that guides history toward its ultimate goal.

Rickert fundamentally rejects this ontological determinism, arguing that history does not unfold according to an inherent rational order but is instead analyzed and structured through methodological principles. His approach, rooted in neo-Kantian epistemology, emphasizes that history is not something that exists independently of human thought but rather a discipline that constructs meaning through conceptual selection. Unlike Hegel, who believes that historical events contain an intrinsic rational logic, Rickert maintains that history does not have a predetermined trajectory; instead, its significance is always determined by historians, based on epistemological and cultural criteria. However, Rickert acknowledges that history is necessarily value-relation (*wertgeladen*), as historians must choose which events to study based on *Wertbeziehung*—the methodological framework that allows historians to determine historical significance without imposing ideological or ethical judgments.

This fundamental divergence leads to the question of whether history should be considered a science or a branch of philosophy. Hegel's approach aligns history with philosophy, as it seeks to uncover universal patterns and rational progress within historical change. In contrast, Rickert insists that history must be approached scientifically, though not in the same way as the natural sciences. He introduces a distinction between nomothetic sciences and idiographic sciences. This distinction underscores Rickert's belief that while history cannot offer universal laws, it can still be studied with scientific precision through systematic methods of classification and differentiation.

Hegel's teleological conception of history assumes that historical events are not arbitrary but necessary steps toward the realization of freedom. This implies that historical causality is not contingent but follows a rational structure, guiding humanity toward higher forms of political and ethical organization. Rickert, however, challenges this deterministic interpretation, arguing that history does not have a single underlying structure but rather consists of multiple interacting causes that shape events in unpredictable ways. From Rickert's perspective, history is not a coherent totality moving toward a goal but rather a complex and heterogeneous field of inquiry that requires rigorous methodological differentiation.

These theoretical differences become particularly evident when applied to concrete historical examples, such as the French Revolution. Hegel interprets the revolution as a necessary stage in the unfolding of Spirit, arguing that the contradictions of the ancien régime had to be overcome in order for political freedom to be realized. Even its chaotic and violent aspects serve a rational historical function, as they contribute to the emergence of modern constitutional government. Rickert, however, would reject this deterministic interpretation. Rather than viewing the revolution as an inevitable event, he would argue that it was a contingent phenomenon shaped by economic, political, and social factors. From a Rickertian perspective, the French Revolution does not have one single meaning or purpose—its significance depends on how historians conceptualize and categorize it.

<sup>74</sup>Rickert, *Die Probleme der Geschichtsphilosophie*, 112-114; *Science and History*, 87-92; *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, 93-96, 113-114.



A similar contrast can be observed in the interpretation of Julius Caesar's role in Roman history. Hegel would regard Caesar as a world-historical individual—a leader who, despite acting according to personal ambition, ultimately served the rational development of history by transforming the Roman Republic into the Roman Empire, thereby contributing to a more unified and structured political order. In contrast, Rickert would argue that Caesar's rise to power was not the result of an inherent historical necessity but a consequence of specific political and military conditions. His significance, according to Rickert, is not inherent in the events themselves but is determined by historians, who choose which aspects of his rule to emphasize and how to interpret them.

One of the key challenges for modern historians is determining whether history should be written as a grand narrative or as a collection of multiple perspectives. Hegel's approach suggests that history can only be understood through a unified, overarching framework, while Rickert's perspective emphasizes that each historical event must be studied individually, without assuming a larger purpose. The question remains: Can these two approaches be reconciled? One possible synthesis is recognizing that while history does not have an inherent teleology, patterns and structures do emerge over time, allowing historians to construct meaningful but flexible narratives. This middle ground allows for the interpretation of historical events within a broader framework and encompassing narratives without falling into determinism.

Ultimately, the debate between Hegel's metaphysical historiography and Rickert's scientific approach highlights the complexity of historical knowledge. History is not merely a collection of facts; it is also a discipline that seeks to construct meaning. The question of whether history follows a necessary trajectory or is shaped by methodological choices remains one of the most pressing issues in historiography. Hegel's framework offers a powerful way to integrate history into a coherent philosophical vision, while Rickert's methodology ensures that history remains a rigorous and critically analyzed discipline. Both perspectives contribute to our understanding of how the past is interpreted and how historical narratives are constructed. In the final analysis, the study of history is not just about understanding the past—it is also about understanding how historical knowledge is produced, structured, and interpreted. The tension between universalist and particularist approaches, between metaphysics and methodology, and between teleology and contingency, continues to shape the way historians approach their craft. Whether one leans toward Hegel's grand philosophical vision or Rickert's scientific precision, it is clear that the philosophy of history remains a dynamic and evolving field, where multiple perspectives must be critically examined and debated.



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Peer Review	Externally peer-reviewed.
Acknowledgment	I would like to thank Dr. Burcu GEDİKLİ for her help in translating the German texts.
Conflict of Interest	The author has no conflict of interest to declare.
Grant Support	The author declared that this study has received no financial support.

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